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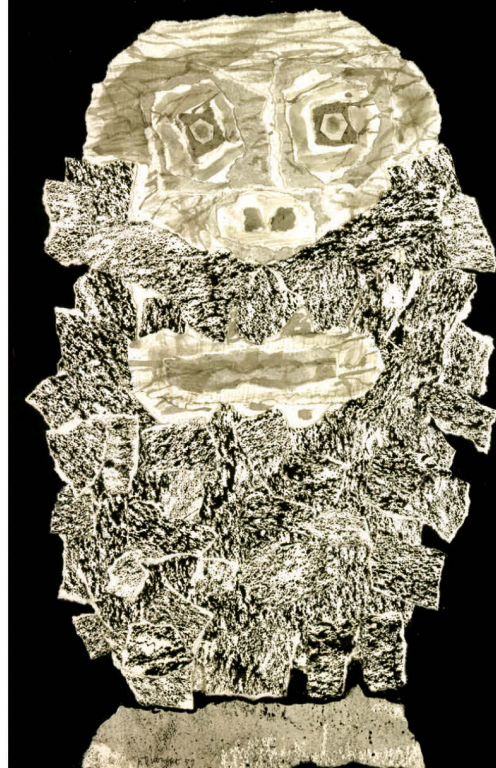
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Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985), *Barbe des colères* (Wrathful Beard), June 1959, collage of cut and torn india ink imprints with brush and ink. Fondation Dubuffet, Paris. © 2016 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Toobin (*"In the Balance,"* p. 28) has written two books about the Supreme Court: *"The Nine"* and *"The Oath."* His latest book, *"American Heiress: The Wild Saga of the Kidnapping, Crimes and Trial of Patty Hearst,"* came out in August.

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Akash Kapur (*A Critic at Large,* p. 66), the author of *"India Becoming,"* is writing a book set in the intentional community of Auroville, in India, where he grew up.

Nyla Matuk (*Poem,* p. 65) will publish *"Stranger,"* her second book of poems, in the fall.

Etgar Keret (*Fiction,* p. 62) is an Israeli writer. *"The Seven Good Years"* is his most recent book.

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Jon Lee Anderson (*"The Cuba Play,"* p. 42), the author of *"Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life,"* has written extensively about Cuba since he lived there, in the early nineteen-nineties. His next book is about the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro.

Ariel Levy (*"Lady Bits,"* p. 36), a staff writer, is at work on a book, coming out next spring, based on her *New Yorker* article "Thanksgiving in Mongolia."

Laura Miller (*Books,* p. 72), a books and culture columnist for Salon, is the author of *"The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventures in Narnia."*

Thomas Meaney (*"Germany's New Nationalists,"* p. 54), a writer and a historian, is working on a book about American thinkers and decolonization. Next year, he will be the Einstein Fellow in Potsdam, Germany.

Chris Ware (*Cover*) is the author of *"Building Stories."* A solo exhibition of his work opens in Bologna, Italy, in November.

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THE MAIL

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Kathryn Schulz's article on the exaggerated importance of the Underground Railroad to the abolition movement is misguided ("Derailed," August 22nd). Schulz argues that both blacks and whites have laid claim to heroic tales of the Railroad as a way to avoid the shame of either enslavement or complicity. But, for most participants, the Railroad was a dangerous enterprise, and its history is full of stories of setbacks, as slaveholders deployed the entire repressive machinery of the state to foil escape attempts. Nor was the steady stream of runaways to the North insignificant. The numbers may not have been as great as we like to think, but they fed into a burgeoning abolitionist movement. Schulz writes that "slavery was institutional" and the Railroad merely the "personal" acts of individual citizens. However, the Railroad was part of a radical, interracial social movement that thrived in areas with free-black populations and antislavery organizations. To minimize its part in the history of abolition is to miss the central role of African-Americans, free and enslaved, in defining their traditions of protest.

Manisha Sinha

*Draper Chair in American History
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As someone who has dedicated her life to working in African-American cultural-heritage repositories, I am saddened to read an article that works so hard to make the white experience central to the discussion of slavery, while claiming to do otherwise. I appreciate that Schulz points out the statistical anomaly of a person gaining freedom by extraordinary methods, such as shipping himself in a box, but her interpretation—that highlighting these stories serves primarily to bolster white people's opinions of themselves—still puts the focus on white lives. I grew up on picture books like "Many Thousand Gone," by the African-American author Virginia Hamilton, and since childhood I have envisaged the Underground Railroad as a tale not of

kindly whites assisting people to freedom but, rather, of the ingenuity and bravery of black slaves, who trusted that unknown white people might be less dangerous than those who had claimed ownership of them. Schulz writes that "we, as a nation," kept people in bondage and that "we" are drawn to these stories because they illustrate our finest moral selves. I would point out that the nation of "we" in this formulation still seems largely to mean white people.

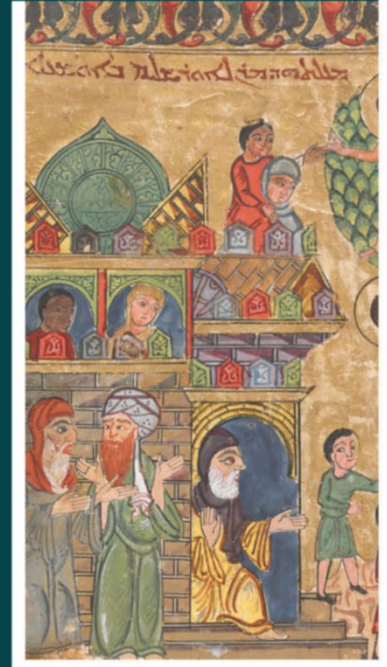
*Dorothy J. Berry
Minneapolis, Minn.*

Schulz's focus on European-American conductors of the Underground Railroad overlooks some of the most important people in this process: Maroons, the African-Americans who, against all odds and legal barriers, extricated themselves from enslavement and formed self-reliant resistance communities. Schulz mentions the Maroons just once, and distinguishes them as separate from the Underground Railroad. In fact, they were a crucial and under-recognized part of it. In my research on Maroon communities, I have found that, at the time the Railroad functioned, there were tens of thousands of Maroons living outside the geographic reach of slavery—in Northern states, Canada, and Mexico—and even within its boundaries. "Runaways" of the Underground Railroad became Maroons, and a part of this powerful network of people that challenged the racism and violence of the wider society. I agree that we need to let go of the Eurocentric notion of the Underground Railroad, but we can't recast the Underground Railroad as a minor part of the resistance among African-Americans, either.

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

MetLiveArts



Imagining Jerusalem: The Golden City in Art, Lore, and Literature

Wednesdays, Oct 5, 19, 26, and
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How has the image and idea of Jerusalem, the tales we tell about the city, and the myths around it, cast such a spell on so many? **Adam Gopnik**, *The New Yorker's* critic at large, leads this stimulating series, joined by **Nicole Krauss**, **Nasser Rabbat**, and **Simon Schama** to explore the city's many images, poetic uses, and spiritual reverberations.

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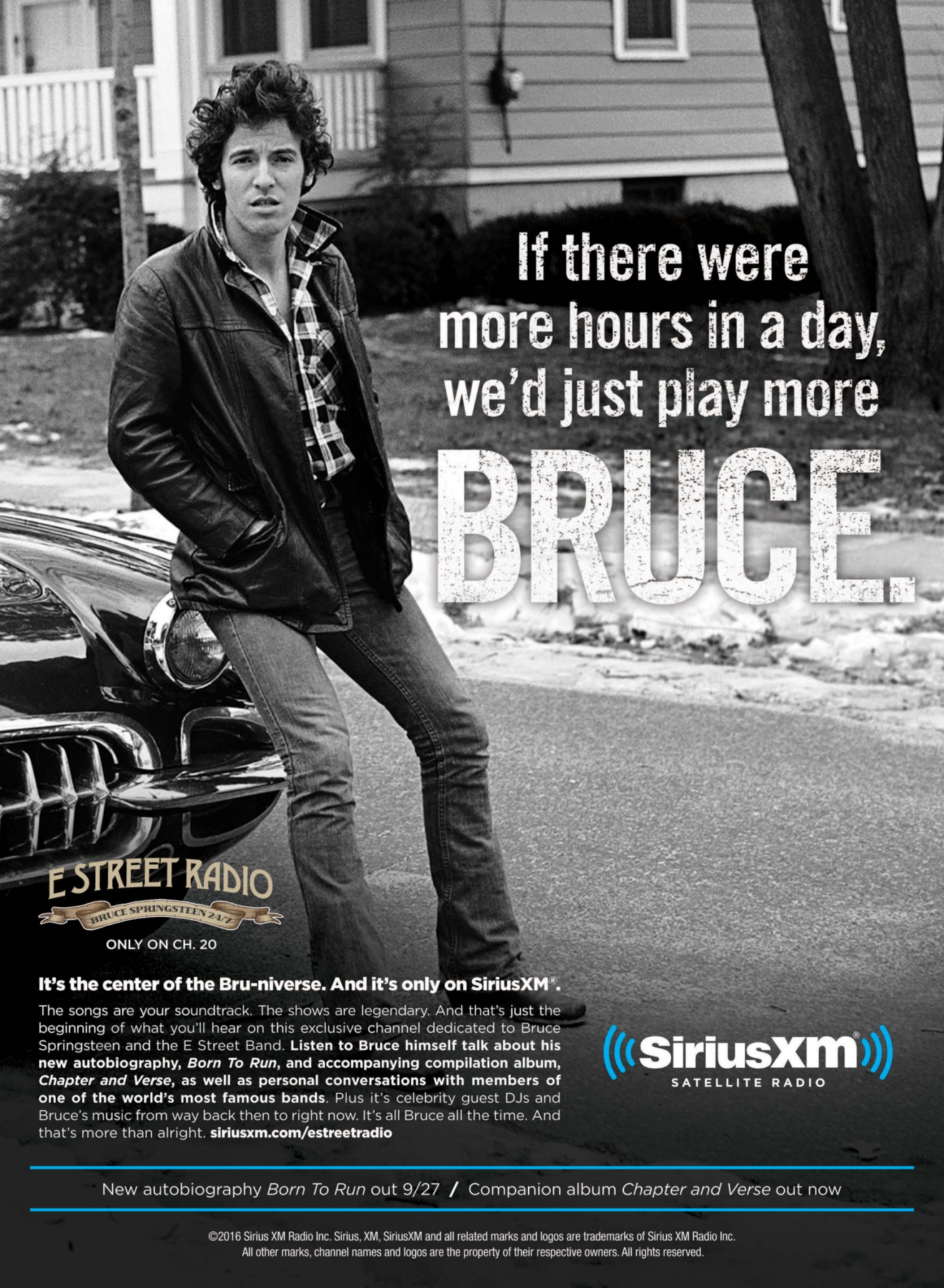
It is presented in conjunction with the exhibition *Jerusalem 1000–1600: Every People Under Heaven*, on view September 26, 2016–January 8, 2017.

The exhibition is made possible by The David Berg Foundation, The al-Sabbah Collection, Kuwait, the Sherman Fairchild Foundation, the William S. Lieberman Fund, The Polonsky Foundation, Diane Carol Brandt, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts, and Mary and Michael Jaharis.

Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Above: *Entry into Jerusalem* (detail) (fol.115) from the Syriac Lectionary, 1216–20. Syrian. Tempera, gold, and ink on paper. London, British Library © The British Library Board

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SEPTEMBER 28 – OCTOBER 4, 2016

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The American artist Spencer Finch is an eco-conceptualist, distilling the essence of landscape (light, water, air) into eye-catching ruminations on memory and the passage of time. In **“Lost Man Creek,”** his new piece for the Public Art Fund, Finch turns his attention to trees. Starting Oct. 1, four thousand saplings will grow in the MetroTech Commons, in downtown Brooklyn, in a 1:100-scale re-creation of seven hundred and ninety acres of California’s Redwood National Park, giving old growth a fresh start.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM KREMER

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art

"Kai Althoff: and then leave me to the common swifts (und dann überlasst mich den Mauerseglern)"

This mid-career retrospective of the fifty-year-old German artist, best known for his ephebic strain of expressionism, transforms part of the museum's sixth floor into a gauze-lined attic, strewn with objects including (but not limited to) paintings, childhood drawings, glazed ceramics, ballet slippers, couches, dolls, effigies, and a stack of art works wrapped in brown paper. Althoff emerged from the hothouse of nineteen-nineties Cologne, and the sardonic figurative painting that was in fashion there influenced his images of triangle-nosed miscreants and lovers lost in space; several later paintings (made after the artist moved to Brooklyn) depict Hasidic Jews, among them two jocular men with *payot* and *tzitzit*. Althoff has always flitted between mediums, and alongside his sensitive drawings of grandes dames and tender boys (indebted to the Symbolist tradition of Munch and Puvis de Chavannes) are papier-mâché ghouls passed out at a dinner table, an instrumental audio track, and the pumped-in aroma of oud. What unites Althoff's works is a quality of evanescence, down to the artist-designed catalogue (whose lead essay is written by a Chabad Lubavitch rabbi), which is wrapped in delicate vellum. This is a *Gesamtkunstwerk* on the cusp of collapse, and it's that fragility, more than Althoff's often wearying sentimentality, that makes the exhibition so moving. *Through Jan. 22.*

Asia Society

"No Limits: Zao Wou-ki"

The Chinese-born French artist, who died in 2013, was a significant figure of postwar European painting, but this is the first U.S. museum retrospective of Zao's saturated, calligraphic, and at times bombastic abstractions. Trained in both oil and Chinese ink painting at Hangzhou's progressive National Academy of Fine Arts, Zao moved to Paris in 1948 and enjoyed quick success for such works as "Lune Noire," a cloudy riff on Paul Klee, featuring a crenellated fortress and what look like six Eiffel Towers. Hazy fields of color, sprinkled with runes adapted from Shang-era oracle-bone script, are wonderful specimens of fifties *informel* abstraction. Later in his career, however, Zao's paintings became overblown. Perhaps the most impressive works here are the smallest: archaized lithographs of fish and wolves, created to accompany poems by his close friend, Henri Michaux. *Through Jan. 8.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Zoe Leonard

Working with a cache of rediscovered family snapshots, the brilliant New York conceptualist probes both photographic truth and personal history. The original images have been rephotographed, often several times, and arranged in pairs and groups that suggest shifting points of view. The primary subjects are Leonard's grandmother and mother, who survived the Second World War in Warsaw

and endured a long period of statelessness before emigrating to New York, where they're seen on a ferry, looking anxious next to a windblown American flag. Touching on issues of displacement and immigration, the work also hints at the vagaries of memory, in images that have been fragmented, cropped, or all but obscured by reflected light. Vintage how-to photography books—"Dealing with Difficult Situations," "Total Picture Control"—are stacked on the floor like totems, souvenirs of an oblivious parallel world. *Through Oct. 22. (Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970.)*

Marcia Resnick

Resnick photographed New York's downtown scene in the eighties, after studying with the Cal-Arts guru John Baldessari. Whether her work honors or spoofs conceptual art, it's reliably clever and handsome. Three identical pictures of a man gazing over the Grand Canyon are painted with gouache, imitating the sky or turning the figure into a silhouette. (Fun fact: the model was the artist James Welling.) The most playful sequence in the exhibition pairs black-and-white images taken out in the world with deliberately crude miniature re-creations constructed in Resnick's loft: crumpled paper becomes a mountain range, a puff of cotton stands in for a cloud, chocolate candies echo a row of tires. *Through Nov. 5. (Bell, 16 E. 71st St. 212-249-9400.)*

Karin Schneider

The Brazilian artist reboots historical modernism without any apparent anxiety of influence (no small feat) in this rigorous, elegant show. Sixteen square monochrome paintings, all nearly black, are mounted on a steel armature; Schneider's copy of a 1928 painting by Tarsila do Amaral intones the Brazilian avant-garde just as the monochromes channel Ad Reinhardt. The paintings are subject to yet another intertextual wrinkle: they are sold with the understanding that another artist must be allowed to paint over them in the future. For Schneider, quotation and adaptation are not ends in themselves but, rather, efforts to dismantle the tyranny of style—a necessary step to insure that art is valued as more than an asset. *Through Oct. 20. (Lévy, 909 Madison Ave., at 73rd St. 212-772-2004.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Matthew Barney

When Barney made his début, in 1991, at the Gladstone gallery, the then twenty-four-year-old's subversive, subterranean universe felt sui generis. At its core was a performance, enacted before the show opened: Barney strapped himself in a harness and drew on the gallery's ceilings and walls. In the exhibition, through video, sculpture, and photography, the artist described the power and the limitations of male strength, male anxiety, and male self-interest—all the while examining gender fluidity. Spectators lined up around the block. What is most striking about this mini-retrospective of that early work is the elegance of Barney's line, seen in carefully executed wrestling mats, lockers, weights, and a bench press made of Vaseline (and refrigerated to retain its shape). They emphasize not only the artist's hand

but, for all the theatricality, his absence, a void that allows our own thoughts about gender, and about sport as ritual, to creep into the space, too. It's an essential show not only for anyone interested in American sculpture but also for anyone reflecting on trans identity. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

Jeff Elrod

The California-born Brooklynite's big, largely computer-generated and drawing-intensive paintings, which are mostly grisaille, speak a patois of adventurous abstraction with a German accent. Elrod has absorbed lessons from, chiefly, Albert Oehlen, in how to jujitsu the challenge to painting of digital media and combat the prevalent palls of zombie jadedness. He complicates matters with crepuscular textures, eccentric stretcher shapes, and flurries of taped white lines. No two works are much alike. Collectively, they suggest a dozing subject (painting?) being slapped wide awake. *Through Oct. 22. (Luhning Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)*

Os Gêmeos

The Brazilian artists (and identical twins) Gustavo and Otávio Pandolfo have festooned every wall of the gallery with their signature colorful images of taggers and break-dancers with flat, yellow faces. The brothers pay homage to New York; one painting stars a sequin-clad heroine riding on the back of a 6 train. But even viewers with a soft spot for street art—or visitors seduced by the d.j. booth outfitted with Victrola horns—are unlikely to be swayed by the artists' puerile sculptures. A rotating, round-shouldered hominid on a flower-bedecked turntable would seem more appropriate at F.A.O. Schwarz than on the streets of São Paulo, and an anthropomorphized crescent moon seems designed to generate hashtags. *Through Oct. 22. (Lehmann Maupin, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-255-2923.)*

Robert Polidori

Three huge color images of India are each stitched together from multiple photographs—a "Behind the Beautiful Forevers" version of NASA's maps of the moon. The biggest, at forty feet long, tracks a row of tenements in Mumbai, its residents eying the camera warily from across a trash-clogged canal. The backs of brick buildings are covered in a patchwork of corrugated sheet metal, faded billboards, rags, and laundry lines, like a readymade Rauschenbergian combine. Another piece surveys a hillside slum from above, a maze of flat-roofed houses—some collapsed, others painted bright colors—sprawling like a single organism. What elevates Polidori's images above poverty porn is his balance of specificity and spectacle, which grounds the work in the rich history of landscape photography. *Through Oct. 15. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)*

Carol Rama

The self-taught Italian artist faced censorship for her early work: rowdy, racy watercolors, including one here, made sometime between 1938 and 1940, depicting a goggle-eyed figure pleasuring a quantity of appendages. Rama later turned to assemblage; her compact, light-absorbing compositions of rubber tires allude to the bicycle factory owned by her father, who killed himself when it went bankrupt. In her seventies, the artist returned to works on paper, furiously original ink drawings in which the erotic collides with a mechanical world of pistons and shafts. *Through Oct. 22. (McCaffrey, 514 W. 26th St. 212-988-2200.)*

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Battlefield

Three decades after his epic version of "The Mahabharata," Peter Brook stages this hour-long piece (co-directed with Marie-Hélène Estienne) drawn from the Sanskrit poem. (*BAM's Harvey Theatre*, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Sept. 28-Oct. 9.)

The Cherry Orchard

The Roundabout presents a new adaptation of the Chekhov play by Stephen Karam ("The Humans"), directed by Simon Godwin and starring Diane Lane, Tavi Gevinson, Joel Grey, Chuck Cooper, and John Glover. (*American Airlines Theatre*, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. In previews.)

The Encounter

Simon McBurney conceived, directs, and performs the theatrical event, in which the audience members wear headphones as three-dimensional soundscapes re-create a 1969 journey into the Brazilian rain forest. (*Golden*, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Sept. 29.)

Falsettos

James Lapine directs a revival of the 1992 musical, with a score by William Finn, in which an unconventional family navigates gay life, AIDS, and bar mitzvahs in Koch-era Manhattan. With Christian Borle, Andrew Rannells, and Stephanie J. Block. (*Walter Kerr*, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Sept. 29.)

Fit for a Queen

The Classical Theatre of Harlem presents a new play by Betty Shamieh ("The Black Eyed"), inspired by the life of Hatshepsut, a woman who ruled as pharaoh in ancient Egypt. (*3LD Art & Technology Center*, 80 Greenwich St. cthnyc.org. Previews begin Oct. 4.)

The Front Page

Nathan Lane, John Slattery, John Goodman, Jefferson Mays, Sherie Rene Scott, Holland Taylor, and Robert Morse star in Jack O'Brien's revival of the 1928 comedy, about Chicago newspapermen on the crime beat. (*Broadhurst*, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Heisenberg

Mary-Louise Parker and Denis Arndt reprise their roles in Simon Stephens's drama, about two strangers who cross paths at a London train station. Mark Brokaw directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Holiday Inn

A new musical from the Roundabout, featuring the songs of Irving Berlin and based on the classic 1942 film; Bryce Pinkham and Corbin Bleu fill in, respectively, for Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. In previews.)

A Life

In Adam Bock's play, directed by Anne Kauffman, David Hyde Pierce plays a man who recovers from a breakup by looking for answers

in astrological charts. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin Sept. 30.)

Love, Love, Love

The Roundabout stages a new play by Mike Bartlett ("King Charles III"), in which a London couple (Amy Ryan and Richard Armitage) meet in the sixties and weather the next four decades together. Michael Mayer directs. (*Laura Pels*, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. In previews.)

Oh, Hello on Broadway

An evening with Gil Faizon and George St. Geegland, two Alan Alda-obsessed Upper West Side geezers played by the comedians Nick Kroll and John Mulaney. Alex Timbers directs. (*Lyceum*, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Plenty

In David Leveaux's revival of the David Hare drama, last seen at the Public in 1982, Rachel Weisz plays a British secret agent adjusting to everyday life after working in Nazi-occupied France. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Previews begin Oct. 4.)

Public Enemy

Hal Brooks directs David Harrower's adaptation of Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People," in which a doctor discovers that his town's main tourist attraction is toxic. (*Pearl*, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261. Previews begin Sept. 29.)

The Roads to Home

Primary Stages presents Horton Foote's 1982 play about three women in Houston in the nineteen-twenties, directed by Michael Wilson and featuring the playwright's daughter Hallie Foote. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

Sell / Buy / Date

Sarah Jones ("Bridge & Tunnel") performs a new multicharacter solo show exploring the commercial sex industry, directed by Carolyn Cantor for Manhattan Theatre Club. (*City Center Stage II*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.)

She Stoops to Conquer

The Actors Company Theatre revives the eighteenth-century comedy by Oliver Goldsmith, in which a young lady poses as a barmaid to appeal to a shy suitor. Scott Alan Evans directs. (*Clurman*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Oct. 4.)

Songs of Lear

At the Next Wave Festival, Poland's Song of the Goat Theatre performs this song cycle, derived from "King Lear" and polyphonic Corsican chanting. (*BAM Fisher*, 321 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Sept. 28-Oct. 1.)

Stuffed

The comedian Lisa Lampanelli wrote and stars in a play that braids together the stories of four women with food issues. Jackson Gay directs WP Theatre's production. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422. In previews.)

That Golden Girls Show!

A parody of the beloved Miami-set sitcom, with puppets re-creating the adventures of Sophia, Dor-

othy, Blanche, and Rose. (*DR2*, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737. In previews. Opens Oct. 3.)

Tick, Tick . . . Boom!

Keen Company revives this autobiographical musical by Jonathan Larson ("Rent"), about a composer on the verge of turning thirty. Jonathan Silverstein directs. (*Acorn*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Oct. 4.)

Vietgone

Manhattan Theatre Club stages a play by Qui Nguyen, directed by May Adrales, about two Vietnam War refugees (based on the playwright's parents) in a relocation camp in Arkansas. (*City Center Stage I*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Previews begin Oct. 4.)

NOW PLAYING

Aubergine

Ray (Tim Kang), a shambolic young chef, has a knack for connecting with people through meals—except his father, whose inaccessibility is pushed to the extreme when he falls terminally ill. The playwright Julia Cho mines her themes of food and death for as many convergences and epiphanies as she can fit into two hours, though her sharpest insights tend to arrive via tossed-off jokes rather than from the heavily underlined profundities that the play is structured around. She is particularly skilled at introducing characters: Sue Jean Kim, as Ray's girlfriend, and Stephen Park, as Ray's father, both make their entrances in fast, funny, angry scenes that instantly reveal their personalities at their most heightened. But her ending is less sure; the last scenes feel like one finale after another, extending well past the play's natural life span. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 2.)

Bears in Space

Four adorable young Irishmen, posing moodily like the galaxy's most absurdist boy band before an array of intentionally cruddy props and poorly constructed puppets, want to take you on a journey through space and time with two very mangy bears. One bear has the hots for the dying captain; the other thinks he'd make a pretty good captain himself. Together, they must face a captain-despising despot, played by Jack Gleeson, whom you might recall in the role of King Joffrey on "Game of Thrones"; in Eoghan Quinn's play, happily, he turns his talent for callow megalomania to the service of silliness. Despite their youth, these Irishmen and their bears have mastered the strange alchemy of transforming misshapen jokes and awkward repartee into contagious hilarity, and underneath their endless sarcasm they are really very sweet. (*59E59*, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 2.)

The Black Crook

After the Civil War, playgoers didn't want serious drama: they wanted glitz, girls, and fireworks. Enter "The Black Crook," from 1866, sometimes cited as the first American musical. A melodrama in the European tradition, though weirder and more vulgar, it concerns an impoverished painter and an evil sorcerer who makes deals with devils. The director Joshua William Gelb probably hasn't struck any such Faustian bargains. His modest, small-cast adaptation (minimal chorus girls, no pyrotechnics) is part revival, part homage, and part deconstruction, in the mode of recent shows like "Incent" and "Shuffle Along." Gelb's version never makes the case for the enduring worth of the original—leaden jokes, incomprehensible plot, a fairy queen named Stalacta.

But, in also telling the story of its writer, Charles M. Barras, who fell or threw himself from a train following the spectacle's success, Gelb locates quiet tragedy amid the spangle showers and the baby ballet. (*Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.*)

Hamlet

Stripped down, in the round, and back home after a tour around town, this production, by the Public's Mobile Unit, just completed a three-week itinerary of community centers, prisons, and shelters in all five boroughs, and has now settled in at headquarters for another three weeks. Rather than apply a single modernizing concept, the director Patricia McGregor smartly opts for a disparate selection of mostly subtle resonances: Hamlet (a spellbinding Chukwudi Iwujui) sulks in his cardigan sweater and seethes with sarcasm and pain, like a reanimated Kurt Cobain; his father's ghost (Timothy D. Stickney, who also makes a mean Claudius) haunts doubly, stalking the castle in a karakul hat in a way that evokes the ill-slain Patrice Lumumba. The company's time out in the world seems to have energized it with uncommon urgency and verve. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

Marie and Rosetta

It is so rare for a play about the inner lives of black women to center on their intimacy and not world politics or degradation that the very fact of George Brant's loving two-character script, strongly and sensitively directed by Neil Pepe, is refreshing. The ninety-minute work follows the growing closeness between the gospel powerhouse Sister Rosetta Tharpe (Kecia Lewis) and her young protégée, the sweet-faced Marie Knight (Rebecca Naomi Jones). As the two women exchange licks on piano and guitar (Elvis learned a lot from Tharpe's strong strumming), it becomes clear that Tharpe is drawn to the young woman's gentleness—but how to love a woman, given the strictures of the black church? Lewis not only inhabits Tharpe's bones and muscle; she raises the roof with her own voice, one that comes from the soul of a great theatre artist who's finally been given a chance to show what she can do. (*Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.*)

A 24-Decade History of Popular Music

Act I: 1776-1806, the first in a series of three-hour concerts from the playwright and performer Taylor Mac, begins with Mac entering the theatre dressed like an illegal firework. The assless costume, courtesy of the designer Machine Dazzle, shimmers with glitter, panniers made from L.E.D. lights, and a tinsel-strewn headpiece. It's hardly the most coruscating element of this project, which refracts America's history through two hundred and forty-six songs popularized between 1776 and 2016, from "Yankee Doodle" to Patti Smith's "Birdland" and beyond. (Credit the pianist Matt Ray with the gorgeous arrangements for an orchestra that begins with twenty-four members and dwindles to just one.) Yes, the audience participation is sometimes unhygienic, and Mac's patter, wry and frantic, occasionally wears. But the show's sense of adventure and event, of beauty and ruin, of sheer theatrical audacity is overpowering. On Oct. 8, Mac will combine all eight of the concerts into one ecstatic, intermissionless, unrepeatable twenty-four-hour marathon. (*St. Ann's Warehouse, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.*)

What Did You Expect?

In the second installment of Richard Nelson's delicate trilogy, which follows a Rhinebeck family called the Gabriels through the current election year, the women of the household are in the

kitchen chopping vegetables and talking—about debts, about Herman Melville, about the new Indian place in town, and, often, about the deceased patriarch, Thomas, who left a hole in the middle of their lives. That's how the election makes them feel, too: adrift and bewildered. "Everyone I know is scared," one of them says. Nelson avoids the overblown tropes of family drama, giving us a carefully calibrated slice of life: after a while, your senses adjust, as if in a darkened room. Under Nelson's direction, the play is a marvel of ensemble acting, with six performers (Maryann Plunkett, Roberta Maxwell, Jay O. Sanders, Lynn Hawley, Amy Warren, and Meg Gibson) as attuned to one another as artists can be. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

Where Did We Sit on the Bus?

Hip-hop musical meets one-man band in Brian Quijada's autobiographical show, framed as the life story he'll one day tell his child. Born to Salvadoran parents in the suburbs of Chicago, Quijada wants to wrestle with heavy themes of legacy and assimilation, but his analysis is disappointingly lightweight, and his narrative keeps tilting toward an all-too-familiar memoir of his struggles to break into show biz. Much of the tale is told in rhyme, and Quijada accompanies himself with the aid of a sequencer, making live loops (in the style of the comedian Reggie Watts) of his own beatboxing, singing, harmonica-playing, and miniature-guitar strumming. His looks recall the young Jerry Lewis, and the resemblance extends to his meaty physicality, his self-mocking cockiness, his little-boy vulnerability, his unabashed silliness, and his weakness for sentimentality. (*Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 866-811-4111.*)

The Wolves

When a show can brag about both fancy footwork and deft wordplay, it's usually a musical. But, aside from a team cheer—and even that's more of a howl—Sarah DeLappe's new play, produced by the Playwrights Realm, is music-free. Rather, she turns her attention to an indoor soccer team made up of girls in junior high. We never see the Wolves compete; they stretch, warm up, and run drills on the Astroturfed set, all while gabbing about everything from menstruation to the Khmer Rouge. DeLappe has an uncanny ear for the lightning-fast way that teen girls ricochet among seemingly unrelated subjects, offense and defense, as they try to figure out how and where they fit: with themselves, with family and friends, or with community. Under Lila Neugebauer's assured direction, the ensemble cast is sensational, suggesting the sisterhood of a genuine team while letting each individual player shine. (*The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through Sept. 29.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

All the Ways to Say I Love You Lucille Lortel. • **American in Paris** Palace. • **The Birds** 59E59. *Through Oct. 1.* • **Cats** Neil Simon. • **The Color Purple** Jacobs. • **A Day by the Sea** Beckett. • **Empathitrax** HERE. *Through Oct. 1.* • **Fiddler on the Roof** Broadway Theatre. • **Fiorello!** East 13th Street Theatre. • **Hamilton** Richard Rodgers. • **Hit the Body Alarm** Performing Garage. *Through Oct. 2.* • **The Humans** Schoenfeld. • **Maestro** 59E59. • **Nat Turner in Jerusalem** New York Theatre Workshop. • **School of Rock** Winter Garden. • **Sense & Sensibility** Gym at Judson. • **Small Mouth Sounds** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **Something Rotten!** St. James. • **A Taste of Honey** Pearl. • **Underground Railroad** Game Ars Nova. • **Waitress** Brooks Atkinson.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Christmas comes early this year, as the Met presents the first of three runs of a holiday favorite—Franco Zeffirelli's snow-kissed staging of Puccini's evergreen romance **"La Bohème."** Carlo Rizzi conducts Ailyn Pérez, Susanna Phillips, Dmytro Popov, and David Bizic in the leading roles. (Sept. 28 at 7:30 and Oct. 1 at 8.) • The season's first new production is Mariusz Trelinski's staging of **"Tristan und Isolde"**—which may well be an auspicious event, since the director's double-bill production of **"Iolanta"** and **"Bluebeard's Castle,"** in 2015, was a critical triumph at the house. Considered the foundational work of Wagner's career, the opera depicts an illicit love affair in wave after wave of ravishing sound as the composer toys with the limits of tonality for nearly four hours. Nina Stemme, today's most in-demand Wagnerian soprano, and Stuart Skelton headline a first-rate cast that also includes Ekaterina Gubanova and René Pape; Simon Rattle, who's made a specialty of coaxing glamorous sounds from an orchestra in this repertoire, conducts. (Sept. 30 and Oct. 3 at 6:30.) • Michael Grandage's strangely inert production of **"Don Giovanni"** is, at the very least, an unobtrusive showcase for talented singers, and there is one in particular who New York audiences are eager to hear: the incisive British baritone Simon Keenlyside, who returns to the Met stage after a long absence. He'll be joined by Hilda Gerzmava, Malin Byström, Serena Malfi, Paul Appleby, and Adam Plachetka; Fabio Luisi. (Oct. 1 at 1.) • It took Marilyn Horne's bravura singing, in the nineteen-seventies, for Rossini's fun and fizzy comic opera **"L'italiana in Algeri"** to find a permanent place in the Met's repertory, and now the talented Elizabeth DeShong joins the short list of mezzo-sopranos—Jennifer Larmore and Olga Borodina among them—whom the company has entrusted with the title role. The bass Ildar Abdrazakov and the tenor René Barbera, in his company debut, join her for Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's traditional production, from 1973; James Levine, now the company's music director emeritus, conducts. (Oct. 4 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Opera America: "Creators in Concert"

The young composer, conductor, and poet Matthew Aucoin, of late a darling of the music press, takes to the piano to play an hour's worth of new vocal works, with help from the countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo and the bass-baritone Davóné Tines. The prolific twentysomething, whose pieces pair shimmery, whirling textures with tricky time signatures, has new operas in the offing for both Los Angeles Opera and the Met. (National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Ave. operaamerica.org. Sept. 29 at 7.)

On Site Opera

The company's season-opening double bill features two monodramas about women awaiting the return of a lover who never arrives: Dominick Argento's elegiac **"Miss Havisham's Wedding Night"** and Hector Berlioz's visceral **"La Mort de Cléopâtre."** Eric Einhorn stages the works (sung by the soprano Leah Partridge and the mezzo-

soprano Blythe Gaissert, respectively) in the grand environs of the Harmonie Club, a private Upper East Side social club that, suitably enough for the jilted Miss Havisham, also hosts weddings; Geoffrey McDonald conducts. (4 E. 60th St. osopera.org. Sept. 29 at 7 and Sept. 30 at 7:30.)

BAM: "The Hunger"

Opera's definitions keep getting broader. Donnacha Dennehy, a leading Irish composer and a favorite of the transatlantic avant-garde, expands it further in this work, based on Asenath Nicholson's personal account of the Great Famine of 1845-52. Dennehy combines new sounds with old Irish songs, and mixes musical performances with video teach-ins from the likes of Noam Chomsky and Paul Krugman; among the musicians on hand are the soprano Katherine Manley, the folk singer Iarla Ó Lionáird, and the ever-ready Alarm Will Sound, conducted by Alan Pierson. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. bam.org. Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Overtures seem to be dropping out of Philharmonic programs lately. The orchestra's next twofor is certainly inviting, though. It features the overdue Philharmonic debut of the mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kožená, who will bring her light yet seductive timbre to bear on Berlioz's intimate song cycle **"Summer Nights";** after intermission, Alan Gilbert and the orchestra will have the stage to themselves for Rimsky-Korsakov's **"Scheherazade,"** a sonic spectacular of a more extroverted type. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656. Sept. 29 at 7:30 and Sept. 30 and Oct. 1 at 8.)

Sacred Music in a Sacred Space: "Choral Elements"

The up-and-coming composer Julia Adolphe is in the spotlight for the environment-themed season-opening concert of this longtime series at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, under the command of its choirmaster, K. Scott Warren. Pieces for chorus, string quartet, and harp are featured on the program, including the New York premiere of Adolphe's **"Sea Dream Elegies"** as well as other works by Mozart, Holst, Frank Ferko, Frank Ticheli, and John Kennedy. (Park Ave. at 84th St. 212-288-2520. Sept. 28 at 7.)

TENET: "The New Art"

Gotham's stellar early-music choir celebrates things French this season, specifically the genius of Guillaume de Machaut, the fourteenth-century polyphonic master. This opening gambit pairs Machaut's music with pieces by his predecessors from the time of the *ars nova* movement, Philippe de Vitry, Adam de la Halle, and Jehan de Lescurel. (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. tenet.nyc. Sept. 30 at 7 and 9.)

RECITALS

Momenta Festival II

The Momenta Quartet, an outstanding young string quartet with an exceptionally

broad range, offers its second annual festival, with four concerts, each curated by a different member of the ensemble. Among the diverse offerings are a new string-quartet opera by Tony Prabowo (with the soprano Tony Arnold); a work by Wang Lu, inspired by Piero della Francesca's **"Madonna del Parto";** and classics by Cage, Takemitsu, Dutilleux, Beethoven, and Grieg. (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. brownpapertickets.com. Sept. 28-29 and Oct. 1-2 at 8.)

Cantata Profana: "Serenade"

Schoenberg's **"Serenade"** is simultaneously a nineteen-twenties atonal masterwork and a tribute to the cabaret music—a genre the composer himself contributed to—that surrounded him in Vienna and Berlin. Among its seven movements (which include a setting of a Petrarch sonnet intoned by the baritone Joshua Jeremiah), this intriguing collective of young musicians will interpolate pieces by Krenek, Tosti, Debussy, Mozart, and Brad Cox (**"Three Lullabies"**). (Church of St. Luke in the Fields, 487 Hudson St. universe.com. Sept. 29-30 at 8.)

House of Time:

"Four Seasons / Three Graces"

This Baroque band, anchored by the impressive talents of such Juilliard faculty musicians as the oboist Gonzalo X. Ruiz and the keyboardist Avi Stein, begins the season with a program that indulges in a bit of counterfactual history, reimagining Vivaldi's **"Four Seasons"** as if it had been originally written for a mixed chamber ensemble instead of for a string orchestra. **"Three Graces,"** a contemporary work by the composer Carolyn Yarnell, inspired by her childhood in the Sierra Nevada, completes the program. (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park W. at 65th St. brownpapertickets.com. Sept. 30 at 7:30.)

National Sawdust Opening Night

Genres bend at the brash Williamsburg performance space, which hosts two dynamic composer-vocalists on its season-opening program. Sophia Brous, collaborating with the British musicians David Coulter and Leo Abrahams, introduces **"Lullaby Movement,"** a piece that explores the good-night ritual by way of twenty-four languages learned among refugees in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East; Helga Davis, known for her work in operas by Philip Glass and Paola Prestini, joins the bass-baritone Davóné Tines, the PUBLIQuartet, and other performers to present **"Requiem for a Tuesday,"** a multi-dimensional "ceremony" that includes music by Davis, Caroline Shaw, Shara Nova, and Lou Reed, with choreography by Reggie (Regg Roc) Gray. (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org. Oct. 1 at 7.)

Issue Project Room: "After 9 Evenings"

I.P.R.'s latest mini-festival honors a concert series that took place fifty years ago at the 69th Regiment Armory, which brought engineers from Bell Labs together with a pioneering group of artists, dancers, and musicians. The final concert is under the command of Ed Bear, a performance artist and electrical engineer, who will, with his team, use a collection of live sound sources (including heartbeats, brainwaves, radio broadcasts, and photocells) to realize **"Variations VII,"** a seminal nineteen-sixties stochastic piece by John Cage. (22 Boerum Pl., Brooklyn. issueprojectroom.org. Oct. 1 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Bad Religion

Near the end of the Carter Administration, a fifteen-year-old Los Angeleno named Brett Gurewitz was trying to come up with a logo for his high-school punk band. He scrawled a Latin cross on a piece of paper, then added a red circle and a diagonal line to form the universal symbol for "NO." The logo has come to be known as the "Crossbuster," and the band became Bad Religion, one of the longest-running groups in punk history. A prime mover in the eighties pop-punk scene, the band is known for elevated three-part harmonies and smartly acerbic lyrics, penned by the vocalist Greg Graffin, who has a Ph.D. in zoology and often lectures on evolution and paleontology. (*Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. Oct. 3-4.*)

Brujeria

Masked nu-metal bands have given way to masked electronic producers, but that doesn't mean that Brujeria is quite done yet. The controversial Mexican-American band from Los Angeles is the brainchild of Fear Factory's Dino Cazeras. Over nearly three decades, he has rotated many of metal's treasured lifers into the lineup, at various points featuring members of Faith No More, Cradle of Filth, and Carcass; Brujeria's new record, "Pocho Aztlan," is its first release in sixteen years. The band debuted its first LP in 1993, with a title translating to "Killing White People," and the record was widely banned. Today, its harsh message is finding side doors into political discourse: metalheads on Web forums were amused to discover that Walmart listed Brujeria's graphic anti-Trump T-shirt on its Web site, via a third-party vender. The group is supported by **Cattle Decapitation**, an environmental deathgrind outfit that denounces animal cruelty. (*Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 212-614-6932. Oct. 3.*)

Diarrhea Planet

This Nashville-based sextet understands the joys of maximalism and willful stupidity. Look past its name to the stage: four guitar players assemble front and center during performances, each with their own mic. The result is near-perfect garage rock that sounds like a Trans-Am parked out front—which is to say, the songs shred. Effervescent college-radio hits like "Ghost with a Boner" have given way to a more honed sound, best captured in cuts like "Announcement" and "Bob Dylan's Grandma," from the band's June album, "Turn to Gold." The group recently performed a new single, "Ain't a Sin to Win," on "The Late Show with Seth Myers." (*Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. Oct. 4.*)

Jenny Hval

This fascinating Norwegian experimental chanteuse and songwriter released "Blood Bitch"

this week, her fourth long-player under her own name. About halfway through, in a snippet from a home recording, a friend asks her what the record is about. "It's about vampires," she laughs. "It's about blood!" Through a sonic collage of ambient noise, spoken word, and transcendent synth-pop, Hval investigates her personal relationship with vampirism, femininity, and menstruation. The result is one of the bravest and best albums of the year, and Hval's making a stop in the Village this week to celebrate its release on the modish Brooklyn label Sacred Bones Records. (*Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. Sept. 30.*)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Laura Benanti

Her spot-on impression of Melania Trump on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" was one of the highlights of this nearly surrealist campaign season, but Benanti possesses other talents besides a deadly sense of humor. A skillful actress and singer, she recently grabbed a Tony nomination, her fifth, for her turn in the Broadway revival of "She Loves Me." (*Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Oct. 4-8.*)

Ron Carter

Carter, the top bassist of his era, has never been shy about training the spotlight on his virtuosic abilities, even when he's playing with the fully stocked big band that he occasionally leads. Grounded by the imperturbable pulse of this ever-in-demand craftsman (Carter has been heard on more than two thousand recordings), the band swings mightily. (*Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Sept. 27-Oct. 1.*)

Ibrahim Maalouf

Maalouf's latest recording, "Kalthoum," pays tribute to the legendary Egyptian vocalist Oum Kalthoum, although Maalouf does his singing with an atypical quarter-tone trumpet. Maalouf's expressive bent notes swirl about a judiciously applied jazz setting that honors Kalthoum through an unexpected and highly personal musical prism. (*Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Sept. 30-Oct. 1.*)

John Scofield

For his latest project, "Country for Old Men," the guitarist didn't exactly run down to Nashville and start cutting duets with the likes of Kenny Chesney. What he did do was transform some favorite country songs into jazz excursions for a crack ensemble featuring longtime collaborators, including the celebrated electric bassist Steve Swallow and the keyboardist Larry Goldings. The result is a clever genre mashup; it's not every day that you hear Dolly Parton's "Jolene" transformed into a stirring jazz-waltz jam. (*Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Sept. 27-Oct. 2.*)

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but upon the art of the world.*
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Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847–1919) *Eternal Orb* (detail)

MOVIES



A drug dealer (Mahershala Ali) mentors a neglected boy (Alex R. Hibbert) in Barry Jenkins's "Moonlight," screening in the New York Film Festival.

Harvest Time

The long and short of new masterworks.

THE MAIN SLATE of the New York Film Festival, at Lincoln Center Sept. 30–Oct. 16, is the city's leading showcase for international and Hollywood art films. This year, programs for documentaries and shorts—in which established filmmakers try out bold new ideas—also present works that offer high artistic quality and probing social perspectives.

"Moonlight," Barry Jenkins's second feature, depicts a young man's coming of age while facing the possibility of being gay, a classic story told in new ways that do more than avoid clichés—they shatter cinematic stereotypes. The film, adapted from Tarell Alvin McCraney's play, shows three episodes in the life of the Miami-born Chiron, starting when the bullied schoolboy (Alex R. Hibbert), neglected by his mother (Naomie Harris), is sheltered by a Cuban-born drug dealer (Mahershala Ali) and his girlfriend (Janelle Monáe), while his friendship with a classmate named Kevin deepens.

Jenkins burrows deep into his charac-

ters' lives and minds with a granular precision, conjured with urgent performances, frank dialogue, and a repertory of tense closeups and hyperkinetic swoops, scalding light and deep darkness, that render Chiron's world with as much psychological as geographical specificity. Chiron and all of the film's characters are black—even the title is no mere nature reference but an evocation of skin color. Subtly alluding to wider societal conflicts, Jenkins looks closely at the passionate and crystalline intimacies of people whose very identities are forged under pressure.

Modern music was scarred by the death, at thirty-three, of the trumpeter Lee Morgan, who was shot in a Lower East Side jazz club in 1972 by his common-law wife, Helen Morgan. The Swedish director Kasper Collin's documentary "I Called Him Morgan" is anchored by the sole recorded interview that she granted, in 1996, shortly before her death. Collin reveals the vast historical range of her story, starting with her move, in the nineteen-forties, from her native North Carolina to New York, where she confronted the limited em-

ployment opportunities for black women and built a sort of freestyle artistic salon. Interviews with Morgan's great musical cohorts, such as Wayne Shorter and Albert (Tootie) Heath, reveal the jazz circuit's high-risk behind-the-scenes energies, involving fast cars, sexual adventures, and—in Morgan's case—drugs. From the story of one complex relationship, Collin builds a resonant portrait of an enduringly influential scene and era.

Jia Zhangke's twenty-five-minute "The Hedonists" is a featurette—a large-scale, wildly derisive, Chaplinesque vision of China's economic and political woes. It's about three middle-aged laborers who lose their jobs in a desolate industrial zone. With blithe hopefulness, they team up to pursue a series of hopeless employment prospects. Their humiliations at the hands of a brazen plutocrat, sardonically filmed with soaring camera work, are matched by their riotous efforts to work in the entertainment business—at a folkloric theme park. There, Jia daringly links China's current regime to the country's harsh feudal dynasties.

—Richard Brody

COURTESY DAVID BORNFIELD/A24

OPENING

American Honey This drama, directed by Andrea Arnold, stars Sasha Lane as a door-to-door magazine seller working in the Midwest. *Opening Sept. 30. (In limited release.)* • **Deepwater Horizon** A thriller, based on the true story of the 2010 explosion of an oil rig off the coast of Louisiana. Directed by Peter Berg; starring Mark Wahlberg. *Opening Sept. 30. (In wide release.)* • **Masterminds** Jared Hess directed this comedy, about a night watchman (Zach Galifianakis) who is lured into a plot to rob a bank. Co-starring Owen Wilson and Kristen Wiig. *Opening Sept. 30. (In wide release.)* • **Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children** Tim Burton directed this adaptation of the novel by Ransom Riggs, about a boy who discovers an abandoned orphanage. Starring Asa Butterfield and Eva Green. *Opening Sept. 30. (In wide release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Author: The JT LeRoy Story

In 2005 and 2006, journalists discovered that the acclaimed novelist JT LeRoy was not, as billed, a gender-fluid, H.I.V.-afflicted adolescent hustler from the South but, rather, the fictitious persona of Laura Albert, then a forty-year-old San Francisco woman originally from New York. This documentary, by Jeff Feuerzeig, relying heavily on interviews with Albert, unravels the twisty, suspenseful, pain-filled, and sometimes beautiful story of LeRoy's creation. Albert details the emotional emergency that gave rise to the persona, which she transformed into an outlet for her long-stifled literary energies. The film also delves into Albert's severely troubled childhood, which was defined by feats of creative disguise. To maintain the fiction of LeRoy, Albert prompted her partner's half sister to play the author in public (with Albert and her partner portraying faux members of the entourage) and among such unwitting participants as Gus Van Sant, Mary Karr, Courtney Love, Asia Argento, and a host of publishers, editors, and critics, who ended up feeling duped. The film includes Albert's tape recordings of conversations, including ones made without the participants' knowledge—yet the film doesn't make clear whether these recordings are archival or reenactments. Feuerzeig's flashy narrative antics reduce a serious and substantial story to mere snippets of information.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

The Beatles: Eight Days a Week

This new documentary, covering the Beatles' years on tour, is reportedly crammed with fresh material, including previously unseen amateur footage, gathered from fans around the world. Sound recordings from live shows have also been cleansed and restored, with voices and instruments unearthed from below layers of uncontrollable screams. Anybody seeking scandal should look elsewhere, but then this is a Ron Howard film, and the tone is remorselessly upbeat—rightly so, when you see and hear the band in its early prime. There are interviews with Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, and with a peculiar selection of celebrities, not all of whom have much to report—an exception being the historian Kitty Oliver, who speaks movingly of being part of an unsegregated audience. (The Beatles, as we see from their contract, would not perform to a segregated one.) The group's withdrawal into the studio, after a final concert in San Francisco, now feels, in the helpful light of this movie, inevitable; not only were the foursome pushing the confines

of technology, the very experience of playing live had coarsened into a chore, and the joyous crowds were verging on a mob. Not that one should rue the retreat; after all, "Sgt. Pepper" was waiting in the wings.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 9/26/16.) (In limited release.)*

Bridget Jones's Baby

Will she, won't she, and with whom? And will she fall over in the attempt? These and other breathless questions attend the return of Bridget Jones (Renée Zellweger), who, for the third time, strives to break the habits of loneliness and, by way of a bonus, to find love. She has a grownup career in TV, but the movie treats her job as little more than a joke, cleaving to romantic satisfaction as the one sure thing. Hence the perpetual need for Mr. Darcy (Colin Firth), who emerges from a failed marriage and pays court, yet again, to the dithering heroine. He also becomes one of two suspects in the matter of her unexpected pregnancy, the other contender being an American billionaire (Patrick Dempsey). Even addicts of the franchise will struggle to maintain that the new film, directed by Sharon Maguire, flows smoothly along; rather, it lurches from one awkward set piece to the next, gamely sustained by Zellweger and, in the role of a wry obstetrician, Emma Thompson.—*A.L. (9/26/16) (In wide release.)*

Cameraperson

The documentary cinematographer Kirsten Johnson's cinematic memoir—a compilation of sequences from films that she shot over the past twenty-five years—is somewhat less than the sum of its parts, yet those parts are, in themselves, transfixing. Johnson avoids voice-over commentaries, using only the sound recorded on location, yet the effect is often deeply personal. The most extended sequences were shot in a village in Bosnia, where Johnson worked on a movie about the systematic rape of women during the civil war in the nineteen-nineties. Her warm relations with the town's residents—and her appreciation of their rustic way of life—poignantly balance, as she tells her hosts, the horrific accounts that she documented. Among the other memorable characters here are a prosecutor in the Texas murder of James Byrd, a doctor who delivers babies in a woefully underequipped clinic in Nigeria, and Johnson's mother, Catherine, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Johnson's brief discussions with directors about the choices and ruses that go into the making of images suggest a depth of knowledge and an artistic morality that the movie only hints at.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Mr. Church

Bruce Beresford, the director of "Driving Miss Daisy," returns with another film about a benevolent and infinitely patient black man who brings sweetness and light to the lives of white people. Eddie Murphy plays the title role, that of a cook who is dispatched to the home of Marie Brooks (Natascha McElhone), a cancer victim and single mother who's raising her ten-year-old daughter, Charlie (Natalie Coughlin), alone. The action is set in Los Angeles in the nineteen-seventies. Mr. Church, a fine cook, is also an excellent artist, a literary connoisseur, and an accomplished jazz pianist; he's at the Brooks home from early morning until late at night, and his cherished private time hardly leaves a moment for sleep. Mr. Church sees the teen-age Charlie (Britt Robertson) off to college; she returns home pregnant, and Mr. Church takes her in. The sentimental vision of improvised families is based on the total commitment and total dependence of a black man whose deferential manner reeks of subjugation and fear.

Though the drama is repellent, Murphy is brilliant even when doing nothing, and the movie's only redeeming moments capture his preternatural grace in the simplest actions.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Don't Breathe

In this taut and claustrophobic thriller by the director Fede Alvarez, a home invasion by three attractive twentysomething criminals goes horribly wrong. An aging blind veteran (played with gusto by Stephen Lang) is the would-be victim of the heist, but, using his unusually keen remaining senses, he turns the tables on the thieves, and a tightly choreographed game of track-and-attack begins. The suspense is built as carefully as it is in a good John Carpenter movie; Alvarez uses the camera like a stealth weapon, exploring dark corners and hidden areas of the house with devilish glee. The film is violent and disturbing, as if Rambo had been let loose in a confined space, and the scares build to a frightening conclusion. The wonderfully expressionistic cinematography is by Pedro Luque.—*Bruce Diones (In wide release.)*

Don't Think Twice

The comedian Mike Birbiglia wrote, directed, and co-stars in this amiable, lovingly detailed comedy about comedy—specifically, about the life and possible death of an admired but struggling New York improv troupe called the Commune. Birbiglia plays Miles, who founded the troupe a decade ago but is struggling to find a place in the business at large. He and the five other members hold down day jobs (one's a waitress, another works in a store, and Miles teaches improv) while awaiting their big break. When a producer invites several of the members to audition for "Weekend Live," the Saturday-night broadcast that makes comedians instantly famous, the resulting turmoil of resentments and frustrations turns the Commune into a buzzing hive of individualists and threatens to pull it apart. Birbiglia films what he knows, offering ample and intricate scenes of improvisations performed onstage, along with an insider's view of the industry, and he pushes his colleagues to the fore—especially Keegan-Michael Key, who has a drolly ambiguous turn as a self-anointed star, and Gillian Jacobs, playing a powerhouse performer tormented by self-doubt, who is the film's movingly dramatic center.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Florence Foster Jenkins

The new Stephen Frears film tells the tale of Florence Foster Jenkins (Meryl Streep), and seeks to explain why, in 1944, a sellout crowd came to hear her sing at Carnegie Hall, in spite—or precisely because—of the fact that she could not sing. She herself did not know this, and what Streep captures best, without a quaver of condescension, is not just the depth of Florence's innocence but the peculiar strain of courage that arose from it and struck a chord with the wartime audience. There is not much of a plot here. We watch Florence rehearsing (as if practice were ever going to help), performing for a select—and mostly aged—few, and then girding herself for the main event. Nor is there much social snap, as Frears inspects the follies of the rich with a surprisingly kindly eye. What lends the film its emotional twist is the presence of Hugh Grant, finally finding his ideal role as Florence's husband, St. Clair Bayfield, whose anxious and adoring love for his wife saved her, time after time, from humiliation. Simon Helberg enjoys himself as Cosmé McMoon, the loyal pianist who accompanied Florence in her happy musical massacres.—*A.L. (8/22/16) (In wide release.)*

Hell or High Water

The Howard brothers, of West Texas—Toby (Chris Pine), who's divorced and unemployed, and Tanner (Ben Foster), who's fresh out of prison—are in mourning for their late mother. They're also pissed off at the Texas Midlands Bank, which will foreclose on her ranch unless they can fork over forty-three thousand dollars by the end of the week. The brothers set out to raise the money by robbing a bunch of the bank's branches, and Marcus Hamilton (Jeff Bridges), a marshal on the verge of retirement, sets out to stop them. The script, by Taylor Sheridan, piles a load of snappy incidents and tangy dialogue on this neo-Western, neo-noir setup; the action is as schematic and artificial as a chess game, and the characters have as much identity as its pieces. The director, David Mackenzie, gives each of his actors time to shine and fills the film with picturesque details, but the movie might as well be a table read set before a green screen. Only Bridges emerges whole; with his typical brilliance, he leaps from the laconic to the rhetorical, making even the shady brim of his hat speak volumes.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

The Light Between Oceans

Derek Cianfrance's new film is plainer in construction than his previous ones, "Blue Valentine" (2010) and "The Place Beyond the Pines" (2012), and far more secluded in its setting. Michael Fassbender plays Tom, an ex-soldier who finds refuge, after the First World War, as a lighthouse keeper. He is the sole resident of an island off the Australian coast, until he is joined by his new bride, Isabel (Alicia Vikander), and then, some time later, by a baby daughter. There is only one problem: she is not their child but a foundling, washed ashore in a boat, and their wrongful claim on her sweeps them to the shores of disaster. Although this peculiar plot, adapted from a novel by M. L. Stedman, bears traces of Shakespearean romance, Cianfrance grounds the action firmly in the emotional wranglings of his central couple. There is a love story, and the irony is that both actors—Vikander, with the alarmingly free flow of her tears, and Fassbender, in his injured stillness—seem more suited to the agony of loss and separation than to marital delight. Rachel Weisz, as the girl's real mother, does fine work, making the most implausible decisions feel stirring and true.—*A.L. (9/12/16) (In wide release.)*

Mia Madre

A pall of sadness hangs over Nanni Moretti's new work, as it did over "The Son's Room," his grief-mantled drama from 2001. Margherita Buy plays a movie director, also named Margherita, who is meant to be concentrating on her latest project—the story of an Italian company that is bought by an American entrepreneur. (Like most films-within-films, it's not something you would rush to watch.) Her professional poise is beginning to crack, however, because of worries about her aging mother (Giulia Lazzarini), a much-loved teacher whose end is nigh; Margherita's brother, played by Moretti, is relatively sanguine in the face of this impending loss, yet she herself seems already bereft. Set against that gloom is the effrontery of her loudmouthed leading man, played—more ripely, perhaps, than the movie requires—by John Turturro. The result is slender but piercing, and there is no mistaking the economy of Moretti's narrative skills; he will cut a scene short rather than have it outstay its welcome, or step in and out of a dream sequence with such aplomb that we instinctively greet it as real. In Italian.—*A.L. (8/29/16) (In limited release.)*

Miss Stevens

The title character of Julia Hart's first feature is a young English teacher in a suburban California high school, Rachel Stevens (Lily Rabe), whose taut composure is punctured by her piercing gazes, which suggest that she cares too much. When Rachel chaperones three of her class's actors on a trip to a drama competition, the hothouse isolation both deepens and roils her relationships with them. The script, by Hart and Jordan Horowitz, defines the students schematically: the brusquely efficient Margot (Lili Reinhart); the sassy and flirtatious Sam (Anthony Quintal), who's gay; and the challengingly talented but tormented Billy (Timothée Chalamet), whose crush on his teacher is all too evident from the start. Rachel is a lonely woman in mourning for her mother, with a fragile veneer of quiet yearning and awkward energy; when that veneer cracks, the effect is powerful despite its air of calculation. Rachel's scenes with Billy have little drama other than her resolve not to cross any lines, but her tense discussions with Walter (Rob Huebel), another teacher at the conference, offer substance to ponder beyond the story's narrow limits.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Pete's Dragon

The director David Lowery brings natural sweetness and heartfelt wonder to this remake of the 1977 fantasy. Young Pete's parents are killed in a car accident in the rural Pacific Northwest, and Pete, who survived, heads for the woods, where he's rescued by a furry green dragon—more like a gigantic, winged, fire-breathing dog—which he calls Elliot. Five years later, Pete (Oakes Fegley), a wild child whom Elliot raises, shelters, and entertains, is spotted by a local girl named Natalie (Oona Laurence), who informs adults, who drag him into society. Elliot, something of a rural myth, comes out of hiding to search for the boy, and the chase is on. Meanwhile, Pete becomes attached to Natalie's family circle, which includes an outdoorsman (Robert Redford) who's the only villager to have seen Elliot for himself. Lowery lovingly crafts a neorealist fantasy, in which Elliot's vast powers—including flight and evanescence—have practical limits. The director revels in the freewheeling frolics of Pete and Elliot, and resolves their conflicts with a hard-earned sentimentality. It's as if Disney were launching a new artisanal line; if so, this finely crafted and keenly felt drama inaugurates it in style.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Snowden

Oliver Stone's fast-paced and large-scale but narrow-focus bio-pic of Edward Snowden covers the near-decade from 2004, when Snowden (played, or, rather, impersonated, by Joseph Gordon-Levitt) dropped out of Army training because of an injury, to 2013, when he left the United States and then got stuck in Russia. A computer whiz as well as a conservative from a military family, Snowden, as depicted here, joins the C.I.A. and is tapped for great things by his Mephistophelian supervisor, Corbin O'Brian (Rhys Ifans), though a frustrated tech genius (Nicolas Cage) dims his enthusiasm from the start. Snowden is disillusioned by his discovery of a vast and illegal surveillance network and its real-world effects, including drone strikes that kill innocent people, but the tipping point is his realization that he and his girlfriend, Lindsay Mills (Shailene Woodley), are also under surveillance. Stone, who wrote the script with Kieran Fitzgerald, sticks to Snowden's point of view throughout, framing the action with scenes of Snowden's high-pressure meetings in a Hong Kong hotel room with the filmmaker Laura Poitras (Melissa Leo) and the journalists Glenn Greenwald (Zachary Quinto) and Ewen MacAskill (Tom Wilkinson). Stone's flashy film-

making, including grand set pieces in enormous secret facilities, can't conceal his flat, thin, psychology-free depiction of a modest and self-sacrificing hero who single-handedly changed the politics of our time.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Sully

Clint Eastwood transforms the events, in 2009, of Flight 1549—which Captain Chesley Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles safely landed in the Hudson River after losing both jets in a bird strike—into a fierce, stark, haunted drama of horror narrowly avoided. Eastwood's depiction of Sully (played, with terse gravity, by Tom Hanks) begins with a shock: the captain's 9/11-esque vision of his plane crashing into New York buildings. The action of the film involves another shock: federal officials question Sully's judgment and subject him and Skiles (Aaron Eckhart) to an investigation that could cost him his job and even his pension. Eastwood films the doomed flight with a terrifyingly intimate sense of danger, focussing on its existential center, the little red button under the pilot's thumb. The film movingly depicts Sully's modest insistence that he was just doing his job and the collective courage of flight attendants, air-traffic controllers, police officers, and the passengers themselves. But, throughout, Eastwood boldly thrusts attention toward the aftermath of the flight: the nerve-jangling media distortion of events and personalities, plus the investigators' ultimate weapon, a computer simulation of the landing, a movie on which Sully's honor depends. The result is Eastwood's dedicated vision of moviemaking itself.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

They Drive by Night

Raoul Walsh's rowdy and romantic 1940 drama about California truckers could serve as a primer for entrepreneurship. George Raft and Humphrey Bogart star as the brothers Fabrini, drivers who dream of owning their own firm but, for now, are struggling with the payments on their decrepit truck. Joe (Raft) is the ambitious one; single and on the prowl, he falls for Cassie Hartley (Ann Sheridan), a sharp-tongued, sharp-witted waitress on the run from a sexual harasser. Paul (Bogart), who is married, wants a steady job but feels bound to help Joe realize his plan. However, when night driving takes its toll (sleep deprivation is a key plot point throughout), Joe goes to work for another former driver who is now on his own, the glad-handing Ed Carlsen (Alan Hale), whose scheming, social-climbing wife, Lana (Ida Lupino), lusts after Joe. The hearty camaraderie of Walsh's working men and women—a force for predatory bosses to reckon with—conceals the physical danger and emotional stress of manual labor. The pugnacity of Walsh's comic direction infuses turbulently free enterprise with tragedy.—*R.B. (MOMA; Sept. 29.)*

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles with a dagger are reviewed.

Film Society of Lincoln Center New York Film Festival. *Sept. 30 at 6, 6:30, 9, and 9:30:* "13th" (2016, Ava DuVernay). • *Oct. 1 at 4:15 and Oct. 2 at 9:* "I Am Not Your Negro" (2016, Raoul Peck). • *Oct. 1 at 6 and Oct. 2 at 11:30 A.M.:* "Manchester by the Sea" (2016, Kenneth Lonergan). • *Oct. 1 at 6:45 and Oct. 2 at 8:45:* "Shorts Program 2: International Auteurs," including "The Hedonists" (2016, Jia Zhangke). • *Oct. 2 at 6 and Oct 3 at 8:45:* "I Called Him Morgan" (2016, Kasper Collin). • *Oct. 2 at 6:15 and Oct. 3 at 9:* "Moonlight" (2016, Barry Jenkins).

DANCE

New York City Ballet

In 1967, George Balanchine created "Jewels," a compendium of his ideas about the French, American, and Russian Imperial schools of ballet. (Gemstones provided the color scheme.) Accordingly, the three-part, evening-length ballet is set to misty Fauré, jazzy Stravinsky, and regal Tchaikovsky. "Emeralds," part one, is the most mysterious; it's a ballet of shadows and fogs. "Rubies" is all Jazz Age angles and sass; "Diamonds" is steeped in longing for a lost world—particularly the rather melancholy *pas de deux*. The ballet returns this week for four performances, alongside a program of Stravinsky ballets, one of new works, and an all-American bill. • Sept. 28 at 7:30, Sept. 30 at 8, Oct. 1 at 2, and Oct. 2 at 3: "Jewels." • Sept. 29 at 7:30: "Stravinsky Violin Concerto," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Duo Concertant," and "Symphony in Three Movements." • Oct. 1 at 8: "For Clara," "The Dreamers," "ten in seven," and "Unframed." • Oct. 4 at 7:30: "Glass Pieces," "Thou Swell," and "Stars and Stripes." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through Oct. 16.)

"Fall for Dance"

There are three mixed bills this week, each shared by four companies. Program 2 (Sept. 28-29)

includes the London-based Richard Alston Dance Company, a modern-dance group known for its affable stage demeanor and highly musical choreography. The Canadian Aszure Barton, who tends toward quirky, slithery movement, brings her water-inspired "Awáa." The stylish tapper Ayodele Casel performs a solo on Program 3; that evening also includes the Melbourne-based Bangarra Dance Theatre, which specializes in works based on the myths of the Australian Aborigines. Program 4 features more ballet: a new dance by Jessica Lang and a performance of Frederick Ashton's "Marguerite and Armand." The latter, based on "The Lady of the Camellias," will star Alina Cojocar (formerly of the Royal Ballet) and Friedemann Vogel, a star at the Stuttgart Ballet. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Sept. 26-Oct. 1 and Oct. 4. Through Oct. 8.)

NY Quadrille

The concept is peculiar: the Joyce Theatre will cover part of its raked seating and install risers on the stage so that a rectangular platform can be viewed from four sides. The idea for this in-the-round arena came from the choreographer Lar Lubovitch, who has generously invited four

exciting choreographers to use it. First up in a two-week series of overlapping programs is Pam Tanowitz, whose latest heady, step-rich creation is called "Sequenzas in Quadrilles" and features live music by Members of the Knights. The intense and esoteric RoseAnne Spradlin follows, with a new trio named "X." Next week: Tere O'Connor and the young Loni Landon. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 27-Oct. 2 and Oct. 4. Through Oct. 9.)

"Pandaemonium"

Directed by Lars Jan, this dance-theatre-cinema work is about disconnection. The choreographer Nichole Canuso and the physical-theatre performer Geoff Sobelle remain mostly apart, on opposite sides of the stage, but their images come together in footage, filmed in the Mojave Desert, à la "Zabriskie Point," and projected on a screen. The musician Xander Duell scores the combination live. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Sept. 28-Oct. 1.)

Caleb Teicher & Company

Mixing super-charged energy with tossed-off charm, Teicher is among the more promising figures in tap dance. His choreography shows potential, too. In "Variations," he's joined by three talented colleagues, whose attempts to keep up with Glenn Gould's 1955 recording of Bach's "Goldberg Variations" are amusing and impressive. (Kupferberg Center for the Arts, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Queens. 718-793-8080. Sept. 29.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Lit Crawl

These pub readings have aimed to bring "literature to the streets" of the Lower East Side, the East Village, and Williamsburg since 2008. Literary debauchery may be a worthy pursuit, bringing to mind Hemingway's brooding, boozy prose and Haight-Ashbury's flighty scribbles. Thankfully, the organizers of Lit Crawl have less anarchic ambitions: events like Literary Pictionary and Nerd Jeopardy welcome regulars to flex their bookish chops; Tarot readings, flash portraiture, and mobile photo booths extend an arm toward casual readers. (Various locations. pen.org. Oct. 1.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Mid-priced contemporary art and photographs are the week's themes. Sotheby's holds one of its "Contemporary Curated" sales, in which a tastemaker (usually someone in fashion, finance, or pop culture) puts his or her seal of approval on the selected lots (Sept. 29). This time around, it's the mixed-media photographer Maxwell Snow's turn; he has selected works by Joseph Cornell, Ed

Ruscha, and his late brother, the photographer and eccentric Dash Snow. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • On Sept. 29, Christie's holds a sale of ninety-seven prints and works on paper by the ninety-five-year-old Wayne Thiebaud, selected in conjunction with the artist. The images include several of his enticing images of cakes and sweets, aptly collected under the title "Delights." An evening sale of photographs follows on Oct. 4. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Swann, which specializes in books and prints, is holding a sale of illustrations on Sept. 29; among the lots are several original cartoons and covers from this magazine, including a full-page illustration from 1951 by Charles Addams ("Noisy Neighbor," in which an elderly gent pounds on the ceiling while his upstairs neighbor, bound and gagged, struggles to break free). (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Miss Manhattan

On the first Monday of the month, Niagara Bar hosts this nonfiction reading series, where formi-

dable names in journalism and media share excerpts from their latest works. This week includes readings from the novelist Porochista Khakpour, the author of "Sons and Other Flammable Objects" and "The Last Illusion"; Alex Mar, a contributing editor at *Oxford American*; Autumn Whitefield-Madrano, whose book, "Face Value," examines positive aspects of American beauty culture; and Esther Wang, a former BuzzFeed editorial fellow and an Open City creative-nonfiction fellow. (112 Avenue A. 212-420-9517. Oct. 3 at 7:45.)

French Comics Framed

This month-long festival and talk series highlights the varied works of Francophone graphic novelists. More than fifty French graphic novels are currently on display at Cooper Union's Fourth Avenue Colonnade, for the first time in the U.S., tracing the history of the medium. In this week's talk, at the Society of Illustrators, the twin brothers Asaf and Tomer Hanuka discuss the contrasting storytelling styles they brought to "The Divine," their 2015 graphic novel, in which supernatural twin children lead a coup in a war-torn Asian country. (128 E. 63rd St. frenchcomicsassociation.com. Oct. 4 at 7.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Ladybird

127 Macdougall St. (212-475-2246)

THE LOGO OF this new West Village restaurant features a bird perched atop a cornucopia of vegetal delights, which itself sits atop a woman's head. The bird holds, in its beak, a single sphere—perhaps it's a cherry tomato, or a tiny beet. The image might evoke twin scenarios for a modern herbivore, both likely and neither ideal: one in which she is judged for her abstemious virtue amid carnivorous abundance, and one in which she finds scarcely more than a side dish of beets on a menu that is overwhelmingly a temple to meat.

Neither happens at Ladybird, where the city's "sophisticated and conscious" (in the words of Ravi DeRossi, its proprietor and a vegan for more than a decade) might seek "escape from the drinking crowd of Macdougall." The aesthetic—gilded stucco ceilings, tiered chandeliers, faux-silk floor-length curtains in aquamarine—summons the sumptuous dining room of a marchioness who has renounced mutton and chicken fricassee in favor of the harvest from her garden, and who has seriously stepped up her cocktail game. As modern aperitifs, the Golden Peasant (Pineau des Charentes, ginger, lemon) and the Bleeding Heart (blood orange, hibiscus, champagne) are splendidly arboreal; the virgin Birds of Paradise (tangerine, lavender, lime) caused a pregnant patron

to exclaim, "I can pound this all night!"

Of some two dozen tapas, the most successful were the least expected and the most unassuming. The olives and cornichons—perfectly pert, coated in seasoned rice flour and gently fried in chili oil—proved to be the kind of addictive nibblers that make you forget the etiquette of communal dining. The cauliflower, nestled in a bed of robust chive pesto, lemon ricotta, and chia, was both flavorful and masterfully subtle. Charred eggplant, topped with feta and apricot-jalapeño jam, had the zestiness of Sichuan-style eggplant without a slick of grease. Other formulations, however, felt overwrought. A caramelized artichoke heart was so besieged by the marcona-almond-and-crème-fraîche glaze that its natural freshness was buried. Mushroom pâté was paired inventively with fig compote and black vinegar, but tasted almost nothing like either mushroom or pâté.

One night, a vegan and three omnivores reflected on the romantic travails of the urban plant eater over a majestic spread of vegetable charcuterie that included roasted grapes, beet "chorizo," and cashew-milk brie. "The worst part is the first date," the vegan said. "If you suggest a vegan place, it's like you are making them suffer." Just then, the chocolate fondue arrived, halting the conversation with its exhalation of cinnamon and coconut. One friend dipped a strawberry into the bubbling dark velvet. "I'm not suffering," he said. (Dishes \$6-\$32.)

—Jiayang Fan

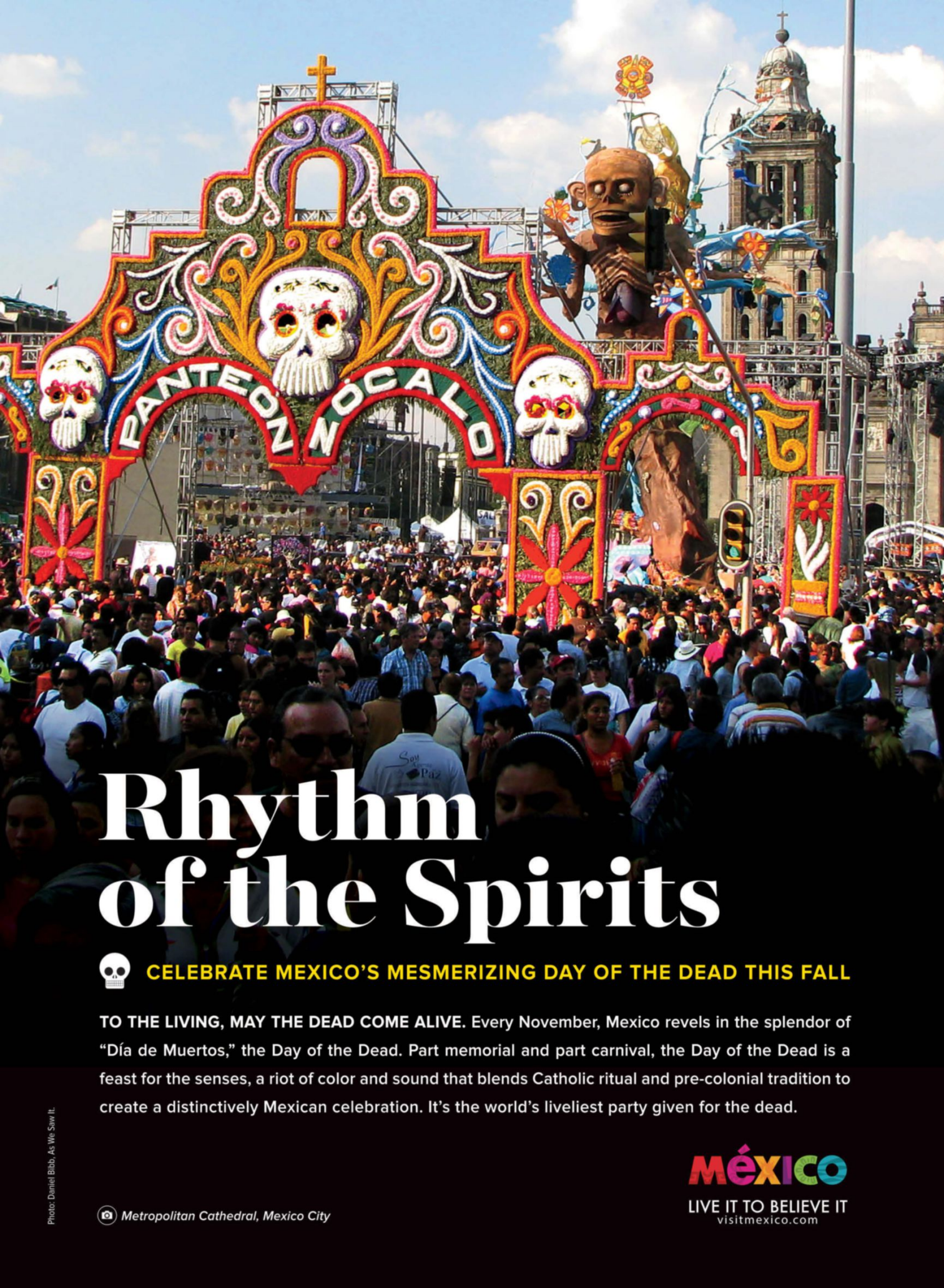
BAR TAB



Tracks Raw Bar and Grill

Penn Station, lower level (212-244-6350)

One nice thing about the drab crypt of Penn Station is the lack of pretension within the subterranean sprawl. There's none in the dingy Amtrak concourse, nor further below, in the long fluorescent hallway flanked with bright shops, at the end of which sits an oyster bar marked by the word "TRACKS," in glowing indigo. Inside, exuberance unfurls like a hallucination in black-and-white tiles, mahogany, and twinkling fairy lights. The space is fiercely dedicated to its theme: there's a map of the Long Island Rail Road painted on the ceiling, laminated photographs of subway depots and Northeastern engines serve as placemats, and the plates are painted with train tracks. The bar bustles with cheerful regulars in dark suits, on their way home to Long Island or New Jersey; it also provides an unlikely refuge for anyone stranded below Madison Square Garden. Its hospitality is evident in the vast drinks list. There is champagne by the glass and a terrific LIRR Iced Tea ("No round trip," the menu warns). Even the Piña Coladas are very good. On a recent Thursday evening, a pair of women in gowns and pearl necklaces shared oysters and Martinis in the back room, also known as "The Dining Car." At the next table, well-biceped young men in snug T-shirts downed burgers and beers. Moody paintings depict mid-twentieth-century train passengers during cocktail hour—elegant men and women in fedoras and pillbox hats. "Personally, I don't like them," one bartender said about the pictures, shaking her head. They do feel incongruous amid such earnest homage, the austere subjects at odds with the bar's welcoming spirit. There is a grander train-station oyster bar ten blocks north, good for airs and sophistication—the beauty of Tracks lies in its democracy.—Wei Tzhou



Rhythm of the Spirits



CELEBRATE MEXICO'S MESMERIZING DAY OF THE DEAD THIS FALL

TO THE LIVING, MAY THE DEAD COME ALIVE. Every November, Mexico revels in the splendor of "Día de Muertos," the Day of the Dead. Part memorial and part carnival, the Day of the Dead is a feast for the senses, a riot of color and sound that blends Catholic ritual and pre-colonial tradition to create a distinctively Mexican celebration. It's the world's liveliest party given for the dead.

Photos: Daniel Blau, As We Saw It.



Metropolitan Cathedral, Mexico City

México

LIVE IT TO BELIEVE IT
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A Celebration of Life

In Mexican tradition, death is a part of life, as natural as birth, childhood, or adulthood. Día de Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, celebrated from October 31 to November 2, honors those who have gone before us with music, laughter, food, and joy. Everyone is invited to the party, including the dead.

The Day of the Dead is unique. A distinctly Mexican fusion of **Aztec rituals** and **Catholicism**, its traditions and rites are recognized by UNESCO as part of the world's intangible cultural heritage.

In late October and early November, families gather by gravesides and altars to pray and to leave offerings for friends and relatives who have died. Tradition holds that the dead return to the world of the living at this time, and the offerings are a way to welcome them. Relatives offer **pan de muerto** (bread of the dead), **mezcal**, and **calaveras** (sugar skulls), as well as fruit, to nourish the dead; water, to quench their thirst; shredded paper, which drifts lightly through the breeze, just as spirits move through the air; and candles, with one lit for every soul being remembered.

Alongside more solemn memorials, the Day of the Dead is also celebrated with an array of parades, festivals, and parties. Many people dress in costumes evoking **La Calavera Catrina**: an engraving of a female skeleton in fine clothes that has become synonymous with the holiday. And parks and town squares are full of **outdoor performances**, including plays, music, and dance.

The Day of the Dead is a celebration of both continuity and change. For in the midst of life, we are in death.



📷 Traditional Day of the Dead celebrations include beautiful costumes, brightly colored skulls, and altars decorated with offerings for the dead.

Photos courtesy Mexico Tourism Board, Skull, ©Studio One-One.



Dance with the Dead

Día de Muertos Across Mexico



Aguascalientes

The birthplace of engraver **José Guadalupe Posada**—creator of the iconic **La Catrina**—hosts the **Festival de las Calaveras** (the Festival of Skulls) every year in his honor. See artists compete in the engraving contest and look out for the skeletons' street parade.

■ Aguascalientes	■ Puebla
■ Campeche	■ San Luis Potosí
■ Chiapas	■ Sinaloa
■ Estado de México	■ Querétaro
■ Mazatlán	■ Quintana Roo
■ Michoacán	■ Tlaxcala
■ Morelos	■ Veracruz
■ Oaxaca	■ Yucatán



Quintana Roo

The **Festival de Vida y Muerte**, held in **Xcaret Park** in late October and early November, is a huge draw for locals and tourists alike. For four days, visitors are treated to a celebration of art, photography, film, theatre, and dance associated with the Day of the Dead.



Michoacán

Few sights are as dazzling as the **Lago de Pátzcuaro** in early November, when the people of **Pátzcuaro** light candles and sail out onto the lake to cast large butterfly-like nets into the water. The ceremony is linked to a legend of ghosts, treasure, conquistadors, and the doomed love of a prince and princess.



Morelos

The people of **Ocotepéc**, a small town in Morelos, have an unusual way of honoring their dead: They create a "simulated body," a mannequin dressed in the deceased's clothes, with a **sugar skull** for a head. Drop by a home during the Day of the Dead and you might see one.



Oaxaca

In **Tuxtpec**, in Oaxaca, locals decorate altars to the dead with **sawdust carpets**: layers of colored sawdust arranged in floral and religious shapes. Visit the town square to admire carpets created during the annual competition.



Spirits and Splendor in Mexico City

As in all the country, Mexico City will celebrate the Day of the Dead, an ancestral celebration that was catalogued by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage experience in 2003. It is a celebration that unites both indigenous and European traditions which, through their constant dichotomy and fusion, have shaped Mexico's cultural essence.

The celebration of the Day of the Dead can be traced back more than 3,000 years to the heart of the pre-Columbian era, when death was considered not the end of existence but a natural part of the regenerative cycle of life. The offerings in part were a means of achieving this renewal. Flowers, food, paper, and “copal” (a special kind of incense) were and still are the elements that allow the dead to coexist with the living. These are a part of today's traditions, showcasing colorful altars and offerings as well as festive events to honor deceased friends and relatives.



Visitors can immerse themselves in a truly ancient Mexican tradition by visiting the cemetery of **Mixquic** on the night of November 1, seeing the light show in **Coyoacán** or taking boat rides in **Xochimilco**—an area in the south of Mexico City known for its network of canals that flow through the “**chinampas**” or floating island gardens—where one can listen to old legends.

Today, this holiday is the most popular festival in the country. People come together to remember friends and relatives who have passed away. Offerings or altars are placed within the home or in cemeteries with the purpose of living together with the dead during this special day. The altars include **cempasúchil** flowers with their beautiful bright orange-yellow color, candles to light the path the



 From outdoor parades to candle-lit ceremonies, Mexico City leaps vividly to life during the Day of the Dead.

souls will take on their journey from the afterlife, water, fruit, “**pan de muerto**” (baked sweet bread with a bone-shaped surface), copal, salt, sugar skulls, and all kinds of food, especially those that the relatives enjoyed most.

Travellers who visit Mexico City during the Day of the Dead will surely find numerous options to experience this fascinating tradition.

MAKE MERRY IN MEXICO CITY

What to see and do during the Day of the Dead

Learn how Day of the Dead traditions influenced **Diego Rivera's** art at the **Museo Diego Rivera Anahuacalli**, in Coyoacán. Also known as the Anahuacalli Museum, the building is home to the nearly 50,000 **pre-Hispanic artifacts** Rivera collected in his lifetime—including funerary urns, masks, and sculpture from the ancient city of **Teotihuacan**—and a gallery of papier-mâché sculptures inspired by the Day of the Dead.

Visit **Ciudad Universitaria** (University City), the main campus of the **National Autonomous University of Mexico**, in Coyoacán and see a selection of **ofrendas**, altars created especially for the Day of the Dead. Students and faculty from across the university put together displays inspired by literature and other themes. Also, don't miss the **outdoor poetry recitals and music shows** on November 1 and 2.

Join crowds in the historical center of **Coyoacán** for the **Day of the Dead Festival**, a colorful costume parade that blends Halloween with Mexican traditions. If you are looking for **La Catrina**, you are sure to spot her here.

Bask in the scent of the **cempasúchil**, or **flor de muertos** (the flower of the dead), garlands that adorn one of the city's most spectacular **ofrendas**, at the **University of the Cloister of Sor Juana**. Students, staff, artists, and alumni decorate and design the ofrenda, which is popular with locals and tourists alike.

Clockwise from top left: Courtesy Mexico Tourism Board; Michael Marquand; EPA/Alex Cruz; Courtesy Mexico Tourism Board; Wendy Connett/Alamy; Sobreira/Alamy.

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT THE FEAR FACTOR

IN MID-SEPTEMBER, Rafia Zakaria, a Pakistani-American lawyer and writer, flew to Denver, to attend the annual conference of the Online News Association, where she was to present a paper on hate directed at American Muslims. She carried “Black Flags,” Joby Warrick’s account of the rise of ISIS, to read on the plane. Worried that passengers might be alarmed if they saw a South Asian woman engrossed in that book, she’d wrapped it in the floral cover of “Georgia,” Dawn Tripp’s novel about Georgia O’Keeffe. That is the sort of “passing,” Zakaria says, that many American Muslims engage in “to appear to be unthreatening” in this season of terror and Donald Trump.

After Paris, Brussels, Orlando, and Nice, it seemed likely that reactions to terrorism inspired by ISIS and its ilk would influence the Presidential election, not least because of Trump’s inflammatory efforts to elevate the subject. Then came last week’s attacks. In St. Cloud, Minnesota, Dahir Adan, a twenty-year-old Somali-American, knifed ten people at a shopping mall before an off-duty police officer shot him dead; ISIS claimed responsibility, but Adan’s motivations remain unclear. A day later, Ahmad Khan Rahami, a twenty-eight-year-old naturalized citizen of Afghan origin, who possessed jihadist literature, allegedly planted several bombs, including one that went off in Chelsea, wounding a couple of dozen people. It was the first successful terrorist bombing in New York City since 9/11.

As this dystopian Presidential campaign enters its final phase, the intermingling of persistent terrorism and resilient Trumpism is painful to contemplate. The candidates interpreted the latest attacks as an invitation to rehearse pugilistic rhetoric for the high-stakes debates. Hillary Clinton called Trump a “recruiting sergeant for the terrorists,” because of his race baiting and his denigration of Muslims, while Trump told his Twitter legions that Clinton’s “weakness” as

Secretary of State had “emboldened terrorists all over the world.” President Obama noted more measuredly that violent radicals “are trying to hurt innocent people, but they also want to inspire fear in all of us.” He added, “We all have a role to play as citizens in making sure we don’t succumb to that fear.”

We might not be up to it. In May, Guido Menzio, an Italian economist on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, was removed from a flight out of Philadelphia and questioned because a passenger thought that his work on a differential equation looked like Arabic. Last month, in Queens, a man approached an imam and his assistant and shot them in the back of the head. Police charged Oscar Morel, who is thirty-six, with double murder but have not explained his motive. According to Zakaria, online searches for “Islamophobia,” the neologism for exaggerated fears of the Muslim faith, often surge after terrorist incidents; so do searches for “Kill Muslims.”

Trump’s mainstreaming of bigotry has already damaged the country lastingly by ripping at its social bonds and popularizing a phony war on “political correctness” as an alternative to the ideals of tolerance and pluralism. Of course, Trump and his fellow-travellers aim vitriol and threats not just at Muslims. The wide-ranging ugliness at his rallies is there for all to see and hear; on Facebook and Twitter, trolls supporting him

spread racist and anti-Semitic poison. Yet America’s three million or so Muslims make up about one per cent of the population, a small, often isolated minority, whose intensifying anxieties this autumn are at least as easy to appreciate as those of New York subway riders. (Asked about the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War, Trump mused that such measures are sometimes necessary.)

Social-science studies show that fear of terrorism does affect voting. It tends to lift the electoral prospects of trusted, “strong” incumbents, but it isn’t obvious how that pattern will play



out this time. Obama enjoys high approval ratings, but he isn't on the ballot. Trump sells toughness, but he seems to frighten some voters as much as ISIS does. Clinton has an incumbent's qualifications, but she hasn't won broad trust, and lately, as her campaign's momentum has slackened, she has struggled to counter Trump's fearmongering. After last week, her task won't be any easier. As Trump's Republican-primary opponents discovered, debating him successfully on security issues requires sidestepping his wild insults while indicting him with his own aggression. Clinton is an experienced, effective debater, but Trump has a fix on the public's fears: during the past two years, casualties in the U.S. and Europe from attacks inspired by ISIS have gone up, and homegrown radicalization connected to that group is likely to persist for a long time.

Trump offers no plausible solutions to this threat, and, as Clinton's "recruiting sergeant" remark sought to highlight, stigmatizing minorities or calling for a ban on immigration by members of an entire faith group is more likely to stimulate violence than to prevent it. Her policy proposals are more comprehensive, and are supported by evidence. They include terrorism-prevention programs similar to those in Britain and other European countries. The best of these promote social integration and community policing, but such efforts can be difficult, particularly if Muslims

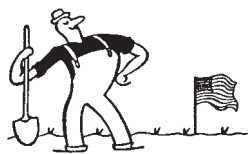
experience them as a pretense for surveillance or sting operations.

Identifying effective ways to intervene when an isolated individual drifts toward violent extremism, or to detect committed singleton terrorists before they act, has proved to be one of the most challenging fields of counterterrorism. In Rahami's case, border agents reportedly referred his name to the F.B.I., but, amid thousands of such preliminary reviews and in the absence of any evidence of a concrete threat, the investigation lapsed. When police look at a possibly radicalized but law-abiding American, their options can be constrained, and properly so; the First Amendment is meant to prevent the criminalization of thought, reading, or speech, even when the ideas at issue are reprehensible or touch on violence.

In "Anxious Politics," a study of fear and public opinion published last year, the political scientists Bethany Albertson and Shana Kushner Gadarian report that when citizens are on edge they pay closer attention and read up on issues, to clarify the source of their anxiety. America's history of the exploitation of domestic terrorism by political opportunists is replete with case studies, from the Red Scare of the nineteen-twenties through the abuses following 9/11. The lessons are repetitive: the most dangerous enemy within has typically been fear itself.

—Steve Coll

STATEN ISLAND POSTCARD DON'T TREAD ON ME



SCOTT LOBAIDO, an artist who paints American flags, is perhaps the most famous living Staten Islander. His flag paintings can be found in outdoor spaces all over Staten Island and in each of the fifty states. Most of the paintings are big; some are gigantic. A flag he painted for a gasket company in Houston, Texas, to welcome returning soldiers as their planes approach the airport, covers three and a half acres of factory roof.

LoBaido is a slim, compact man of fifty-one who drinks Martinis, smokes Marlboro Lights, and is often spattered with paint—"My second skin," he says. He appears occasionally in the news for his acts of public disruption, such as throwing horse manure at the Brooklyn Museum when it displayed a painting of the Virgin Mary stained with elephant dung, or illegally painting an American flag on a school whose principal had discontinued the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. He has been arrested about a dozen times,

though the charges are usually dismissed.

Last month, a large letter "T" that he had built out of insulation board and painted with a flag motif and erected on a Staten Island lawn went up in flames in the middle of the night. The police and the fire department investigated the fire as arson. A political motive was suspected. The "T" stands for Trump, among other things; LoBaido and the homeowner, Sam Pirozzolo, a local political figure and optician, both support the candidate. Trump himself called them the day after the fire to make sure Pirozzolo's family was safe, and to tell them, "You guys on Staten Island have my back."

At Da Noi, an Italian restaurant on Fingerboard Road, LoBaido always sits at a table by the wall under his large glass-enclosed work consisting of thirty-five hundred toy army men painted different colors and arranged to depict an American flag. The army men are all American-made, and it took him a long time to find American-made army men, he told a visitor who joined him there recently. In conversation, LoBaido effervesces like a Roman candle. "People write graffiti on my work," he said. "It happens. So what? I paint it out. Someone wrote 'Patriotism makes me sick' on a flag I did in Brooklyn. I painted a rattlesnake over the writing, like the

'Don't tread on me' snake. Graffiti doesn't bother me. But I was surprised when my 'T' got torched. I expected some reaction to the 'T,' like maybe graffiti or eggs being thrown at it. But, I mean, you're gonna *burn* my 'T'? Disagree with it, sure. Yell at it, say it's lousy art. But why would you burn it? The fire scared the hell out of Sam, the guy whose lawn it is. He lost that house to an electrical fire eight years ago. It took him three years to build it back. Why would you use violence? I never use violence. Throwing horseshit at the Brooklyn Museum is not violence. What is horseshit? Basically just wet straw."

A white-haired man at the bar came over and told LoBaido that he wanted to shake his hand. LoBaido thanked him.

"So after the fire, of course, I rebuilt the 'T' bigger," he continued. "On the phone, I even told Trump, 'I'm gonna make it *yuuge*.'" He got a chuckle out of that. It used to be twelve feet high by eight feet wide, and now it's sixteen feet high by twelve feet wide. It's beautifully lit up by spotlights, looks gorgeous at night. Security cameras, the works. Rebuild it bigger! That's my one complaint with the Freedom Tower. It's fine, but we should've rebuilt the original towers just as they were, or even bigger—like, 'Fuck me? Uh-uh. No, no, fuck you!'"

He ordered a decaf espresso and asked the waiter to top it off with Sambuca. A smell of licorice rose. “It’s decaf because I don’t need the caffeine,” LoBaido explained. “I got so many ideas for paintings, sculptures, projects, I can never get to sleep as it is. I believe the American flag is the greatest work of art ever created by mankind, and I’m always thinking of more I can do with it. I’m a pariah in the New York art world. Just today, a guy I’ve known a long time unfriended me on Facebook for being a Trump supporter.”

Before he stepped out for a cigarette, he said, “Sometimes people tell me, ‘Scott, New York is not the place for you—you better move to a red state.’ My answer always is: No fuckin’ way. I’m a fourth-generation Staten Islander. My dad worked for the Sanitation Department for thirty-five years. New York is my city. I love the excitement and the conflict and the sexiness of it. It’s *democracy*, you know what I mean? I ain’t movin’ to no red state. I’m stayin’ here, and you’re just gonna have to deal with me.”

—Ian Frazier

DEPT. OF LINGO DICTIONARY DUDE



ALUXURY OF PEACE and prosperity: Last year, editors at the Oxford English Dictionary, in the midst of a long march toward a third edition, set out to add an entry on “tandem surfing.” (“The practice of two people riding a single surfboard at the same time.”) They were seeking an earlier citation; the best they had was from 1961, in the *Los Angeles Times*. A researcher contacted a surf museum in San Clemente, California, and eventually wound up in touch with an autodidact in Seattle named Matt Warshaw.

Warshaw is the world’s leading surfing scholar, the Linnaeus of the lineup. Over the years, he has assembled a research library, in his home, of hundreds of books, thousands of periodicals, and some three hundred and fifty movies, and created a database: logged, indexed, searchable. From all

this, and from his own experience as a California beach rat, middling pro surfer, and surfing writer, he composed the idiosyncratic yet authoritative “Encyclopedia of Surfing,” which was published, to wide acclaim, in 2003. “I decided to rule this domain that no one gives a shit about,” he said the other day. In the past half-dozen years, he’s been transferring the encyclopedia’s fifteen hundred-odd entries to the Web, and adding many new ones, along with a wealth of photographs and videos. He has likened this migration to Dorothy’s arrival in Oz.

Within a day of the request from Oxford, Warshaw came across, in his stacks, a mention of “tandem surfing” from 1935. You can now find, in the O.E.D.’s Web edition, the following citation: “T. Blake *Hawaiian Surfboard* (front material, verso of fifth leaf)(caption): ‘A tourist, without surfboard experience, can enjoy . . . tandem surfing. The boy in most cases does most of the work, his partner enjoys the rides.’”

The O.E.D. sent Warshaw a few more terms, and before long hired him to be its first-ever Surf Consultant (total pay: four hundred pounds). The O.E.D. has some three hundred consultants, who provide an extra layer of expert scrutiny in such areas of arcana as falconry and wine. It has always tried to keep up with American slang; noted recent additions are “Masshole” and “vape.” “Clearly, they felt they needed to up their surf game,” Warshaw said. He speculated that there was a closet surfer on staff.

The dictionary people sent him about seventy terms, among them “barrel,” “reef rash,” “board sock,” “grom,” “close out,” “dawn patrol,” “doggy door,” “green room,” “shaper,” and “swallowtail.” His database, unfortunately, didn’t contain most of these, so he soon found himself scouring old magazines and manuals—“like a fucking intern.” Days turned into weeks. “I got obsessed,” he said. “I didn’t want to let them down.” Often, he succeeded in finding an earlier mention. Now and then—maybe every third entry—he found something to tweak in the definition, or a bit of illuminating context.

Warshaw is fifty-six. Moving to Seattle from San Francisco, several years ago (his wife works for Amazon), forced him to give up his habit of surfing more or less every day. Also, he’d grown weary

of witnessing his own physical decline in the water. “After forty years, I let it go,” he said. “It’s embarrassing. Now I’m a walker. I count steps on my Fitbit.”

His family tree is thick with fancy degrees. “Of course I’m insecure,” he said. “I went to El Camino Junior College, what we used to call ‘thirteenth grade,’ directly out of high school. Fit my surfing schedule.” Just after he turned thirty, he quit his job as the editor of the magazine *Surfer* and talked his way into U.C. Berkeley. (To commemorate the occasion, his father, a RAND Corporation phys-



Matt Warshaw

icist, bought him a two-volume edition of the O.E.D., which he still keeps at his desk. His O.E.D. surf consultancy, he says, is the accomplishment of his that has most impressed his parents.) He graduated Phi Beta Kappa, with a degree in history, but still has trouble telling nouns from verbs. “I’m like a musician who can’t read music,” he says.

“There’s a built-in sense of irony in surfers’ use of language,” he said. “When we say ‘dude,’ it’s a riff on you thinking we’re stupid.” He was relieved not to have been asked about “sick,” as in “excellent”—“I hate that word”—but, alas, it’s already in there: “*Sick*, unbelievably good: The Fleetwood Mac concert was sick.”

The O.E.D.’s closet surfer, it turns out, is Warshaw’s handler, the senior editor David Martin, whose phone manner, at least, is low on stoke. “We take the long view,” he said last week. “We track things.”

He went on, “A surf word that we are currently tracking is the verb ‘chandelier.’ It seems to be used with reference to the lip at the opening of a barrelling

wave closing in on or falling on top of a surfer.” (One can understand Warshaw’s noun-verb confusion.) Tracking consists of keeping an eye on a term’s usage in books and magazines, and perhaps paying closer attention in the waves off the coast of Wales. Martin also confessed to watching live Webcasts of the World Surf League. “I will note, not when I work,” he said. “It’s a great way to get through a cold and dark English winter.”

—Nick Paumgarten

THE PICTURES DOPPELGÄNGERS



RACHEL WEISZ and Deborah Lipstadt’s friendship turns on the question of who speaks for whom. In the new film “Denial,” Weisz plays Lipstadt, the Emory University professor who was sued for libel by the British historian David Irving after she called him a Holocaust denier. The trial, which took place in London, in 2000, struck Lipstadt as another form of denial, because her lawyers would not allow her and survivors of the concentration camps to testify, and because it seemed to let a bewigged British judge determine whether the Holocaust was real.

The two women met for breakfast recently at Café Mogador, in the East Village. Lipstadt, a sixty-nine-year-old redhead, wore a flowery silk scarf that she’d loaned to Weisz for the film. She said, “The first thing Rachel said to me was ‘David Irving said you have a Brooklyn accent, as a put-down, but I’ve been listening and it’s Queens.’” She put her hand on the arm of Weisz, forty-six, who’d arrived in a tweed jacket. “My family is annoyed because I didn’t correct you. It was the Upper West Side.”

Weisz laughed. “Is it more aspirational, the Upper West Side?”

“It’s more intellectually interesting.”

“That’s what English snobbery is about, too,” Weisz said. She explained that she had invited Lipstadt for tea at her Manhattan apartment, then bombarded her with phone calls, trying to extract—She made a squeeze gesture. “We were re-creating everything fastidiously, using the exact testimony from the trial, filming Auschwitz for Auschwitz—I can’t believe I’m saying that—and so I wanted to pay tribute to what is true of Deborah. Maybe this is wrong . . .” She looked over.

“Go, go, go, go, go!”

“But I felt that you’ve never adapted your Jewishness, your Upper West Side-ness—they both laughed—to make other people more comfortable. I felt you carried your home on your back, like a shell.”

“I’ve tried to adapt, but it doesn’t work,” Lipstadt said. “My lawyers sent me Richard Evans’s expert report—he’s a Cambridge historian, hoity-toity, intimidating. The report devastated Irving. But I didn’t want to gush, among all these Cantabrigians with their secret language, their subtext. So I wrote and said, ‘It’s really quite good.’ Ten seconds later comes back an e-mail: ‘What didn’t you like?’”

“In England, ‘quite good’ means ‘you’ve messed up,’” Weisz said.

Lipstadt asked for skim milk with her coffee, but the waitress shook her head, explaining that they were Israeli.

Weisz said, “I thought the café was Moroccan-Jewish.”

“Moroccan *lineage*,” the waitress said. “But the family moved to Tel Aviv, and so now we are serving only whole milk.” She strode off.

“I’m English,” Weisz said, after a moment, “so it was quite delicious, playing Deborah, to pretend to be confused by all the politesse, by the Oxbridge way of playing with words in a double game.” She mimed patting her head while rubbing her belly.

“I exude this take-no-prisoners thing,” Lipstadt said, “but at the trial I felt like a cipher.”

“Yeah,” Weisz said. “It was an interesting challenge to be silent. It wasn’t the usual movie story of a woman finding her voice and becoming empowered, like ‘Erin Brockovich.’ This was a powerful woman who must suppress herself, so that Irving would be the one on trial—and so the truth could come out.”

“It took me a long time to accept that,” Lipstadt said. “I was brought up on the beginnings of feminism, and my first response was always ‘I am woman, hear me roar.’”

“I was brought up on the Holocaust,” Weisz said. “My mum got out of Vienna two weeks before the Anschluss, and my dad got out of Budapest in ‘38.”

“Tell the James Parkes story,” Lipstadt said.

“My mum’s dad had a friend, the Reverend James Parkes. He was the one who sent the invitation to my mum’s family—which you needed in those days, to leave—so they could get out of Vienna and go live on charity in the English village of Barley. He saved their lives, basically. I told Deborah this—”

“And my mouth dropped open,”



PANCKERI

“Oh, great, the fundamentalists are back.”

Lipstadt recalled. “I said, ‘James Parkes the theologian I studied in graduate school? Who wrote about the Church’s role in anti-Semitism?’ So, fast-forward, I’m packing up scarves for Rachel to wear and photos for her house, and on impulse I put in my copy of James Park-



Rachel Weisz and Deborah Lipstadt

es’s book. She called me from her house—my house—”

“Our house. We’ve become one.”

Lipstadt grew misty-eyed. Weisz kissed the crown of her head and said, “That secret message—it helped me, emotionally. Deborah was very liberating to me, as a Brit.”

“Sure, you were liberated,” Lipstadt said. She mimicked the actress: “I don’t want you on the set today!”

“Because you’re very distracting!” Weisz said. “You’re not a wallflower! You can’t blend in!” Snuffling, Lipstadt accepted the compliment.

—*Tad Friend*

BRAVE NEW WORLD DEPT. SMARTY PANTS



IT’S BEEN TWENTY years since Michael Kinsley, the former editor of *The New Republic*, undertook a novel adventure: the creation of a magazine, underwritten by Microsoft, that was to exist primarily in what was then known as “cyberspace.” “There will be efforts to update it, perhaps on a daily basis,” the

Times noted, in a report that appeared below the fold on page D1 of its issue of Monday, April 29, 1996, two months before the launch of Slate.

Recently, Kinsley, who was the editor-in-chief of Slate from 1996 until 2002, and his three successors—Jacob Weisberg, David Plotz, and Julia Turner—gathered in Washington, D.C., to record a podcast: a five-way conversation with Josh Levin, the magazine’s executive editor. It was a nostalgic and forgivably self-regarding celebration of what Turner characterized as Slate’s “smarty-pants, curious journalism, opinion, and analysis.” The editors posed, grinning, for a group photo.

“We probably need to airplane mode,” Turner said, fiddling with her phone.

“I turned off any signalling for text, because my kids just text all the time,” Weisberg said. “Nate was, like, ‘You can’t do that—how can I get in touch with you?’”

Everyone but Kinsley wore headphones. Turner said, “I would feel *weird* podcasting without headphones.” As virtual tape rolled, they recalled Slate’s début. The first issues had page numbers; Kinsley expected that readers would print them. For the most part, the site updated only once a week. There was a button that a reader could click on to hear a song by Fats Waller.

“Was the idea that you would have nice music to accompany you while you were printing it out?” Turner, who has been the editor since 2014, asked.

“The idea was that we had this new technology, and we ought to do anything that we could to exploit it, to counteract the disadvantage of having to read it on the computer,” Kinsley said. He praised colleagues who were bold enough to forgo traditional print careers in order to pursue what to many observers at the time seemed a quixotic endeavor. “Jacob took more risk than anyone at Slate, because you were the political correspondent of *New York* magazine,” he said, to Weisberg. “And you traded that in for this mysterious thing.”

“For a job at Microsoft, with stock options,” Weisberg averred. He was the editor from 2002 until 2008, and is now Slate’s C.E.O., having orchestrated its purchase by the Washington Post Company, in 2005.

The editors surveyed the magazine’s contributions to what are now conventions of online media: links in stories, aggregation, crowdsourcing. “I think we invented the slide show,” Weisberg said, with a note of regret. There was an analysis of what Plotz, the editor from 2008 until 2014, called “Slateyness,” a tone of contrarian inquiry. One story was recalled with glee: “How Complicated Was the Byzantine Empire?,” by Brian Palmer, scrutinized the political structures of medieval Constantinople and found them to be substantially less complex than those of modern governments.

After an hour or so, the recording stopped and the headphones came off. The chat continued. There was fond recollection of company retreats during which the staff divided into teams for softball: Christians versus Jews. Plotz mentioned Matt Drudge, whom the magazine had once tried to enlist to write “Today’s Papers,” a daily survey of the news, which was discontinued in 2009.

“That, actually, was my bad idea,” Weisberg said.

“That was a *great* idea!” Plotz said. “History would have taken a different turn.”

“The thing I forgot to ask was, How close were we to publishing the Lewinsky tapes?” Levin said.

There were “*Ahh!*”s all around.

“Jonah had them in a drawer in the office,” Kinsley said. Plotz launched into a scattered account: Slate once shared office space with a production company where a young television producer named Jonah Goldberg worked. His mother, Lucianne Goldberg, a literary agent, was the conduit through which the world learned of Monica Lewinsky’s confessions of intimacy with President Clinton, secretly recorded by Linda Tripp, Lewinsky’s one-time friend.

A producer entered the room: “You sure you don’t want to put the headphones back on and do this for real? This is good.”

Everyone except Kinsley restored the headphones. They reenacted the conversation—adding details for the benefit of those many listeners who might not remember the nineteen-nineties, and how things worked all those long years ago.

—*Rebecca Mead*

IN THE BALANCE

The Supreme Court has leaned right for decades. Is that about to change?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

*President Obama's judicial appointments have already transformed the lower courts.*

HISTORY, AS A rule, unfolds slowly at the Supreme Court. The Justices serve for decades. The cases take years. The Court's languorous work schedule includes three months of downtime every summer. But the death of Antonin Scalia, earlier this year, jolted the institution and affirmed, once again, a venerable truism, attributed to the late Justice Byron White: "When you change one Justice, you change the whole Court." For the first time in two generations, the Court's liberals were ascendant. After many years of liberal Justices struggling to win big cases, suddenly they couldn't lose them. But this, too, might represent only a brief interregnum. The future of the Supreme Court always depends princi-

pally on the outcome of Presidential elections; this year's race will have a nearly immediate impact on the fate of the Court. But the changes may only begin with a replacement for Scalia. Stephen Breyer is seventy-eight, Anthony Kennedy is eighty, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg is eighty-three. If all of them have to be replaced in the coming four years, the next President will have a Supreme Court legacy comparable to that of Richard Nixon, who filled four vacancies in a little more than two years, or Ronald Reagan, who filled four vacancies in seven years, or Dwight Eisenhower, who filled five vacancies in five years.

The membership of the Court now reflects the partisan divisions in the

rest of the country, where crossover voting rarely takes place anymore. There are only four Republican appointees on the Court: Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. (nominated by George W. Bush), Kennedy (Ronald Reagan), Clarence Thomas (George H. W. Bush), and Samuel Alito (George W. Bush). They are matched by four Democratic appointees: Ginsburg (Bill Clinton), Breyer (Clinton), Sonia Sotomayor (Barack Obama), and Elena Kagan (Obama). "There has not been a definitively liberal majority on the Supreme Court since Nixon was President," Noah Feldman, a professor at Harvard Law School, said. "Ever since then, liberals have sometimes managed to cobble together majorities to avoid losing—on issues like affirmative action and abortion—but the energy and the initiative have been on the conservative side. That stopped, at least for now, this year."

Scalia's final vote as a Justice provided an apt symbol for the state of the Court at that moment. The case combined several of the conservatives' pet peeves, which include environmental protection, unilateral executive action, and, especially, Obama himself. "Judicial conservatives for a long time believed in a very powerful executive branch, but in more recent years there has been sharp skepticism toward Presidential power," Justin Driver, a professor at the University of Chicago Law School, told me. "A skeptic might say the real issue is who is the occupant of the Oval Office. Certainly, there has been a noticeable amount of hostility to President Obama's executive authority on the right." In the summer of 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency issued a long-awaited regulation aimed at combatting climate change, requiring electric power plants to sharply reduce their emissions. "It was probably the most important environmental regulation in history, since power plants account for about half of the carbon-dioxide emissions in the country," Richard Revesz, a professor at New York University School of Law, said.

Twenty-nine states sued to block the regulation. In the United States Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, an ideologically diverse panel of three judges

unanimously declined to stay the regulation while the case proceeded. Nevertheless, the five Republican appointees on the Supreme Court blocked the regulation from going into effect. "It was totally unprecedented for the Supreme Court to step in and grant a stay when the D.C. Circuit had denied the stay and was still looking at the merits of the case," Revesz said. "It reflected an attitude of hostility toward the Obama Administration." Even though the record of the case consisted of thousands of pages, the Supreme Court imposed the stay in just a few days. The last briefs in the case were filed with the Justices on Friday, February 5th, and they imposed the stay, by a vote of five to four, on Tuesday, February 9th. Scalia then left for a hunting trip in Texas. He was found dead in his room, of natural causes, four days later.

ONE PERSON WHO correctly gauged the significance of Scalia's absence from the Court was Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader. An hour after the death was confirmed, when other politicians were offering condolences to the Scalia family, McConnell issued a statement announcing that the Senate would not allow a vote on any nominee whom President Obama might put forward for the seat. "The American people should have a voice in the selection of their next Supreme Court Justice," McConnell said. "Therefore, this vacancy should not be filled until we have a new President." Such premeditated obstruction by a Senate leader, aimed at a President with nearly a full year remaining in his term, was without precedent, but McConnell has shown no sign of wavering. (He has also said repeatedly that he will not allow a confirmation vote in the lame-duck period, after Election Day.)

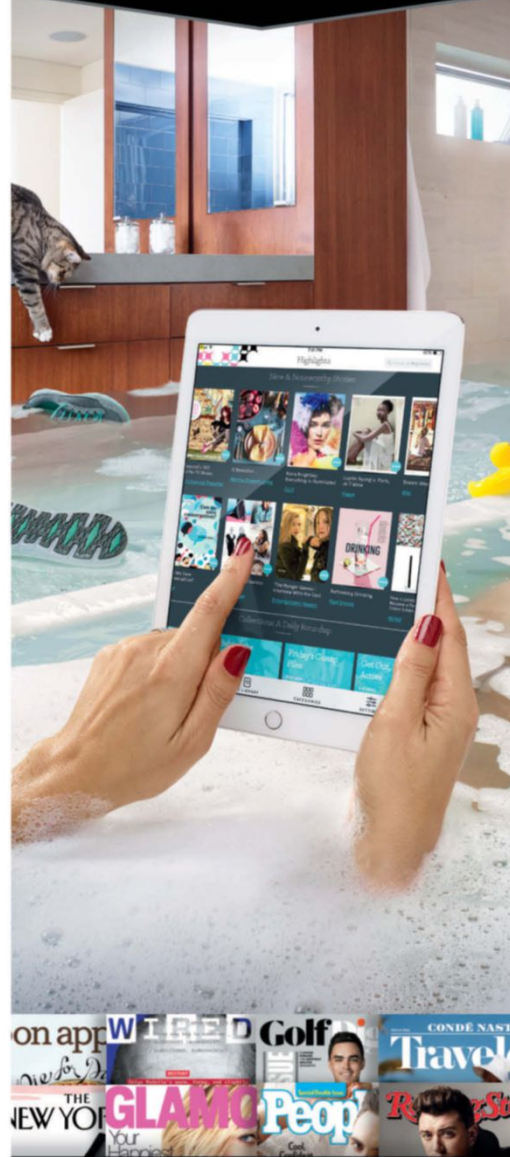
The remaining Justices, too, immediately saw the significance of Scalia's departure. Partly, this had to do with his outsized personality and his long tenure on the Court. He died at the age of seventy-nine, having served since 1986, which made him the senior Associate Justice. His energetic presence and provocative questions dominated the Court's public proceedings. Scalia never played devil's advocate in the

courtroom; he used his queries to make arguments to his colleagues, and, just as often, to the broader public. He was best known for championing originalism—the theory that calls for interpreting the Constitution as its words were understood to mean at the time of its ratification. He was never able to bring a majority of his fellow-Justices around to this approach, but he was still on the winning side in all the great conservative victories of his era, including *Bush v. Gore*, which gave the Presidency to George W. Bush; *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which hastened a deregulation of American political-campaign funding; and *District of Columbia v. Heller*, for which Scalia wrote the majority opinion, recognizing for the first time an individual's right, under the Second Amendment, to own firearms. Almost everyone at the Court missed Scalia's voice, but it was conservatives who missed his vote. On February 29th, Clarence Thomas, Scalia's frequent ideological ally, asked his first question in more than a decade at an oral argument. He then resumed his customary silence for the remainder of the term.

The effect of Scalia's absence could be seen in the first major case argued after his death. Scalia's place—to the immediate right of the Chief Justice, where the senior Associate Justice always sits—was still draped in black crêpe on March 2nd, when the Court heard *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*. In recent years, especially after the Republican landslides in the midterm elections of 2010, many states had begun to restrict access to abortion. Texas imposed especially onerous new requirements on abortion clinics, insisting that they install hospital-level equipment and that their doctors have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals. These rules, which Texas lawmakers said were designed to protect women's health, led to the closure of twenty-three of the forty-two clinics in the state. The plaintiffs in the case argued that the new rules had nothing to do with women's health, and were a transparent attempt to limit women's access to abortion.

Since Scalia's death, one rule of Supreme Court practice has dominated

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the deliberations of the eight remaining Justices. When the Court splits four to four, the lower-court decision is affirmed, but the Justices don't write an opinion and the ruling does not represent a national precedent. This meant that if the four Democratic appointees voted in lockstep—as they already tended to do in controversial cases—they would not necessarily win every case, but they couldn't lose, either. The liberals could always prevent the establishment of a new Court precedent not to their liking.

As Carrie Severino, the chief counsel of the right-leaning Judicial Crisis Network, put it, "Losing Justice Scalia on the Court created a one-way ratchet, making it so much easier to move in a liberal direction. Every time Kennedy joined the conservatives, there was just a tie, and no real precedent was made. But when Kennedy joined the liberals they could set binding precedent."

Because Kennedy in recent years had appeared to weaken in his support for abortion rights, the case had initially seemed like a possible vehicle for the conservatives to impose severe limits on the rights guaranteed to all

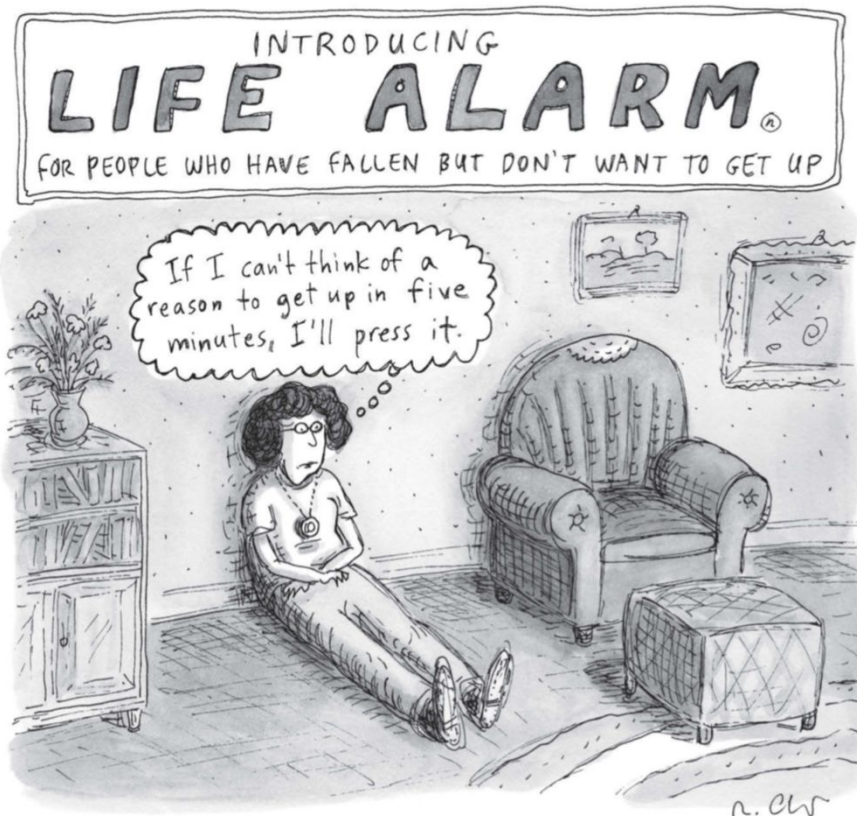
women by the Court in *Roe v. Wade*. But Scalia's death reversed the odds. Texas's abortion restrictions had been upheld by the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, the most conservative circuit in the country, and a tie would affirm the ruling—but only in that region.

So when the liberal Justices entered the courtroom on March 2nd they did so confidently. Scott Keller, the Texas solicitor general, opened his remarks by pointing out that most of the state's big cities still had abortion clinics. Ginsburg pounced, asking, "Well, how many women are located over a hundred miles from the nearest clinic?" About a quarter of the women in the state, Keller said, adding that clinics in New Mexico were also available to Texas women. "That's odd that you point to the New Mexico facility," Ginsburg replied. New Mexico imposed none of the requirements that Texas had established. "If that's all right for the women in the El Paso area, why isn't it right for the rest of the women in Texas?" she asked.

The Justices often ask lawyers challenging questions, but the liberals, in a rare departure, took control of the courtroom. The Chief Justice manages

the arguments and decides when the questioning of lawyers must cease. John Roberts is less of a stickler for protocol than his predecessor, William Rehnquist, but in the Texas case Sotomayor talked over him when he tried to stop Stephanie Toti, the lawyer representing the Texas clinics. And, when Toti wanted to elaborate on an answer after her time had expired, it was Ginsburg who suggested that she be allowed to continue. Roberts meekly acceded. In tone and in substance, the liberals were sending the message that they were in charge.

The legal world took note. Just after Scalia's death, Dow Chemical announced that it would settle an anti-trust case against the company for eight hundred million dollars. Liberals are known to be sympathetic to anti-trust plaintiffs, so Dow decided not to chance an appeal before the Justices. On March 4th, the Justices met in their regular Friday conference to cast their preliminary votes in the Texas abortion case. The result would not be released until the end of the term, in June, but the Court gave a clear hint where it was heading. It overruled the Fifth Circuit in a different case and blocked the implementation of a Louisiana law that would have forced all but one of the state's abortion clinics to close. In another ruling issued that week, the Court rejected a request from Michigan and other mostly Republican-led states to stay a new E.P.A. regulation that would reduce mercury emissions from power plants. The legal issue was not identical to the one in the climate-change regulation, which the Court had just stopped, but the cases were close enough to highlight the contrast. With five votes, the conservatives could block the Obama E.P.A.; with just four, less than a month later, they couldn't.



UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES, President Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to replace Scalia, which the President announced on March 16th, might have aroused little controversy. After graduating from Harvard Law School, Garland served as a law clerk for William J. Brennan, Jr., the liberal lion of the Supreme Court, but Garland's trajectory has reflected technocratic excellence rather

than ideological passion. He worked in private practice and as a prosecutor, and, as a Justice Department official in the Clinton Administration, he supervised the prosecution of the Oklahoma City bombers. In 1997, Bill Clinton nominated him to the D.C. Circuit, where he earned a reputation as moderately left of center but hardly controversial.

As a Democratic President's choice for the Supreme Court, Garland had much to commend him to Republicans. In nearly two decades on a generally conservative court, he had rarely protested his colleagues' rulings, writing, on average, less than one dissenting opinion a year. And Garland was already sixty-three, meaning that his career was likely to be shorter than those of most Justices on the Supreme Court.

It was possible to see Obama's nomination of Garland as a kind of peace offering to McConnell. If that was the theory, the gambit failed. Some Republicans agreed to conduct the traditional courtesy meetings with the nominee, but none suggested that Garland deserved a confirmation hearing, much less an up-or-down vote. Because the majority party controls the agenda in the Senate, the President was powerless to do more than protest.

Still, it became apparent in the spring that Obama, and the liberal quartet on the Supreme Court, would begin to reap the benefits of seven years of Obama's lower-court appointments. This success owed as much to Harry Reid, the Democratic leader in the Senate, as to the President. While Reid was Majority Leader, especially in the period before the 2014 midterm elections, he put judicial confirmations at the top of his agenda. Faced with Republican filibusters, he and his fellow-Democrats deployed the so-called "nuclear option," rewriting the Senate rules so that lower-court judges could be confirmed by a simple majority vote. Once McConnell took over as Majority Leader, he all but ceased allowing votes on Obama's judicial nominees (not just for the Supreme Court), but by that point Reid had enabled Obama to remake the federal judiciary. Obama has appointed three hundred and twenty-nine federal judges, more than a third of the total. They include two on

the Supreme Court, fifty-five on the courts of appeals, two hundred and sixty-eight on the district courts, and four on the Court of International Trade. (Obama's totals are roughly in line with those of his predecessors: George W. Bush appointed three hundred and twenty-four judges, and Bill Clinton appointed three hundred and seventy-two.) More to the point, Democratic appointees now dominate most of the courts of appeals. When Obama took office, only three of the thirteen appellate courts had more Democrat-appointed judges than Republican-appointed judges. Now nine do. This means that more cases come to the Supreme Court after liberals have prevailed in the courts of appeals.

That's what happened with *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, which concerned the efforts of public-employee labor unions to collect fees from non-members. Undermining the financial viability of unions, which generally support Democratic candidates, has long been a conservative cause; on the Supreme Court, it is most closely associated with Samuel Alito. The *Friedrichs* case was argued in January, while Scalia was still on the Court, and the five conservatives seemed poised to deliver a victory. But, with Scalia gone, the Court split, and, because liberal judges had prevailed in the Ninth Circuit, the status quo favoring union rights remained intact. As Noah Feldman observed, "There has been a sense of empowerment among liberals on a whole bunch of appellate courts, in which Obama has appointed a majority of the judges. They know that if their cases go to the Supreme Court they will be protected by four-to-four votes."

The one big liberal disappointment of the post-Scalia era also involved a four-four vote. After Congress failed to pass comprehensive immigration reform, early in Obama's second term, the President issued an executive order to allow nearly four million unauthorized immigrants who were the parents of citizens or of lawful permanent residents to apply for a program

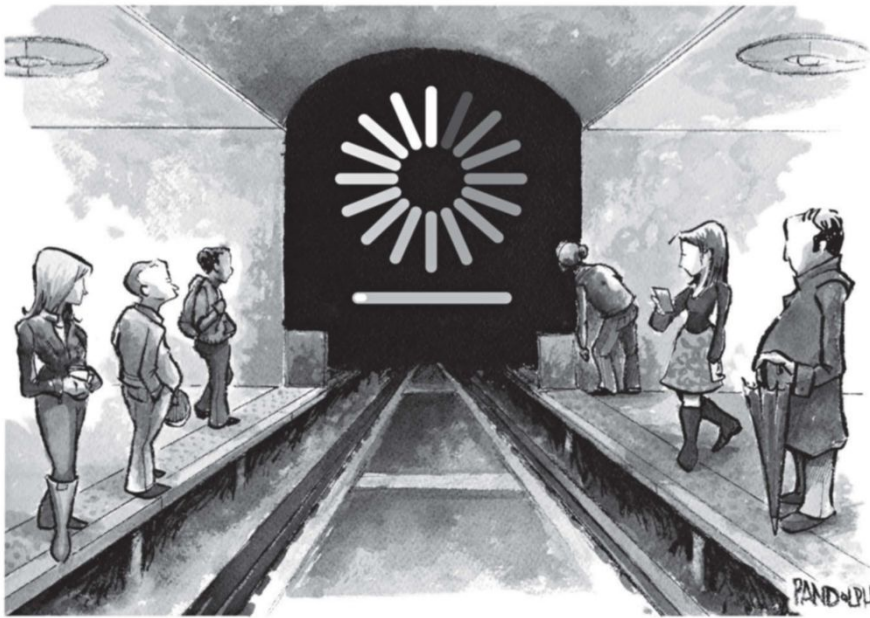
that would spare them from deportation and provide them with work permits. Texas and other states challenged Obama's action as an abuse of his powers under the Constitution, and a panel of the Fifth Circuit, by a vote of two to one, sided with the challengers. As is customary with tie votes, the Court's opinion was just nine words: "The judgment is affirmed by an equally divided Court." The millions who might have benefitted from Obama's order returned to a state of legal limbo.



AS THE TERM came to a close, two significant cases, both of which originated in Texas, remained unresolved. The

first was *Hellerstedt*, the challenge to the state's restrictive abortion law, and the other was *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, which represented the Court's latest chance to address affirmative action in college admissions. In that case, which the Court was hearing for the second time, a white student was challenging her rejection by the state's flagship university, which used race as a factor in weighing whether to admit a student. Both cases illustrated that, for the time being, at least, Anthony Kennedy remained the swing vote, and thus the pivotal figure on the Court.

On both abortion and affirmative action, Kennedy had appeared to drift right in recent years. In 1992, he was a co-author of the decision, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, that reaffirmed the core holding of *Roe v. Wade* and held that states could not impose an "undue burden" on a woman's right to choose abortion. But in 2007, in the Court's last major abortion case, Kennedy had written the opinion upholding the federal law banning so-called partial-birth abortions. On affirmative action, Kennedy had always been a skeptic. He dissented from Sandra Day O'Connor's opinion in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, a case decided in 2003, which sanctioned race-based admissions to foster diversity at the University of Michigan Law School. Indeed, Kennedy had always voted to reject affirmative-action programs, regarding



them as violations of the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The fate of affirmative action in the Fisher case looked even more perilous, because Elena Kagan recused herself from participating.

Yet, in the final week of the term, Kennedy sided with the liberals in both cases. Thanks to his vote, the Court rejected Texas's restrictions on abortion clinics and upheld the affirmative-action plan at the university. Roberts, along with Thomas and Alito, dissented, so Kennedy, as the senior member of the majority, had the privilege of assigning the opinion in *Hellerstedt*. He gave it to Breyer, who provided the Court's clearest defense of abortion rights in more than two decades. Breyer said that neither the hospital-level-equipment requirement nor the admitting-privileges rule "offers medical benefits sufficient to justify the burdens upon access that each imposes." He went on, "Each places a substantial obstacle in the path of women seeking a previability abortion, each constitutes an undue burden on abortion access, and each violates the Federal Constitution."

Kennedy assigned himself the affirmative-action opinion, and seemingly went even farther in endorsing the university's interest in attracting a diverse student body than O'Connor did in *Grutter*. O'Connor suggested a limit of

twenty-five years for the use of race in admissions. In *Fisher*, Kennedy imposed no such limit, saying that "considerable deference is owed to a university in defining those intangible characteristics, like student body diversity, that are central to its identity and educational mission." As has often been the case with Kennedy, outsiders were left to speculate about his motives. "It's possible that Kennedy saw the writing on the wall about a liberal future for the Court," Ilya Somin, a professor of law at George Mason University, said. "If he reached a conservative outcome, it might be quickly reversed when Kagan would be back and there was another Democratic appointee on the Court."

IN THE LIGHT of the Senate's continuing refusal to consider the Garland nomination, it seems clear that one of the first acts of the new President will be to nominate a replacement for Scalia. In an unusual move, in May, Donald Trump provided a list of eleven judges whom he would consider nominating to the Court. (He added ten more candidates last week.) The group includes state and federal judges, as well as a senator, Mike Lee, of Utah, all strongly conservative in outlook; many of the names would surely appear on any Republican President's list of possible nominees. Among them is William Pryor, Jr., a judge on the Eleventh

Circuit, who has called *Roe v. Wade* "the worst abomination in the history of constitutional law." Carrie Severino, of the Judicial Crisis Network, said of Trump, "I thought his list of judges was excellent. He had obviously consulted with people from the Federalist Society and Heritage Foundation and found people who would be consistent constitutionalists." The confirmation of any of the judges on Trump's list would essentially return the Court to where it was before Scalia's death—with five Republican appointees, including Kennedy, who would sometimes cross sides to join the liberals. If Trump were then to replace Ginsburg or Breyer with a judge from his list, the transformation of the Court would be dramatic. The frustrated hopes of conservatives during the Rehnquist and Roberts years—for restrictions on abortion and affirmative action, for the removal of the barriers between church and state, for the elimination of the last vestiges of political-campaign regulation—would likely be realized.

The calculus would be somewhat more complex for Hillary Clinton. She has declined to say whether she would reappoint Garland, telling reporters earlier this year, "When I am President, I will take stock of where we are and move from there." A senior Clinton campaign aide told me, "She thinks the Senate should do its job and confirm Garland in 2016. She wants to keep the pressure on the Republicans now, and doesn't want to give anyone the excuse to put the issue off until next year." Furthermore, if Clinton wins, she will want to move quickly on all judicial appointments. "The Secretary, as a former senator, is very attuned to the appointments process, and she knows you have to get your ducks in a row and you have to move fast to get your people confirmed," the aide said. "When it comes to judicial appointments, if she wins, we'll be looking at where the vacancies are, where the Obama nominees are in the pipeline, and looking to sit down with the Democrats and the Republicans in the Senate to make a plan to get it done as soon as possible." The political calendar affects the process, too. Even if the Democrats retake the Senate in 2016, the Party's odds of holding on to it in 2018 are

daunting. Clinton may have to put her stamp on the judiciary right away. If the Senate remains in Republican hands, which is a distinct possibility, the nomination of a moderate like Garland might represent Clinton's only chance to fill Scalia's seat.

Some liberal advocacy groups, such as Democracy for America, have expressed hope that Clinton would nominate a judge more liberal than Garland. During the primary campaign, Bernie Sanders said that, if elected, he would put forward a more progressive nominee. But conversations with several senators suggest that Democrats in the Senate support a renomination of Garland by a newly inaugurated President Clinton. "What we've seen from McConnell and the Republicans is the most irresponsible thing I've seen since I've been in the Senate," Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Democrat, said. (Leahy formerly chaired the Judiciary Committee, and is currently the longest-tenured member of the Senate.) "If the President had picked Garland for the seats that went to Sotomayor and Kagan, he would have been confirmed by ninety to ten."

Leahy would not comment publicly on whether Clinton should renominate Garland, but others were less reticent. In the past, Senate Republicans, including Orrin Hatch, of Utah, who is also a former chair of the Judiciary Committee, had praised Garland. Before the Scalia vacancy, Hatch said that Garland would be a "consensus nominee" and that there was "no question" he would be confirmed. Given these sentiments, many senators appear to believe that Clinton should go for a swift Garland confirmation and use the extra time to try to push more controversial matters through Congress. Richard Blumenthal, the Connecticut Democrat, who once clerked for Justice Harry Blackmun, told me, "If you have a time manager for the President of the United States and you have several significant and politically sensitive issues that you want to get done, you should not expend the time and take the heat of fighting day after day for another nominee when Garland will be on the right side of all the major issues, like choice, right from the start."

A confirmation of Garland, or any

Clinton nominee, might affect future retirements from the Court. Many people expect Ginsburg to retire during a Clinton Presidency. But, if there is a fifth Democratic appointee on the Court, Ginsburg will be the senior member of a likely majority in some important cases; she will thus enjoy the corresponding opportunity to assign the opinions. In more than two decades on the Court, Ginsburg has never assigned an opinion. (Neither has Breyer.) The chance to control the opinion-writing might present a significant disincentive for Ginsburg to retire. "You can imagine that it galled Ginsburg that Kennedy, who was the senior Justice in the Texas abortion case, assigned that opinion to Breyer, instead of her," Noah Feldman told me. "The assigning power is very meaningful." Thus, it might be Breyer, who has many non-judicial interests, such as serving on the board that awards the Pritzker Architecture Prize, who retires first. (The retirement plans of Kennedy are unknown. Thomas, who is sixty-eight,

has made clear that he enjoys the job less than his colleagues seem to, but he is unlikely to leave a seat to be filled by a Democratic President.)

A liberal majority on the Court would present a particular dilemma for the Chief Justice. Roberts's voting pattern suggests that he would be a frequent dissenter—which no Chief Justice has ever been. Feldman said, "Roberts might have thirty more years in that job, and he might have it with a liberal majority. Because his only real power is to assign opinions when he is in the majority, he could actually wind up with no power." At this point, it appears that Sotomayor, the author of a best-selling memoir and a frequent presence on the lecture circuit, has chosen an outsider's role on the Court, while Kagan is trying to become the internal playmaker, building coalitions that might achieve majorities. "In future years, if Ginsburg and Breyer are replaced by Democratic appointees, Roberts could turn into the Chief Justice in name while Kagan becomes the



"Roger, I think it's time we had a little talk about the birds and the bees."

de-facto Chief Justice,” Feldman said. “But, if Roberts wants to stay the real Chief Justice, he might have to moderate his views and join more often with the liberals. But would he want to do that?”

LIBERALS ON THE Court have spent decades in a defensive crouch, trying to fend off challenges to treasured precedents in areas such as abortion rights and affirmative action. But if they were a majority they would have the chance to go after some conservative landmarks. What new crusades might the liberals begin?

Democrats in the political arena have a clear target: the Court’s decision in *Citizens United*, in 2010. In July, Hillary Clinton released a campaign video in which she said, “Today, I’m announcing that in my first thirty days as President I will propose a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* and give the American people, all of us, the chance to reclaim our democracy. I will also appoint Supreme Court Justices who understand that this decision was a disaster for our democracy.” This might sound good to the Democratic base, but overruling *Citizens United* would probably not accomplish what the politicians imagine it would.

“People use ‘*Citizens United*’ as shorthand for all the problems of money in politics, but in fact the decision itself had little to do with money in politics, and reversing it would do little or nothing to remove money in politics,” Pamela Karlan, a professor at Stanford Law School who also worked in the Obama Justice Department, told me. Justice Kennedy’s decision for the Court in *Citizens United*, though now symbolically important, held that the First Amendment prohibited the government from penalizing a nonprofit corporation that was distributing a political film during an election year. The notion that corporations have First Amendment rights, which is central to the decision, has had little to do with the role of money in political campaigns. Subsequent decisions that limited the government’s power to regulate campaign financing also had modest practical impacts. “Google, Ford, and other companies

don’t generally support individual candidates. They spend their money on lobbying,” Karlan said. “*Citizens United* has nothing to do with the huge amount of money, the dark money, that is being spent by rich individuals to influence campaigns and public opinion. In our system, there’s basically nothing you can do to stop the Koch brothers from independent spending in elections. That’s their right under the First Amendment.” Even Clinton’s proposed constitutional amendment (which, like all proposed amendments, would have virtually no chance of adoption) would make little difference. According to Karlan, a more liberal Court would probably allow some state-based experiments in public funding of campaigns, but the Court certainly would not take a leading role in limiting the influence of money in politics.

Moreover, it’s largely up to Congress, not the courts, to take the first steps toward greater regulation of campaigns. “You can erase *Citizens United*, and nothing will change until Congress decides to regulate the super PACs and political nonprofits,” Heather Gerken, a professor at Yale Law School, said. “Of course, those groups are of great value to many members of Congress, so the chances of Congress passing a law against them are remote.”

A liberal Court would, however, make a difference on the issue of voting rights. In 2013, in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the five conservatives on the Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, effectively eliminating the provision of the law which allowed the Justice Department to monitor changes in state and local laws to protect the rights of minorities. Many Republican-dominated states responded by imposing photo-identification requirements, limiting early voting and absentee voting, and closing polling places in minority neighborhoods. In the past year or so, federal judges have begun using other provisions of the Voting Rights Act to strike down these changes. In a current North Carolina case out of the Fourth Circuit, a liberal panel voided the state’s newly passed restrictions on voting. The decision was allowed to stand by the Supreme Court in a four-to-four tie. “A liberal major-

ity on the Supreme Court could put the teeth back into the Voting Rights Act,” Karlan said.

The liberal wish list expands rapidly from there—limited only by the imaginations of law professors, advocates, and the Justices themselves. One possibility is that the Court might recognize a constitutional right to counsel in civil cases. (Currently, only criminal defendants are guaranteed legal representation.) In criminal law, the Court might adopt the idea, which Sotomayor has suggested, that the Constitution forbids incarcerating individuals who are too poor to pay fines. Several scholars have proposed a constitutional right to education, which might force increased funding for poor districts, or, even more speculatively, a right to a living wage.

The Court invariably responds to the political priorities of the moment—and to those of the President making the nominations. In the New Deal years, Franklin Roosevelt’s appointees validated many of his aggressive steps to address the crisis of the Great Depression. If elected Democrats succeed in tackling income inequality, judges may follow suit. Joseph Fishkin and Willy Forbath, who teach at the University of Texas Law School, have proposed that the Court enforce what they call “the Constitution of opportunity.” They write, “As structures of opportunity grow more narrow and brittle, and class inequalities mount, our nation is becoming what reformers throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth century meant when they talked about a society with a ‘moneyed aristocracy’ or a ‘ruling class’—an oligarchy, not a republic.” And it is the duty of the Supreme Court, they assert, to prevent this system from persisting. Of course, the immediate prospects for any such decisions remain remote.

For the first time in decades, there is now a realistic chance that the Supreme Court will become an engine of progressive change rather than an obstacle to it. “Liberals in the academy are now devising constitutional theories with an eye on the composition of the Court,” Justin Driver said. The hopes for a liberal Court will begin—or, just as certainly, end—with the results on Election Day. ♦

ASK DR. JELLOWITZ-KESSLER

BY PAUL RUDNICK



I, SUSAN JELLOWITZ-KESSLER, am perhaps the world's most noted and compassionate authority on marital relations. Thanks to the impending divorce of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, my in-box and my Web site have been overwhelmed with queries. In a selfless attempt to satisfy all those who are suffering, I am posting the most frequently asked questions, along with my expert and helpful responses.

Q: With everything that's going on between Brad and Angelina, does my own marriage have a prayer?

A: Yes. Since you and your spouse are undoubtedly far less wealthy and less physically attractive than the Jolie-Pitts, your problems will never be anywhere near as upsetting or as interesting as theirs.

Q: Should two movie stars ever marry each other?

A: That's an excellent point of interest, which I explored in my doctoral thesis, entitled "Excuse Me, He Has a Soulpatch and Highlighted Bangs, He Wears a Little Porkpie Hat, and He's Been Married Once Already, Not Counting the Broken Engagement to Gwyneth Paltrow, What Did You Ex-

pect?" I concluded that, for celebrities, marriage should be considered neither a holy sacrament nor a legally binding contract but, rather, a hobby, like origami or running for President.

Q: A tabloid recently filled its front page with a photograph of Jennifer Aniston laughing. Do you think this was actually Jen's response to the news about her former husband?

A: Never. Jennifer, from everything I've heard, is a kind and openhearted person who harbors no resentment toward her ex or toward the woman who broke up their marriage. Jennifer moved on with her life a long time ago, and has continued acting and also endorsing both a bottled-water brand and a line of skin-care products. I'm told that Jennifer has, as a healing gesture, just shipped a crate of these products to Angelina.

Q: It's rumored that Brad has been undergoing a midlife crisis. Is such a phenomenon treatable?

A: It can be. Except in men.

Q: Would this be a good time for me to contact Brad, perhaps on Twitter, and suggest that we meet for coffee?

A: Of course. Brad is at an intensely

vulnerable juncture, so he might be willing to drunkenly stumble into a Starbucks, take one look at you, and mumble, "Are you out of your mind?," which would be a beginning, and most likely something you've heard before.

Q: If I happen to run into Angelina at, say, the United Nations or on the Academy Awards red carpet, what would be an appropriate and helpful greeting?

A: You might just say, "Hi there!," in a cheerful manner, and then mime a teardrop rolling down your cheek, or use both hands to form the heart shape that Taylor Swift often uses during her concerts. You could also suggest a favorite tea blend or a machete.

Q: Is it ever possible to forgive infidelity?

A: Yes. Except in men.

Q: Was the Jolie-Pitt marriage doomed owing to the onslaught of media attention and online scrutiny?

A: Perhaps. But, as the Kardashian family has proved, constant selfies, reality television, and the exposure of visible thongs beneath crocheted jumpsuits can also solidify a marriage. (Although instead of using the word "marriage," Kim Kardashian prefers the phrases "limited series," "branding opportunity," and "this afternoon.")

Q: Will Brad and Angelina ever get married again, perhaps to other movie stars?

A: It's possible, especially if either of them hits a career lull or needs to promote a documentary. When a patient of mine recently experienced the premature cancellation of a network spinoff, I suggested, "Have you thought about dating Ben Affleck?"

Q: I feel bad for Brad and Angelina, and I wish them only the best. But I wonder: If such a gifted couple can't make things work, is love possible for anyone?

A: Of course it is. The real explanation for the Jolie-Pitt split is that, unlike the rest of us married people, when they made love they were unable to shut their eyes and imagine either Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie. ♦

LADY BITS

Ali Wong's radical comedy.

BY ARIEL LEVY



Wong's standup explores the last taboo of female sexuality: women are animals.

IT IS NOT unusual for a female comedian to talk about her body. It is a little less conventional for her to talk about what comes out of it. Her breast milk, for instance. “Local, organic, free-range, farm-to-mouth milk,” Ali Wong recently told an audience at the Comedy Store in West Hollywood. “Squirting out of my titties,” she continued, circling her index fingers in front of her breasts.

“Squirting out of like fifteen holes in each titty. Like a Bellagio fountain.” Or her mucus. “I’m addicted to picking my nose,” she declared later that night, at a second gig. “In a world of red tape and bureaucracy, where it takes forever to buy a house or get a cell-phone plan going, it’s so *instant* to just stick your finger up there and go for something your own body produces.” Or her afterbirth: “After

the baby comes out, you know what else exits? Her *house*.”

It is possible that female excretion is relatively untouched comedic terrain because the most noteworthy things that women expel are children—and few female standups have any. Performing in clubs is not a career that fosters an ideal work-life balance. “It’s almost impossible to be on the road as a female comic,” Amy Schumer said, “even without having to keep something other than yourself alive.”

Wong, who is thirty-four, filmed her recent Netflix special, “Baby Cobra,” when she was seven and a half months pregnant. “It’s very rare and unusual to see a female comic perform pregnant,” Wong announced from the stage. “Because female comics . . . *don’t get pregnant*.” (As with many rules, Joan Rivers presents an exception: in the late sixties, she performed on “The Ed Sullivan Show” while pregnant—though she didn’t mention it in her set.) “Once they do get pregnant, they disappear.”

The opposite has been true for Wong. Not long before she taped “Baby Cobra,” tickets for a show that she headlined—at Cobb’s Comedy Club, in her home town, San Francisco—sold so poorly that the proprietors put a block of them up for sale on Groupon. Recently, the club, which has four hundred seats, sold out five of her shows in minutes. She is juggling a job as a writer on ABC’s “Fresh Off the Boat” (the first prime-time series about an Asian-American family on network television since Margaret Cho’s “All-American Girl,” which aired for one season in the nineties) with acting in a new sitcom, also for ABC. Earlier this month, the clothing label Opening Ceremony invited Wong to walk the runway during Fashion Week. She is beloved by mothers, who have started coming up to her on the street. The Web site scarymommy.com announced, “She is your new queen, pregnant ladies.”

“Baby Cobra” is an hour of often extremely filthy material delivered by a tiny, foxy, Vietnamese-Chinese-American wearing a short, tight, black-and-white dress that hugs the balloon of her belly. There is a bracing thrill to watching a woman so manifestly gravid being irreverent and lewd. She describes meeting her husband at a wedding six years earlier like so: “I knew that he was a catch, so I was, like, ‘All right, Ali, you gotta

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make this dude believe that your body is a secret garden.” She makes a sexy face and thrusts her big belly forward. “When really it’s a public park,” she continues, hand on stomach, “that has hosted many reggae fests, and has even accidentally let . . .” she trails off and counts, “two homeless people inside. I thought they were hipsters.”

Wong’s impending motherhood is “Baby Cobra”’s most striking element, but it is not the one that has impressed other comics. “Everybody is making a big fucking deal that she was pregnant,” Bill Burr said on his podcast, when what really mattered was that “she was fucking original.” Margaret Cho said, about “Baby Cobra,” “I’ve never seen anything like that before.” Schumer told me that she considers Wong “a revolutionary in comedy.”

In many ways, though, the things that Wong describes onstage are unremarkable—the typical concerns of a person in her mid-thirties who grew up “a total private-school Asian.” She is coping with the demands of her career and motherhood. (Her standup now includes a bit about how expensive her nanny is: “My husband and I, we gotta work very hard—to not take care of our child ourselves.”) She used to be promiscuous and wild, but now she’s too tired for sex. She wants her husband, a graduate of Harvard Business School, to be successful. She is concerned about her aging mother. She eats gluten-free.

What is radical about Wong is that her discussion of quotidian domesticity is interwoven with commentary on what may be the last taboo of female sexuality: women are animals. It’s old news that women can be as raunchy and libidinous as men. Wong addresses something else, which has remained virtually unexplored, not just in comedy but in pop culture at large: the terrifically hard-core female experience of reproduction—the part that comes *after* the sex that so many women have already publicly declared they want. Wong describes nursing, for instance, as a “savage ritual that reminds you that you ain’t nothing but a mammal.”

When aspiring comics ask Wong how she has dealt with being a standup who

is Asian or female or a mother, she tells them not to think of these things as obstacles. “You just shift your perspective and think, Wait a minute: I’m a woman!” she told me. “And most standup comics are male. You know what male comics can’t do? They can’t get pregnant. They can’t *perform* pregnant. So my attitude is, just *use* all those differences. Don’t think of it as you’re oppressed.” She switched from her normal voice to one of indeterminate ethnic origin—Chinese? Chola?—that she often uses onstage: “You *special*.”

WHEN WONG IS not performing, her speech is slower, and she has none of the coiled intensity she puts into her show. “People are always very surprised by how offstage with my husband I’m a completely different person . . . very soft and nurturing,” Wong says in “Baby Cobra.” She boasts that she has been packing his lunch every day for five years. “I did that so he would become dependent on me,” she continues, “because he graduated from Harvard Business School. And I don’t want to work anymore.”

Wong is her family’s primary breadwinner at the moment. Her husband, Justin Hakuta, who had a mild goatee and was wearing gym shorts and a T-shirt when I visited their house in Culver City one evening this summer, is a product manager for Internet companies, but he was between jobs. Neither he nor Wong

seemed particularly concerned. “I don’t worry about that, ever,” Wong said. She was sitting on the living-room floor, playing with her daughter, Mari, who was nine months old: intent, curious, peaceful, dressed in a white onesie that Randall Park, the star of “Fresh Off the Boat,” had hand-lettered with the Louis Vuitton monogram. “A lot of people in those product-manager positions fall into a trap of getting into a startup that’s like a nightmare: crazy hours, totally disorganized, toxic environment,” Wong continued. “And I don’t want him doing that.”

Hakuta—who is half Japanese and half Filipino but looks, Wong thinks, “Asian with Aztec undertones”—said that he’d grown up comfortable with the idea of a varied and fluctuating career.



His father, Ken, introduced the United States to the sticky, wall-walking toy octopuses that were a hit in the eighties, then became the host of a children’s television program called “The Dr. Fad Show,” and now manages the estate of his uncle, the Fluxus artist Nam June Paik. “Of course,” Wong said, “my mom, she’s always, like, ‘What’s gonna happen? Oh, my God, it’s the end of the world!’” In the kitchen, Wong’s mother, Tammy, a retired social worker, and her uncle, Long Nguyen, were making dinner: the two had come to Los Angeles from San Francisco for a visit. Wong said that when she told her mother she was filming a Netflix special Tammy said, “They show ‘Cheers’ reruns on there. So what?”

Wong, who has been performing standup for a dozen years, had been approached several times about recording a special, and had always said that she wasn’t ready. “But I thought that if I did it when I was pregnant then I would always associate the baby with a break if I got it,” she told me. “A couple of female standup comics I know refer to their kids as their Little Career Killers,” she continued. “I was, like, I really do not want to feel that way. It sounds crazy, but if it wasn’t for Mari and doing that special when I was pregnant with her I could see how very easily I would have slowed down, and stopped.”

Wong and Hakuta’s house is a wacky one-story with several outbuildings and lots of mosaic tile, installed by the previous owner, which depicts sailboats, bright flowers, clouds, and happy people with red and yellow hair. “We’re thinking of redoing the hair in black, so they all look Asian,” Wong said. She showed me the low-ceilinged room where she does yoga, and then the shed where Hakuta meditates, the walls hung with paintings of nature scenes. Before the baby, they liked to take ayahuasca and go on silent meditation retreats together. “Sometimes,” Wong says onstage, “all this hippie-dippy shit we do makes me feel like we are white people doing an impression of Asian people.”

Wong’s mother and her uncle Long had set out a meal of *bánh tráng*: rice noodles, stir-fried shrimp, greens, and rice-paper wrappers that they dipped, one by one, in a half-moon-shaped vessel of water to soften them. Tammy immigrated to the United States from Hue, Vietnam,

when she was eighteen, and went to school in Nebraska. “I thought, What is this?” she remembered. “It was like ‘Green Acres.’” As she served noodles, she said, “We came from eleven children.”

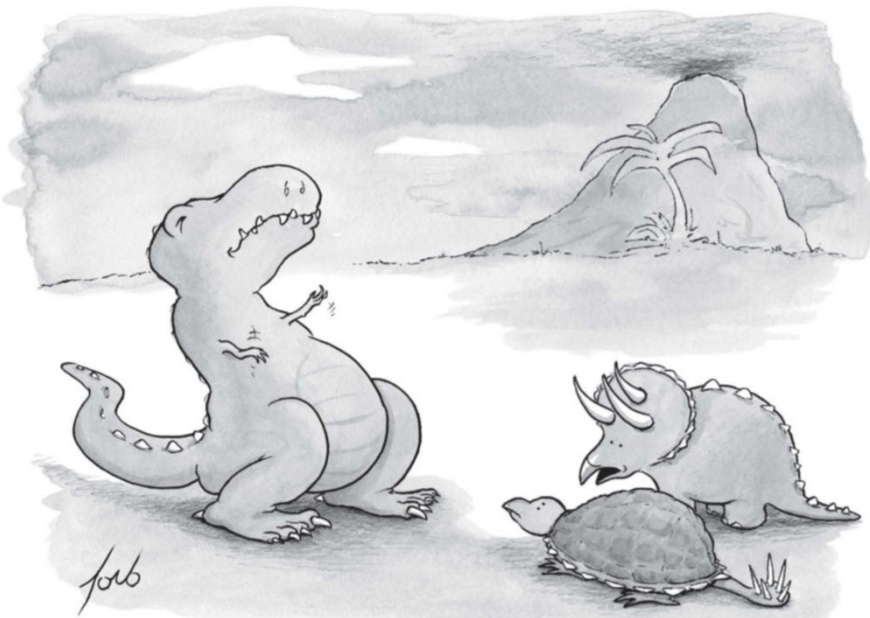
“That number is always changing,” Wong said, feeding Mari spoonfuls of mashed taro root.

“Well, there were fourteen births all told,” her uncle clarified; several of the siblings died as infants or children. In “Baby Cobra,” Wong talks about having a miscarriage eleven weeks into her first pregnancy: “My mom, she’s from a Third World country, and when I told her I had one she was, like, ‘Uh, yeah, where I’m from that’s like losing a pair of shoes.’”

After college, Tammy married Adolphus Wong, a Chinese-American anesthesiologist, and they raised four children in Pacific Heights, a picturesque neighborhood in San Francisco. Ali is the youngest by a decade: her two sisters are stay-at-home moms; her brother is an acupuncturist whom she describes as a “Chinese George Costanza—he’s always got some side hustle going.” I asked Tammy if her youngest daughter had always been funny. “I don’t know,” she replied. “I had four kids. So I was busy.”

IN ADDITION TO shooting the new sitcom—“American Housewife,” about a stay-at-home mother trying to adjust to life in Westport, Connecticut—and writing for “Fresh Off the Boat” and getting up at five-thirty to breast-feed, Wong goes out most nights, after she and Hakuta put Mari to sleep by singing “Baby Beluga” in unison, to perform at local clubs. She doesn’t announce these gigs to her fans, because, for her purposes, the fewer spectators there are at these shows the better. “If the audience is really shitty, you feel free to just blurt things out,” she told me. “That’s the only way I write: onstage.” She estimated that out of every ten gigs maybe one yields a new nugget that she can use. “I’m always chasing that,” she said.

After the *bánh trắng*, Wong drove half an hour from her house to Pancho’s, a place in Manhattan Beach that is part Mexican restaurant and part music-and-comedy club. There were about a dozen people in the audience, mostly male, including a table of four very buff guys in tight T-shirts. “You all into gel and ket-



“The arms wouldn’t be so noticeable if he’d stop playing air guitar.”

tlebells?” Wong asked them from the stage. She was wearing a brown jumpsuit that she had put on earlier because it was convenient for breast-feeding. “Did you guys all see each other and say, ‘We should hang out, because our arms look the same?’”

They laughed at everything she said, which was striking, because so much of it had to do with things that supposedly make men squeamish. Like giving birth: “They put up this curtain so your husband can only see your human side and not your cadaver side.” And rage. “My husband occasionally changes diapers and people can’t believe it—‘What a dotting father!’” Wong shouted. “I was doing skin-on-skin contact with my baby girl to bond with her: she shit on my chest. Where’s my trophy at?”

Wong can get away with a considerable amount of vulgarity—and hollering—because she is funny, but it also helps that she uses her differences, as she put it, to destabilize her audience’s expectations. “The archetype that gets projected onto us as Asian women of being silent—she really does go against that,” Margaret Cho told me. Sometimes, when Wong wants to find out if a riff is good, she’ll deliver it in a soft voice, a kind of monotonic stage whisper, because then if people laugh she knows that they are

responding to the material and not to her crackling energy. More often, she is almost screaming at the audience—mixing enthusiasm and outrage in a kind of delighted tantrum.

At Pancho’s, Wong began questioning one of the muscular friends, who was Asian, about his romantic life. “I bet white chicks love you,” she said. “You’re like an exotic . . . fish. You’re like a buff bird.” He said he was out looking to meet someone, and asked for her number. “I have a C-section scar, bro!” Wong howled. “I haven’t showered in like a week! If you think that’s hot—and you got money and you know how to commit and you’re good with children—maybe!”

In the car on the way to her next appearance, Wong told me that, in fact, she had not had time to shower in five days, since she stayed overnight at a hotel in Dallas for a gig and was fleetingly free of maternal responsibility. “The telltale giveaway is when I have my hair like this.” It was in two French braids that graduated into pigtails. She looked surprisingly clean. “It’s an art,” she said.

We were in Wong’s new RAV4, her only splurge after her recent success. She was giving her mother her old Toyota Corolla, which, as she said in “Baby Cobra,” has a “huge bear-claw scratch on the side from this aggressive brick

wall that came out of nowhere." According to Wong's routine, there are two stereotypes of Asian women that are fair: they live forever, and they drive poorly—"You know why we're such bad drivers? Because we're trying to *die*." As we hurtled down the freeway, Wong came very close to smashing her new car when she changed lanes. "Hoo-wee!" she shrieked. "*Hoo-wee*."

DOING MULTIPLE SHOWS every night is Wong's long-standing habit: between 2009 and 2011, when she lived in New York City, she did as many as nine a night. Nahnatchka Khan, the showrunner of "Fresh Off the Boat," told me, "I don't think that she considers performing *working*, necessarily—it's so much a part of her. Like, I can't imagine a world where Ali is not performing."

Wong's standup career began when she moved back home to San Francisco in 2005, after majoring in Asian-American studies at U.C.L.A., and then completing a Fulbright program studying language in Vietnam. In college, she was in a comedy-and-theatre group that Randall Park had co-founded. After she graduated, standup seemed like the simplest way to get back onstage. "You don't need much," Wong said. "You do whatever you want—you don't depend on anybody else. So I started going to open mics when I was twenty-three and living with my parents. I've been doing it pretty much every night, or every other night, ever since." Park, who had also started doing standup,

stayed on Wong's couch when he performed in San Francisco. "Before I knew it—like half a year into dedicating herself to standup—she had a following," he told me.

Wong said that her parents used to go see her sets, and that they were proud of her ambition. She describes her father as "highly non-stereotypical"—open-minded and quirky. "He was born and raised in San Francisco's Chinatown," Wong told me. "Poor. Like fishing-vegetables-out-of-a-garbage-can-with-his-mom poor. Like no-running-water-in-his-apartment poor. And they invested everything in my dad. I can't believe he didn't cave under all that pressure, and just did what he was supposed to do and became a doctor." When he came home from the emergency room, he told Wong about everything he saw; after a man came in one night with, "like, fifty Barbie heads in his butt," she remembered, her father drew her a diagram that showed the path of the doll parts through his large intestine. Adolphus died in 2011, after battling cancer. "He had an attraction toward the arts. But, because of his duty, he couldn't," Wong said. "My sister has this painting of his—it's, like, this great painting, by anybody's standards. I really love that painting."

During the decade that Wong was focussed on standup, Randall Park's acting career took off: he played Kim Jong-un in "The Interview," and appeared in "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and in "The Office," as a character called Asian Jim Halpert.

Then he landed the lead in "Fresh Off the Boat" and recommended Wong for a job, even though she had no experience writing for sitcoms. "There was all this speculation and paranoia that it wasn't going to be good," Wong told me. "I think people think that Asian-Americans are really good at hive-mentality stuff—you know, like, in entertainment maybe they're good at 'America's Best Dance Crew' dancing, or, like, tennis—but not at being truly innovative and having something to say that will create a cultural Zeitgeist. What hurts is when I feel like Asian people believe that about ourselves."

For Park, part of Wong's appeal was the specificity of her voice. "For a lot of Asian-American—a lot of minority—comedians, myself included, the crutch when you first start out is to do hacky ethnic jokes," he said. "It's in a lot of ways an easier laugh. She never really relied on that." Wong uses her ethnicity in her comedy—"I have some useful advice for all of my Asian-American brothers and sisters: never go paintballing with a Vietnam veteran"—but not more than her sexuality or her eating habits or her finances. "A lesson that I keep learning from her is: do *you*," Park continued. "Her voice is just so . . . it's Ali. If it's happened to her and if it's affected her, it's going to come out."

One of the characters that she writes for "Fresh Off the Boat" bursts into nosebleeds whenever he gets worked up. "I really do have chronic bloody noses," Wong told me. "This is disgusting, but it gets triggered either by me picking my nose or by me getting really excited." During the shooting of the first episode that Wong wrote, Nahnatchka Khan came on set and called out a greeting. "I turned to her, and I had tissues in my nose with blood streaming in them," Wong told me. "And I was like, 'I'm just so excited!'"



"Yes, you've mentioned this 'Facebook' in the past—tell me, is 'Facebook' saying anything right now?"

WONG DID NOT tell her family when she was hired on "Fresh Off the Boat." "They found out because I had a framed picture of me and Justin at the finale party dressed up, and then there was a little 'Fresh Off the Boat' icon in the corner," she said. She still hasn't told them about "American Housewife." Before "Baby Cobra," Wong explained, she had been in at least six pilots, as well as a medical-procedural drama with Vanessa Redgrave and a sitcom with Laura

Prepon, and none of them amounted to much. “My mom doesn’t understand that I have no control if a project dies,” Wong said. “She’ll be, like, ‘Why didn’t you say something about the writing not being good?’ Or, ‘Why didn’t you tell the main actress to be more funny?’ And then it makes me super upset. And then it’s bad for our relationship.”

She would tell her mother about the new show only once it had aired. “I mean, it’s absurd,” Wong continued. “If Mari didn’t tell me what she was working on, it would drive me crazy.” She sighed. “If I didn’t have to make money, I would be happy just staying home with her all day and doing these shows at night.” When she arrives at clubs with time to kill before her set, she watches videos of the baby, and sometimes it makes her ache to go home.

For the average fan, it is probably less surprising to hear a hugely pregnant woman describe herself as a “pervert—a gross, filthy animal,” as Wong does in “Baby Cobra,” than to hear any successful woman admit, “I don’t want to lean in: I want to *lie down*.” Wong says in her routine that she “trapped” her husband for his earning potential, and declares, “Feminism is the worst thing to ever happen to women: our job used to be...*no job*.”

She was kidding about feminism. “I think people who don’t get that are, like, not so smart,” she said. “It’s a comedy show, not a TED talk.” But she was serious about wanting to work less. “I really just want more money for less effort,” she told me. “Don’t you want that, too?”

The problem, though, is that Wong also wants to make a romantic comedy that she and Randall Park have been talking about for years—“our version of ‘When Harry Met Sally.’” And she is already planning a follow-up special to “Baby Cobra,” trying to improve things that she could have done better. In the car one night, on the way from one show to another, she reworked the joke about trying to convince her husband that her body was a secret garden: “What I *should* have said somewhere in there is ‘When a woman sleeps with a man right away, it’s not because we don’t respect ourselves—it’s because we don’t respect *you*.’”

Wong’s gig was at the Lab at the Hollywood Improv: a small room with burgundy walls, decorated with rainbow

Christmas lights. She was wearing her brown jumpsuit again, and a small backpack that she kept on as she got onstage. She did her usual C-section and Bellagio-fountain material, but then she brought in something new. As her father reached the end of his life, she said, he “just didn’t give a shit anymore.” She had been talking in the car about his painting, and he seemed resurrected in her mind. “He couldn’t hold his bladder very well,” she continued. “And when T-Mobile would tell him, ‘Sir, we don’t have a bathroom for customers,’ he would pull a jar out of his backpack and go, ‘You do now.’” He would hide the container under his coat and then discreetly urinate, “like a pee ninja!”

Earlier that evening, one of the comics sharing the bill with Wong had done a bit about receiving a “blowie” from a woman named Bambi. Another had talked about how he’d like to receive a “ho fax” on each prospective sexual partner. Wong’s jokes about sex had a decidedly different tone. She started by talking about how little of it she wanted since she gave birth. “I cannot be bothered to put a towel on the bed afterward to absorb that post-sex wet spot—you know that perfectly round-ass wet spot on the bed that gets all cold in wintertime? It’s like an ice-fishing hole, because it smells like penguins.” The crowd was loosening up, getting more pliant; people moved their bodies more as they laughed. “The faster we let a fresh new penis inside us, the less we think of the person attached to it as marriage material,” Wong said, and then assumed the pose she often takes onstage after she drops an insight: lips flexed forward, eyebrows up, one arm slung over the mic stand, her body language announcing, *This is how it is*. “If a woman sleeps with a man on the first date, it doesn’t mean we don’t respect ourselves.” There were some encouraging hoots from the audience. “It means we don’t respect . . . you.”

The reaction was intense: there was clapping, there was laughing, and there was a certain amount of yelling. As Wong took in the response, I noticed a darkening by her nostrils. “Shit—I just got really excited,” she said, and clamped her fingers on her nose to stem the bleeding. Then she pulled a pack of Kleenex from her bag and stuffed a little plug of tissue up each nostril and kept on going. ♦



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THE CUBA PLAY

President Obama's plan normalized relations. Can it also transform the nation?

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

ONE AFTERNOON LAST spring, President Obama sat on a stage at La Cervecería, a high-ceilinged beer hall on Havana Harbor, where he had been invited to preside over a gathering billed as “an entrepreneurship and opportunity event.” Just a few hundred feet down the harbor wall was the spot where, in 1960, a French cargo ship full of munitions exploded, in a lethal blast for which Fidel Castro blamed the C.I.A. But no one at La Cervecería was in the mood to dwell on history. Obama’s visit was the culmination of fifteen months of diplomatic engagement, which began when the U.S. and Cuba restored relations, on December 17, 2014, bringing an end to the United States’ longest-lasting hostile standoff with another nation: fifty-six years of bad blood and broken ties. An audience had gathered—a handpicked group of Cuban and American entrepreneurs, government officials, and journalists. Brian Chesky, the co-founder of Airbnb, one of the first American companies to receive a license to do business on the island, rose to speak with barely restrained wonder about the possibilities of Cuban commerce: Airbnb was in more than a hundred countries, and Cuba was its fastest-growing market.

When Chesky finished, Obama spoke. “I just want to brag on Brian just for one second,” he said. “How long ago did you guys start, Brian?”

“Eight years,” Chesky said.

“Eight years,” Obama repeated. “And what’s the valuation now?”

“Twenty-five—”

“Don’t be shy.”

“Twenty-five billion,” Chesky said.

“Twenty-five billion?” Obama asked.

“With a B?” Smiling, he looked around at the audience. No one needed reminding that this figure was equal to almost a third of Cuba’s G.D.P. “I use Brian as an example,” he went on. “He’s one of our outstanding young entrepreneurs

who had an idea and acted on it. And in this global economy it can take off.”

Obama said that if Cubans wanted to improve their standing in the global economy their government needed to free things up. “Cuba should take ideas, steal ideas from wherever you see something working,” he said. “Now, my advice would be: don’t steal ideas from places where it’s not working.” Obama paused for a laugh from the audience. “There are some economic models that just don’t work. And that’s not an ideological opinion on my part. That’s just the objective reality.”

The exchange at La Cervecería, which would have been uncontroversial at any Chamber of Commerce meeting in the United States, was without precedent in Communist Cuba: an American President had been allowed to speak directly to the Cuban people about the virtues of capitalism. It was as if the 1959 Kitchen Debate had been replayed, with Nixon allowed to show off the American model home in Sokolniki Park and Khrushchev forbidden to talk back. “The American people are not interested in Cuba failing,” Obama said. “We’re interested in Cuba being a partner with us.”

During Obama’s visit, security men cordoned off the streets, mostly keeping ordinary Cubans at a distance. But when they did get close the reception was ecstatic. As Obama strolled through the Plaza Vieja with his family, Cubans shouted his name, hoping to attract his attention. The backlash, though, began swiftly after he and his entourage left town. An acquaintance who works for Cuba’s security services told me that one of his colleagues had called Obama’s appearance at La Cervecería “as subversive as the Bay of Pigs.” I found the sentiment echoed by other Cubans, most of them Communist Party loyalists, who share the conservative views of former President Fidel Castro, who is now ninety years old and fragile.

Fidel has been officially out of power

since 2008, when he handed over his duties to his brother Raúl, who is eighty-five. But he has remained the elder statesman of Cuba’s revolution and, from the beginning of the diplomatic reengagement with the United States, has let it be known that he distrusts America’s intentions. Soon after Obama’s visit, he wrote an open letter in *Granma*, the “official organ” of the Cuban Communist Party: “Nobody should be under the illusion that the people of this dignified and selfless country will renounce the glory, the rights, or the spiritual wealth they have gained.” Despite years of financial privation, he insisted that isolation was better than engaging with his old enemy. “We do not need the empire to give us anything,” he said.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, in the Oval Office, I asked Obama about the reaction. “I actually thought that the pushback was milder than I expected,” he said. But he suggested that he had done his best not to offend Cuban national pride. “I hope that what I conveyed . . . was that the policy I put forward was designed not to take America out of the equation but to remove it as an excuse for Cuba feeling trapped in its past,” he said. “Now, Fidel’s response, in part, was: ‘I don’t want to escape the past.’ Which, if you’re ninety years old and you were an iconic figure of the twentieth century, I completely understand.” Obama laughed. “But I think the Cuban people heard me say, ‘This is in your hands.’ And I suspect that made it more difficult for some of the hardliners on the island to try to characterize anything that I said as yet another gesture of Yankee imperialism.”

The entrepreneurship event, however, seemed to have been devised to bypass the Cuban state in order to advertise the possibilities of commerce freed of political constraint. “That was very intentional,” Obama said. “And that’s consistent with the theory that



Obama's idea isn't "to take America out of the equation but to remove it as an excuse for Cuba feeling trapped in its past."

we have been operating under since this whole project began.”

The project, according to Obama and a number of his key advisers, started with the modest goal of tweaking a few regulations, but it evolved into an ambitious bid to open up Cuba’s closed system, by using seduction instead of force. For a generation brought up with the terror of the Cuban missile crisis, this meant abandoning a half-century-long crusade. Over the years, the United States had tried to dislodge the Castro regime by a variety of methods, including invasion, attempted assassination, funding dissidents, and a baroque plot to create a fake Twitter service that was intended to aid an antigovernment uprising. When Obama announced the opening with Cuba, John Boehner, then the Republican Speaker of the House, said, “There is no ‘new course’ here, only another in a long line of mindless concessions to a dictatorship that brutalizes its people and schemes with our enemies.” For a younger generation, though, it seemed obvious that commerce would triumph over politics. “We just don’t believe that rhetoric about changing the Cuban political system is constructive,” one of Obama’s aides told me. “And we don’t think it resonates broadly with the Cuban people, who are more focussed on their economic well-being.”

Obama said that his operating theory was based on three premises. “No. 1 was, Cuba is a tiny, poor country that poses no genuine threat to the United States. No. 2, in this era of the Internet and global capital movements, is that openness is a more powerful change agent than isolation. That’s not always the case. There are unique circumstances, like North Korea, which is such a closed system that all you do there is reward those who are in power, and there’s no capacity to reach people.

“No. 3 was the belief that, if you are interested in promoting freedom, independence, civic space inside of Cuba, then the power of things like remittances to give individual Cubans some cash, even if the government was taking a cut, that then allowed them to start a barbershop, or a cab service, was going to be the engine whereby individual Cubans—not directed by the United States, not directed by the C.I.A., not through some grand conspiracy, but Cuban peo-

ple—who now have their own little shop and have a little bit of savings can start expecting more.”

THE ORIGINS OF Obama’s Cuba project can be found in an intemperate remark made during his initial run for the White House, setting off what he described as “one of the first big hubbubs in my Presidential campaign.” In July, 2007, CNN and YouTube held a debate for the Democratic contenders in South Carolina. As Obama stood onstage with Joe Biden, John Edwards, Hillary Clinton, and a handful of other aspirants, they were asked if they would be willing to meet with the leaders of America’s most vociferous enemies: Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and North Korea.

“I would,” Obama replied. “The notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them—which has been the guiding diplomatic principle of this Administration—is ridiculous.” He waited out a round of applause, then continued, “Now, Ronald Reagan and Democratic Presidents like J.F.K. constantly spoke to the Soviet Union at a time when Ronald Reagan called them an evil empire. And the reason is because they understood that we may not trust them and they may pose an extraordinary danger to this country, but we had the obligation to find areas where we can potentially move forward.”

Dan Restrepo, who had just joined Obama’s campaign as a Latin America



adviser, recalled that this response sent a jolt: “Some of his entourage said, ‘Oh, shit, did he just say that?’” It was a political truism that any candidate who wanted to win Florida had to be tough on Cuba. Obama’s opponents moved quickly to characterize the answer as a gaffe: Mitt Romney said that he had “demonstrated a dangerous naïveté.” The publicity forced his aides to quickly define a Cuba policy. In the car driving back from the debate, Obama recalled, he held a conference call with his campaign team

and said, “I do not want people to back off one inch from this position.”

Obama’s stance on Cuba was the result of a long evolution. “I was definitely left of center by the time I had any awareness of politics,” he told me. “And in college in the early eighties . . . you’re reading development theory and biographies of Che.” But, he said, “perhaps because I had grown up for a time in an underdeveloped country, in Indonesia, I was never star-struck by revolution. I think I understood Cuba as a revolution that had started with recognizable motives, a desire for poor people in an oppressive and corrupt society to make things better. But I was never persuaded that they had taken the right course of action.”

In 2004, on a cigarette break outside a political fund-raiser in Chicago, Obama met a Miami businessman named Joe Arriola, who began inviting him down for listening tours. For decades, the Cuban-American community, composed largely of staunch Republicans, had lobbied insistently to uphold the U.S. trade embargo—a complex, ever-growing suite of regulations intended to isolate Cuba from the rest of the Western Hemisphere. But Florida was changing. As Puerto Rican immigrants surged into the state, Cuban-Americans found for the first time that they were not the majority of Hispanic voters there. The Cuban *históricos*—the most recalcitrant exiles of Fidel’s generation—were beginning to die off, replaced by their children and by more recent immigrants.

Alfredo Mesa, a Cuban-American who is a vice-president of the Miami Marlins, told me that Obama’s visits helped him understand something important: “To the rest of the world, it is a battle between Cuba and the United States. For Cuban-Americans, this is an issue between Cubans.” The new generation, born in America, was less concerned with ideology than with practicality. By U.S. law, Americans of Cuban origin—there are about two million of them—could visit the island only once every three years, and could send no more than three hundred dollars a year to relatives there. In August, 2007, Obama published an op-ed in the *Miami Herald*, announcing his intention to ease those policies.

The following May, Obama appeared at a gathering in Miami, organized by the ultraconservative Cuban American

National Foundation. In a finely calibrated speech, he promised again to open the flow of money and visitors to Cuba, but he was careful to avoid any appearance that he was capitulating. "Don't be confused about this," he said. "I will maintain the embargo. It provides us with the leverage to present the regime with a clear choice: if you take significant steps toward democracy, beginning with the freeing of all political prisoners, we will take steps to begin normalizing relations." If he had to sit down with Raúl Castro, he said, he would do so, "at a time and place of my choosing."

On Election Day, Obama narrowly won Florida—a state that had largely voted Republican since the early fifties. In the 2000 election, twenty-five per cent of Florida's Cuban-Americans had voted Democratic; now Obama won thirty-five per cent. "Things in Miami had already begun to change," Restrepo said. "So this stuff—family travel and remittances—made good policy. And the politics of it worked, too."

ON A RECENT afternoon, Carlos Saladrigas, one of the most influential of the new Miami Cubans, sat sipping a Bloody Mary at his table at Miami's Riviera Country Club, as he explained how he and a few fellow Cuban exiles—all lifelong Republicans and *anticastristas*—had changed their minds, and then worked to win over the White House. "This was not a journey that happened overnight," he said.

Saladrigas, a burly, hale man of sixty-eight, is a wealthy businessman and a founding member of the Cuba Study Group, a nonprofit organization devoted to restoring relations with Cuba. He was born into an affluent Havana family a decade before the Cuban Revolution. At the age of twelve, he was evacuated by Operation Peter Pan, a two-year airlift run by the Catholic Church to "rescue" children from Communism. By the time it ended, in October, 1962, when the airspace was closed down by the Cuban missile crisis, Peter Pan had flown out fourteen thousand children, to be looked after by relatives or by charitable organizations in the United States.

The event that started to change Saladrigas's thinking was another disastrous and well-publicized ocean cross-



"Anytime I've ever been asked 'What do you want, a medal?' I've said yes."

ing. In November, 1999, a five-year-old Cuban boy named Elián González set off from Cuba, with his mother and a group of others, on a clandestine boat journey. The engine failed, and a storm sank the boat, killing twelve of the passengers, including his mother. Elián was rescued by fishermen and handed over to relatives in Miami, but his father, still in Cuba, insisted that he be sent home. The relatives refused, and American politicians took up their cause. In Havana, Fidel Castro led huge demonstrations demanding Elián's return, while Miami Cubans defended his relatives' right to keep him in the United States. Finally, after a six-month standoff, Attorney General Janet Reno ordered Elián's return to Cuba, and armed American border agents came to retrieve him. Those who had argued that he should be kept in the U.S. felt betrayed.

The Cuban-Americans, Saladrigas said, "got their revenge on the Democratic Party by voting for Bush over Gore in 2000." But he and a few of his wealthy friends were unhappy. "We concluded that we had reacted too much with our hearts, not our heads. I wrote a column

in which I asked, 'Why do we have to swing the bat every time Fidel Castro pitches a ball?' We began soul-searching, and we started polling the community." The younger Cuban-Americans, he found, "were not as willing to subjugate their emotions and sacrifice their relatives on the island to politics."

Saladrigas and his friends—including Andrés Fanjul, a sugar and real-estate mogul—formed the Study Group, and began to contend with Florida's Cuban-American hard-liners. The infighting was intense, almost fratricidal. One of the most intractable opponents of the Cuban regime, a Republican congressman in Florida named Lincoln Díaz-Balart, was Fidel Castro's nephew by his first marriage.

A few days after Fidel resigned, in February, 2008, he noted in *Granma* that Saladrigas had heralded his resignation as an opportunity for the U.S. to accelerate political change in Cuba. Castro quoted him with the glee of a prosecutor locking up a case: "In Florida, there are a million Cubans with sufficient resources to revitalize the economic machinery of the island in a short period,"

if the U.S. allowed its citizens to invest in Cuba and the Cuban government legalized private property. Fidel went on, “‘Once these conditions are created,’ in Saladrigas’s opinion, ‘the political reforms will be automatic’” and “‘the exiles can become the greatest aid fund of any political tradition in history.’” Noting that Saladrigas shared a name with a prime minister in the regime of the late dictator Fulgencio Batista, Fidel wrote, “How cheaply the new Carlos Saladrigas wants to buy us!”

Saladrigas didn’t deny his intentions. “We understood that change must be gradual but that it was also inevitable,” he said. “The important thing was not to isolate Cuba but to open it up. So we looked at our policy”—the relentless enforcement of the embargo—“and saw that it hasn’t accomplished anything. Our previous policy was based on squeezing people on the island, forcing an uprising. This, we decided, was unethical.” During the Bush Administration, he said, he and his peers had argued against tightening sanctions. “But we didn’t have much luck. It was very much a ‘You’re either with us or against us’ situation. So then Barack Obama came in, and we decided to focus our efforts on the new Administration.”

WHEN OBAMA ENTERED the White House, in January, 2009, his foreign-policy priorities were to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and, at least ostensibly, to close the prison at

Guantánamo. But in mid-April—before heading to the Summit of the Americas, a meeting of regional heads of state that was being held that year in Trinidad and Tobago—he made good on his campaign promise to eliminate the restrictions on family travel and remittances to Cuba. Soon afterward, Raúl Castro made an unprecedented announcement: “We have sent word to the U.S. government in private and in public that we are willing to discuss everything—human rights, freedom of the press, political prisoners, everything.”

Even so, Obama told me, the scenario in Trinidad was daunting. “Remember, when I came into office Hugo Chávez was the dominant political figure in Latin America,” he said. A few years earlier, when George W. Bush came to the summit to propose a regional free-trade agreement, Chávez proclaimed that he had brought a “gravedigger’s shovel” to bury it, inspiring protest rallies that drew thousands of people. In the years since, he and his allies in the “Bolivarian” alliance—including the leaders of Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia—had kept up the anti-American rhetoric. But, Obama recalled, “rather than building these guys up as arch-villains who threaten America, [which] made them stronger and covered up all their foibles, my view consistently was: let’s shrink the problem.”

At the 2009 summit, Chávez approached Obama, clapped him on the

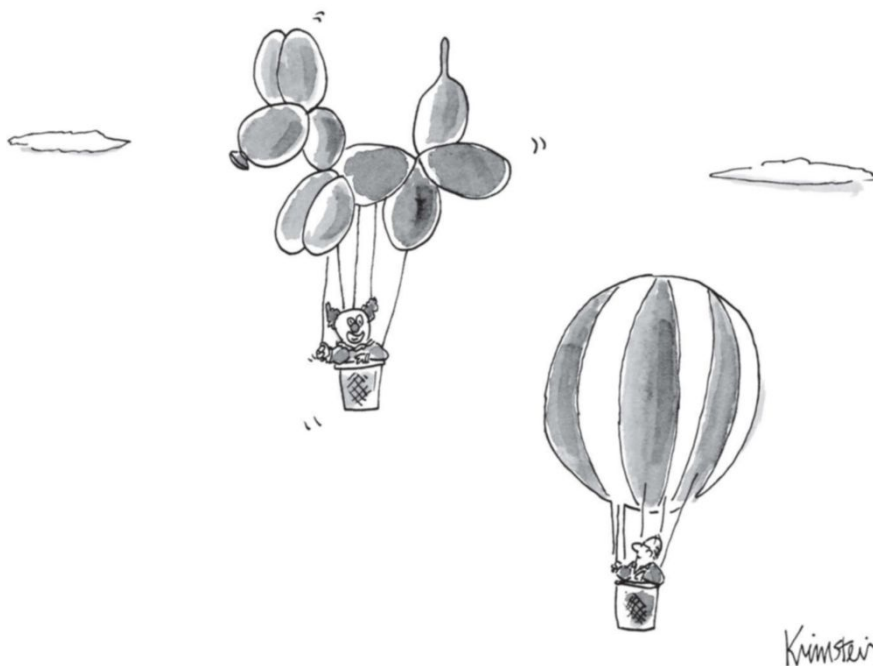
back, and handed him a copy of Eduardo Galeano’s “Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent,” an anticapitalist history with a cultish following. Obama accepted it, smiled, and shook Chávez’s hand. The book, first published in 1971, soared to sixth place on Amazon’s best-seller list.

Still, Obama said, the Bolivarians subjected him to tendentious lectures during meetings: “Ortega, Chávez, Morales, Correa . . . went on these long rants against the United States. And I just sat there, and I smiled and I listened. And people noticed that I didn’t walk out, and that I let them have their say.” Obama told the assembled leaders that he was seeking a new relationship: “I’m prepared to have my Administration engage with the Cuban government on a wide range of issues—from drugs, migration, and economic issues to human rights, free speech, and democratic reform.” He added, “Let me be clear: I’m not interested in talking for the sake of talking. But I do believe that we can move U.S.-Cuban relations in a new direction.”

EIGHT MONTHS LATER, on December 4th, Ricardo Zúñiga, the acting director of Cuban Affairs at the State Department, was working alone in his office when he got an alarming phone call. “It was a senior official at the Cuban program of U.S.A.I.D.,” he told me. “She said, ‘I think we may have a problem. We have a contractor who was picked up by Cuban authorities. It’s been a couple of days, and they’re still holding him.’”

Zúñiga had spent two years at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana—the American government’s only presence there since 1961, when the Embassy was closed. He had seen many visitors to the island detained after meeting with dissidents, but typically they were released after a few hours. “I hoped it was like the others,” he said. “But something about this one made me think, This isn’t good. In response to an inquiry we made, the Cubans let us know they were holding someone. Then they went quiet.”

The detainee was a sixty-year-old U.S.A.I.D. contractor named Alan Gross; he had been arrested on suspicion of espionage. Gross, who worked in international development, had gone to Cuba disguised as a tourist, and had



been caught distributing illegal communications equipment to Jewish community groups. Gross insisted that he was a humanitarian, not a spy; his mission was part of a government-funded “democracy promotion” program, authorized by the Helms-Burton Act.

The act had exacerbated the conflicts between Cuba and the U.S. for two decades. In the mid-nineties, before it was passed, Castro and President Bill Clinton had exchanged exploratory messages, using the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez as an envoy. Then, in 1996, the Cuban Air Force shot down two small U.S. aircraft off the Havana coast. The planes, flown by a Miami-based exile organization called Brothers to the Rescue, were on a mission to drop anti-Castro leaflets; the four men on board, all Cuban-Americans, were killed. In an atmosphere of outrage, Clinton signed Helms-Burton, which was ostensibly meant to enable “a peaceful transition to a representative democracy and a market economy in Cuba”—but which prohibited dealing with any government that included the Castro brothers.

Under George W. Bush, the law’s provisions were applied with increasing alacrity, and funding for democracy-promotion programs, like the one that Gross had been hired for, grew almost without restraint. A Government Accountability Office report, released in 2006, pointed out that U.S.A.I.D. had devoted seventy-four million dollars to pro-democracy projects in the previous decade, with little oversight of how the money was spent. “Nobody could say where it was going,” a senior U.S. official told me. “They were just sending money to people with P.O. boxes in Miami.”

Eventually, Gross was formally accused of working for U.S. intelligence and sentenced to fifteen years in a Cuban prison. As Saladrigas saw it, the extremists on both sides had once again spoiled the opportunity to move forward. “Historically, every time an American President tried to make an overture to Cuba, Fidel did something to stop it,” he said. When I pointed out that Raúl, not Fidel, was President at the time, he said sourly, “Fidel doesn’t govern, but he doesn’t let anybody else govern, either.”

In fact, Raúl Castro had been slowly bringing about change. After taking

office, he had eased some of the more onerous restrictions on Cuban citizens, giving them the right to own computers and cell phones. At first, his fixes seemed diffident and largely cosmetic. Then, in 2010, he rolled out a series of major initiatives, allowing hundreds of thousands of new *cuentapropistas*—self-employed workers, such as restaurateurs, barbers, and cabdrivers—to sell their services directly to customers. More controversially, he laid off half a million state employees and scheduled a Communist Party Congress, Cuba’s first in fourteen years; the country, he said, needed to discuss “erroneous and unsustainable concepts about socialism,” stemming from “the excessively paternalistic, idealistic, and egalitarian approach instituted by the revolution in the interest of social justice.” In 2011, Cubans were given the right to buy and sell their own homes and cars, to start an expanded range of businesses, and to travel freely—all of which had been allowed only with the permission of the government.

For longtime supporters of Cuba’s revolution, Raúl’s moves seemed almost heretically bold. In fact, they had nearly come too late. That July, Hugo Chávez announced that he was undergoing treatment for an unusually aggressive cancer. For a decade, Chávez had been giving Cuba generous subsidies, bartering oil for doctors in a deal that had kept the island’s economy afloat. Without his patronage, the socialist experiment might be unable to continue.

When the next year’s Summit of the Americas was held, in Cartagena, Colombia, Chávez, visibly swollen from his medical treatments, stayed home. But he put on a rowdy performance in Caracas, in which he rallied his fellow-leaders to denounce the Americans for stalling on Cuba and said, “The empire should go elsewhere.” In Colombia, the President, Juan Manuel Santos, declared that this summit would be the last one without Cuba present.

Obama felt stung by the criticism, and afterward, in a private meeting at Casa de Huéspedes, the Presidential guesthouse, he asked Santos for help in opening up communication with Castro. “I told him, ‘Of course,’” Santos said

to me. In the coming months, he relayed discreet messages between the two leaders, much as García Márquez had done two decades before.

In November, Obama won a second term, and, soon afterward, the political balance in Latin America began turning in his favor. In December, Chávez announced that his cancer had returned, and prepared to fly to Cuba to receive treatment. By March, he was dead.



BETWEEN ELECTION DAY and his second inauguration, Obama asked his national-security team to draw up priorities for his second term. Ben Rhodes, the President’s chief foreign-policy aide, recalls, “We had a series of meetings in which you basically go through the whole world, and Cuba was sitting there as an area where we had to make a decision.” Rhodes, a laconic, watchful thirty-five-year-old who aspired to be a novelist before Obama hired him, asked for the portfolio; despite his inexperience, he got it. “There was a feeling that—unlikely as it would be for someone like me to do Cuba, because I am not a Latin-Americanist—what the Cubans would care about was my proximity to the President,” he said.

With Cuba in mind, Obama brought Ricardo Zúñiga, the State Department official, to the N.S.C., where he could work closely with Rhodes. Zúñiga, then in his early forties, was boyish, genial, and, after a decade working in Latin-American affairs, deeply versed in the intricacies of regional policy. Rhodes said, “Everybody thought he was the best Cuba hand in Washington.” The two men resolved to keep the “Cuba play,” as they referred to it, secret from almost everyone else in the government, trying to preserve what Zúñiga called “flexibility and political space.” If the news of negotiations leaked to opponents of reconciliation in Congress, they could easily be scuttled.

Zúñiga recalled, “All the N.S.C. directors had been told to come up with their big objectives, so I proposed a thing on Brazil—also Mexico and Central America, which the President was going to visit soon.” Tom Donilon, the national-security adviser, called Rhodes

to his office and remarked that he didn't see Cuba on the proposal. "I said, 'Let's not put this on paper,'" Rhodes recalled. "I told him that we were striking out on our own."

Obama met with Rhodes and Zúñiga and approved the secret project. "Ricardo and I basically designed a play in which we would send a message to the Cubans through a discreet channel, not through the State Department, indicating that the White House was prepared to have a dialogue with them and that the dialogue would be initially on issues relating to counterterrorism and prisoners," Rhodes said. "Which, in our view, if this went nowhere and it got out, was unobjectionable: Who wouldn't want to talk about counterterrorism and getting Alan Gross home?" In turn, the Cubans agreed to reveal the talks to only a few trusted people in their own government. "It was a very small circle," Zúñiga said.

They needed a secure place to meet, and, in June, 2013, the Canadian government provided a site, in Ottawa. "The Canadians were very helpful, in an underappreciated role," Rhodes said. "They came up with a very nice facility that hosts diplomatic meetings. They didn't ask to be debriefed after the meetings—they just picked us up at the airport, took us to our meeting site, and then took us back to the airport."

The Cubans did not greet the Americans warmly. "They didn't really trust us," Rhodes recalled. Zúñiga had been the human-rights officer at the U.S. Interests Section, "so they had a file on him, I am sure, that was a mile long." At one point, *Granma* had described him as "a travelling salesman, distributing the most backward, anti-Cuban ideas wherever he lands," and noted that he was the grandson of a former official in a conservative Honduran government ("a rabid anti-Communist and a great friend of United Fruit"). Rhodes, with his shorter tenure in public service, seemed to inspire little more confidence. "I was just this guy who I think they thought was a little different, but they didn't know where that was going to lead," he said.

In the initial meetings, there were three Americans—Zúñiga, Rhodes, and an "American counterterrorism expert"—and four Cubans. Both Zúñiga and Rhodes declined to identify their Cuban counterparts. Rhodes said only, "They

were sending people who were in a position to speak for Raúl Castro and for the top leadership." Several reliable sources have confirmed that the leader of the Cuban team was Alejandro Castro Espín, Raúl's only son, a colonel in the Interior Ministry who reputedly also leads the counterintelligence services. Castro Espín is a garrulous, formidable negotiator. Known as One Eye ever since he injured an eye during military service in Angola, he has degrees in engineering and international relations, and is the author of "The Empire of Terror," a book about the rise of American power through corporate interests.

The first meeting began, Rhodes said, as "a throat-clearing exercise": an exchange of basic security concerns. "But then it quickly moved into discussions around Alan Gross, and from the very beginning the one thing that was clear was that they wanted Gerardo Hernández released from prison." Hernández, a senior Cuban spy, was partly responsible for the downing of the Brothers to the Rescue planes; he had infiltrated the group and tipped off Cuban authorities to the flight plans. In 1998, U.S. authorities broke up a Cuban espionage ring based in Florida and arrested Hernández and four other men. After a trial in Florida, the five were found guilty of a range of offenses and given harsh sentences, with Hernández receiving two consecutive life terms. Cuba erupted.

SOUTH

In the cold, clear winter air
of Andalusia, I walked
a trail up through pig grass
toward a distant abandoned
farmhouse. No one could live here,
I said aloud, the land is baked clay,
the long summers are withering.
Yet someone did. The one wall
left intact bore the handprint
of a child, the fingers splayed
out to form half a message
in the lost language of childhood.
It said, "You won't find me!"
Then the wind woke from its nesting
in the weeds and the tall grass
to blow the childish words away.

The spies became the focus of protest marches; in speeches, Fidel demanded the return of the "Five Heroes," insisting that they had been sent to protect Cuba from violence being plotted by anti-Castro groups.

The meetings in Ottawa continued, every six weeks or so, through the summer and the autumn. "We kept having the same meeting, basically," Rhodes said. "We tried to see if they were interested in freeing Alan Gross in exchange for things we wanted to do anyway"—mostly changes in provisions of the embargo—"but they would not move off of a linkage of Gross and Gerardo." There were long discussions about the nature of espionage: the Americans explained that the U.S. could not swap Gross for Hernández because Gross "wasn't a spy," while the Cubans insisted that the work he had been doing in their country amounted to espionage.

Since the sixties, when the C.I.A. trained thousands of anti-Castro operatives at stations in Florida, the two countries had carried out a series of clandestine operations that lurched between bloodshed and farce. In Canada, the Cubans focussed intently on Luis Posada Carriles, an exiled operative whom, according to Rhodes, they saw as "the Osama bin Laden of Cuba, basically." An ex-C.I.A. agent with the nickname Bambi, Carriles was widely believed to be responsible for masterminding

Almost noon, the distant sun
rode straight above us like a god
aware of everything and like
a god utterly silent. What
could ever grow from this ground
to feed anyone? And who bore
the mysterious child who spoke
in riddles? If we climbed
the hill's crest we'd find
a higher hill and then another
hill until we reached an ocean
or gave up and turned back
to where the land descends step
by slow step to bring us exactly
here, where we began, stunned
by raw sunlight yet in the dark.

—Philip Levine
(1928-2015)

the bombing, in 1976, of a Cuban airliner, which killed all seventy-three people on board. He was also alleged to have carried out a series of anti-Castro bombings in Cuba in the nineties—one of which he admitted to in an interview in the *Times*. After the Bush Administration refused to extradite him, he was tried and acquitted by an American jury, and so he was living in Miami, where he sometimes attended fund-raisers for right-wing groups.

As the meetings continued, Rhodes recalled, the Cubans seemed determined to address “the whole bill of goods from the Bay of Pigs on,” working through the tangled history of the two countries. “It was actually very useful for me to take my disadvantages of being young and not very experienced on Cuba and just say, ‘Well, I wasn’t born when half the things you’re describing happened, and President Obama was born around the time of the revolution, and he doesn’t want to be trapped by that.’ We had that conversation probably for three meetings; but at each meeting there was less and less of the history.”

Because the meetings were kept secret, the Administration could do little to change U.S. laws on Cuba. “There wasn’t a change in our relationship, so you couldn’t do a shift in policy,” Zúñiga explained. The pro-democracy programs sponsored by Helms-Burton continued, and, Zúñiga said, the Cu-

bans “were always complaining about them.” Advocates of reconciliation pressed the Administration to act. The Cuba Study Group and its allies sponsored events, released white papers, and lobbied politicians. Senator Patrick Leahy, of Vermont, who had been involved with Cuba policy for more than a decade, brought a team of concerned congressmen to meet with Obama. The President reassured them in vague terms—“We’re working on it”—and the senators left frustrated.

That spring, Leahy visited Gross in prison and lobbied the Cubans for his release. As a good-will gesture, he helped arrange for Hernández’s wife—who was in her forties and childless—to become pregnant via artificial insemination, using a vial of Gerardo’s sperm that was ferried from the U.S. to a fertility clinic in Panama. The Cubans made a gesture of their own, quietly improving Alan Gross’s medical treatment and his living conditions in prison.

Then, in June, 2013, the former intelligence agent Edward Snowden arrived in Moscow, and it seemed possible that he would continue on to Cuba. Rhodes recalled telling the Cubans, “I’m worried that would derail the things we’re talking about here.” With the Cubans, you’re always looking for smoke signals, and I took it as a signal that they didn’t take Snowden. I think they were trying to leave themselves a space.” He

added, “These gestures were important for building confidence—but also because they showed we could reach into our systems and get something done.”

In the autumn, Rhodes and Zúñiga felt ready to broaden the negotiations. “We decided to put everything on the table,” Rhodes said. “Normalization, diplomatic relations, regulatory changes—all the way through to elections: ‘Here’s the relationship that we see, and President Obama would like to do as much of this as he can.’”

THROUGHOUT OBAMA’S first term, critics described him as naïve, particularly in the area of foreign relations—so ignorant of practical realities that he didn’t even understand the symbolic protocols of a state visit. In 2009, when he bowed to Emperor Akihito, on a trip to Tokyo, he was referred to on the far right as “treasonous.” When he bowed to King Abdullah, of Saudi Arabia, the *Washington Times* said that he had “belittled the power and independence of the United States.”

In December, 2013, Nelson Mandela died. At his funeral, in South Africa, Obama encountered Raúl Castro, greeted him, and shook his hand—the first public handshake between leaders of their two countries since 1959, when Nixon posed dourly with Fidel at the White House. Castro wore an expression of flustered delight, and news photographers’ snapshots of the moment immediately made the international wires. Obama claimed that the gesture wasn’t premeditated. It was “purely just a human response,” he said. “I’m not even sure I’d been briefed that he was going to be onstage. And certainly there wasn’t some lengthy discussion within the State Department about whether or not I should do that.”

At the next meeting in Ottawa, the Cubans were considerably warmer. “You had the President of the United States shaking Raúl Castro’s hand in front of the entire world at Nelson Mandela’s funeral—which was for them kind of a home game,” Rhodes recalled. “It was the first discussion we had about history that wasn’t contentious. We then had a whole discussion about Africa, and Angola, apartheid, and Obama’s history in the anti-apartheid movement. They had read ‘Dreams from My

Father,' and had studied his role in the disinvestment movement. They had done their homework."

Around that time, the C.I.A. told Zúñiga that one of its agents, Rolando Sarraff Trujillo, was imprisoned in Cuba, and it wanted him back; Sarraff, a senior Cuban Interior Ministry official, had provided valuable intelligence to the agency before he was caught, in 1995. Now that Zúñiga and Rhodes had a confirmed spy, they could propose a direct exchange: Sarraff for Gerardo Hernández. The Cubans indicated that they would consult in Havana, but, at the next meeting, in January, 2014, they refused the offer. "They said they weren't prepared to let him go," Zúñiga said. "So at that point we made a much bigger play." The Americans offered to release Hernández and several other intelligence agents, in a swap that would also allow Gross to be freed. "They didn't bite," Zúñiga told me. "We decided we'd wait for them to come back with a better answer." The wait lasted half a year.

IN AUGUST, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, of Havana—a small, round-bellied, cheerful man who has warned against the excesses of both capitalism and Communism—flew to Washington, D.C. He was there ostensibly to accept an invitation from his Washington counterpart, Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, to speak at Georgetown University. In fact, he was carrying a covert letter from Pope Francis to Obama. A few months earlier, Obama had visited the Vatican and discussed his efforts in Cuba. The Pope offered his support, and designated Ortega as a courier, carrying letters between the two capitals and the Vatican.

After Ortega arrived in Washington, Rhodes arranged for him to be "brought in the back door of the White House," and into the Rose Garden, where he read the Pope's letter aloud to Obama, Rhodes, and Zúñiga. In the letter, the Pope offered help with the issue of prisoners, and with improving relations between the two countries. Another letter went to Raúl Castro, in Havana.

The Cubans had evidently been un-

certain whether to proceed, and the Vatican diplomacy helped them decide. "I think what it comes down to is that they wanted to roll the dice," Zúñiga told me. In Ottawa, they announced that "they'd be interested in working with us on the economy, social development, and the Internet," Rhodes said. "Suddenly, we were dealing with questions like 'What are we going to announce?' We went to them and said, 'We want to announce a process of normalization that would include the establishment of diplomatic relations.' And we explained that from a public-relations standpoint, when the U.S. and Cuba announced something, they should make it as big as possible to create a political space for these changes."

They began meeting every month, varying the location, Rhodes said, "so as not to abuse the hospitality of the Canadians." They met once in a Toronto hotel, and another time "in a Caribbean country." As they began to hone the details of an agreement, they asked the Vatican to act as a guarantor. "It was a way of making it real," Rhodes said. "By agreeing to go to the Vatican and make the commitments, you're sort of on the hook. We also both insisted on registering our differences in the presence of the Vatican. It was important for the Cubans to be able to say, 'There's not full normalization until Guantánamo is returned and the embargo is lifted,' and it was important for us to say, 'We will continue to support human rights and free elections.'"



On the night of October 28, 2014, the American and Cuban delegations gathered at the Vatican, for a meeting watched over by the Pope's secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and a group of senior prelates. The Americans were led through winding passages to an ornate chamber near Parolin's office: a lofty, dimly lit room with heavy tapestries and dark-red curtains, where a long table was surrounded by paintings of past Popes and cardinals. "All the Vatican knew was that they were going to host a meeting with American and Cuban delegations," Rhodes said. "They certainly suspected that the prisoners thing was going to be involved, but they were shocked, I think

is a fair word, when we indicated to them that we were going to normalize and establish diplomatic relations." He added, "There was something pretty powerful about it being in a religious venue, because they blessed this process literally and spiritually. We'd had this laborious, tedious series of discussions for a year and a half, then you have people of spiritual stature speaking in very soaring words about what this would mean to people around the world, and how it would be a hopeful sign in the darkness. Some of the people on the Vatican side were emotional to the point of tears."

After the Vatican meeting, all that remained was coordination and logistics. As Zúñiga and Rhodes finalized details, they were obliged to let a few more people in the U.S. government know what they were doing, and they were "terrified," Zúñiga said, that the news would leak at the last minute. "It seemed too big to keep under wraps," he told me. "And we had people's lives at stake." To their astonishment, the secret held.

ON DECEMBER 17TH, Raúl Castro and Obama appeared simultaneously on live television to announce the normalization of relations, the release of prisoners, and the swapping of spies. Cubans hearing the news burst into tears and celebrated in the streets. In coordinated efforts, the remaining members of the Five Heroes were flown home, and Sarraff and Gross were returned to the U.S.; Cuba released fifty-three political prisoners, whose names Zúñiga had culled from reports by human-rights groups. Almost immediately, Cuban and American diplomats drew up an intense schedule of bilateral talks, and Obama began unbundling the embargo with a series of executive orders.

Fidel withheld comment for six weeks. Then, in January, he released a letter that said, "I do not trust the politics of the United States. I have not exchanged a word with them." He added that this did not signify "a rejection by me of the idea of resolving conflicts by peaceful means." But pretty much everyone in Cuba understood that he was unhappy with the deal.

That year's Summit of the Americas was held in Panama, in April, and Obama and Raúl Castro were the stars of the event. The two had spoken once, in a

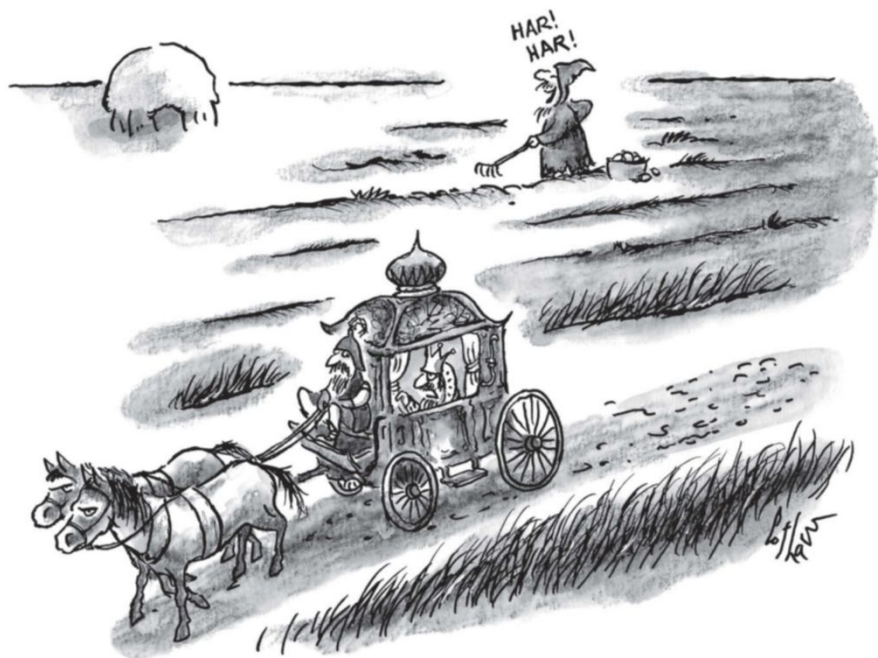
ceremonious telephone call before their announcement in December, but this was Obama's first chance to take Castro's measure in person. "For the head of a one-party state, he has a healthy sense of humor, a self-awareness, and a sense of irony," Obama told me. "I suspect that's in part because he was the younger brother who for so many years . . . was having to clean up and make things work" while "Fidel was out there making speeches."

Obama described Castro as a canny, good-humored pragmatist: "The first time we had the conversation about normalization, he warned me, 'Look, we Castros, we speak a long time, but you're lucky you're talking to me and not Fidel.' So that combination of humor and insight into his own issues has led me to be able to have productive conversations with him. Now, that does not mean that he is not guarded, cautious, that he's not steeped in his own dogmas. What it does mean is that we don't spend a lot of time on lengthy rants about Communism and imperialism." Before the encounter in Panama, Rhodes said, Obama sometimes teased him for "spending a hundred hours with the Cubans." Now he became involved in the talks himself.

Still, Fidel continued to bluster. After the Summit of the Americas, he published another letter in *Granma*, titled "In Defense of Our Right to Be Marxist-Leninists." In the letter, which marked the seventieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, he lauded the Soviet contribution to the world: "The twenty-seven million Soviets who died in the Great Patriotic War also did so for humanity and the right to think and be socialists, to be Marxist-Leninists, to be Communists, and to leave the dark ages behind."

American conservatives seemed no happier than Castro was about the opening. Mario Díaz-Balart—a Florida congressman who had taken over the seat previously held by his brother Lincoln—called Obama an "Appeaser-in-Chief who is willing to provide unprecedented concessions to a brutal dictatorship." Senator Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, announced, "I will do all in my power to block the use of funds to open an embassy in Cuba. Normalizing relations with Cuba is a bad idea at a bad time."

Nevertheless, in August, an Ameri-



"Go find out why a peasant is giggling at midday."

can delegation, headed by Secretary of State John Kerry, flew to Havana for a ceremony to reopen the U.S. Embassy, which had been closed for fifty-four years. Nearby, a middle-aged man, bare-chested in the heat, watched the American flag go up with a bittersweet expression. He told me afterward that a gap in history was being closed. He had grown up in the neighborhood, he said nostalgically. When he was a boy, he and his friends congregated on the seawall across from the Embassy, waiting to dive for coins that the Marine guards tossed into the sea.

WHEN OBAMA CAME to Havana, a group of Miami Cubans were there to cheer him on. Carlos Saladrigas had flown in on a private jet owned by his friend Mike Fernández, a healthcare billionaire, together with Andrés Fanjul and Joe Arriola. Zúñiga had been making regular trips to Miami to meet with the Cuba Study Group and other influential Cuban-Americans, to gather ideas and to hint that talks were under way. As Obama prepared for the trip, Saladrigas was summoned to the White House. He recalled, "My advice to the President was: 'Be yourself. Just by being there you are showing the Cuban people that change is possible, and that

they don't need to feel afraid of change. You can show warmth and vitality; they are more used to an authoritarian style from their leaders.'"

Obama's tour culminated in a speech in Havana's ornate Gran Teatro, which included language inspired by conversations with the Cuban-Americans. Before a packed audience, including most of the surviving luminaries of Cuba's revolutionary generation, he said, "I have come here to bury the last remnants of the Cold War in the Americas." Then, more pointedly, he added, "A country's greatest asset is its people. In the United States, we have a clear monument to what the Cuban people can build—it's called Miami."

As it turned out, the Gran Teatro speech was the only event of Obama's visit that was broadcast on Cuban television, and it was not rebroadcast later. But Cuban-Americans had been pursuing a similar outreach in Havana for years, advancing the idea that, as Saladrigas said, "economic rights are also human rights." With funding from Miami, Cardinal Ortega and the Church set up an N.G.O. called Cuba Empeñe, which held workshops for budding entrepreneurs in Havana and in the provincial cities of Cienfuegos and Camagüey. The workshops, which

address everything from marketing and management techniques to applying for bank loans, have trained more than twenty-five hundred Cubans, the majority of them women; about two-thirds have gone on to run businesses. Saladrigas gave a guest lecture in Havana as part of an international M.B.A. program—the first public speech in Cuba by a Cuban exile. In an unmistakable signal that the initiative had Raúl's blessing, he was asked to expand his class to accommodate five Castro grandchildren. Afterward, several of them thanked him personally.

I asked Obama why, considering Fidel's long-standing distrust of the Americans, Raúl had finally stepped forward. "It's my sense that two things are going on," he said. "One is that there is a recognition—particularly in light of what's happening in Venezuela—that sustaining their economic model over the next ten years becomes increasingly untenable. So they're very much in the mode of: how do we make our economy run without giving up power?" He went on, "My impression also is that Raúl recognizes that any substantial change to their economic system—and, by extension, at least their civil society, if not their full political system—requires him to do the downfield blocking. If a younger generation tries to pull this off without the revolutionary credentials, there will be too much pushback."

He recalled a particularly frank conversation, after a tour of Havana's old

city, a neighborhood of grand colonial buildings whose façades are being eroded by the salty air. "I said this directly to Raúl," Obama told me. "It is not my objective to see Cuba turned into some tourist playground for the United States.' There are genuine gains they made in health care and education that are worth preserving." He went on, "By opening up your economy, you can transform Havana in a way that really works for the economy and works for you. But it can't just be haphazard. It can't be opening it up to the highest bidder, and then suddenly you've got the cruises coming in and you've got fast-food joints popping up in the middle of the old city.' I said, 'You should find advisers—and they probably shouldn't be U.S. advisers—to think about a controlled, thoughtful development plan.'" He said that he proposed calling Singapore, or one of the Scandinavian countries—"whoever it is that you think has properly balanced a market economy with some sort of planning."

Obama said, "I suspect that the model that appeals to him most is a China, Vietnam type of shift, where, slowly, market elements are introduced but an authoritarian political system remains." He suggested that such a strategy would be inherently short-lived. "China may be able to pull that off for a while—for a pretty long while, given the culture and the size of the country and its ability to isolate itself from outside forces. It's very hard for a small country to pull

that off. Once you start being part of the global economy and the global supply chain, things happen quickly."

DURING OBAMA'S VISIT, the Starwood company announced a deal to open Havana's first American-managed hotel. Soon afterward, the first Carnival cruise liner docked in Havana, just as the Malecón was closed so that action scenes for "Fast and Furious 8" could be filmed. At the same time, Chanel put on a fashion show, with the theme of "Cuba Cruise," on the elegant Paseo del Prado. After police removed street people from the area, Gisele Bündchen arrived for the show in a vintage red convertible. Karl Lagerfeld m.c.'d. Fidel Castro's grandson, an aspiring model, showed up to help visiting celebrities to their seats.

Over lunch in Miami, Emilio Morales, a former market analyst for the Cuban government who is now a consultant for prospective U.S. investors, told me that he has a team of researchers going quietly from neighborhood to neighborhood throughout the island, tracking the recipients of financial remittances to locate "clusters of purchasing power."

"Would you like to see where the McDonald's will go?" Morales asked me. He pulled out his laptop and opened up a program; a map of Cuba appeared, with a welter of little red tacks all over the island.

"How many McDonald's are we talking about?" I asked.

"Havana can absorb fifty—the island itself eighty-four," Morales said. "That's in the first phase."

Mike Fernández, the Cuban-American businessman, said, "I have no business interest in Cuba myself. I look at it and see an economy of seven billion dollars—no more than Miami-Dade County. But it has the potential to be an economy of three hundred and fifty billion dollars within fifteen years."

Many close observers are less optimistic. "I think there's a certain euphoria in the U.S., whereas the pace of change is actually very gradual," Richard Feinberg, a longtime Cuba analyst at the Brookings Institution, said. "The conservative forces there are very strong. The number of new business deals that have gone through is one in a hundred."

Unravelling the rest of the embargo would be a complex task, requiring changes to countless provisions, spread



across many government agencies. If Obama wants to make significant alterations before he leaves office, he'll have to issue executive orders, and Cuba's critics in Congress will fervently oppose him. Obama is betting, though, that even without greater foreign investment, Cuba's new entrepreneurs will be a vanguard of change: "If those *cuentapropistas* are spreading, as they have since we started these changes in policy—when I came into office, about ten per cent of the population was self-employed; now it's approaching thirty—then they are empowered in ways that we on the outside could never match."

But that requires the Cuban government to feel secure enough to loosen constraints. Feinberg compared Obama's highly restricted trip to Cuba with a visit that he made to Vietnam this summer. "The Cuban regime closely controlled the Obama visit—they purposely kept him at a distance from people," he said. "In Vietnam, he had a lot more interaction with people. Shows you how much further along Vietnam is, and how much further along the Vietnamese Communist Party is in terms of self-confidence."

In mid-April, three weeks after Obama's visit, Cuba's Communist Party held its seventh Party Congress. Fidel, the guest of honor, spoke with difficulty, but he remained commanding enough so that many of the delegates wept at the sight of him. He talked about his impending ninetieth birthday, and suggested that he might not be around much longer: "Soon I will be like all the others—we all have our turn," he said. "But the ideas of the Cuban Communists will endure. . . . To our brothers in Latin America and the world, we should let them know that the Cuban people will triumph."

The speeches at the congress seemed to raise the possibility that Obama's meeting with entrepreneurs was a blunder: by speaking too freely, he had forced the regime to tighten its grip again. The Foreign Secretary, Bruno Rodríguez, blasted Obama's visit as "an attack on our history, culture, and symbols." Alluding to the event at La Cervecería, he said, "He came to dazzle the non-state sector of the economy, as if he were a defender not of the big corporations but of hot-dog sellers." When Raúl Castro spoke, he reassured the delegates that the economic reforms were merely steps toward a more "sustainable and prosperous model of social-

ism." Referring to Obama's overtures, he said, "We are not naïve. We know there are powerful external forces that aspire to 'empower' non-state actors to change and finish off the revolution by other means."

In Washington, people seemed chastened and unsure what would happen. The Obama aide told me, "We've done our thing. The best for us to do right now is probably to keep quiet." The Cuban state remains strong: after the congress, it reintroduced price controls on agricultural products; a Cuban Army holding company, which dominates commerce on the island, still owns development rights in many of the areas that might appeal to tourists. In Miami, Saladrigas told me, "Fidel wanted to slow down the train, and I think he accomplished it. For the moment, the hardliners have regained the upper hand."

FOR MUCH OF Obama's time in office, his foreign policy has seemed to be built on the assumption that there are messes in the world that are beyond our ability to clean up. As crises have proliferated—the tumult that followed the Arab Spring, Russia's predatory behavior in Crimea and elsewhere, a coup in Turkey—the Administration's response has been, for better and for worse, cautious, rationalist, and unhurried. The results have been fitful, most obviously in the Middle East. There, and in the burgeoning regional competitions in the Baltics and in the South China Sea, the Administration's policies have left no clear endgame for the next President.

Perhaps the most persistent effort has been to fix the present by symbolic attempts to mend the past. Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo offered the Muslim world "a new beginning," and he later made similar gestures in other places where the U.S. has been at war: Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam. This summer, he became the first U.S. President to visit Hiroshima, seventy-one years after an American plane dropped an atomic bomb there.

The opening with Cuba has been a victory for the Obama White House, achieved at little cost. But even those who worked on it speak of it as an incremental change. "I don't think anyone involved ever thought there would be a magic moment of change in Cuba," Dan Restrepo told me. "These guys have been playing the same game for the past fifty-

five years, and they're good at it. For the past year and a half, though, they've been forced to play a different kind of game."

Rhodes says that the effects of the opening have rippled through the region: he points to the recent peace deal between the Colombian government and the rebel group FARC, which was negotiated with help from both the U.S. and Cuba. But, even though he believes that the opening with Cuba is "in the first tier of Obama's foreign-policy achievements," he says that its greatest importance is symbolic—a belated reckoning with the "outsized role in historic events and the global imagination that Cuba played in the Cold War."

In the Oval Office, Obama told me he believed that Americans needed to make a greater effort to acknowledge perceptions that exist outside the United States. "We are a superpower, and we do not fully appreciate the degree to which, when we move, the world shakes," he said. "Our circumstances have allowed us to be ahistorical. But one of the striking things when you get outside the United States is—Faulkner's old saying, 'The past is never dead. It isn't even past.' . . . People remember things that happened six hundred years ago. And they are alive and active in their politics."

"And so the intention here is not, as the Republicans like to call it, engaging in apology tours. It is dignifying these countries' memories and their culture, and saying to them, 'We understand your experience and your culture, and that is valid.' And, once you do that, if people think, he sees me, even if they disagree with you, there is an openness to having a conversation."

The work his Administration had done in Cuba, he suggested, was a preamble, but an essential one. "It's not a cure-all. It's a start. And if U.S. policy then simply repeats some of the mistakes of the past, it has no force, then it just looks like cosmetics and manipulation. If, on the other hand, what we do seems to reflect examination of our own past and where we've been right and where we've been wrong, then the possibilities of more allies, more support, stronger pro-American sentiment are a whole lot greater. And one of the things that you can't always measure but I'm absolutely confident is true is that world opinion matters. It is a force multiplier." ♦

GERMANY'S NEW NATIONALISTS

The country's resurgent far right has a surprising face.

BY THOMAS MEANEY

YOU CAN TELL well in advance when Frauke Petry, the leader of Alternative für Deutschland, a burgeoning new right-wing party, is going to give a speech. AfD members put up posters all over a town's main streets declaring, "Frauke Petry Is Coming." As the appointed hour approaches, police assemble, and usually demonstrators, too, protesting against a woman known to her enemies as "Adolfina" and "die Führerin." At bigger events, hundreds show up bearing placards with slogans like "Voting AfD is so 1933," pelting Party leaders with cake. Occasionally, a few of them sneak into Petry's talks.

Petry, who is forty-one, with a pixie haircut and a trim, athletic build, frequently arrives late. She travels continually, often without any immediate electoral aim—the next federal elections won't be till the second half of 2017—but simply to publicize the Party and herself. Like most German politicians today, Petry observes the national moratorium on charisma, but her appearances have the feel of a celebrity tour. Her audiences seem awed, unsure whether it is appropriate to take photographs. But, once someone starts, the room fills with the soft clicks of phone cameras.

Petry sees the presence of protesters as an opportunity to score points. "We're not the sort of people who shut voices out," she tells her audiences. One evening in Landau an der Isar, a small town in Bavaria, she produced a flyer that had been distributed outside and read it aloud, in the tone of a teacher who has intercepted a note being passed around a classroom: "You believe women should return to the kitchen? You're against the protection of the environment? You have homophobic, xenophobic, and extreme right-wing tendencies? Then you've come to the right place. Thank you for your vote!" Silence filled the hall, and Petry gave a tight smile. "That must have been

written by some very gutsy and well-informed citizens," she said. "Maybe they should come forward and tell us where they got these ideas." The audience cheered.

A nervous-looking sixteen-year-old with a mop of blond hair shuffled toward the platform. The audience jeered, but Petry motioned for silence and said to the boy, "I'll give you the microphone for a bit and you can explain to us how you got the idea that women should return to the kitchen."

"But of course I don't believe that," the boy muttered in a deep Bavarian accent. "It's your people here who do."

"Now you're repeating your hypothesis," Petry said, leaning over him from the stage. "But how do you justify it?" He hesitated in confusion, and other protesters joined him. A teen-age girl began to speak from prepared notes, saying that the AfD denied climate change. "You have to hold the mike closer to your mouth," Petry interrupted, and then rocked from foot to foot, marking the slow tempo of the girl's speech. "Your party claims that CO₂ is not dangerous, but how do you explain all the people dying from air pollution in China?" the girl asked.

"I'm a chemist," Petry said. "The problem is not CO₂—it's the nitrogen and sulfur oxides that make the smog. So many people make this mistake." She went on, "Let me ask you a question. If you dissolve CO₂ in water and the temperature rises, will you have more or less CO₂?" It was a trick question that Petry often uses.

"More," the girl said, meaning CO₂ in the atmosphere.

"Exactly wrong," Petry said, meaning in the water. She made a dismayed face to the audience. "There's a huge amount of misinformation out there," she said. "When you see what's in their school textbooks, it's no surprise they believe these things."

Petry spent half an hour more raking through the protesters' arguments, expressing concern that Germany's youth could be led so badly astray and exasperating the students with her pedantry. Both the protesters and the audience were relieved when she finally began her speech.

For decades, the German far right has been a limited force, with easily recognizable supporters—nicotine-stained ex-Nazis in the sixties and seventies, leather-clad skinheads in the eighties and nineties. Petry is something different, a disarmingly wholesome figure—a former businesswoman with a Ph.D. in chemistry and four children from her marriage to a Lutheran pastor. During a month I spent with her this summer as she drove around Germany giving speeches, she drew connections between politics and laboratory science, sprinkled her speech with Latin phrases, and steered discussions about German culture toward the cantatas of Bach.

Petry is not a gifted orator. Her speeches tend to be dull, with ornate sentences and technocratic talking points, and she is more comfortable citing economic studies than discussing the lives of ordinary people. Her manner belies the extremism of the AfD's views. At the start of this year, Petry said that, in the face of the recent influx of refugees (many of them fleeing the war in Syria), the police might have to shoot people crossing the border illegally. In April, the Party said that head scarves should be banned in schools and universities, and minarets prohibited. Party members called for a referendum on whether to leave the euro; for the expulsion of Allied troops, who have been stationed in Germany since 1945; and for school curriculums that focus more on "positive, identity-uplifting" episodes in German history and less on Nazi crimes. Most contentious of all was



Frauke Petry leads a new populist party that has become Germany's most significant right-wing force since the Nazis.

PHOTOGRAPH BY OLAF BLECKER

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the declaration “Islam does not belong in Germany.”

By American standards, especially in the age of Donald Trump, contemporary German politics is decorous and understated. But although Petry’s crisp style is in many ways the opposite of Trump’s, her rise has similarities to his. She, too, has come late to politics and relishes her outsider status. Like him, she often works by insinuation, fanning right-wing conspiracy theories not merely to stir up grievances but to bind members together with a sense of shared beliefs. Like him, she has been accused of financial improprieties. Like him, she castigates the media for liberal bias but also thrives on media attention. Petry and her colleagues have mastered the art of dominating the news cycle, to the point where a visitor to Germany listening to the radio or reading the newspapers could be forgiven for thinking that the AfD is the party in power.

Two years ago, the AfD won its first seats in regional parliaments. (Petry was elected to the parliament of Saxony, one of Germany’s sixteen federal states.) Earlier this year, support for the AfD reached fifteen per cent in national polls, three times more than for any previous right-wing party, and well beyond the five-per-cent threshold required to enter the Bundestag after next year’s national elections. In a recent election in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, where Germany’s Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has her constituency, the AfD got more than twenty per cent of the vote, edging Merkel’s party—the center-right Christian Democratic Union—into third place. A week ago, the AfD won its first seats in the state parliament of Berlin, traditionally a social-democratic stronghold, in an election that brought the C.D.U.’s worst ever result in the city.

Populist parties have been flourishing across Europe, and are already in power in Hungary and Poland, but a far-right resurgence in Germany is uniquely alarming, both because of its history—the postwar constitution was designed to curb populist influence—and because of its dominant position

on the continent. “It’s my hope that the future will bring a Chancellor named Petry,” the leader of Austria’s Freedom Party recently said. That hope is still far from fruition, but the AfD is already the most successful far-right phenomenon in Germany since the Second World War.

I FIRST MET PETRY in April at her offices in the Saxony State Parliament, a gray modernist building, in the center of Dresden, which incorporates the ruins of a government office destroyed in the Allied bombing raid of 1945. She was in her pressroom, preparing for the AfD’s annual convention and dictating posts for its Facebook page to two assistants. Behind her was a shelf of binders decorated with stickers that said, “Merkel Must Go.” Petry took me to her office, where a biography of Merkel that she’d been reading lay on the floor. “Like me, she’s from the East and trained as a scientist, so I can relate with her to some extent,” Petry said. “You get the sense that she’s a woman who just fell into things. When Merkel was young, she had no passions.”

When conversation turned to the AfD’s rise, Petry said, “You could say we are Merkel’s children.” She meant that the AfD owed its popularity to Merkel’s announcement, in August, 2015, that Germany would take in anyone who was a refugee. (Last year, 1.1 million refugees arrived.) Merkel argued that Germany’s history gave it a moral obligation to

respond to the humanitarian crisis. “We can do this,” she said—a call for national solidarity that achieved the opposite. The phrase electrified the German right, which accused the Chancellor of selling out the country in order to burnish her cosmopolitan image abroad. Voters began to flock to the AfD, many of them from Merkel’s own party.

Several events this year have exacerbated this rightward turn. On New Year’s Eve, in Cologne, roving groups of Middle Eastern and North African men sexually assaulted and robbed hundreds of women as they celebrated in the city center. The German Federal Criminal Police Office drew an analogy with cases

of group sexual harassment in the Arab world—the ones that occurred during the Tahrir Square protests are the most famous instance—and the crimes were quickly established in the public imagination as a specifically Islamic phenomenon. In July, there was a weeklong spate of violent attacks, unconnected with one another but involving perpetrators of Muslim heritage: a teen-age Afghan refugee pledging loyalty to ISIS wounded four people with an axe on a train near Würzburg; an Iranian-German gunman killed nine people at a shopping center in Munich; in Reutlingen, a small town near Stuttgart, a machete-wielding Syrian refugee murdered a pregnant Polish woman at the kebab shop where they both worked; and a Syrian asylum seeker blew himself up outside a night club in the Bavarian town of Ansbach, injuring fifteen people.

The response of Merkel’s government, and of most of the German press, has been measured, emphasizing the unique aspects of each attack: the Munich shooting turned out to be a case of right-wing, rather than Islamist, extremism; the kebab-shop murder a crime of passion; the Syrian asylum seeker a psychiatric case. When I spoke to Petry not long afterward, she was scornful of what she saw as a liberal tendency to suppress politically inconvenient truths. “Big German media are always careful about what they report,” she said. “Our political opponents absolutely avoid acknowledging the factors of illegal migration and open borders in these attacks.” For her, the attacks had a simple explanation: “These people coming into Germany are used to being in completely different social circumstances.”

I asked Petry if she had ever met a refugee, and she told me about an official visit she had made to an asylum shelter. “It’s true the quality of their rooms was not very good,” she said. “But I saw food on the walls, excrement as well—I saw how they behaved. And I thought, This is not going to work.” Most of the refugees, she said, were a threat to contemporary German values, such as the separation of church and state and the freedom of the media. Sometimes she justified her views with long discourses on the history of Islam and the European Enlightenment. At other times, she cited Muslim clerics



who she claimed agreed with her, or opted for statistics about the failures of integration. But generally she hewed to a kind of populist folklore. “Asylum seekers must appear for appointments in order to have their status reviewed, but they are often late by one or two hours,” she told me matter-of-factly. “If you’re German and you’re fifteen minutes late to a court date, that’s it, it’s over!” When I asked whether Germany wouldn’t need younger workers to service its rapidly aging population—a common argument for a liberal immigration policy—she laughed and said, “To be frank, I don’t see young Muslim men wiping the asses of old German pensioners.”

LAST WEEK, MERKEL publicly admitted that her original decision to let in so many immigrants had been a mistake. “If I could, I would rewind time by many, many years so that I could better prepare myself and the whole government,” she said. She now believes that her “We can do this” slogan was “almost an empty formula,” and sees that she gravely underestimated the challenges involved. This was the climax of months of backpedalling in response to the AfD’s electoral momentum and to criticism within her own party. After the sexual assaults in Cologne, she expedited the deportation of refugees who commit crimes and cut a deal with the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to reduce the number of Syrians crossing into Europe. After the recent attacks, Merkel’s Interior Minister, Thomas de Maizière, called for a ban on burkas in a wide range of public contexts—an appropriation of the AfD’s party line. The government also announced a new Integration Law, which gives the state the power to determine where refugees can live and requires them to learn German and to take classes on the country’s history and culture. The underlying assumption—that immigrants don’t want to learn the language—is a widespread belief in the AfD, and the C.D.U.’s embrace of it represents an about-face: such programs have been underfunded for years.

So far, this tack to the right has done nothing to halt the AfD’s rise, and politicians in other parties have been alarmed at how much power the AfD now has to shape government policy. Kerstin Köditz, a representative for Die Linke,



“Do I want the job? Huh, I never thought about it like that.”

the main left-wing party, who has often clashed with Petry in the Saxony parliament, told me that she thought the Integration Law would prove counterproductive. “People are now under general suspicion until they prove otherwise,” she said. “Migrants are deprived of all self-evident fundamental rights, such as the free choice of residence. The law provides them with jobs but pays them only eighty cents an hour. That’s not even a tenth of the minimum wage. Second-class citizens are being created—a poor prerequisite for integration.”

Some version of the law would have passed even without the AfD, Köditz thought, but the Party’s influence had made it harsher. The outcome demonstrated the precariousness of Merkel’s position, in a system where coalition governments are the norm. “Will the C.D.U. continue to be a moderate people’s party, representing broad sections of the population?” Köditz said. “If so, then there is a gap to the right, which the AfD can easily occupy. Or will the AfD push the C.D.U. to the right? Then the C.D.U. might start losing votes in the middle but take them away from the AfD. And yet the closer the parties

move together, the more likely the AfD is to form some part of the government. It will be only a matter of time.”

ONE MORNING in May, at a thermal spa on the outskirts of Munich, I joined Petry as she relaxed before an event at a beer hall downtown. There was a drowsy atmosphere, with pensioners suspended in the pool, exercising in slow motion. Petry had changed into a dark-blue one-piece and a swimming cap. She lowered herself into the water, annexed a lane, and launched into an efficient breaststroke. I hung back, splashing around aimlessly with a businessman named Wilfried Biedermann, an AfDer who organizes Petry’s Bavarian appearances. His duties had somehow included bringing an extra Speedo for me to wear. After forty laps, Petry signalled that she had finished. As she got out of the pool, she pointed to a sign warning swimmers of the deep end—in German, French, English, Turkish, and Arabic. “Really, Arabic, too, now?” she said, smiling.

We made for the hot pools, and Petry positioned herself in front of a jet of water, while Biedermann fiddled with

the controls. "That's one thing they did right in the East," he said. "They trained you to be real athletes."

"No, I wouldn't say that," Petry said. "They wanted me to be a gymnast—I had the right body for it—but I wasn't going to be in their circus."

Petry was born in Dresden in 1975. Her mother was an industrial chemist, and her father was an engineer who was unhappy under Communism and tried to escape to West Germany three times, finally succeeding in 1989, just before the Berlin Wall fell. The rest of the family joined him soon after, settling in a small town near Dortmund. "There's a cruel stereotype of Easterners coming to the West and taking advantage of everything," Petry told me. "I pretty much fit that." In her teens, she took after-school language courses and singing classes, and made extra money playing the organ in church on Sundays.

In high school, she met her future husband, Sven Petry, and played in his father's church. "He comes from a line of something like four or five generations of pastors," Petry said. "I fell in love with him for his brain. He wanted to study chemistry, like me, but I thought

one chemist was enough for the family. We agreed he would study theology." Keen to perfect her English, Petry got a bachelor's degree in chemistry in the United Kingdom, and moved back to Germany in 1998. She and Sven pursued Ph.D.s in Göttingen, where their first two children were born. Later, Sven became a pastor in a small town near Leipzig, where they had two more.

In 2009, Petry won a competition for entrepreneurs and invested the prize money in a chemicals company she had just started with her mother. The company didn't grow fast enough to repay its debts, and after five years Petry declared personal bankruptcy—which is far more uncommon in Germany than it is in the United States. She was sued by creditors of the business; the case was eventually settled, but journalists still delight in speculating about the state of her finances.

While the company was struggling, Petry's mother read on the Internet about a new political party called Electoral Alternative 2013. "It was about the euro, family policies, and energy, and it demanded more direct democracy," Petry recalled. The Party, which

soon changed its name to Alternative für Deutschland, had been founded by a group of economists and journalists who felt betrayed when Merkel broke a promise not to bail out Greece. Petry contacted the founders and helped set up an office in Leipzig. The Party's leader, Bernd Lucke, was a mild-mannered free-market economist, whose agenda was based on a conviction that the euro was unsustainable as a currency. Other Party founders, however, wanted stronger restrictions on immigration, and soon more people were joining for anti-refugee reasons than for euro-related ones. Petry felt that Lucke was failing to adapt to the concerns of the membership, and at last year's Party conference she seized control.

Her accomplice was a Party leader from North Rhine-Westphalia named Marcus Pretzell, with whom she is now in a relationship. The pair, who have divorced their previous spouses, are inseparable, courting publicity at every turn, and their relationship has become tabloid fodder in a way that is a novelty in German politics. The Petry-Pretzell phenomenon complicates Petry's long-established image as a figure of maternal wholesomeness; where she once bounced children on her knees at Party meetings, she is now more likely to be found on motorboats, in hotel bars, and at summits in the Alps. Her glamorous transformation has aroused suspicion and opprobrium among the Party's rank and file, but many forgive it. Several AfDers I spoke to expressed pride that the Party now had a clever, starry member of the meritocracy who can take on the élites of the establishment parties.

At the conference, Petry and Pretzell filled the hall with their supporters, who shouted Lucke down when he exhorted the Party to shed its extremist image. Petry's faction then riotously applauded her speech, which asserted that the AfD existed beyond conventional political categories and should ignore what outsiders thought of it. A few hours later, a vote established Petry as Lucke's replacement.

When I met with Lucke, he characterized Petry not as an ideologue but as an opportunist. "A new party attracts all sorts of people who see a new professional future in an otherwise unsuccessful career," he said. He told me that



"Give me liberty, or give me just one sec."

he first suspected her motives when she refused to help him quell wild conspiracy theories that were circulating on the Party's fringes—for instance, that Germany was not actually a state but a registered company on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. Petry didn't want to risk losing votes by disavowing the rumors. "I was starting to realize that she would do anything to keep her position in the Party, even if she didn't herself believe in it," Lucke said.

Petry's tendency to temporize may be a crucial asset, according to Hajo Funke, an expert on Germany's far right who has just published a book, "On Angry Citizens and Arsonists," about the AfD. The party she presides over, he explained, is fundamentally split. On one side there are moderate members, for whom the AfD is basically a protest vote; on the other is what he called a "dark core" of true believers—people like Björn Höcke, a former history teacher who has said that the "reproductive strategies" of Africans are diluting the ethnic-German population. Petry had been a link between the two wings, Funke said, but now she was vulnerable, because the dark core had succeeded in moving the AfD even further to the right. "The Party is in the hands of radicals now," he said.

EVERY MONDAY in the city of Dresden, a few thousand nationalist protesters take to the streets for what they call an "evening stroll." One week in April, I joined them. Skinheads marched alongside elderly people and gentle-looking fathers in fleeces trying to keep overtired children in line. Banners with Angela Merkel's face filled the streets: there was "Fatima Merkel," in a head scarf, and "Adolf Merkel," wearing a Nazi armband but with a euro symbol in place of a swastika. "Homeland, Freedom, Tradition!" the crowd chanted. "Ali Go Home!" The protest is the work of a movement called PEGIDA—an acronym that stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West—which arranges similar demonstrations across Germany. It is not officially allied with the AfD, but the groups share many supporters.

I was puzzled to see among the placards a yellow pennant with a picture of a brown leather shoe. "It's the Union Shoe," an excited voice behind me said.

"The symbol of the Peasants' War of 1524!" I turned to find a small blond man in his forties. He introduced himself as Andreas Kucharicky, and took me to meet the men holding the flag—colleagues of his at a construction-equipment firm where he is an engineer. I asked them if they joined in PEGIDA's strolls every week, and they said that Kucharicky did. We caught sight of a placard with Petry's face, beaming angelically. "That's Frau Doktor Petry,"



Kucharicky said. "That's who we want for our next Chancellor."

We marched out of the Old Market Square onto the main avenue in downtown Dresden. "This is where the Communists had their big parades," Kucharicky told me with satisfaction. I asked when he began to think of himself as a nationalist, and he told me about a protest in 1999, to commemorate the victims of the Allied bombing of Dresden, half a century before. Police broke up the march, because of neo-Nazi involvement, and Kucharicky was appalled. "Germans trying to remember Germans being arrested by Germans—it made no sense," he said.

As we marched, Kucharicky pointed to some teen-agers outside a McDonald's and said, "They just sit there while the nation slips away from them." He was disgusted that so many of his countrymen were immune to the tug of patriotism, and called Merkel "the Germany abolisher"—a newly popular term derived from a right-wing tract titled "Germany Abolishes Itself," by Thilo Sarrazin, a member of the executive board of the German Bundesbank. The book, which appeared in 2010 and sold more than a million and a half copies, argues that everything from high immigrant crime rates to low test scores among Muslims could be partly traced to genetic factors.

The success of Sarrazin's book revealed an important shift in public opinion. For

decades, Germany was proud of not being proud—of confronting its past openly and of accepting the principle of collective guilt. It developed a political identity based on allegiance to the laws and norms of the state, rather than on any cultural or ethnic sense of Germanness. As a result, patriotic displays that would be uncontroversial in other countries, such as flying the national flag or saying that you love your country, were taboo in Germany. But, as the memory of the Third Reich recedes and the last generation of perpetrators and victims dies out, the nation has begun to see itself differently. The AfD is attracting voters, like Kucharicky, who want Germany to become a normal country again, with an unashamed sense of nationalism.

In the weeks that followed, I struck up a correspondence with Kucharicky. His e-mails gave me his nationalist perspective on current events: he used the word *Vaterland* without irony. In some ways, he seemed like a typical AfD supporter. On the other hand, as I discovered, there is no truly typical AfD supporter, because the Party attracts voters who have a wide range of concerns and grievances. At town-hall meetings, conferences, white-sausage breakfasts, dinners, and late-night carouses, I encountered many types. I met a doctor from Kiel who had come back to Saxony to reclaim ancestral land confiscated by the Communists; I met a middle manager for Mercedes who had had to seek medical attention for his heart when he learned of Merkel's bailout of Greece; I met a Vietnamese-German man who joined the AfD because it was the only party that talked about the global influence of the C.I.A.; I met a trainee pilot for United Airlines who admired Trump and had decided that the AfD was the closest German equivalent; I met a quiet architect who thought that most of the Party was unhinged but still joined, because it was right about the economy. I met very few women. (The membership is eighty-five per cent male.)

IN APRIL, soon after the AfD issued its statement that "Islam does not belong in Germany," Aiman Mazyek, the head of the Muslim Central Council, publicly compared the Party to the Nazis. He invited Petry to exchange views at a summit meeting in Berlin. Other Party

leaders sensed danger, but Petry accepted.

Surrounded by the German press corps, Petry and Mazyek, a sturdy forty-seven-year-old former media consultant, met in a boardroom on the second floor of the Regent Hotel. The discussion escalated when Petry accused Mazyek of wanting to impose Sharia law on Germany, a popular but unfounded claim. In response, Mazyek produced what he said was a gift—a giant copy of the German Basic Law, which was drafted in 1949, under Allied supervision. Mazyek had put his signature next to Article 4, which guarantees religious freedom.

Petry was in a bind. If she rejected the gift, she would be disrespecting the German constitution; if she accepted it, her supporters would say that she was capitulating to the caliphate. She got up, rushed out of the room, and told reporters that she would hold a brief press conference in the hotel's lobby. Mazyek held his own press conference, and journalists had to choose which one to attend. Most followed Petry. "I asked Mr. Mazyek whether he would approve of marriages between Christians or atheists with Muslims," she announced. "He could not give me a guarantee that Islam does not dominate these relationships. We came here for guarantees and we got none."

As damage control, Petry's words were more or less effective, but she clearly realized that the meeting had been a mistake. "On Facebook I said we taught him a lesson," she admitted to me afterward. "But no one was able to teach anyone a lesson. It was a good play on his part." Mazyek, when I asked him about it later, admitted to an element of showmanship. "We did not go into the meeting with any expectations but approached the AfD in the hope of raising awareness about its unconstitutional agenda," he said. The ploy had succeeded in showing that "the AfD is not capable of having democratic discussions."

He went on, "The AfD uses the refugee crisis to foment a propaganda of fear in the minds of its followers. Insults and daily Islamophobia have led to the desecration of houses of worship, and bullying in the streets." According to an estimate by the German Interior Ministry, violence against foreigners increased by more than forty per cent last year. There were six hundred and sixty-five

assaults on asylum shelters—an average of almost two a day—including fifty-five cases of arson, and there were more than a hundred attacks on individuals.

The most notorious attacks have been in Saxony, Petry's state. At the start of this year in Chemnitz, neo-Nazis beat and trampled a thirteen-year-old Tunisian girl. In Bautzen, a small town close to the Czech border, a large crowd cheered when a refugee shelter went up in flames. In Clausnitz, another crowd attacked a bus transporting refugees to a shelter.

The attacks take place in a sinister atmosphere of municipal complicity. The police keep interventions to a minimum, and prosecutions are rare, in part because few witnesses come forward. In one town, after the home of an immigrant family was firebombed, a volunteer fireman who helped fight the blaze was later discovered to have thrown the Molotov cocktail that started it.

In the economically stagnant, mostly Eastern, towns where anti-immigrant feeling runs highest, hatred of the new arrivals has not prevented people from taking advantage of their presence. The government has invested millions of euros in housing for refugees, which local interests have welcomed as a rare form of economic stimulus. The Clausnitz attack was led by an AfD supporter named Frank Hetze, whose brother, another AfD member, turned out to be the director of the shelter. It later emerged that the Hetze family business, a metals factory, had sold shipping containers to a refugee center in Leipzig, which used them for temporary accommodations.

The day after the Clausnitz attack, Petry gave a press conference in which she blamed refugees on the bus for inciting the violence. "The incoming refugees were making unsightly gestures—possibly obscene gestures," she said. When asked about the involvement of AfD members, she said that the matter would "need to be further researched." Later, when I said that the AfD affiliation of the attackers was well established, she became flustered. "That's not true!" she kept saying. "There were no AfD members connected with any of the attacks, or whatever you are calling them."

When I asked if AfD rhetoric con-

tributed to the violence, she said, "Typical German journalist question!" Her voice took on a steely hauteur. "The first question you have to ask is what is causing so many cases of breaking the law in Germany," she said. "Of course masses will get out of control. Most of the Saxon protesters stay peaceful, but these are never talked about." She began to speak faster and faster. "We have to distinguish between the causes and the symptoms," she said. "In order to get rid of the symptom, you have to get rid of the problem." After all, if there were no immigrants there would have been no protests.

LAST WINTER, I took the first of a number of trips to Berlin's main center for processing refugees, not far from where I live. It is in Moabit, a former working-class neighborhood that is now gentrified. The center—called LAGESO, an acronym, in German, for State Office for Health and Welfare—is in a bureaucratic slab of concrete occupying a city block across from a small park. Next to the main building, there is an empty lot with two large makeshift tents where people wait for their appointments. There are guards out in front, but no one ever tried to stop me from going in.

Each tent had a wood-plank floor and benches around the perimeter. Berlin winters are very cold and damp, and families clustered near large white ducts that piped in warm air. The men paced back and forth, nursing giant plastic cups of tea or bottles of mineral water that had been handed out. The tents filled up throughout the day, as buses arrived with exhausted-looking asylum applicants from camps outside Berlin. My eyes were drawn to people's shoes. Some were nearly falling to pieces, from the journeys that had been taken to get this far. Others were new and shiny—recent purchases by those with connections in Berlin or access to a bank account.

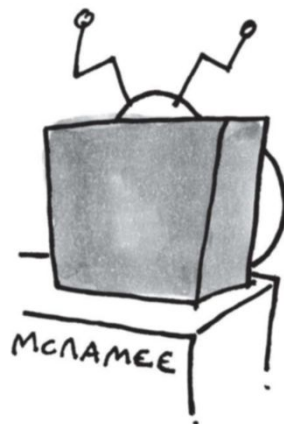
I met a gangly eighteen-year-old from Aleppo named Muhammed Fateh. He was leaning against one of the warm-air ducts, drinking tea. He had braces on his teeth that had worked themselves crooked, and wore track pants and a sleeveless T-shirt. He told me that he and his father had left Aleppo during the Russian bombing campaign in January. Initially, they took cover in a nearby village. When they returned to their

house, they found that it had been destroyed. "It was unbelievable," he said, sweeping his arm across the tent. "It was gone, gone, gone." But his tone was nonchalant, as if he were referring to something much milder, like a car accident. He didn't want to burden me with all the details.

Fateh spoke decent English, wincing when he thought he'd mispronounced something. He was impatient to begin learning German, and confident that he would find a place in a German school. Assimilation seemed to present few challenges for him. But his father appeared crushed. He lay on the floor, staring at the metal beams of the tent. A relative of theirs hovered nearby, looking warily around and examining the bottles of water to see if they had been tampered with. Fateh periodically glanced over at them with concern. When I asked him what their future in Germany might be, he shrugged.

I spoke to Cemile Giousouf, a politician who is a rising star of the C.D.U. and is well placed to understand the position of people like Fateh. Thirty-eight years old, she is of Turkish descent and the first Muslim member of the C.D.U. to enter the Bundestag. Looking around her office there—a shrine to multiculturalism, adorned with Islamic, Christian, and Jewish iconography—I wondered how she would defend her party's burka ban, which had been proposed a few days earlier. Her answer showed how valuable she is to a party that has traditionally had little in the way of multicultural bona fides. "When my parents came to Germany, in the seventies, my father worked in a factory," she said. "He never learned German. I still have to translate letters for him when I'm home. But German wasn't as necessary for the work he was doing as it is for the work we need immigrants to do now. I'm talking about nurses, I.T. programmers, and so on. You need to know German to do these jobs, and so we need people to integrate more quickly. We can't afford to wait a whole generation."

THE LAST TIME I met Petry was in August, back at the Saxony State Parliament. When I arrived, she was standing in a glass atrium, speaking sternly to a group of advisers—all men,



"I'm sick of experts telling me what paints I can't drink."

all much taller than she was, and most at least a decade older. She looked like a young Renaissance prince consulting with his courtiers. She was complaining about the latest machinations of one of her AfD rivals, a favorite topic. We moved to a pressroom, where Petry addressed a handful of journalists about the AfD's budget policy. Her speech was, as usual, boring, but its dullness muted the radicalism of her proposal—to defund asylum shelters and put the money into teachers' salaries.

Afterward, in her office, we talked about the AfD's connections to other populist movements. She has established close ties with Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of Austria's Freedom Party, and has also met with Geert Wilders, the star of the Dutch far right. She told me that a colleague had recently met with Marine Le Pen, of France's Front National, and that over the summer she had spoken to various American Republicans, including the Iowa congressman Steve King, who has compared immigrants to dogs and suggested building an electric fence on the U.S. border with Mexico. When I asked her what she thought of Donald Trump, she said, "My impression is that Trump may become the Amer-

ican President, because the alternative to him, Hillary Clinton, is just so unconvincing. She is almost like a copy of someone like Merkel—someone who just keeps on with the same policies that led to the trouble in the first place." She admired the American willingness to take risks: "It might not be better under Trump, but at least with him there is the chance to change."

She thought that German politics was more weighed down by liberal pieties. "It's so moral to allow these attacks to happen," she said sarcastically. "It's so moral to promise to people around the world that they can come to Germany and find paradise." She found this outlook anti-democratic, disdainful of the views of ordinary Germans. "I myself am not morally good," she said. "I'm just a human being. I try to stick to the rules. And I think there is a majority of Germans who agree with me. So, reducing the entire Enlightenment and all of the successes of European history down to this need to be morally good: I find that extremely dangerous. There's this saying of Nietzsche"—she took out her phone and pulled up the quote almost instantly. "Here it is, in 'Zarathustra': 'The good have always been the beginning of the end.'"
♦

ICELEBRATE THE KID'S birthday the day after. Always the day after or the day before, never on the actual date. Always the same shit. Why? Because his honor the judge decided that the kid has to be with his mommy on his birthday, even if she's a bitch and a liar who fucks every jerk who smiles at her at work. Daddy is less important.

Lidor and I go to the mall together, not for a present; the last time I was in a duty-free shop, I bought him a remote-control multicopter drone. Eighty-nine dollars—eighty-nine!—and they didn't even put batteries for the remote in the box. So we're going to the mall to pick up some batteries, but I tell Lidor that it's to have fun. What *can* I tell him? Not only did Daddy bring his present a day late but he didn't even check to see if there were batteries inside? No way.

The bitch. Yesterday I say to her, Let me come to the party, just for ten minutes. To give the kid a kiss, take a shot of him with my cell when he blows out the candles, and then I'll leave. But she starts with the threats and the restraining orders, texts her boyfriend, the law clerk, while she's on the line with me—I can actually hear her tapping—and says that if she sees me anywhere near the building she'll make my life hell.

Lidor wants us to fly the drone first and then go to the mall, but there are no batteries in the remote, and I don't want to tell him that, so I say, We'll go to the big candy store on the third floor, the one with the SpongeBob SquarePants helium balloons and the lady with yellow teeth who yells, "Come in! Come in! Buy candy for the little boy," and I'll buy him another present there, whatever he wants.

Lidor says, The mall's great, but first the drone. I lie to him, tell him that the mall closes early. Luckily for me, he's still young enough to believe.

Three in the afternoon and the mall is packed. To be with him for his birthday, I had to take half a day off work. Judging by how mobbed the mall is, I must be the only person in this country who works. But Lidor, what a sweet kid, he laughs all the time, never whines, not even when we have to wait in line forever to get inside.

At the escalator, he wants to go up the down side, for the fun of it, and I go along with him. It's a good workout for both of us. You have to run as fast as you can so you won't be dragged down, have to strain the whole time not to fall on your ass. Just like in life. A hunchbacked old lady who is coming down tries to argue with us, asks why we don't go up the regular way, like everyone else. She'll be in her grave in another minute, and this is what bothers her? I don't even answer her.

WHEN WE GET to the candy store on the third floor, the lady with yellow teeth isn't there, only a pimple-faced teen-ager, as thin as a chopstick. I say to Lidor, "Pick out whatever you want. But only one thing, O.K.? And whatever it is, even if it costs a million shekels, Daddy will buy it for you, promise. What does Lidor want?"

The kid is excited, walks around the store like a junkie in a pharmacy, looks at the shelves, picks things up, tries to decide. Meanwhile, I use the time to buy AAA batteries. Pimple-Face doesn't ring them up on the register, even though I wave the money in front of him. "What are we waiting for?" I ask.

"For the kid to decide," he says, and pulls a string of gum out of his mouth. "I'll ring them up together." And, before I can say anything, he starts playing with his cell.

"Do them separately, man," I insist, shoving the batteries into the bag with the drone. "Before the kid comes over. It's a surprise." Pimple-Face rings them up, and the cash-register drawer springs open with a ding. He doesn't have small bills to make change for me, so he loads me down with coins.

Just then, Lidor comes over. "What did you buy, Daddy?"

"Nothing," I say. "Just some gum."

"Where is it?" Lidor asks.

"I swallowed it."

"But it's bad to swallow gum," he says. "It can stick to your stomach."

Pimple-Face gives a stupid laugh.

"You want a present or what?" I say, changing the subject. "Come on, pick out something."

"I want that," Lidor says, pointing

to the cash register. "So I can play with Yanir and Lyri, like we have a candy store."

"They don't sell the cash register," I say. "Pick out something else."

"I want the cash register," Lidor persists. "Daddy, you promised."

"I said to pick out something that's for sale."

"You're a liar!" Lidor yells and kicks my leg as hard as he can. "Just like Mommy says. You're all talk."

The kick hurts, and, when something hurts me, I get pissed off. But today I manage to control myself. Because I love my son more than anything else in the world, and today's a special day, his birthday. I mean, the day after his birthday. The bitch.

"How much do you want for the cash register?" I ask Pimple-Face, as cool as can be.

"What are you, six years old?" he says with a crooked smile. "You know it's not for sale." He says "six years old" as if Lidor were a moron or something, and I realize now that he's trapped me. I have to choose a side—either I'm with him or I'm with Lidor.

"A thousand shekels," I say and extend my hand. "We shake on it now, and I go down to the A.T.M. and come back with the money."

"It's not mine," he says, squirming. "I just work here."

"So whose is it?" I ask. "The lady with yellow teeth?"

"Yes," he says, nodding. "Tirza."

"So get her on the phone," I say. "Let me talk to her. For a thousand shekels, she can get a new register. A better one."

Lidor looks at me like I'm some kind of a superhero. There's nothing greater than to have your kid look at you that way. It's better than a vacation in Thailand. Better than a blow job. Better than punching someone who has it coming. "Go ahead, call her," I say and give him a little push. Not because I'm angry. For the kid.

He taps in the number and walks away from us, half whispering into the phone. I follow him wherever he goes, Lidor behind us. He looks happy. He was already happy earlier, when I picked him up, but now he's flying.

"She says no," Pimple-Face tells me

and shrugs as if the word had come from God.

"Give her to me." I gesture with my hand.

"She says stores don't sell their cash registers," he says. I grab the phone away from him. That makes Lidor laugh. Daddy's making Lidor laugh.

"Tirza," I say. "Hi, this is Gabi, a good customer of yours. You don't recognize the name, but you'd know my face in a second. Listen, I need you to help me out here. A thousand shekels—you not only buy a new register, but I owe you a favor."

"And where the fuck will we ring up the thousand?" Tirza asks on the other end of the line. She's in a noisy place; I can hardly hear her.

"So you don't ring it up," I say. "What am I, the Tax Authority? A thousand shekels straight into your pocket. Come on, what do you say?"

"Put him on the phone," she says impatiently.

"The teen-ager?" I ask.

"Yes," Tirza says, starting to sound angry. "Put him on."

I hand the phone to Pimple-Face. He talks to her for a minute, then ends the call. "She says no," he tells me. "Sorry."

Lidor takes my hand. "Cash register," he says in his most serious voice. "You promised."

"Two thousand," I say to Pimple-Face. "Call her back and tell her I'll

give her two thousand, a thousand now and another thousand tomorrow."

"But—" Pimple-Face starts.

"I can't take out more than a thousand at a time," I interrupt him. "I'll bring the other thousand tomorrow morning. Don't worry, I'll leave you my driver's license as a guarantee."

"She told me not to call anymore," he says. "She's sitting shivah for her father. She doesn't want to be disturbed."

"Sorry for your loss," I say, putting a consoling arm around his shoulder. "So think about it. Two thousand is a lot of money. If she finds out later that I offered it and you said no, she'll tear you a new one. Listen to a grownup—it's not worth getting into trouble over a small thing like this."

I press the bottom of the cash-register drawer and, bam, it opens. It's a trick I learned when I worked at the Burger Ranch, after the Army. "Take out the money," I tell him, but he doesn't move, so I collect the money for him and stick it into the front pocket of his jeans.

"Stores don't sell their cash registers," he says.

"Who cares," I say. "Trust me, it's a sweet deal. Wait here for me, and I'll be back in five minutes with a thousand shekels so the bills in your pocket don't get lonely."

Before he can answer, I take Lidor

by the hand and go down to the A.T.M. Sometimes the machine gives me problems, but today it spits out the thousand in blue two-hundred-shekel bills without arguing.

WHEN WE GET back, a sweaty fat guy with a mustache is talking to Pimple-Face. I know him, he owns the frozen-yogurt stand next door. When Pimple-Face sees us come in, he points at me. I wink at him and put the thousand on the counter. "Here," I say. Pimple-Face doesn't move. "Come on, take it already! Lighten up!" I pick the bills up and try to shove them into his pocket.

"Leave him alone," Fat Guy says. "He's just a kid."

"I can't," I say. "I promised my son. Today's his birthday."

"Happy birthday," Fat Guy says and tousles Lidor's hair without even looking at him. "Want some ice cream, buddy? A present from me—a cup of ice cream with whipped cream and chocolate syrup and gummy bears on top." The whole time he's talking his small eyes stay fixed on me.

"I want the cash register," Lidor says, moving away from him and pressing up against me. "Daddy promised."

"What will you do with a cash register?" Fat Guy asks but doesn't wait for an answer. "We have one, too, but only because the tax people make us use it. It's not good for anything. It just makes noise. What do you say—let Daddy take you to the computer store on the second floor and buy you an Xbox instead. For a thousand shekels, you can get the best one, with Kinect and everything."

I don't say anything. I actually like the idea. It'll save me a lot of trouble here, and later, too, with Lilia, when I take him back home. Because the minute Lilia sees the cash register, she'll start carrying on.

"So what do you say?" Fat Guy asks Lidor. "Xbox is the best. Races, chases, whatever you want."

"Cash register," Lidor says, hugging my legs tightly.

"Look at what an angel he is," I say and try to hand the money to Fat Guy. "Help me make him happy on his birthday."

"It's not my store," Fat Guy protests.



"You'll feel a pinch and then a burn."

RESOLVE

I believe the moai
walked to their resting places.
Neither a zigzag
nor a bellwether
beeline in their history.
All face, some fell en route,
the machinery of government
getting by on the flat-foot plan.
Now disappeared, the largest palm trees
on earth lived like revolutionaries
but only until the seventeenth century.
So much for strong silent types.
Today in the street, winds
swept two wheeled garbage bins
halfway across, a frightening
noon-hour stunt.
Returned from the chalklands
and wearing my feather headdress,
I apprehended the pair,
pushing them out of harm's way
before they reached that legendary dinette
the National,
full of salty toffee, *pâtes de fruits*,
candied tumbleweed.
There was something so sweet
about that vehicular effrontery,
as if their obsidian eyes could
issue an endgame between
irony and rationality.
Marooned in winter country,
their green gazes presided
over me like gods on Rapa Nui.
For them all, double-handled
and long-eared,
I hoped for loving cups.
So I said,
my loving cup
shall be your loving cup.

—Nyla Matuk

"I don't even work here. I'm just trying to help—"

"But you're not." I move so close to him now that my face almost touches his.

"I have to go back to the store." Fat Guy shrugs and says to Pimple-Face, "If he tries anything, call the police," and leaves. A real hero.

I put the thousand shekels on the counter, unplug the register, and start rolling up the cord, and, when Lidor sees that, he claps his hands.

"I'm calling the cops," Pimple-Face

says, and begins punching in numbers. I grab the phone away from him again.

"Why?" I say. "It's his birthday today. Everyone's happy, don't ruin it." Pimple-Face looks at his phone, which is in my hand, then at me, and runs out of the store. I put Pimple-Face's phone on the counter and pick up the register. "Now we'll leave here fast," I say to Lidor, my voice cheerful, as if this were a game. "We'll go back home and show Mommy what you got."

"No," Lidor says, stamping his feet.

"First we fly the helicopter and then we go home. You promised."

"Yes," I say in my gentlest voice. "But the cash register is heavy. Daddy can't carry it and fly the helicopter at the same time. Now the register and tomorrow, right after school, we'll go fly the helicopter in the park."

Lidor thinks for a minute. "Now the helicopter," he says. "And tomorrow the cash register." And right then, just in time, Pimple-Face comes running back into the store with a security guard.

"What do you think you're doing?" the guard says. He's a short, hairy guy, looks more like a pinscher than like a security guard.

"Nothing." I give him a wink and put the cash register back in place. "Just trying to make the kid laugh. It's his birthday today."

"Happy birthday, kid," the guard says to Lidor, as if he couldn't care less. "Many happy returns. But now you and your father have to leave."

"Yes," Lidor says. "We have to go and fly the helicopter."

IN THE PARK, Lidor and I play with the multicopter drone. The brochure says that it can fly forty metres high, but after about fifteen metres it can't pick up the signal from the remote, its propeller stops spinning, and it falls. Lidor likes that.

"Who loves Lidor the most in the world?" I ask, and Lidor answers, "Daddy!"

"And how much does Lidor love Daddy?" I ask while the multicopter drone spins around him, and he yells, "A whole bunch!"

"Up to the sky," I shout. "Up to the moon and back!"

My cell starts vibrating in my pocket, but I ignore it. It must be Lilia. Above us, the drone is getting smaller and smaller. In another second, it'll be out of our field of vision and will fall. Then we'll both start running across the grass and try to catch it, and if Lidor beats me to it again he'll laugh that killer laugh of his. There's nothing nicer in this stinking world than the sound of a kid laughing. ♦

(Translated, from the Hebrew,
by Sondra Silverston.)

NEWYORKER.COM

Etgar Keret on the purest form of racism.

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

COULDN'T BE BETTER

The return of the utopians.

BY AKASH KAPUR

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS ago, a man who condoned torture, religious persecution, and burning at the stake wrote a book about the perfect world. In “On the Best Kind of a Republic and About the New Island of Utopia” (the book’s full title, translated from Latin), Sir Thomas More envisaged a paradise where men and women could choose their religion, without fear of violence or coercion. In practice, as Lord Chancellor of England, More oversaw the burning of at least six Protestants and the jailing of some forty. One merchant was tortured in More’s own home, and tied so tightly to a tree that blood reportedly flowed from his eyes. More referred to it as “the Tree of Truth.”

Contradiction and hypocrisy have always hovered over the utopian project, shadowing its promise of a better world with the sordid realities of human nature. Plato, in the *Republic*, perhaps the earliest utopian text, outlined a form of eugenics that would have been right at home in the Third Reich—which was itself a form of utopia, as were the Gulag of Soviet Communism, the killing fields of Pol Pot’s Cambodia, and, more recently, the blood-and-sand caliphate of ISIS. “There is a tyranny in the womb of every utopia,” the French economist and futurist Bertrand de Jouvenel wrote.

The twentieth century was perhaps the cruellest for utopian hopes. “Innumerable millions of human beings were killed in this century in the name of utopia,” the Polish poet Czesław Miłosz reminded his audience, at a 1986 PEN conference. In a 2007 polemic, “Black Mass,” John Gray proclaimed “the death of utopia.” Indeed, utopia’s name has become so tarnished that it has recently been used

almost interchangeably with its evil twin, dystopia—a word coined by John Stuart Mill, three and a half centuries after the publication of More’s book, to describe a society that was “too bad to be practicable.”

NOW THE TIDE may have shifted. As the literary Marxist Fredric Jameson observes, “In the last years, utopia has again changed its meaning and has become the rallying cry for left and progressive forces.” A slew of books have arrived to celebrate the utopian spirit, notably two on the history of utopia in the United States. Erik Reece’s “Utopia Drive” is a travelogue through the ghosts of America’s nineteenth-century intentional communities. In Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, New York, and Massachusetts, Reece visits the remains of a handful of utopian settlements and towns, mining their histories to reflect on the present. Chris Jennings’s “Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism,” a historical account of five utopian projects, is more firmly rooted in the past. Both books seek to capture the spirit of what Jennings calls “a long, sunny season of American utopianism”—a period of about a century, roughly bookended by the optimism of American independence and the butchery of the Civil War.

Neither author is blind to the shortcomings of his subject. Jennings is attuned to the latent “terror and repression” in the utopian project. Reece has a sharp eye for the contradictions of communities that condemn the capitalist economy but are sustained by vibrant commercial enterprises. The founders of these communities—a colorful cast of prophets, dreamers, and narcissists—preach against private property and possessions as they

jealously guard their own. “One thing we can say about the seductive visionaries who led the utopian movement in America,” Reece notes dryly, “is that they did not lead the most self-examined lives.”

Despite the caveats, the over-all tone of both books is enthusiastic, even laudatory. Set against the general opprobrium that has tarred utopia in the twentieth century, these are works of intellectual and political rehabilitation. Jennings laments “a deficit of imagination” in our era, and argues that, “uncoupled from utopian ends, even the most incisive social critique falls short.” Reece likewise ends his travels convinced “that things will only get worse if we *don’t* engage in some serious utopian thinking.” For Reece, in particular, the process of rehabilitation is an explicitly political project—an attempt to exhume the lessons of the past in order to frame an alternative to the economic, environmental, and political despair of recent times. Sitting in a hammock in the intentional community of Twin Oaks, in Virginia, he reads More’s “Utopia” and thinks of Bernie Sanders. Driving toward what remains of the community of Modern Times, on Long Island, he decries “Big Oil, Big Coal, Big Agra, Big Pharma” and the “corporate vandals” who “pollute the commons.” Although their books are formally about nineteenth-century intentional communities, both Reece and Jennings tap into an altogether more contemporary strand of post-crisis (i.e., post-2008) economic and political discourse.

A rejuvenated Marxism underlies much of this thinking. In fact, Marx and Engels were dismissive of nineteenth-century bourgeois “utopian socialism,” contrasting it with their own “scientific



Not long ago, utopianism was a mark of naïveté or extremism; now pragmatists are denigrated for complacent cynicism.

socialism.” Yet many of the principles championed by these communities—collectivism, egalitarianism, the rejection of capitalism and individualism—reflect a softer version of Communism: what Benjamin Kunkel has described as “Marxish” thought. As Fredric Jameson notes in his manifesto “An American Utopia,” now republished, along with several commentaries, in book form, modern-day utopians embrace “Marxism as a negative and critical analysis of capitalism, without any longer being attracted to the cultural, social, and political traditions established over a century by the communist movement.”

One sign of how far political rhetoric has shifted in recent years is that when Reece and Jennings write about “secular communism” or the “communistic” tendencies of these projects they are writing in celebration, instead of lamenting an ideology that tyrannized vast swaths of the planet. Not long ago, utopianism was a mark of naïveté or fanaticism, or even of solidarity with political coercion; today, *anti*-utopianism is denigrated as a form of political cynicism and complicity with the global forces of oppression.

Utopias come in waves. The era that Reece and Jennings write about represents an early heyday of American idealism. For ambitious young men of the nascent Republic, utopia schemes were the apps of their day. “Not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket,” Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote. The nineteen-thirties witnessed a short-lived flowering of New Deal utopias, government-created coöperatives built to generate employment; the next big wave was in the sixties. Each of these periods was marked by a sense of tumult, of cultural and financial dislocation, much like the present. Jennings writes that “literature is a sensitive indicator of utopian sentiment.” Could these books—along with the other recent utopian books—offer guidance for a grand new moment of social reform?

ONEIDA, IN CENTRAL New York, was one of the most prominent, and promising, of these communities. It was founded in 1848 by a mercurial Vermont-based preacher named John Hum-

phrey Noyes, whose followers pooled their resources and bought a hundred and sixty acres of land on the Oneida Reserve, named for a local Indian tribe. They set about realizing Noyes’s vision of “Bible Communism,” believing that Christ had already made his Second Coming (“like a thief in the night,” as the Bible puts it), and that humans were thus living free of sin, with the responsibility to create a perfect world.



The pursuit of Perfectionism, as the doctrine was called, led to a number of unorthodox practices, notably “complex marriage” and “sexual communism,” which were essentially coinages for radical polyamory and free love. (Utopia is very good at rebranding existing human behaviors.) Underlying Oneida’s quirky sexual norms was, in fact, a set of deeply progressive beliefs in collective ownership and equality, notably for women.

Oneida was sustained by a robust communal economy, built around the manufacture of animal traps and silverware. Just as Noyes and his followers opposed any form of private property in this economy, so they were against the ownership of people, particularly in the form of marriage (which they saw as a means of patriarchal control) and slavery. In an 1850 Oneidan pamphlet titled “Slavery and Marriage: A Dialogue,” one character argues that each was an “arbitrary institution and contrary to natural liberty.” Women in Oneida were free to choose lovers and jobs (e.g., as carpenters) in a manner that was elsewhere shut off to them. Noyes wasn’t exactly a feminist, but he helped create an environment that was among the most emancipatory for women.

A similarly vanguardist outlook characterized almost all the places that Reece and Jennings write about. Their books are exemplars of historical reconstruction, and they vividly bring to life the ecological sensitivity, inclusiveness, and egalitarianism that inspired so many in early America. A significant number of these communities treated women (and a few even African-Americans) as equals; almost all set out to erase barriers of economic class and conventional hierarchy.

It was a time of remarkable ferment and innovation, marked by what Jennings, who has a gift for the striking phrase, calls a belief that “society seemed like something to be invented, rather than merely endured.”

Of course, all along there were forebodings, hints of the injuries and iniquities that so often seem to accompany utopias. For all the idealism, daily life in these “heavens on earth”—to borrow the title of Mark Holloway’s classic 1951 work on American utopias—rarely managed to rise above the mundanities that mark most human settlements: financial shenanigans, nepotism, authoritarianism, envy, sexual exploitation. The Icarians, of Nauvoo, Illinois, instituted a “moral purge,” complete with a network of spies, designed to cleanse the community of imperfections. In Oneida, parents were separated from their young offspring, in an effort to break attachments that could deviate from communal solidarity (“stickiness,” in another Oneidan coinage). Children, passive receptacles for their parents’ life choices, are always the worst victims of such communities.

Over all, though, the biggest problem—at least, in any attempt to harness these nineteenth-century projects to twenty-first-century reforms—is one less of evil than of ineffectuality. A spectre hangs over these places—the spectre of failure. In 1879, under external and internal pressures to conform, Oneida voted to adopt traditional marriage practices. The next year, it abandoned the principle of collective ownership, converting itself into a joint-stock company that went on to become a major silverware manufacturer. Shares in the company were allocated according to members’ initial contributions (as well as time spent in the community), in a stroke undoing the equality that had originally characterized communal life. Noyes was in exile at this point, having fled threatened legal action over the community’s sexual practices. A mere three decades in, the dream was effectively over.

Virtually all these utopian communities met the same fate. Reece ends his book with a cry to action: “We can head out today toward the utopia of reconstruction. We can build the road as we travel.” Readers of these books might be forgiven for thinking that this road is

something of a dead end. None of the five places that Jennings writes about remain in existence. Of the many that Reece travels through, only one, Twin Oaks, survives in anything even vaguely resembling its initial form. The small number that haven't disappeared are now tourist attractions or bourgeois housing settlements—"a toy town, an ersatz version of the original dream," as Reece puts it, visiting what remains of New Harmony, in Indiana.

The issue isn't just that these communities failed to achieve the lasting, epochal change that they often envisioned. Even at their height, they never reached a critical mass, remaining instead scattered and mostly minuscule attempts at social tinkering—Trialville, as one called itself, in an uncharacteristic burst of modesty. Oneida, at its apogee, numbered some three hundred people. Walking around the Twin Oaks settlement one day, Reece asks a man how far he thinks the community's collectivist economy could grow. "I'd say it can't go beyond a thousand people," the man ventures.

This is delicate territory for utopians. There is a sense in which failure is baked into the very idea of utopia; the goal of a perfect world—a holiday from history—is intrinsically self-undermining. The literature, consequently, ties itself in anxious knots. Ruth Levitas, a luminary in the academic field of utopian studies, writes defensively about "the elision between perfection and impossibility" employed by critics who dismiss the practicality of utopias. Reece thinks that, "as a culture, we need them to fail because that failure affirms the inevitability of the dominant economy, with its attendant violence, inequality, and injustice." Contemplating the now extinct Shakers of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, he argues that there are "simply no criteria by which we can say that [they] failed." Instead, "we might say, in retrospect, that the larger American culture failed them."

Fair enough; there's always plenty of blame to go around. But the serial collapse and the sheer insubstantiality of these projects brings to mind Thomas Macaulay's jibe that an acre of Middlesex is worth more than a principality in Utopia. The heart wants such worthy causes to succeed, looking to them hopefully for solutions to our contemporary dilemmas. The head can't turn away from

reality. At a certain point, it becomes impossible to resist asking, What is it that makes the noble ideas embodied in these communities so fragile, and so apparently unattractive?

Arthur C. Clarke had one answer. "The newspapers of Utopia . . . would be terribly dull," he wrote in "2001: A Space Odyssey." The Polish poet Wisława Szymborska, who, like so many of her Eastern European compatriots, lived through the ravages of two dystopian utopias, hints at some deeper possibilities. In her poem "Utopia," she writes of an "Island where all becomes clear," where "Unshakable Confidence towers over the valley," and where "The Tree of Understanding, dazzlingly straight and simple, / sprouts by the spring called Now I Get It." And yet:

For all its charms, the island is uninhabited,
and the faint footprints scattered on its
beaches
turn without exception to the sea.

As if all you can do here is leave
and plunge, never to return, into the depths.

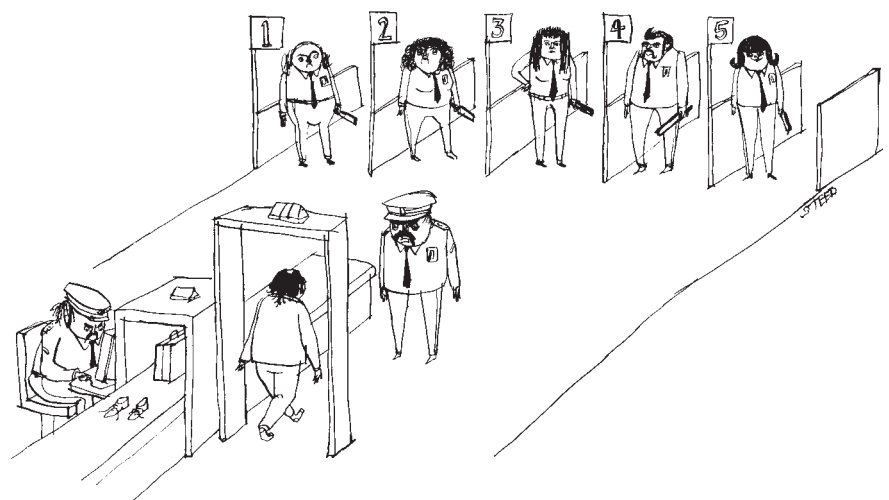
Into unfathomable life.

THERE IS A moment early in Reece's journey when he is having a meal of snap peas and fried chicken with his wife at Pleasant Hill. The waitress has a hickey on her neck. Conversation turns to Shaker injunctions against sex. "That's crazy," Reece's wife says. "Why build something this beautiful and then tell people they can't have sex here. It's not natural."

Utopians tend to be skeptical when it comes to talk of human nature and, indeed, of humanism in any recognizable form. They contest our assumptions about what's "natural." Yet, as the portraits in these books indicate, those dreary assumptions win out every time. Utopias are, in the philosopher Leszek Kołakowski's phrase, "anti-human."

Sex—more specifically, the urge to procreate and nurture a family—has proved to be one reliable trip wire. Many of these communities sought to regulate conjugal relations. They are not alone: think of China's one-child policy, or of early Soviet efforts to dismantle the institution of marriage. If the Oneidans and their sexual communism occupied one end of the spectrum, the Shakers were at the other. They tried to address the same anxiety harbored by the Oneidans—that private ties would trump communal solidarity—by banning sexual relations. Both approaches were fighting some powerful headwinds. Oneida nearly collapsed amid accusations of statutory rape and squabbles over the allocation of virgins. The course chosen by the Shakers was, quite evidently, the surest way to extinction.

Today's utopians are less interested in sex than in the economy—specifically, in hastening the downfall of capitalism. More than a century and a half after Marx and Engels predicted that capitalism would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions, contemporary neo-Marxists maintain a



*"For your comfort, you will be searched by someone
of your own level of sexiness."*

dogged faith in the ephemerality of the modern economic system. “The starting point of the entire analysis is that capitalism *is going to end*,” Peter Frase, an editor at *Jacobin*, writes in an upcoming book, “Four Futures: Life After Capitalism.” We can think of these two ambitions—reinvented sex and a remade economy—as the twin pillars of the utopian project.

In fact, the example of America’s nineteenth-century intentional communities suggests that there is something elemental in what John Maynard Keynes, writing during the Great Depression, called “the resilience of capitalism.” Nearly every utopia in these books begins with a determination to create a new economy, usually through some amalgam of collective ownership, central planning, and voluntary labor. Yet egoism, acquisitiveness, competitiveness, and all the other ills of human flesh bob repeatedly to the surface, like a cork that will not be submerged.

Twin Oaks, inspired by B. F. Skinner’s “Walden Two” (1948), was founded on a behaviorist faith that mankind could be molded by “a positive, healthy environment” and could elevate community over the individual. Yet when Reece visits a Twin Oaks spinoff, Acorn, what he encounters suggests that age-old dilemmas of human motivation and incentives are not so easily overcome: some people are shirking work, others are complaining about the need for more “accountability” and a “system to make sure everyone is pulling their fair share.” Similarly, in Oneida the twin pillars of sexual communism and collective ownership give way in quick sequence, suggesting their fragile interdependence. Family life opens the door to self-dealing clannishness: parents hoard for their children; siblings and spouses favor one another over the collective.

Such moments—along with the repeated tensions over sex, property, and labor, which rent nearly all these places—are reminders that their inhabitants, for all their efforts at transcendence, stubbornly remain status-seeking, gene-propagating, and, quite simply, selfish creatures. As one member of Oneida wrote, in a lucid assessment of the community’s decline, “Every serious student of social prob-

lems has discovered that possessiveness in sex and family relations makes economic communism unattainable.”

ONEIDA, AND ESPECIALLY the manner of its ending, is worth revisiting. Reece and Jennings largely cover the period from its founding until its incorporation, in 1880, but the story doesn’t actually end there. A fuller treatment of Oneida’s history, stretching over more than a century, can be found in another recent book, “Oneida: From Free-Love Utopia to the Well-Set Table,” by Ellen Wayland-Smith, who also happens to be a descendant of Noyes. (Owing to the community’s principled promiscuity, he had many descendants.)

Assembled from diaries, personal correspondence, and family recollections, Wayland-Smith’s book is a lively and often entertaining account. Sexual communism lends itself to some raunchy passages. “Tirzah Miller liked to have sex,” begins one chapter, which goes on to quote a description of an encounter from Miller’s diary: “There was a wonderful glow and ache between us. . . . We seemed all aflame. We hurried to the house, and then he wanted me to come to his room. Ecstasy.”

But the core of the book is really an account of Oneida’s many incarnations over the years and, in particular, of its evolution from a group at the radical fringe to a large corporation catering to middle-class fantasies of sophistication and class distinction. In the decades after its incorporation, Oneida Limited (as it was now known) became one of America’s most profitable silverware companies—“an economic powerhouse and a leader in the field of industrial relations,” as Wayland-Smith puts it. Initially, the company tried to hold on to some vestiges of its founding idealism, by paying more progressive wages, among other things. By the nineteen-sixties, when an “efficiency expert” was brought in and the company was listed on the New York Stock Exchange, even these trace principles were a distant memory. The nineteen-eighties and successive decades saw efforts to professionalize management and a string of acquisitions that loaded the company with debt. Predictably, this all led to bankruptcy, in 2006, and the company’s dissolution was accompanied, Wayland-Smith writes, by the termina-

tion of one of its workers’ pension plans. Oneida’s founding idealism, she concludes, “had been made a mockery.”

This passage—from radicalism to conventionality, from communal socialism to sharp-elbowed corporatism—makes for a fascinating, if somewhat depressing, read. In Wayland-Smith’s extended chronicle, we see utopia as it sails through the world, assaulted on all sides by the forces of assimilation and greed. But, for all the idiosyncrasies of this particular story, the broader contours are in fact quite familiar. Wayland-Smith bemoans the “loss of energy and imagination behind the original dream,” the descent into “middle-class smallness” and “conformity.” This is the trajectory of so many of the utopias in these books and, indeed, throughout history.

There is an element of reinventing the wheel here, a sense that Oneida, in its crawl toward monogamy, dynastic families, and mercantile (and mercenary) capitalism, was simply reverting to something like a human mean. The circle of our aspirations is not easily reconciled with the square of our human propensities. Over and over, optimistically and stubbornly, commendably but maybe also a bit foolishly, utopia just seems to take a long and circuitous route to the same, inevitable destination.

HAVE I BEEN unfair to utopia? An acquaintance who spent several decades of his life working and living in an intentional community much like the ones in these books told me once that utopia was all a matter of perspective. The final, articulated goal remains always just out of reach. But a lot of good can nonetheless result from aiming for that goal. Small victories mark the path to ultimate failure. Utopia is always susceptible to the tyranny of high expectations, but it was up to each individual, my friend said, to decide whether to focus on the victories or on the failure.

This seems close to the perspective taken by Reece and by Jennings, and by at least some of their fellow-travellers on the new left. Jennings writes that “the mere contemplation of an ideal polis . . . is a civic act.” Reece approvingly quotes a man who tells him that utopia is “always a disappearing horizon.” In this view, utopia is “less a blueprint than a direction,” as a recent article

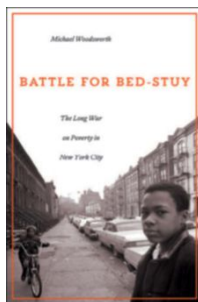
in *Jacobin* put it. We live in unjust and uncertain times, utopia's contemporary enthusiasts seem to be saying. Surely these nineteenth-century communities have much to teach us about daring to imagine alternatives, about interrupting what may seem like the ineluctable march of history.

As always with utopia, the sentiment is irreproachable. But imagining is the easy part. It is what happens after the imagining—the movement from what Ernst Bloch called “abstract utopia” to “concrete utopia”—that is most concerning. Modern-day utopians are not blind to the lessons of history. Many of them see the limits posed by human nature, and recognize that utopia has always veered between evil and futility. Yet, at least implicitly, they seem to view the price of utopia—the disruptions of sweeping change, the inevitable turmoil of total overhaul—worth paying. “A revolution is not a dinner party,” as Mao put it.

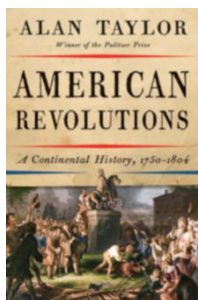
But what if there were another way? What if lasting change could happen without all the violence and disillusionment and just sheer drama that always seems to accompany utopia? What if the real way forward weren't a great leap but grinding, tedious, unglamorously incremental change—what George Eliot called “meliorism”?

The zealous conviction of utopians that the present must be erased, rather than built upon, fuels their denunciations of pragmatic incrementalism. It leads them to belittle the energies of reformism, and to obscure the truth that change and reform do occur, even if in a halting and often unfathomable manner. Few, if any, major improvements in recent decades—the spread of democracy, say, or the halving of extreme poverty, or the expansion of women's and L.G.B.T. rights—can be attributed to utopianism. (In fact, the first of these was helped along by the collapse of the twentieth century's most prominent utopian project.) Aiming not at perfection but at improvement, accepting the vagaries of human nature as a premise that policy must accommodate, rather than wish away, meliorism forces a longer, more calibrated approach. It is not a path for the impatient, but it has the verdict of history on its side. The utopian has a better story to tell; the meliorist leaves us with a better world. ♦

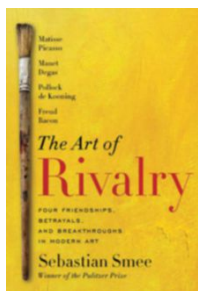
BRIEFLY NOTED



Battle for Bed-Stuy, by Michael Woodsworth (*Harvard*). In the nineteen-sixties, federal policy experts descended on Bedford-Stuyvesant, in Brooklyn, to investigate the “root causes” of urban decay. As Woodsworth's history shows, the neighborhood's block associations and community councils made it seem a perfect laboratory for President Johnson's War on Poverty, whose aim was to marry grassroots organizing with Great Society bureaucracy. There were notable successes, such as the Women's Talent Corps, but more frequently the initiative exposed tensions within the black community and stoked anger at funding delays and confusing regulations. Gradually, Bed-Stuy became a lesson in the limits of political action, and by 1977 Mayor Edward Koch was campaigning to rid the city of “poverty pimps.”



American Revolutions, by Alan Taylor (*Norton*). This history, by a two-time Pulitzer winner, surveys the War of Independence in the context of the wider colonial world of the Americas. Unsurprisingly, the question of race dominates. Taylor juxtaposes the white revolutionaries' fears of enslavement to imperial power with their dependence upon slavery, and argues that their unity arose from a sense of superiority to other races. Weaving accounts by ordinary colonists into the sweep of events, Taylor undercuts the narrative of noble patriots standing up to monarchical tyranny. The Founding Fathers emerge as greedy, hypocritical élites who, as the young nation foundered under debt and class conflict, set out to put in place a government that would “weaken the many and empower the few.”



The Art of Rivalry, by Sebastian Smee (*Random House*). This portrait of four fiercely competitive friendships at the heart of modern art—between Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, and Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon—is a tantalizing exploration of the role of passion in art. “Influence is erotic,” Smee writes of Bacon's effect on Freud, arguing that he stimulated the ruthless purging of sentimentality that characterizes Freud's mature style. What to make of the fact that de Kooning had an affair with Pollock's girlfriend after Pollock's death, he asks? Or that Manet obliterated a likeness of his wife painted by Degas? The tales are well known, but Smee extracts new insights from them, combining sophisticated criticism with psychological acumen.



Welcome to the Goddamn Ice Cube, by Blair Braverman (*Ecco*). In this coming-of-age memoir, a native Californian records her obsession with all things Arctic. As a child, she dreamed of the North Pole. At eighteen, she enrolled in a Norwegian folk school and learned how to dogsled. The memoir cuts, at times haphazardly, between Braverman's time in Norway and her work as a tour guide on a glacier in Alaska. Her descriptions of the natural world—the “gun-shot crack of avalanches,” a glacier that “lay like a dropped towel”—are arresting, and powerfully convey her conviction that “how to be cold” means “how to live.”

TRY TO REMEMBER

Tana French's odd, intimate crime fiction.

BY LAURA MILLER



ALL CRIME NOVELS are social novels. They can't help it; without a society to define, condemn, and punish it, crime itself wouldn't exist. Even the detective fiction that seems most untethered from real-world concerns—those British country-house puzzles in which ladies in drop-waisted frocks and gentlemen in evening dress gather in the drawing room to hear a sleuth dissect the murderer's devious plot—murmurs of class and history: the wealth necessary to staff such a house, the far-off lands where Colonel Mus-

tard earned his insignia. Fictional detectives make handy protagonists because they have license to explore milieus that are off limits to other characters. This is part of the genre's allure: the windows it opens onto the street life of Victorian London, the sordid fringes of postwar Hollywood, the dol-drum of Sweden's welfare state, and the sooty haunts of working-class Edinburgh. The detective, an intruder, provides the friction.

So it's not particularly remarkable that Tana French's Dublin Murder

Squad series presents its readers with a portrait of contemporary Ireland wobbling in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger's collapse. The portrait is, to be sure, of extraordinary quality. French, an American who has lived in Ireland for twenty-six years, chooses locations where her characters get pinched between the desire to cling to history and the urge to jettison it for brighter horizons: an archeological site soon to be paved over for a motorway, the ramshackle Georgian "big house" outside a fading rural village, and the tight-knit working-class Dublin enclave known as the Liberties. Most memorable is the setting for her fourth novel, "Broken Harbor": a "ghost estate," one of the half-built, barely inhabited suburban developments sold to families eager to climb the "property ladder" and then abandoned by developers when the housing market crashed. The corpse in "The Trespasser," the most recent book in the series, turns up in a Victorian terraced cottage on a nondescript Dublin street, a home furnished in the kind of canned, impersonal good taste that would give Detective Antoinette Conway the creeps if she permitted herself such whimsies. She gazes down at the victim, Aislinn Murray, whose straightened blond hair and fake tan are the series' badges of today's generic young Irish womanhood, and thinks to herself, "She looks like Dead Barbie."

Yet, however convincing and well observed French's Ireland feels, it isn't the kernel of her work's appeal, the thing that makes the Dublin Murder Squad series the object of an intense, even cultic fascination. French's readers like to go online and rank the books (six so far, counting "The Trespasser") in order of preference, and while there's no consensus, it's taken for granted that anybody who's read one will very shortly have read them all. The early copy of "The Trespasser" that I presented as a hostess gift this summer was greeted with ecstasy. The recipient spent much of the weekend shuffling around in a robe with the book clutched to her chest and a distracted expression on her face. Most crime fiction is diverting; French's is consuming. A bit of the spell it casts can be attributed to the genre's usual devices—the tempting

French's Dublin Murder Squad series inspires cultic devotion in readers.

conundrum, the red herrings, the slices of low and high life—but French is also hunting bigger game. In her books, the search for the killer becomes entangled with a search for self. In most crime fiction, the central mystery is: Who is the murderer? In French's novels, it's: Who is the detective?

The Dublin Murder Squad books are a mystery series in name only; in multiple respects, the series transgresses the well-established conventions of the genre, the first of which is a reliable continuity in tone and *dramatis personae*. The typical detective series offers its readers soothing familiarity spiced by the mild novelty of each installment's crime. The quirks and philosophy of the sleuth—Sherlock Holmes's rationalistic brio, Hercule Poirot's little gray cells, the glum Nordic professionalism of Kurt Wallander—become beloved talismans to his fans. By contrast, each novel in French's series is narrated by a different detective, someone who appears as a supporting character in an earlier book. Several of these narrators quit the squad entirely by the end of their novel, and one—Frank Mackey, the narrator of “Faithful Place”—was never on the Murder Squad to begin with. (Mackey runs *Undercover*.) The view that the narrator of the previous novel has of another detective is often revealed to be significantly skewed when that detective gets to tell his or her own story.

THE MYSTERY GENRE is a minuet between disruption and order. The murder sets the story in motion by introducing instability: not just the moral wrong of homicide, a horror that remains fairly notional in most crime fiction, but the violation posed by the mystery itself. Far more unbearable than the murder is the fact that we don't know who did it. To solve this, the detective must strip away a host of concealments, opening up drawers and prying off lids. Small objects are made to speak volumes, and the culprit is only the last of the secrets to be exposed. At the end of the novel, justice is (usually) served, but, even more satisfying, the truth is made visible and incontrovertible.

French's first novel, “In the Woods,” published in 2007, rejected this formula. It opens with a rhapsody, a dappled

evocation of summer as experienced by three quicksilver twelve-year-olds given the run of an ancient patch of forest near the small town of Knocknaree:

These three children own the summer. They know the wood as surely as they know the microlandscapes of their own grazed knees; put them down blindfolded in any dell or clearing and they could find their way out without putting a foot wrong. . . .

They are running into legend, into sleepover stories and nightmares parents never hear. Down the faint lost paths you would never find alone, skidding round the tumbled stone walls, they stream calls and shoelaces behind them like comet-trails. And who is it waiting on the riverbank with his hands in the willow branches, whose laughter tumbles swaying from a branch high above, whose is the face in the undergrowth in the corner of your eye, built of light and leaf-shadow, there and gone in a blink?

Three kids go into the woods—two boys and a girl—but only one comes out, scraped and bruised, with his clothes ripped and his shoes filled with blood. He has no memory of what happened to him or his friends, who are never seen again. He grows up, begins going by his middle name, and becomes a policeman, Rob Ryan, the murder detective who narrates “In the Woods.” He and his partner, Cassie Maddox, enjoy a seamless, wisecracking, joyful rapport, much like the fellowship he once shared with his vanished chums. Then the pair get called in to investigate the murder of a twelve-year-old girl whose body is found at an archaeological excavation in the very woods where Rob's friends disappeared.

Fair warning: the girl's killer will be revealed, but what happened to Rob and his friends in the woods will not. Depending on your taste, this is either an unforgivable lapse on French's part or a thrilling defiance of the mystery genre's complacent faith in the knowability of the world. Rob regains, briefly, flashes of childhood memory leading up to the fateful day, and they are as sweet, golden, and heady as mead. As with many of French's narrators, Rob clings to an idyll, an interlude of past perfection to which he longs, hopelessly, to return. His two lost friends remain suspended within that moment, and his deepest secret is that he envies them. “Sometimes I think of the ancient gods who demanded that their

sacrifices be fearless and without blemish,” he muses, “and I wonder whether, whoever or whatever took Peter and Jamie away, it decided I wasn't good enough.”

The Knocknaree case wrecks Rob's life, his career, his friendship with Cassie. She takes over the narration of the second Dublin Murder Squad novel, “The Likeness,” in a scenario that is flagrantly incredible. A dead girl, physically identical to Cassie in every respect, is found in a ruined cottage in County Wicklow. She carries the I.D. of Lexie Madison, a false identity created by Cassie and Frank Mackey back when Cassie worked for him. Frank persuades her to go back undercover, to masquerade as Lexie, with the supposed goal of finding the killer. He champions this scheme for the sheer audacity of it. But Cassie's motives are murkier. An orphan and only child, she concocted Lexie out of scraps of a wished-for childhood, a second self who now haunts her like a ghost.

In pursuit of this phantasm, Cassie moves into the country house where the victim lived with four fellow grad students from Trinity College, an ensemble whose close bonds and genteel, antiquated preoccupations (they read Dante aloud to each other in the evenings) pay homage to Donna Tartt's “The Secret History.” The students, too, cleave to an impossible paradise: to live together, more or less platonically and without forming significant outside relationships, for the rest of their lives. Cassie falls in love with this quixotic union, and with the beautiful old house that shelters it, even as she betrays them all.

ALTHOUGH SOCIAL ISSUES aren't excluded from French's first two novels—both involve schemes to raze a rare old property in order to build a profitable new one—they cluster at the periphery of a crisis with deeper roots. The images and language are archetypal, the stuff of ballads (“And who is it waiting on the riverbank . . .”) and fairy tales (Cassie imagines sewing herself and Lexie “together at the edges with my own hands,” like Wendy reattaching Peter Pan's shadow). This is the terrain of the gothic, a fictional mode that, at its best (“Jane Eyre,” the

novels and stories of Shirley Jackson), scrutinizes the boundary between the inner self and the outer world and finds it permeable. Identity is its abiding theme, and the house, a proxy for the psyche, is its organizing motif. In “Broken Harbor,” French’s eeriest novel, a family of four is assaulted in a shoddily constructed suburban three-bedroom; only the mother is left alive, and she just barely. At first, Detective Mick (Scorcher) Kennedy, a rule-loving martinet, and his rookie partner suspect the dead husband, a financial-industry recruiter who was laid off in the economic bust, unable to find new work, and held captive by an underwater mortgage. But then the detectives discover video cameras trained on numerous holes in the house’s walls, and a leg trap in the attic big enough to take down a puma. And *then*, in one of the many empty houses nearby, they find a hideout like a sniper’s perch, affording a perfect view into the family’s kitchen. Someone outside was peering into the house while someone inside was trying to look even deeper, into the walls themselves.

Gothics can be absorbing in a different way from whodunits, their inward gaze enthralling but claustrophobic. This might have become French’s formula, a moody police procedural perfumed by the uncanny and narrated by a psychologically unstable sleuth. But her third novel, “Faithful Place,” departed decisively from that mood. Narrated by Frank Mackey, the book takes its title from the working-class cul-de-sac where Frank grew up. There’s nothing spooky in “Faithful Place.” It’s a ceaseless, riotous cascade of Irish yammering, from the operatic scoldings of Frank’s ma to the chatter of his four siblings as they squeeze around a table in the corner pub. Instead of rural and isolated, Faithful Place is urban and crowded, and Frank, a genuine self-made man, seems anything but fragile. He has left his past behind and made a new life as a police detective with a middle-class family. He hasn’t lost the common touch, by any means—when he notes a couple of junkies eying him for a smash-and-grab, all he has to do to scare them off is smile—but he repudiates the old neighborhood and stays in contact only with his kid sister Jackie.

Frank believes that his first love, Rosie, a girl whom he arranged to run off to England with but who never showed, bailed on him because of his family. The night they were supposed to elope, Frank’s drunken, violent da and his battle-axe ma (“your classic Dublin mammy: five foot nothing of curler-haired, barrel-shaped don’t-mess-with-this, fueled by an endless supply of disapproval”) pitched a ghastly scene right out in the street. Twenty-odd years later, a couple of laborers find Rosie’s suitcase hidden in an abandoned house not far from where the young lovers were to meet. Further investigation unearths her body in the basement, and Frank reels:

All my signposts had gone up in one blinding, dizzying explosion: my second chances, my revenge, my nice thick anti-family Maginot line. Rosie Daly dumping my sorry ass had been my landmark, huge and solid as a mountain. Now it was flickering like a mirage and the landscape kept shifting around it, turning itself inside out and backwards; none of the scenery looked familiar anymore.

CRIME WRITERS WHO win the approval of the literary world tend to earn it with their style. Raymond Chandler and Elmore Leonard fashioned quintessential American voices—tough and melancholy, lean and slangy—and whatever you read by either one of them is instantly recognizable. In French’s novels, however, character trumps all. Each book has a dis-



tinct voice, from Rob Ryan’s cultured lyricism to the blunt, meticulous fed-upness of Antoinette Conway: “The case comes in, or anyway it comes in to us, on a frozen dawn in the kind of closed-down January that makes you think the sun’s never going to drag itself back above the horizon.”

Antoinette first appears in French’s fifth and least successful novel, “The Secret Place,” where she partners with the narrator, Stephen Moran, to inves-

tigate the murder of a teen-age boy on the grounds of a posh Catholic girls’ school. This time around, the paradise of perfect fellowship belongs to a foursome of fifteen-year-old girls who attain an unusual power—social and paranormal—by swearing off boys until they graduate. Stephen, naturally, has no access to or investment in this circle, so chapters of his first-person narration alternate with third-person present-tense chapters that are set, confusingly, a year or so before the investigation. The novel’s emotional center is diffused, and it loses the tense, marvellous effect of French’s other books, in which the scrim of a faltering narrator makes it impossible to ascertain whether the supernatural elements are real or merely a manifestation of the detective’s psychic distress. The girls’ witchy exploits are a thin pop-culture borrowing, and teen-agers are so protean to begin with that their identity crises lack the power to unnerve.

“The Trespasser” returns to the series’ first-person form, cinching the novel tightly to Antoinette’s well-armored view of the proceedings and her panic as that perspective comes undone. A friend recently remarked that French’s novels always seem to be about real estate, which is not surprising in Ireland, where identity is often linked to the land. “The Trespasser” moves away from this metaphor, an indication that French has figured out how to expand the series’ scope without abandoning the intensity of its focus. The only woman on the Murder Squad, and mixed-race as well, Antoinette has found it necessary to plow a path for herself through an unwelcoming world. “Round Conway’s patch of rough and mine,” Stephen observes, “someone disses you, you punch hard and fast and straight to the face, before they see weakness and sink their teeth into it.” While one understands how this instinct has served her, it doesn’t adapt well to a professional career. Antoinette often displays a hair-trigger defensiveness that only the easygoing and persistent Stephen can penetrate.

As with “Faithful Place,” there isn’t a whiff of the otherworldly in “The Trespasser”; a refusal to truck with such rubbish is one of the few qualities that Antoinette Conway shares with Frank

Mackey, along with a jumbo working-class chip on her shoulder. The murder of Aislinn Murray dredges up some issues; both women were abandoned by their fathers. Antoinette refuses to be troubled by the similarities. Far more perturbing is the vague, elusive memory she has of once turning away from Aislinn's pleas, way back when Antoinette was still in uniform. Now the young woman lies in her own sitting room with her head bashed in, not far from a table set for a romantic dinner. Antoinette can't remember what Aislinn asked of her, only that she refused, thinking, "*Pathetic.*"

MORE THAN ANY other novel in the Dublin Murder Squad series, "The Trespasser" concerns the squad itself, the pinnacle of the force and the unit (along with Undercover) to which all Dublin police aspire. A crime writer's own background often shapes how he or she conceives of the art of detection. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a medical doctor, made Sherlock Holmes a scientific diagnostician. French studied drama at Trinity College and worked in the theatre for ten years. Her detectives are all performers, and the Murder Squad detectives have nabbed the lead roles. (There's also much of the fierce, fleeting camaraderie of the troupe in French's fascination with the tight, almost telepathic bonds between partners, siblings, and the best of friends.) They pay close attention to how they dress, which cars they drive to the scene, and exactly how they walk once they get out of them. Their interrogations are elaborately staged to manipulate their witnesses and suspects. "Our relationship with truth is fundamental but cracked," Rob Ryan explains, "refracting confusingly like fragmented glass. It is the core of our careers, the endgame of every move we make, and we pursue it with strategies painstakingly constructed of lies and concealment and every variation on deception." The same could be said of actors and novelists.

Antoinette knows how to fight, and Stephen knows how to mollify; together they form an alliance that provides one of the few pleasures Antoinette takes in the job she once passionately coveted. The rest of the squad,



"Everybody has a headache since we switched to solar."

she thinks, want to shut her out and watch her fail: "They went shoulder to shoulder and started pushing me out of the pack." This is Antoinette's dilemma: she sees enemies and detractors everywhere, and she's not always wrong. She is the target of bias in at least some quarters, and someone in the department seems to be steering the Aislinn Murray investigation in a particular direction. But why? Antoinette and Stephen get saddled with a third detective, a fatuous, patronizing showboater whom French deploys to delicious comic effect. Toward the end of the investigation, Antoinette has convinced herself that this man is faking the signs of a conspiracy to provoke her into a career-ending error. She even begins to suspect Stephen of being in on the plot. It's as if she had contracted a psychological autoimmune disorder: the very qualities that helped her muscle her way into this dream job—her tenacity and bravado, her denial of both her own vulnerability and her longing for intimacy—have begun to eat away at her. "Someone wants me to make a mistake," she thinks. "And I'm a couple hundred miles out to sea with all my systems going haywire."

Antoinette Conway, Rob Ryan, Cas-

sie Maddox, and each of French's other detectives not only narrate a case but navigate one of those rare interludes when a human being's foundations shift permanently, for better or worse. Each of them is remade by the events the book relates. As much as readers may come to love a series detective (few characters have ever been more beloved than Sherlock Holmes), the genre mostly doesn't give us this. The creator of a series detective has two options: supply the sleuth with one forgettable case after another while the character remains essentially unchanged or, in the interest of keeping the stakes high, turn the detective's life into soap opera, a preposterous string of murdered wives, kidnapped children, and showdowns with diabolical serial killers. Those detectives investigate crimes, but French's pursue mysteries, the kind that can never be completely solved, although we all spend a life's worth of days in the trying. ♦

Correction of the Week

From People.

In our Sept. 29 issue the reviewer of the Pussycat Dolls' *Doll Domination* misquoted the lyrics to "When I Grow Up" as saying they want to have "boobies" when they grow up. The lyrics actually say "groupies."

HOLY PLACES

Passion, war, and medieval Jerusalem.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



JERUSALEM, 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven," at the Metropolitan Museum, is a captivating show of some two hundred objects from the era of the Crusades. There are manuscripts, maps, paintings, sculptures, architectural fragments, reliquaries, ceramics, glass, fabrics, astrolabes, jewelry, weapons, and, especially, books—in nine alphabets and twelve languages. The works, from sixty lenders in more than a dozen countries, express the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian cultures of the time, the three great Abrahamic faiths sharing a city holy to them all, when they weren't bloodily contesting it. The installation is lovely: rooms in gray

and blue are filled with a cumulative haze of spotlights, designed not for drama but for ease of attention; the show, though immense, won't exhaust you. There are mural-like video projections of the city today and brief video interviews with representative citizens. The ambience is conducive less to learning than to dreaming. This feels right for a history that is incomprehensible without reference to religious passions. I am reminded of Marianne Moore's description of poems as "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." Jerusalem was then, as it remains for many, as much an idea as a locale. In 2000, the *British Journal of Psychiatry* reported

on about twelve hundred cases, during the previous decade, of "Jerusalem syndrome," in which ordinary tourists were seized by convictions of a sacred mission and made public nuisances of themselves, often by sermonizing at holy sites while clad in hotel sheets.

In the introduction to the show's catalogue, the curators, Barbara Drake Boehm and Melanie Holcomb, tell of meeting with Theophilus, the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem. He asked them, "Whose story do you intend to tell?" They answered that they hoped "to tell everyone's story, and no one's." And so they have, to the extent possible, with visual evidence from a time and a place roiled by dozens of ethnic and religious constituencies. Most of the objects were not made in Jerusalem, and only a quarter of them are from collections there. But their association with the city isn't strained; they evince a gravitational tug that was felt, according to Boehm and Holcomb, by people in regions as far-flung as Iceland and India. The show documents the medieval city's allure in sections entitled "The Air of Holiness" and "The Promise of Eternity," and follows its consequences in "The Pulse of Trade and Tourism"—involving waves of pilgrims and the commerce that served them—and "The Drumbeat of Holy War." Regarding the last section, we are led to reflect on the era's amplification of the concepts of Christian *bellum sacrum*—"God wills it!" was the Crusader battle cry—and Islamic military jihad, waged "to uproot the unbelievers," as a Muslim leader declared in the twelfth century.

Jerusalem was among the first conquests of the Arab Caliphate, in 638. It was a polyglot city, in which Christians suffered oppression, when, in 1099, armies of the First Crusade took it and massacred nearly all the Muslim and Jewish inhabitants. The lavishly renovated Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on the supposed site of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection, stood near the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, built on the ruins of the Hebrew Second Temple, which were temporarily converted to a palace and a church, respectively. (The rock enshrined is thought to be the one on which Abraham was to have sacrificed

Detail from a choir book depicting the prophet Isaiah outside the city.

Isaac, and from which, in 621, Muhammad ascended to Heaven during his night journey.) Muslims led by Saladin, the first Sultan of Egypt and Syria, retook the city in 1187, and several subsequent Crusades failed to achieve more than fleeting footholds there. But a regime of general tolerance, instituted by Saladin and continued by Mamluk sultans, prevailed throughout most of the following two centuries, drawing visitors including the Spanish poet Judah al-Harizi, who characterized his days in Jerusalem, in the early thirteenth century, as “carved from rubies, cut from the trees of life, or stolen from the stars of heaven. And each day we would walk about on its graves and its monuments to weep over Sion.”

As a cultural center, the city was more a destination than a fount of creativity. Medieval invention from all points of the compass generated echoes in the area, with such hybrid effects as Christian symbolism engraved on a dagger-scabbard in a fabulously intricate Arab style. The effigy on the tomb of a Crusader knight—French, from the thirteenth century—finds him armed with a Chinese sword. (How he got it, by purchase or in combat, is among the time’s innumerable untold tales.) The show’s wealth of calligraphic books includes translations between languages and faiths. Even a non-bibliophile like me cannot help being riveted by the beauties and the significance of the tomes on display. Equally striking is the historical drama of such documents as a letter from the Spanish philosopher and scholar Maimonides, in 1170, seeking funds to ransom Jewish hostages held in the Holy Land.

The aesthetic appeal of the exhibits is continual and intense, but concentration on it can feel disrespectfully indulgent. Message, not medium, is the motive of even the most decorative work, in which visual pleasure serves to enhance belief and, perhaps, to give a foretaste of Paradise. Partly, this is true of all properly regarded medieval art and design, from the time before Giotto and Duccio began insinuating personal style into painting. Most of the work in the show is not credited to a named artist. An exception is Sargis Pidzak, an Armenian who made superb illuminations for a Gospel book

dated 1346. Another illustration, in a beautiful Italian Torah, of sacrificial rites in the courtyard of the Temple, is attributed to the place-holding “Master of the Barbo Missal.”

The assumptions of the pre-Renaissance world are irremediably alien to most of us. But this show, more than any other that I can immediately recall, closes mental circuitry between then and now, owing to an exquisitely managed sense of collective drives and emotions that have not ceased to influence human affairs. The first of two ravishing stained-glass roundels—the only ones surviving of fourteen Crusade windows from the twelfth-century Church of St. Denis, north of Paris—shows mounted knights on the march to Jerusalem. In the second, three of them receive crowns of martyrdom from the hand of God. The missing middle of the story is evoked by an undated, probably Egyptian, watercolor of a battle that abounds in severed heads and legs. The rumble of violence renders sharply poignant the show’s more prevalent invocations of piety and peace.

In the uneasy peace of today, there are tensions even within communities of faith. In one of the video interviews, an amusing Armenian Orthodox priest, Father Samuel Aghoyan, says that at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which his congregation shares with Catholic and Greek Orthodox ones, he must watch that the services of those sects do not run over their allotted time, because the extra length may set a precedent and “become tradition.” (“Sometimes we argue with each other, like members of a family,” he says, in a tone not suggesting mild demurrals.) More astringently, the writer Ruby Namdar testifies to the “wound that, deep inside, never healed,” for Jews, of the lost Temple. The merchant Bilal Abu Khalaf displays the fabrics and liturgical garments that he sells to groups from all three religions—an ecumenical business that he maintains, it seems, with an edge of nervous defiance. “I hope in the future to be much better,” he says of the city. Similarly wistful, and gently remonstrating, is the Franciscan friar Father Eugenio Mario Alliata, who says, “You know, Jerusalem, it is called the Holy City, but it is really made Holy City only if we are a little bit holy in it.” ♦

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**THE
NEW YORKER**

WORD OF MOUTH

Bon Iver's new voice.

BY HUA HSU

*Justin Vernon's voice is one of the most recognizable instruments in indie music.*

SINGING IN FALSETTO is, by definition, a kind of false projection into the world. About a decade ago, when Justin Vernon, the principal member of Bon Iver, was recording the songs that became the band's debut album, "For Emma, Forever Ago," he realized that ranging just above his usual register made it easier to sing about memories that were otherwise too painful to recount. Vernon's falsetto caused an obvious strain on his voice, making it sound weary and brittle. His recordings gave the impression of someone forcing himself to venture far outside his comfort zone; they communicated a sense of solitude and drift, even if, as was often the case,

you couldn't make out exactly what he was saying.

"For Emma," which was released in 2007, became the type of album that fans believe has magical, healing qualities, an aura that had something to do with the record's glum backstory. Vernon had lived the kind of quaint, rooted existence that seems increasingly rare, given the cosmopolitan ambitions of most professional musicians. Born and raised in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, Vernon moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, with some friends, to try to make it as a band. Within a year, about a quarter of which Vernon spent bedridden with mononucleosis and then with a liver infection, his relationship with his

bandmates and a girlfriend were in shambles. He retreated to his father's cabin, in the woods of Wisconsin, where, after spending a few weeks drinking beer and watching movies, he picked up his acoustic guitar, wrote some songs that reflected his bleak, wintry surroundings, and began experimenting with new ways of singing them.

The odd thing about Vernon's music, which fans related to because of its folksy vulnerability, was how much he withheld. His songs felt authentic and intimate, yet they were filled with invented places and characters, private symbols, and impressionistic scraps of language. Emma wasn't a person, he explained, but a foggy, wallowing state of mind. Do we listen to a musician's melancholy songs because we want him to feel better, or because it's comforting to know that people who are famous and accomplished don't have it all figured out, either? Vernon followed "For Emma" with "Bon Iver, Bon Iver" (2011), a Grammy-winning album of exquisite, forlorn chamber pop. This time, he was surrounded by a band, which included his longtime collaborators the percussionists Matt McCaughan and Sean Carey, the saxophonist Michael Lewis, and the guitarist Mike Noyce. The pained vocals, the pastoral arrangements: Vernon seemed to have perfected a studied approach to writing and singing sad songs.

VERNON'S VOICE HAS become one of the most recognizable instruments in indie music, and not just on his own albums. During Bon Iver's frequent hiatuses, Vernon has recorded and toured with Gayngs, a largely Midwestern supergroup devoted to eighties soft rock, and Volcano Choir, a Wisconsin rock band that specializes in a kind of chugging, open-road ambience. He has lent his falsetto to the supple synth-pop of Polica and to the downcast electronic balladry of James Blake. But his most famous collaborator—and the one whose influence resounds through Bon Iver's new album, "22, A Million"—is Kanye West. Several years ago, West became enamored of "Woods," an unusual Bon Iver track that Vernon sang through Auto-Tune, and invited him to collaborate on his 2010 album, "My Beautiful Dark Twisted

Fantasy.” West recently called Vernon his “favorite living artist.”

Earlier this year, Vernon and West made guest appearances on “Friends,” a song by Francis and the Lights, which featured Vernon, West, and Francis singing through Prismizer, a software program that, like Auto-Tune or the vocoder, makes sounds bright and syrupy. Melodies pulse and glow, supposedly following the dispersive properties of a prism. After fiddling with Francis’s Prismizer, Vernon enlisted his engineer, Chris Messina, to tweak the software. Eventually, Messina created the Messina, a combination of software and gear that is capable of harmonizing voices and instruments live. (The success of the first two Bon Iver albums has allowed Vernon to make investments in and around Eau Claire: he set up April Base, the studio Messina oversees, became part-owner of a boutique hotel, and helped found an annual summer music festival.)

“22, A Million” is an astonishing and strange album, the sound of a man trying to figure out what he can make once he has broken a kaleidoscope into its constituent slivers. Mostly, it feels like an attempt to erase the flesh-and-bone authenticity that made Vernon into an icon. Vernon’s falsetto is still identifiable through the digital scrim, but now the words wobble beyond his control. Sometimes it sounds like a one-man gospel chorus; at other times as if it came from a distant crater. Vernon’s lyrics suggest narrative episodes, or glimpses into someone else’s intimacy: fragments of an argument, a quick peek into a room at the Ace Hotel, bundling “your sister” into a cab, hallucinations in fields of tall reeds, a cry for help to his own personal “A-Team.” “I’d be as happy as hell if you’d stay for tea,” he sings on “33 ‘GOD,’” with a kind of glistening desperation whose context we can’t quite grasp.

When Bon Iver first emerged, Vernon seemed like an artist from the past transported to the present, his selfies rendered as daguerreotypes. But the ready-made idioms of folk and rock that inspired his first couple of albums are no longer sufficient. Instead, “22,” which makes generous use of the Messina, is filled with a sense of adventure and mischief that his older works

seemed too serious to indulge. It’s an attempt at a new language, as evidenced by the album’s unusual song titles and hip-hop-inspired approach to production. “10 d E A T h b R E a s T ☒ ☒” and “33 ‘GOD’” are built on crunchy digital drum programs. Samples abound: one, of Stevie Nicks singing “Wild Heart,” is sped up to a high-pitched squiggle; in another, the Scottish pop singer Paolo Nutini belts out a line about finding God and religion, making plain Vernon’s riddle-like yearning; elsewhere, he weaves an Eau Claire radio jingle into a synth line, a nod to the locals.

Throughout, Vernon tests the limits of the Messina. One of the album’s most startling tracks, “____45____,” is a duel between Vernon’s voice and Lewis’s saxophone. The sax is fed through the synthesizer, where it’s sped up and slowed down before settling into a gorgeous flutter. On “715 - CRΣΣKS,” Vernon’s sentences dissolve into digital purrs. There are no other instruments, just Vernon cooing and pulsing and raging against the Messina, trying to outrace the imperative of harmony. A patch of static almost scratches out the words “alimony butterfly” on “29 #Strafford APTS,” a song built on acoustic guitar, piano, strings, and Vernon’s untreated voice, which feels almost too raw to leave out in the open.

Speech synthesizers often make a song sound as though someone were running a leaky fluorescent highlighter across its lyrics. There are those who think that mediating voices through technology is somehow inauthentic, that when we sand away the coarse edges of our voices, or speak into boxes that make us sound like robots, we lose touch with what makes us human. Rock music has generally remained hostile to these kinds of innovations. But there’s nothing particularly natural about a singer’s murmur or a soft cry rising above a full band. These, too, come out of recording studios, and are tricks of signal processing and amplification.

The voice has become the focus of the most vital experiments in pop music today—the way that the vocals of rappers like Kanye, Future, and Young Thug sound mangled and gooey over their

tracks; the centrality of Auto-Tune to Caribbean pop and Afrobeats, a style of music that often sounds like a more ecstatic version of American R.&B.; the possibility that T-Pain, who popularized the use of pitch-shifting software, might be one of the most influential artists of our time. Modified voices are the perfect sound for a moment when old orthodoxies about identity, gender, and authority are slipping away.

We cherish the capacity of voices to come together, to balance harmonies or resolve one another’s melodies. On “22, A Million,” synthesizers and samplers help Vernon shake his despondency, adding layers, taking his voice apart and putting it back together, making his words gleam. As the story goes, Vernon began conceptualizing “22, A Million” while on a solo trip through the Greek islands. It was intended as a vision quest, but the quiet and the isolation only amplified his blues. He kept humming a line to himself: “It might be over soon.” Those words open the album; they’re roughed up by software, and greeted by a regal saxophone, a sampled whisper from a Mahalia Jackson tune, and resplendent guitars—all sounds suggesting a range of possibilities beyond Vernon’s despair. “It might be over soon” could be something you tell yourself to get through a tough time; or perhaps it could serve as a reminder to stay in the moment a bit longer.

The most enchanting aspect of “22” is the way that Vernon’s voice grows in confidence, shedding its affectations, digital or otherwise. Maybe the past is finally past. As with all of Bon Iver’s music, the scenes that compelled “22” remain out of reach. When he played the album for a roomful of journalists earlier this month, he said that he didn’t even want his picture taken anymore. “Faces are for friends only,” he explained. The lustrous final track, “00000 Million,” is just Vernon, a piano, and a faint sample of the Irish folksinger Fionn Regan longing for “where the days have no numbers.” “I hurry bout shame and I worry bout a worn path / And I wander off / Just to come back home,” Vernon sings. He’s never sounded this unburdened, this plainly iridescent. It makes one wish that there were a machine through which we could pass our words, and fix ourselves. ♦

HELP!

"The Magnificent Seven" and "Goat."

BY ANTHONY LANE

*The band of renegades from Antoine Fuqua's version of the classic Western.*

WAY OUT WEST, in 1879, the town of Rose Creek is under threat. A land grabber named Bartholomew Bogue (Peter Sarsgaard) has arrived with a squadron of heavies and made the place his own. To be honest, he doesn't look well. Pasty and perspiring, he sniffs a lot, as if scenting gold in the nearby mine, and his eyelids droop with fatigue as he issues his commands. Setting fire to the church perks him up, but not a lot. I reckon you could defeat Bogue by sneezing in his general direction, but for some reason the townsfolk are terrified, and one of them asks, "Who's going to stand up to a man like that?"

Well, the movie is "The Magnificent Seven," so you know the answer. Enter Sam Chisolm (Denzel Washington), described as a warrant officer from Wichita, Kansas. His name recalls the hero of "Chisum," a John Wayne picture from 1970, and, in terms of fashion sense, Chisolm goes for the all-black look, as modelled by Hopalong Cassidy. The most pressing task, of course, is the formation of a team, and Chisolm spends the first half of the

film rounding up a suitable herd of renegades. These include Josh Faraday (Chris Pratt), a cardsharp; Goodnight Robicheaux (Ethan Hawke), a marksman who saw action at Antietam; his sidekick, Billy Rocks (Byung-hun Lee), who keeps a lethal weapon in his hair; Jack Horne (Vincent D'Onofrio), a wild man of the woods; Vasquez (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo), an outlaw; and a Comanche warrior, Red Harvest (Martin Sensmeier), whose horse wears even more face paint than he does. That makes seven fighters in all—or, judging by volume, eight, since Horne counts as two persons rather than one. As Faraday observes, watching him on the move, "I believe that bear is wearing people's clothes."

Pratt seems happier firing off lines like that than wielding a pistol, and he gives the impression that killing people onscreen is somehow uncalled for. That's a problem for "The Magnificent Seven," which calls for little else, yet Pratt relaxes the movie, as he did last year's "Jurassic World," and his presence will bring in younger viewers who neither know nor care about the ancestry of the plot.

Just for the record, then: the new film, directed by Antoine Fuqua, rehashes John Sturges's 1960 classic, teasing us throughout with the drumbeat of Elmer Bernstein's original score, and refusing to unveil the great tune until the final credits. The Sturges production was itself a Western transplant of Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai" (1954), and it led to a diminuendo of sequels—"Return of the Magnificent Seven" (1966), "Guns of the Magnificent Seven" (1969), and "The Magnificent Seven Ride!" (1972).

That's an awful lot of magnificence to have at your back, so what does Fuqua bring to the party? The most obvious contribution is the ethnic range of his cast. It was difficult to ignore the patronizing tone of Sturges's tale, in which helpless Mexican villagers in white blouses are saved and blessed by the intervention of American tough guys, so the new version is wise to recruit a Latino gunslinger to the front line. From then on, however, surprisingly scant use is made of him, or of his Asian comrade, the implication being that a redressing of the racial imbalance is compensation enough, and that, with the right actors in place, the movie's moral work is done. Maybe that's true; maybe the virtues of multiculturalism, on film, are best enforced by not making a big deal of them.

That is certainly the case with Chisolm, whose color, like that of Morgan Freeman's character in Clint Eastwood's "Unforgiven" (1992), goes unmentioned. Washington is not the first African-American to be numbered among the Seven (Bernie Casey was, in "Guns of the Magnificent Seven"), but, with the nonchalant blaze of his stardom, he's the first to captain the gang. There remains, nonetheless, a hint of missed opportunities, and it would be a privilege to watch him, one day, in a film that does delve into the ethnic perplexities of the period. The year in which "The Magnificent Seven" is set, for instance, was the year of the Exodusters—tens of thousands of black migrants escaping the harshness of the South for a new and, in some ways, no less challenging life in Kansas.

Traces of real history are hard to spot in Fuqua's Western, but there isn't much evidence of a real Western, either. You sense that an entire genre, far from being revitalized, is being plundered for handy

tips. The closeup of a shooter's fist, curling around the butt of his holstered firearm in readiness for the draw; the swing of saloon doors, admitting the quiet stranger whose very entrance halts the chatter within; the coward who skips town on the eve of battle, only to return in the redeeming hour of need: these and other details pop up in "The Magnificent Seven" not because they promote its emotional cause, or whip the narrative along, but as rusty quotations. Sergio Leone's famous crane shot in "Once Upon a Time in the West" (1968), following Claudia Cardinale's arrival at a railroad station, observing her through a window, then rising seraphically over a roof to survey the wider scene, made audiences swoon, and not just because of Ennio Morricone's score. They felt that they were witnessing both the start of something—the bustle of a newborn town, in a promised land—and an elegy for a past that was irretrievably lost. When Fuqua tries the same trick, it seems merely like the kind of move that a director in his position, given such a setting, ought to make.

On the other hand, he does have Vincent D'Onofrio: a mountainous figure squeezed into a shrunken role, and making the most of it. Having twice played Orson Welles, D'Onofrio has chosen to import a Wellesian bulk to "The Magnificent Seven," though without the matching rumble of intonation. Instead, Jack Horne's voice is a high and husky affair, and you yearn—sadly, in vain—for Fuqua and his screenwriters, Nic Pizzolatto and Richard Wenk, to furnish Horne with a tall tale. No less striking is Haley Bennett, who plays Emma Cullen, the

widow of a fellow from Rose Creek. He was murdered by Bogue, in full view of Emma, and it is she who summons the Seven. "So you seek revenge," Chisolm says. "I seek righteousness," she replies. "But I'll take revenge." The line is delivered straight, all stubborn resolve and no irony, and just for a moment you catch the authentic flavor of God-fearing desperation that the saga demands. It's a shame that she gets saddled, at the end, with a laughable voice-over, which is tacked on as one last tribute to the effort made by her saviors. "It was," she tells us—a weighty pause—"magnificent." If you say so, Ma'am.

THE OPENING CREDITS of "Goat" present an extraordinary sight. We see young white men, naked from the waist up, snarling and clapping in slow motion. Their roaring is silent; all we hear is the thrum of an electronic score. What has ignited them is unclear, but they seem to be goading something on. So elemental is the display that you wonder: Don't these guys belong in *National Geographic*?

Needless to say, they are students. "Goat" is a feature film, directed by Andrew Neel, and we are glimpsing a fraternity at play. Most of the action unfolds at Brookman, a fictitious college at which Brad (Ben Schnetzer), still smarting from a random assault and robbery back home, arrives as a freshman. His older brother, Brett (Nick Jonas), is already there, proudly enrolled in Phi Sigma Mu, and hoping that Brad will follow suit. And so to Hell Week, as Brad, his roommate, Will (Danny Flaherty), and a bunch of others

are ground through the mill. What makes the hazing onerous to watch is not just the bestial particulars—newbies are bound, beaten, hooded, caged, and forced to wrestle in mud, submit to sexual mockery, and drink until they retch—but the fact that they choose to suffer so. To pose "Guantánamo style," as one tormentor puts it, is to submit, of your own free will, to a regime that has no authority. Apart from a school administrator, a couple of cops, and a quick shot of the brothers' mother and father, silent at dinner, adults are no more in evidence here than they are in "Lord of the Flies."

Neel's cast is terrific, from Schnetzer and Flaherty, with their soft and soulful—and thus punchable—faces, to Jake Picking, who plays the leader of the frat pack, and whose Popeye arms and buggy unblinking eyes make him both a monster and, if you stand aside from the melee, a bad joke. But standing aside is no easier at Brookman than it will be in the corporate world outside. "I can't quit," Will says. "If you quit, what else is there? You're just another guy who couldn't hack it." The movie is many things: an evil twin to Richard Linklater's "Everybody Wants Some!!," from earlier this year; a bruising account of brotherly love; and a fetid handbook to a culture (not confined to higher education) that is nourished by the all-male terror of being thought anything but strong and exceptional. If you are college-bound, go and see "Goat" first, but for God's sake don't take your parents. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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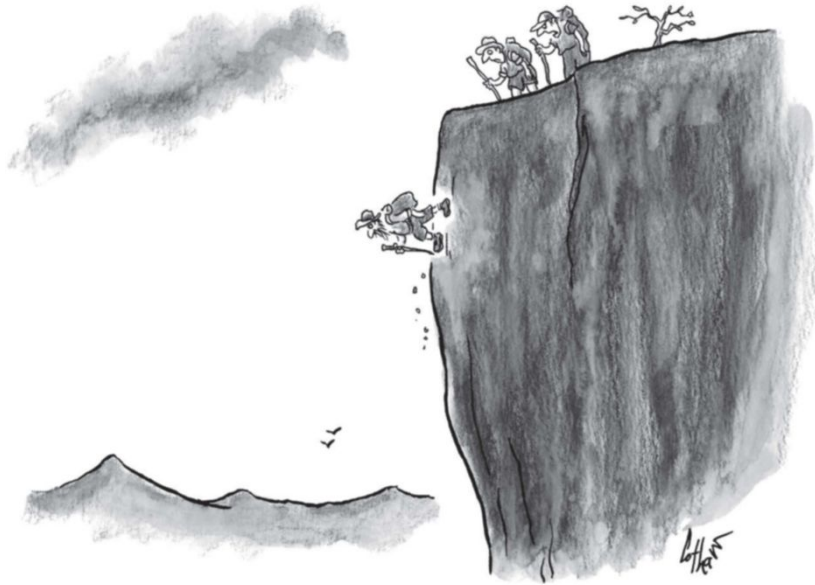
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, October 2nd. The finalists in the September 19th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 17th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



“Try to look surprised.”
Kathleen A. Moore, Toronto, Ont.

“He’s not reinventing it—he’s making it great again.”
Tim Noble, Brooklyn, N.Y.

“The hole in the middle was my idea.”
Jonathan Fast, Greenwich, Conn.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“He wants to know if you can move your seat up.”
Rebecca Holzschuh, San Francisco, Calif.

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