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JAN. 23, 2012

THE NEW YORKER

jorge colombo

“This delightful modern-day Baroque pastiche could be the sleeper hit of the Met season.

The librettist Jeremy Sams has devised a wonderfully convoluted and involving story that conflates two Shakespeare plays, *“The Tempest”* and *“A Midsummer Night’s Dream.”* His original libretto, complete with witty recitative, is set to music lifted from various Baroque operas by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau

and others. Phelim McDermott’s imaginative production blends old-fashioned stagecraft with sophisticated videos and animation, and the cast could not be better: David Daniels as Prospero, Danielle de Niese as Ariel, Joyce DiDonato as Sycorax, Luca Pisaroni as Caliban, Lisette Oropesa as Miranda and, in a short but crucial star turn, Plácido Domingo as Neptune. William Christie, an acclaimed exponent of Baroque opera, conducts.”

– Anthony Tommasini,
The New York Times



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THE NEW YORKER

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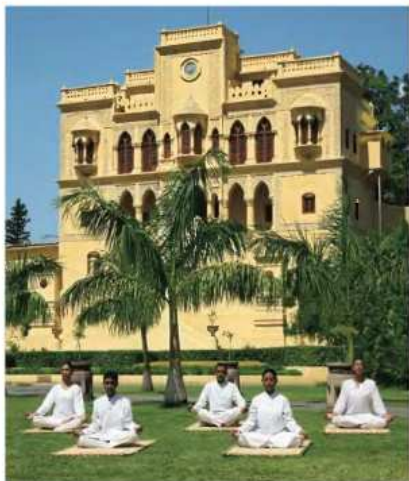
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Jorge Colombo (Cover) is an illustrator, photographer, and graphic designer. His book, "New York: Finger Paintings by Jorge Colombo," came out last fall.

Donald Hall ("Out the Window," p. 40), a former United States Poet Laureate, was awarded the National Medal of Arts last March. His most recent book is a poetry collection, "The Back Chamber."

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Anthony Lane (The Current Cinema, p. 86) is a staff writer and film critic. "Nobody's Perfect" is a collection of his *New Yorker* essays.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

The Political Scene: Our hub for coverage of the 2012 campaign. / Ask the Author: *Jeffrey Frank* takes readers' questions. / Audio: *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts a political conversation; *Donald Hall* talks to *Blake Eskin*; *Thomas Beller* reads a *Niccolo Tucci* story. / Video: Plowshare tortoises. / News Desk: *John Cassidy* and *Ryan Lizza* on the primaries; Daily Comment, by *Steve Coll* and *Amy Davidson*. / Culture Desk: *Dana Goodyear* on food; *Emily Nussbaum* on TV; Photo Booth. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and cover jigsaw puzzles. / Our complete archive, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

POSTAGE & HANDLING

Roger Angell, in his enjoyable elegy for snail mail, exaggerates the downside of e-mail replacing letters (Comment, January 2nd). "If we stop writing letters," he asks, "who will keep our history or dare venture upon a biography?" Surely the bigger problem for future generations seeking the thoughts of their forebears is that so many conversations are by telephone, disappearing as soon as the call ends. Because of the Internet, more of our communications are being written down. Biographers and historians, having long wrestled with poor handwriting and unsearchable documents, should see the benefits that come with our troves of e-mail. Providing, that is, they can gain access.

*Henry Mance
London, England*

Angell notes that the post office is "broke." But even though individuals no longer communicate primarily through letters, the post office's central problem is not volume. Mail volume continued to grow through 2006, even as Internet use expanded—the many products we order online are often shipped through the Postal Service. Since 2006, though, Congress has required the post office to prefund a hundred per cent of its retirement and retirement health-care costs, a five-billion-dollar annual burden imposed on no other public or private institution in America. Most state agencies prefund eighty per cent of anticipated retirement expenses, and the industry average in the private sector, for Fortune 1,000 companies, is closer to thirty per cent. But for this absurd requirement, the Postal Service's finances might be in the black.

*Representative Gerald E. Connolly
11th Congressional District of Virginia
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.*

MINORS' OFFENSES

Rachel Aviv's article about Dakotah Eliason and his trial as an adult for first-

degree murder shows how adolescents often do not understand the consequences of their actions and therefore fail to show the regret that officials expect to see ("No Remorse," January 2nd). By treating youths as adults in the criminal-justice system, we are contesting the construct of childhood itself. Young people who are convicted of murder should be punished, but laws that don't take into account their rehabilitative potential are unjust. Sentences need to be meaningfully and periodically reviewed later in life to determine whether a person can safely return to our communities. This is an appropriate alternative to sentencing youths to die in prison, because it reflects the capacity of children to change, and rewards those who do, while insuring that dangerous people remain in prison. At the time of his sentencing, Eliason clearly lacked maturity, but Aviv's portrait shows that he has the potential for growth.

*Jeffrey James Shook
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

Aviv's article forces us to rethink the justice system's treatment of young adults, but it should also be a call for stricter gun control. It was too simple for Eliason to take "his grandfather's loaded gun off the coatrack" and then shoot his grandfather. Eliason's grim tale shows what surveys have already told us: the availability of guns is linked to higher rates of both suicide and homicide. A teen-ager's rather routine funk became a senseless tragedy because a lethal device was at hand. A person's situation has a lot of power over his or her behavior; we would be wise to recognize that fact and shape our situations accordingly.

*Matthew McFeely
Cambridge, Mass.*

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. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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PETER MARTINS

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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22	23	24				

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE THAT'S ABSURD

The York Theatre Company presents "Ionescopade," a musical amalgam of excerpts of works by Eugene Ionesco. Mildred Kayden wrote the music and lyrics and Bill Castellino directs, at the York Theatre at St. Peter's. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE PEARLS OF WISDOM

Lucia Pulido, a rich-voiced singer from Colombia, made her reputation interpreting

the cumbia, bullerengue, currulao, and joropo styles of her homeland. Since moving to New York, in 1994, she has expanded into jazz, electronica, and other genres. Pulido celebrates her thirtieth anniversary as a performer with a free concert at Lincoln Center's David Rubenstein Atrium, featuring such guests as the saxophonist David Binney and the cellist Erik Friedlander. (See page 10.)

ART CRIME SEEN

The International Center of Photography delves into its archives of images by Weegee for "Murder Is My

Business." The exhibition focusses on the years between 1935 and 1946, when Weegee developed his style and paved the way for tabloid photojournalism. (See page 12.)

MOVIES BIG CHILLS

The recent release of "A Dangerous Method" offers a salutary reminder of the director David Cronenberg's blend of the suave and the horrific, the grotesquely physical and the elaborately psychological. Museum of the Moving Image offers a retrospective of his work, which opens with a discussion with Cronenberg

and includes several of his rare, early experimental works. (See page 20.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND WINTER DREAMS

All sorts of entertainments take place at the Park Avenue Armory these days, but the Winter Antiques Show, a major event for socialites, decorators, and enthusiasts alike, is a perennial favorite. The fifty-eighth edition begins this week. (See page 22.)

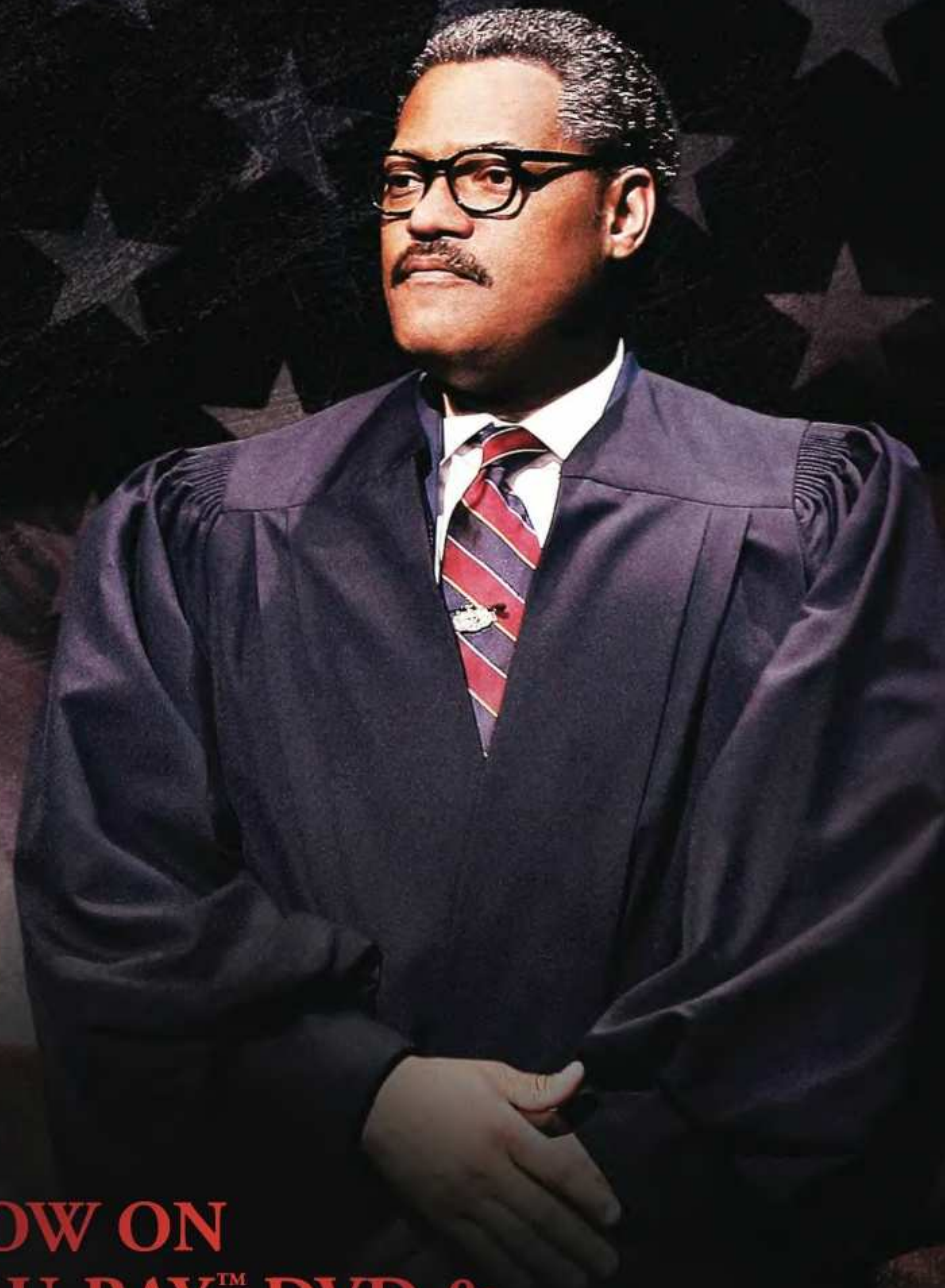
"Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," at the Brooklyn Museum. Photograph by Lauren Lancaster.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK ENCHANTÉ

"The Enchanted Island," a lavishly zany production now playing at the Met (it will be broadcast in the company's "Live in HD" series on Jan. 21), revives the concept of the Baroque pastiche opera, with extant scores repurposed to



fresh dramatic ends. As Handel might have done when pressed for time, the writer and director Jeremy Sams has devised new words for a slew of Baroque arias both famous and obscure, spinning a semi-Shakespearean tale. (Essentially, a spell-casting mixup lands the lovers from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on the island of "The Tempest.") The libretto runs long and waxes cutesy, but it has its charms, and the music is terrific: a cast led by Joyce DiDonato, David Daniels, Luca Pisaroni, and the godlike Plácido Domingo revels in Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau, and Purcell, among others, with William Christie conducting stylishly and Phelim McDermott providing witty direction. Let's hope this project creates more of an appetite for Baroque fare at the Met.

—Alex Ross

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BRIDGE PROJECT'S RICHARD III

The Bridge Project, along with the Old Vic, BAM, and Neal Street, presents the Shakespeare play, directed by Sam Mendes, with Kevin Spacey in the title role. Opens Jan. 18. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

CULTUREMART

A festival of works presented by HERE includes "The Strangest," by Betty Shamieh, inspired by the Arab who was killed in Camus's novel "The Stranger." Opens Jan. 24. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101.)

THE FALL TO EARTH

InProximity Theatre Company presents this play by Joel Drake Johnson, in which a woman and her mother travel to an unfamiliar town in search of the truth about their family. Joe Brancato directs. Opens Jan. 18. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE

Norbert Leo Butz and Elizabeth Reaser star in the Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Paula Vogel, from 1997, a dark story following the relationship between a girl and her uncle as she learns to drive. Kate Whoriskey directs. Previews begin Jan. 24. (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

INSTINCT

Michael Kimmel directs a new play by Matthew Maguire, in which four epidemiologists who live together try to prevent an outbreak of a contagious disease. Opens Jan. 18. (Lion, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IONESCOPADE

York Theatre Company presents a revival of this 1974 musical, with music and lyrics by Mildred Kayden, a composite of the works of Eugene Ionesco in the form of music, playlets, and poetry. Bill Castellino directs. Previews begin Jan. 23. (York Theatre at St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.)

LOOK BACK IN ANGER

Sam Gold directs John Osborne's seminal play from 1956, set in England in the fifties, in which four working-class people face challenges while living together. Presented by the Roundabout Theatre Company. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE PHILANDERER

The Pearl presents this play by George Bernard Shaw, directed by Gus Kaikkonen. In previews. Opens Jan. 22. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

RUSSIAN TRANSPORT

Janeane Garofalo stars in a new play by Erika Sheffer, about a Russian family in Brooklyn that welcomes an uncle who has come to pursue the American Dream. Scott Elliott directs the New Group production. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

RX

Kate Fodor's romantic comedy follows a woman who enters a drug trial for a pill that purports to end her depression and then falls in love with her doctor. Ethan McSweeney directs the Primary Stages production. Previews begin Jan. 24. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

WIT

Cynthia Nixon stars in Margaret Edson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play from 1995, about a poetry professor undergoing experimental cancer treatment. Lynne Meadow directs the Manhattan Theatre Club production. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

YOSEMITE

At the Rattlestick, Pedro Pascal directs a new play by Daniel Talbott, in which three siblings head to the Sierra Nevada in an attempt to outrun their past. In previews. (224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

NOW PLAYING

COIL FESTIVAL

The seventh annual festival, presented by P.S. 122, includes works by Young Jean Lee ("Untitled Feminist Show"), the TEAM ("Mission Drift"), and Temporary Distortion ("Newyorkland"). For a complete schedule, visit ps122.org. (Various locations.)

THE GERSHWINS' PORGY AND BESS

Audra McDonald, Norm Lewis, and David Alan Grier star in the musical by George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, with a revised and shortened book by Suzan-Lori Parks. Diane Paulus directs. (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 800-745-3000.)

HOW THE WORLD BEGAN

An offhand comment in a biology class instigates a near-firestorm in Catherine Treishmann's delicately balanced and stirring new play, directed with grace by Daniella Topol, about a high-school teacher (played by the inimitable Heidi Schreck), a recent transplant from New York City to Tornado Alley, who must defend herself against a small Kansas town's creationist inhabitants. Captivating performances by the cast—most notably, a brilliant turn by Adam LeFevre, as a local peacemaker—more than compensate for the play's few minor missteps in logic, especially the pat final few minutes. Still, the playwright's sensitive and dramatic handling of such potentially preachy and leaden material hints at a rare and refreshing intelligence. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IT'S ALWAYS RIGHT NOW, UNTIL IT'S LATER

Daniel Kitson explores the ways in which the past and the future influence identity. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

OUTSIDE PEOPLE

Zayd Dohm's comedic drama, a co-production of the Vineyard and Naked Angels, juxtaposes insiders and outsiders in present-day Beijing. Wang (Nelson Lee), a canny, gregarious big shot, has offered his American college roommate, Malcolm (Matthew Delapina), a struggling artist, a job at his company; on Malcolm's first night in town, Wang takes him to a night club, buys him drinks, and introduces him to Xiao Mei (Li Jun Li), a beautiful Mandarin tutor. Wang is the kind of guy who says, "You should get to know each other better—Biblically"; Malcolm is the kind who calls his friend from a hotel room and asks him to translate "I have herpes" into Mandarin. In its better moments, Dohm's script transcends the heavy-handedness of its worlds-collide themes—Malcolm's reaction to Xiao Mei's eating fried squid on a stick is gently, wonderfully evocative—but, too often, the obvious jokes and the reliance on cultural types make outside people of the audience. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

THAT AIN'T NO LADY!

Lady Bunny offers up raunchy comedy in this cabaret act. Tuesday nights. (Escuelita, 301 W. 39th St. 800-838-3006.)

WORLD OF WIRES

At the Kitchen, Jay Scheib adapts Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1973 sci-fi series, "Welt am Draht," about a computer that can simulate the entire world. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Jan. 21.)

Also Playing

ANYTHING GOES: Stephen Sondheim, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE BOOK OF MORMON:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **CHINGLISH:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FOLLIES:** Marquis, Broadway at 46th St. 877-250-2929. Through Jan. 22. **THE MOUNTAINTOP:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Jan. 22. **OTHER DESERT CITIES:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **RELATIVELY SPEAKING:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929. **SEMINAR:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **SPIDER-MAN: TURN OFF THE DARK:** Foxwoods, 213 W. 42nd St. 877-250-2929. **STICK FLY:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **WAR HORSE:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.

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NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

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

BAM'S HOWARD GILMAN OPERA HOUSE

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Jan. 19-21: After a thirteen-year hiatus from public performing, Jeff Mangum, the songwriting force behind the nineties band Neutral Milk Hotel, is back. Last fall, Mangum gave an inspiring impromptu performance at Occupy Wall Street and another, less impromptu one at Town Hall. At both shows, fans sang along to his poetically succinct lyrics, which he delivers in a punchy and sincere style. Expect more of the same here.

BOWERY BALLROOM

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 20: The budding quintet Caveman is fully committed to the simple pleasures of rollicking indie pop. Nick Stumpf, the singer of the French Kicks, produced the band's first record, "CoCo Beware," whose muted, tasteful approach makes room for the fluttering, earnest melodies of its front man, Matthew Iwanusa. Jan. 24: The New York trio Nada Surf celebrates the release of "The Stars Are Indifferent to Astronomy," the band's eagerly awaited seventh studio album. The group, which formed in 1993, continues to deliver perfectly wrought and melodically adventurous pop songs.

CARNEGIE HALL

Seventh Ave. at 57th St. (212-247-7800)—Jan. 24: "Fado: From Lisbon to New York." The music style known as fado, from the Portuguese for "fate," or "destiny," can be traced back to the early nineteenth century and is characterized by its mournful tunes and lyrics. This celebration will feature the singers Jorge Fernando, Celeste Rodrigues, and Fábria Rebordão, as well as a number of other masters of the form.

DAVID RUBENSTEIN ATRIUM

Broadway at 63rd St. (212-546-2656)—Jan. 19: Lucia Pulido, a talented singer from Colombia, is joined by such guests as the saxophonist David Binney and the cellist Erik Friedlander. (For more information, visit lincolncenter.org.)

IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl. (212-777-6800)—Jan. 24: One might be forgiven for assuming that Lamb of God is a Christian band, but one would be in for a rude awakening. The group fuses the various strains and unwieldy subgenres of heavy metal into a giddily sacrilegious and doom-laden combination and gives it a Southern-fried edge.

JOE'S PUB

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8778)—Jan. 23-24: The singer and guitarist Stew and his composing partner Heidi Rodewald, following up the Broadway success of their collaboration "Passing Strange," have re-formed their old band the Negro Problem, which is marking the release of its new album, "Making It." Expect serious self-reflection embedded in meaty rock and roll.

"LET'S ZYDECO"

Jan. 22: The Revelers, from southwest Louisiana, shift their concentration to bluegrass, Western swing, and swamp rock, while still honoring their Cajun roots. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. 212-685-7597. For more information, visit letszydeco.com.)

LITTLEFIELD

622 Degraw St., between Third and Fourth Aves., Brooklyn (718-855-3388)—Jan. 18: Sam Hillmer, who is the saxophonist for the downtown avant-chamber group Zs, also leads Diamond Terrifier, a sax-and-electronics project named for Vajrabhairava, an irate Buddhist deity with nine faces, thirty-four hands, and sixteen legs. The group's first album, comprising its long-form, drone-oriented songs, will be produced by Grizzly Bear's Chris Taylor and released through Northern Spy Records this September. Hillmer and company open for the MIVOS Quartet, which premieres a string quartet by Patrick Higgins. The piece, based on Proust's reflections on memory and recollection, marks Hig-

gins's debut as a classical composer; he is more well known as a gifted guitarist at home on the more brutal, punky fringes of the prog-rock community. Jan. 20: Califone (see Merkin Concert Hall) plays songs from its back catalogue.

MERCURY LOUNGE

217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Jan. 20: The current crop of neo-folk artists may make music that's ideal for putting the kids to bed, but there's often a lack of fresh ideas behind the genre's tranquilizing effects. The North Carolina producer and musician Jonathan Wilson has set himself apart by making low-impact country folk that's rooted in the musical legacy of Laurel Canyon, the storied Los Angeles neighborhood that incubated the Mamas & the Papas, Buffalo Springfield, and Crosby, Stills & Nash. In 2005, Wilson took up residence in the canyon himself, and has since reenergized the area with high-profile, invitation-only jam sessions for a multigenerational group of local artists: members of Wilco, the Black Crowes, and the Jayhawks have often been on hand at these epic gatherings.



ON AND OFF THE AVENUE TREASURE & BOND

350 West Broadway (646-669-9049)—Virtue shopping comes to SoHo. You can be a giver—and, not to worry, also a taker—at the Nordstrom-owned emporium Treasure & Bond, which donates the entirety of its profits to children's charities, the selection of which changes every three months. (Proceeds are currently earmarked for the Children's Health Fund, as well as for a sleepaway camp and an after-school service program, both sponsored by the Coalition for the Homeless.) The twelve-thousand-square-foot, two-level loft is decorated in monastic chic, with gray painted concrete floors and exposed pipes overhead, and the space is minimally appointed, with shelving and tables constructed from shipping crates and display cases that have had previous lives at Nordstrom.

And the goods? Some have specific philanthropic tie-ins, such as the metal whistle necklaces, whose sales support a campaign to protect the children of Congo from warfare (\$34), or the attractive tribal-looking jewelry in antiqued gold and brass, made by diverse artisans living in political strife and sold by a company called A Peace Treaty, whose founders, a Pakistani Muslim and a Libyan Jew, donate money to reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Less eleemosynarily, there is apparel for men, women, children, and dogs, as

well as cable-knit blankets made from recycled cotton (\$155); pebbled-leather fold-over clutches styled with artful slashes (\$375); hand paper shredders (\$28); whiskey stones, which, when frozen, can be used as non-diluting ice substitutes (nine soapstone cubes/\$24); an assortment of chunky-knit wool scarves in different shapes (asymmetrical cowl, infinity scarf, bunting chain, etc.) (\$160-\$295); emerald-blue fake-fur hats (\$160); Lafco candles in fragrances supposedly reminiscent of tree houses, lake houses, carriage houses, pool houses, and other houses (\$55); an ingenious contraption called a shable, consisting of a set of wooden shelves that reversibly turns into a table (imagine shelves configured as a freestanding staircase; now imagine rotating a cast-iron crank to level this ziggurat so that it flattens into a single horizontal plane) (\$1,245); bilingual Snow White picture books (\$14.95); and a brand of nail polish called Strange Beautiful, which comes in colors inspired by menstrual blood, Benjamin Disraeli, the shell of a boiled lobster, the green veins of Roquefort cheese, and, issued specially for the holidays, a worn black Bible (\$85 for a collection of ten).

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG

66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Jan. 19: Boston's loud and proud Mission of Burma. Jan. 22: Pissed Jeans. Considering this Allentown hardcore powerhouse's stubborn allegiance to slovenly, self-annihilating sludge-punk, it's a wonder that the group is still kicking. Having laid low for most of 2011, it finishes up a three-day mini-tour here. The band has been travelling with Protect-U, a D.C. duo that traffics in dreamy, narcotic disco. How these dissimilar acts ended up on the same bill is a mystery.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE

158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Jan. 21: A night of old-school hip-hop legends, including Slick Rick, whose smooth lyrical delivery and eye patch have made him a rap icon; the South Bronx d.j. and

—Patricia Marx

MERKIN CONCERT HALL

129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3330)—Jan. 19: The veteran Chicago experimental-rock band Califone was founded in 1997 by the guitarist and songwriter Tim Rutili, after his previous group, Red Red Meat, broke up. What began as a solo project quickly evolved into a quartet that meshed an avant-garde aesthetic with well-crafted and uncanny pop melodies. The band's last record, from 2009, a beautiful and haunting collection called "All My Friends Are Funeral Singers," was conceived as a soundtrack for a film that Rutili made about a woman who lives in a house filled with ghosts. For this performance, part of the excellent and diverse New York Guitar Festival, Califone will premiere a new live

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame nominee Afrika Bambaataa, who, with his emphasis on danceable beats and flamboyant showmanship, was responsible for many early developments in hip-hop; and the mixtape pioneer and d.j. Tony Touch.

SHEA STADIUM

20 Meadow St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Jan. 19: The shoegaze-y and guitar-heavy indie-rock veterans Hopewell (named for the home town of the founding member Jason Russo) have been performing their tight, well-balanced rock songs since 1995. With Woodsman, a quartet sporting two guitarists and two drummers, whose songs are reminiscent of Sonic Youth's early-nineties work, except that the vocals are almost completely ob-



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secured by effects. Also appearing are the Zabalas, a collaboration between the Argentinean singer Flor Zabala and the New York producer David Pattillo, who offer a straightforward, slick rock-and-roll sound highlighted by Flor's commanding vocals.

285 KENT

285 Kent Ave., Brooklyn (No phone)—Jan. 21: Akron/Family returns to its former Williamsburg stomping grounds for a show at this unmarked venue. The trio's long, epic songs delve into both Americana and experimental idioms and are highlighted by noisy climaxes and ecstatic group vocals.

UNION POOL

484 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Jan. 24: A performance by Sam Hillmer's droning sax-and-electronics project Diamond Terrifier (see Littlefield), along with, among others, the Parts & Labor alumnus Dan Friel's byzantine, laser-fried solo electronic project.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Jan. 17-21: Jane Monheit. The blizzard of hype that greeted this vocalist at the turn of the millennium has passed, giving us a chance to hear how she's matured; evidence of this can be found on her most recent album, "Home," a fond take on sturdy standards.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St. (212-475-8592)—Jan. 17-22: No one can replace the drummer Paul Motian, who died in November, but the guitarist Bill Frisell and the bassist Ron Carter—who played in an occasional and fruitful trio with Motian—will benefit from the rhythmic imagination of the drummer Joey Baron, a longtime Frisell collaborator.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 17-22: In addition to being one of the premier drummers of modern jazz, the late Max Roach was also a masterly bandleader whose music often reflected his outspoken political convictions. The drummer Willie Jones III will head a sextet honoring Roach that includes the trumpeter Jeremy Pelt and the saxophonist Stacy Dillard.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Jan. 19-22: No living musician exemplifies the funky side of Blue Note Records' classic era like the alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson. He's here with his quartet, featuring the organist Akiko Tsuruga.

THE KITANO NEW YORK

66 Park Ave., at 38th St. (212-885-7119)—Jan. 20-21: Bill Goodwin, the stalwart drummer best known as the rhythmic engine behind the saxophonist Phil Woods's ensembles for the past five decades, celebrates his seventieth birthday in fine company; his quartet includes the pianist Mulgrew Miller and the bassist Ray Drummond.

SMALLS

183 W. 10th St. (No phone)—Mainstream jazz has a staunch defender in the clarinetist and saxophonist Ken Peplowski, who leads a quartet here Jan. 20-21.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jan. 17-22: Taking a more conventional route than usual, the saxophonist Chris Potter sur-

rounds himself with a piano-bass-and-drums unit that will frame his virile playing without inhibiting his more exploratory side.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Jan. 21: Chucho Valdés with the Afro-Cuban Messengers. The virtuosic Cuban pianist performs songs from "Chucho's Steps," which earned him a Grammy last year. He'll also be joined by the Spanish vocalist Buika, with whom he recorded "El Ultimo Trago," a tribute to the Mexican singer Chavela Vargas, in 2010. (Carnegie Hall, Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. For more information, visit worldmusicinstitute.org.)



"World of Wires," at the Kitchen. Photograph by Ethan Levitas.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini." Through March 18. ♦ "Chinese Art in an Age of Revolution: Fu Baoshi (1904-1965)." Opens Jan. 21. ♦ "Photographic Treasures from the Collection of Alfred Stieglitz." No longer overshadowed by "Stieglitz and His Artists: Matisse to O'Keeffe," which closed earlier this month, this smaller exhibition of the photographs that Stieglitz donated to the museum has a chance to shine. Included are fine examples of the early-twentieth-century work he championed in his New York galleries and in the pages of *Camera Work*: subtly toned, exquisitely printed images by Edward Steichen, Adolf de Meyer, Gertrude Käsebier, Clarence White, and others identified with the Photo-Secessionist movement. Modernism made this short-lived style look precious and musty, but its soft, romantic glow remains seductive. Among the pretty pictures are some brilliant oddities, notably F. Holland Day's tortured

self-portraits as Christ and Anne Brigman's haunting image of a nude woman suspended in a spiderweb. Through Feb. 26. ♦ "Heroic Africans: Legendary Leaders, Iconic Sculptures." Through Jan. 29. ♦ "Infinite Jest: Caricature and Satire from Leonardo to Levine." Through March 4. ♦ "Duncan Phyfe: Master Cabinetmaker in New York." Through May 6. ♦ "Storytelling in Japanese Art." Through May 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"Diego Rivera: Murals for the Museum of Modern Art." Through May 14. ♦ "Sanja Iveković: Sweet Violence." Through March 26. ♦ "Projects 96: Haris Epaminoda." Through Feb. 20. ♦ "Standard Deviations: Types and Families in Contemporary Design." Through Jan. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MOMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens (718-784-2084)—"Clifford Owens: Anthology." Through March 12. ♦ "Frances Stark: My Best Thing." Through Jan. 30. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3587)—"Maurizio Cattelan: All." Through Jan. 22. ♦ "Pop Objects and Icons from the Guggenheim Collection." Through Feb. 8. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"Sherrie Levine: Mayhem." Through Jan. 29. ♦ "Real/Surreal." Through Feb. 12. ♦ "Aleksandra Mir: The Seduction of Galileo Galilei." Through Feb. 19. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture." Through Feb. 12. ♦ "Youth and Beauty: Art of the American Twenties." Through Jan. 29. ♦ "Newspaper Fiction: The New York Journalism of Djuna Barnes, 1913-1919." Opens Jan. 20. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 10.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"Beyond Planet Earth: The Future of Space Exploration." Through Aug. 12. ♦ "The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter." Through May 28. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

ASIA SOCIETY

Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—"Sarah Szc: Infinite Line." Through March 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

FRICK COLLECTION

1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—"White Gold: Highlights from the Arnhold Collection of Meissen Porcelain." Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GREY ART GALLERY

100 Washington Sq. E. (212-998-6780)—"Soto: Paris and Beyond, 1950-1970." Through March 31. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6, Saturdays, 11 to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"The Loving Story: Photographs by Grey Villet." Opens Jan. 20. ♦ "Weegee: Murder Is My Busi-

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VISIT
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"OSLO IS EMERGING AS ONE OF EUROPE'S COOLEST CAPITALS."

Condé Nast Traveler magazine, 2011

AND HERE ARE SOME COOL THINGS TO DO:



Explore Oslo, the capital of Norway with its northern, urbane flair, architecture both historical and new, and world-famous attractions and museums. Must-sees include the Vigeland Sculpture Park, Holmenkollen Ski Jump, Viking Ship Museum, and the cutting-edge Oslo Opera House, an instant cultural classic. Situated on a fjord and surrounded by hills and forests, Oslo is at once urban and rural. Hike in a forest, swim in a fjord, and then go to a world-class concert—all in the same day. Combine a slice of vibrant city life with a visit to "Villmarksriket"—the heart of Eastern Norway's stunning countryside and an exciting and inviting wilderness region famed for the Lillehammer Winter Olympics of 1994. These impressive natural landscapes, paired with the scenic Oslofjord coastline, make for a marvellous activity arena for all kinds of outdoor adventures.

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ness." Opens Jan. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"Treasures of Islamic Manuscript Painting from the Morgan." Through Jan. 29. ♦ "Charles Dickens at 200." Through Feb. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—"Cecil Beaton: The New York Years." Through Feb. 20. ♦ "Kevin Roche: Architecture as Environment." Through Feb. 5. ♦ "The Greatest Grid: The Master Plan of Manhattan, 1811-2011." Through April 15. ♦ "Police Work." Between 1972 and 1979, the photographer Leonard Freed rode in squad cars, hung out in precinct stations, and went to demonstrations, drug busts, and crime scenes in order to document the N.Y.P.D. at work. He also spent time with off-duty officers and their families and colleagues. "I worked alongside and with the police," Freed said. "I 'stole' no pictures." The result is a classic of you-are-there photojournalism—tough, unflinching, and surprisingly evenhanded. Freed captures the routine brutality of police work—the corpse laid out in a tenement hallway, the suspect cornered at gunpoint in a dark vestibule, the prostitute handcuffed to a precinct chair, waiting to pay her fine and go back to the street. He catches four cops manhandling a student demonstrator but also others who let children play in their car. After decades of good-cop, bad-cop TV shows, none of this is news, but it's still strong, shrewd stuff. Through March 18. (Open daily, 10 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"Enrico David: Head Gas." Opens Jan. 18. ♦ "Brian Bress: Status Report." Opens Jan. 18. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Hero, Villain, Yeti: Tibet in Comics." Did you know that the legend of the Abominable Snowman was born in the Himalayas? The mythical creature makes multiple appearances in the comic books on display in this small, charming, and surprisingly informative show. One learns, for example, that the theosophist Madame Blavatsky never set foot in Tibet but spread loads of misinformation about the region, and that T. Lob-sang Rampa, a British man who claimed to be a reincarnated Tibetan monk, wrote about the third eye, which crops up here in a Japanese manga as a formidable asset for a superhero. The dissemination of stereotypes is inescapable (and often amusing): Mickey Mouse and Goofy travel to "Yakety-Yak" and drink endless cups of butter tea; Lara Croft, the Tomb Raider, chases a mandala thief. But other comics are more faithful to Tibet's true culture and history—Eva van Dam's beautifully drawn graphics depicting the life of the Buddhist yogi Milarepa borrow from Tibetan scroll paintings and allude to the ongoing political strife there. Through June 11. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Queens (718-361-1750)—"Scene, Hold, Ballast: David Maljkovic and Lucy Skaer." Through March 19. ♦ "In Practice: You Never Look at Me from the Place from Which I See You." Through March 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"The Bearden Project." Through March 11. ♦ "Kira Lynn Harris: The Block/Bellona." Through May 27. (Open Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

KELLY ANDERSON-STALEY

The subjects of Anderson-Staley's tintype portraits are men and women whom she calls "hyphen

Americans"—people of mixed race or ethnicity, products of the proverbial melting pot. More than a hundred of them confront the viewer here, most often eye to eye, in a salon-style installation of images large and small, unframed and untitled. Because the tintype requires a long exposure, the sitters' expressions tend to be intensely focussed, thoughtful, and grave. Maybe that's why it's easy to see these contemporary Americans as historical figures, a response that's reinforced by the antique nature of the prints themselves. Anderson-Staley's subjects all have strong individual presences, but it's their collective impact that impresses. Through Feb. 9. (Palitz Gallery, Lubin House, 11 E. 61st St. 212-826-1449.)

"LATE MEDIEVAL PANEL PAINTINGS: MATERIALS, METHODS, MEANINGS"

The power and the charm of this bonanza of obscure fifteenth-century religious oil paintings, mostly German, astound. The period is pre-Dürer; its revealed crux is a fervent piety in tension with a tumultuous ingenuity. Gothic motifs shudder under strange new pressures of mind and heart. Most of the artists are anonymous but are identifiable by style—as, say, the Master of the Holy Kinship. Jewel-like color predominates. So does drama. The latest of the works, the incredibly grisly "Torture of the Maccabean Brothers" (circa 1517), illustrates five ways to martyr people, slowly. It is an exuberant, gorgeous work of art. Through Jan. 27. (Feigen, 34 E. 69th St. 212-628-0700.)

Short List

DAMIEN HIRST: Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Feb. 18. **RASHID JOHNSON:** Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970. Through Feb. 25. **VIVIAN MAIER:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Jan. 28. **FAUSTO MELOTTI:** Mathes, 22 E. 80th St. 212-570-4190. Through Feb. 4. **DANA SCHUTZ:** Gallery Met, Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-799-3100. Through May 12. **DOUG WADA:** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 212-541-4900. Through Feb. 11. **JORDAN WOLFSON:** Zachary/Currie, 16 E. 77th St. 212-628-0189. Through Feb. 18.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

"LOOKING BACK"

Let museums have their biennials, quadrennials, and duodecennials—the White Columns annual, now in its sixth year, just might trump them all with its localist focus on New York's gallery trenches. This year's curators, the artists Ken Okishi and Nick Mauss, strike a collegial note at the outset, with a boisterous painting by the German nonagenarian Maria Lassnig of a man and a woman giving viewers two big thumbs up. Togetherness is one of the shows many threads. Margaret Lee's zingy photographs were each made in collaboration with a different artist; Adrian Piper exhibits snapshots of herself posing with groups; a video by Loretta Fahrenholz and Emily Sundblad proves that the latter should consider a second career as a torch singer. But it's a different kind of crossover that provides the show with its big revelation (and its aching heart): a selection of works by the transgender artists Chloe Dzubilo, Siobhan Meow, Josie Collins, Donna Collins, T De Long, and Sid Branch, all of which were originally exhibited at the Umbrella Arts gallery. Through Feb. 18. (White Columns, 320 W. 13th St. 212-924-4212.)

Short List

AI WEIWEI: Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 212-752-2929. Through Feb. 4. **LAWRENCE FANE:** Danese, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227. Through Feb. 4. **GUNTHER FÖRG:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Opens Jan. 19. **JASON FOX:** Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through Feb. 25. **DAN GRAHAM / COREY MCCORKLE:**

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK PERFECT LADY

In 1985, a performer named Lady Bunny founded Wigstock, in New York's Tompkins Square Park, and the dream was this: drag artists like Bunny and RuPaul (then relatively unknown) would share the stage with fabulous pop



stars such as Deee-Lite and Deborah Harry to promote wigs, glitter, sexual and racial tolerance, and a better understanding of the queer life. With outfits and hairdos that amounted to more than simple sight gags, Lady Bunny was the m.c. who held Wigstock together, while audiences watched the late Leigh Bowery "give birth" onstage and grooved to Tabboo!'s very particular bent. Now, six years after the last Wigstock, the Chattanooga native is doing her own thing, in "That Ain't No Lady!," at Escuelita. In it, Lady Bunny flashes her combination of devil-may-care bravado and happy mean-girl seductiveness, which adds up to a lot of fun, and a surfeit of knowing wickedness. As she dances and lip-synchs to popular tunes, you can't help but notice her towering blond do. Will it topple, or will you?

—Hilton Als

Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through Feb. 11. **DAMIEN HIRST:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111; Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through Feb. 18. **ON KAWARA:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Feb. 11. **VIVIAN MAIER:** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through Feb. 25. **NICK MAUSS:** 303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121. Through Feb. 18. **SHIRIN NESHAT:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Feb. 11. **JOYCE PENSATO:** Petzel, 537 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Feb. 25. **THOMAS SCHEIBITZ / MAT COLLISHAW:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Feb. 18. **"INTERIORS: BONNARD, CHAIMOWICZ, COPLEY, VUIL-LARD":** Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849. Through Feb. 11.

GALLERIES— BROOKLYN

"BROKEN HOMES"

The fundamental need for home—whether physical shelter or psychological refuge—is the subject of this affecting group show. Francis Cape juxtaposes photographs of post-Katrina wreckage in New Orleans with pristine sculptures of dismantled furniture—a table, a bed frame—to poignant effect. Pictures by Anthony Marchetti document casualties of a different nature: tract houses vacated because of foreclosure. Lisa Kirk built a makeshift bar from materials salvaged from stalled development projects. A video of Kate Gilmore hurling furniture around in high heels and a strapless dress injects some dark humor, as does Marni Kotak's replica of a holiday hearth, complete with a picture frame engraved with a quote from her mother: "I am not apologizing for being me." Through Jan. 22. (Momenta, 359 Bedford Ave. 718-218-8058.)

Short List

DANA BELL / ALASDAIR DUNCAN / DON VOISINE: Theodore, 56 Bogart St. 212-966-4324. Through March 4. **DAWN CLEMENTS:** Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144. Through Feb. 12. **TAMARA GAYER / STEPHEN SOLLINS / HEESEOP YOON:** Smack Mellon, 92 Plymouth St. 718-834-8761. Opens Jan. 21. **"THE BEST OF 2012":** Soloway, 348 S. 4th St. 347-776-1023. Through Feb. 5. **"ILLEGITIMATE AND HERSTORICAL":** A.I.R. Gallery, 111 Front St. 212-255-6651. Through Jan. 28.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The winter repertory season begins with two full programs of crowd-pleasing Balanchine, including "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," based on a bittersweet tale by Hans Christian Andersen, and the all-Gershwin "Who Cares?" The more cerebral but no less joyful "Le Tombeau de Couperin," for eight couples, divided into two quadrilles, is a suite of dances inspired by French courtly forms (the minuet, the *forlane*) but also by American square dancing. Set to Ravel's wistful music, this is one of Balanchine's loveliest works, and it is not performed often enough. A jazzier side of Ravel will be revealed in Jerome Robbins's "In G Major" (part of an all-Robbins program), a sunny ballet with maritime palettes and costumes designed

by Erté. And Peter Martins's subaqueous love story "Ocean's Kingdom," with a score by Paul McCartney, returns to the stage for several performances; viewer discretion is advised. ♦ Jan. 18 at 7:30: "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Union Jack." ♦ Jan. 19 at 7:30: "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "Ocean's Kingdom," and "Who Cares?" ♦ Jan. 20 at 8: "In G Major," "In Memory of ...," and "The Concert." ♦ Jan. 21 at 2: "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Le Tombeau de Couperin," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "The Concert." ♦ Jan. 21 at 8: "Ocean's Kingdom" and "Union Jack." ♦ Jan. 22 at 3: "Who Cares?" and "Union Jack." ♦ Jan. 24 at 7:30: "Ocean's King-

dom" and "Union Jack." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through Feb. 26.)

KEELY GARFIELD DANCE

Danspace Project presents an expanded version of "Twin Pines," a 2010 work that Garfield began thinking about during a silent retreat, while confronting the noise of her mind. But all of the British-born choreographer's productions tend to be hallucinatory mindscapes, inscrutable and frequently compelling, and laced with acid wit. This one draws upon myths of metamorphosis—specifically, of humans turning into trees—

with a cast of regulars (including Omagbitse Omagbeni) who are not easily overwhelmed by Garfield's punk charisma. (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 19-21 at 8.)

"DANCE FROM THE HEART"

In this benefit for Dancers Responding to AIDS, the worthiness of the cause is largely matched by the high calibre of the participants. The first evening's extensive lineup includes Kyle Abraham, Michael Trusnovic, and New York City Ballet's Janie Taylor and Jared Angle. The second evening boasts Jodi Melnick, Rennie Harris Puremovement, and American Ballet Theatre's Matthew Prescott and Misty Copeland. (Cedar Lake, 547 W. 26th St. 212-868-4444. Jan. 23-24 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

"PROPHETS OF FUNK"

This work by David Dorfman honors Sly and the Family Stone. With the dancers tricked out in Afro wigs, and a visual design that features psychedelic projections, the piece's funk is part stale, part fresh—more successful in channelling the band's populist goofiness than in handling the dark forces that broke up the party. The dance, which premiered at Connecticut College last February, was performed at Lincoln Center Out of Doors this past summer, in a special concert with the Family Stone. Here, the classic recordings must suffice. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 24 at 7:30. Through Jan. 29.)

OUT OF TOWN

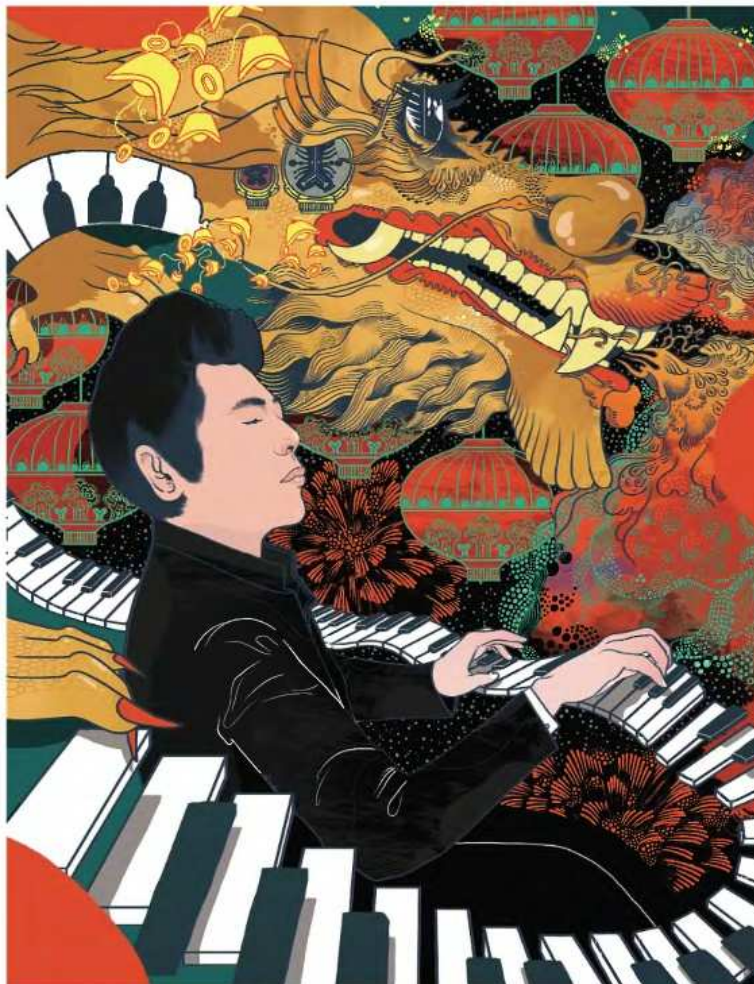
BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY

Retired from dancing but still a fine storyteller, Jones adopts the structure of John Cage's 1959 "Indeterminacy," but, whereas Cage read ninety one-minute stories, Jones's "Story/Time" sticks to seventy. They're journal-like, and centered, naturally, on Jones himself: his life, his thoughts. As the choreographer reads, seated at a small desk, his excellent dancers perform excerpts from Jones's oeuvre. Ted Coffey plays a score that is easier on the ear than David Tudor's, while a clock above Jones's head shows us the time elapsed, keeping the form in mind. (Alexander Kasser Theatre, Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 3. Through Jan. 29.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Luc Bondy's 2009 production of "Tosca," which replaced the sturdy and much loved Zeffirelli staging, is hardly a favorite, but the management continues to cast it strongly. This revival features the company regulars Patricia Racette and James Morris in the



Lang Lang celebrates the Chinese New Year with the Philharmonic.

dom" and "Union Jack." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through Feb. 26.)

MILLS/WORKS DANCE

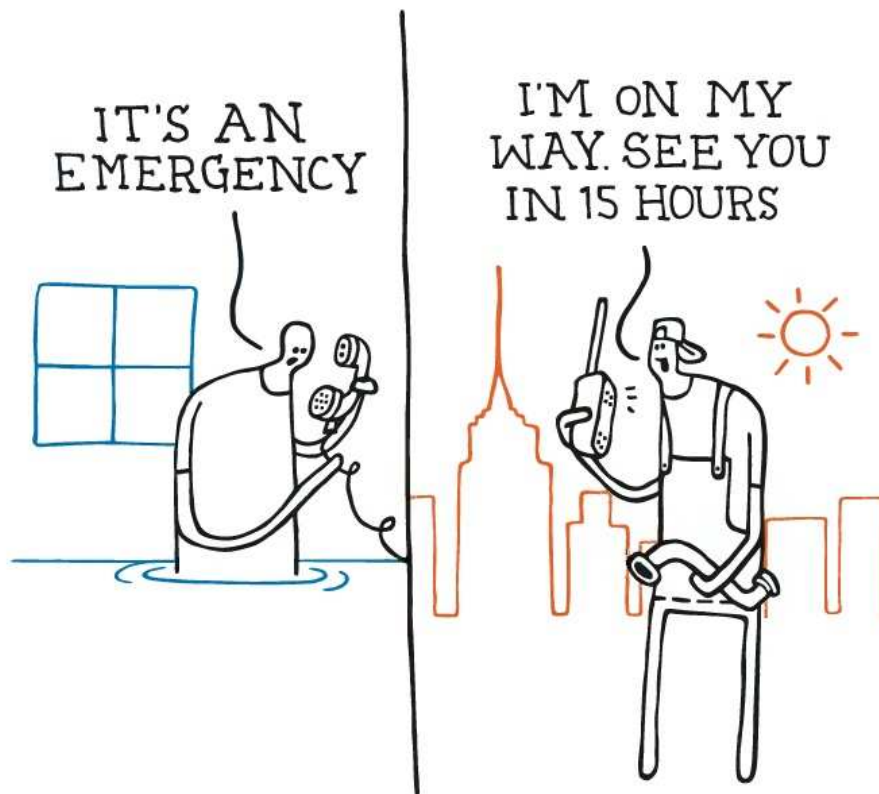
Joseph Mills debuts "Questions About Angels," at Theatre for the New City. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-254-1109. Jan. 18-21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 3 and 8.)

YAA SAMAR!

The Palestinian-American choreographer Samar Haddad tends to tackle big issues and sticky situations in her works, which are as much theatre as they are dance. "The Store" homes in on the moment at which the lives of a diverse group of city-dwellers intersect in a burst of violence at a corner deli. Through a series of video projections, fragmentary internal dialogues, and vigorous choreography, Haddad attempts to examine the essential struggle for survival under extreme circumstances. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 19-21 at 7:30 and Jan. 22 at 2.)

FLICFEST

The acronym FLIC stands for Feature-Length Independent Choreography—no excerpts, no multi-artist showcases. Now in its second year, the Brooklyn festival presents twelve little-known choreographers or companies in ten days, two selections per evening, chased by a late-night cabaret. Up first are



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roles of Tosca and Scarpia, with a relative newcomer, the strong Latvian tenor Aleksandrs Antonenko, as Cavaradossi; Mikko Franck conducts. (Jan. 18 and Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 24 at 7:30.) ♦ Des McAnuff's new production of "Faust" may be problematic in the extreme, but at least audiences should enjoy a feast of fine singing when Joseph Calleja, who possesses the most honeyed lyric-tenor voice of his generation (and who can sing French just fine), takes the title role and the veteran basso Ferruccio Furlanetto, who is never less than commanding, replaces René Pape as Méphistophélès. Marina Poplavskaya, as Marguerite, triumphs, as usual, over her vocal flaws to create a compelling three-dimensional portrait; Alain Altinoglu. (Jan. 19 at 7:30. This is the final performance.) ♦ The Met's newest confection is "The Enchanted Island," a lighter-than-light (though overlong) Baroque pasticcio with a fresh, faux-Shakespeare text by the writer Jeremy Sams, retrofitted to preëxisting music, operatic and otherwise, by Handel, Rameau, and the Met débutants Vivaldi and Leclair; the starchy cast features such singers as Danielle de Niese, Lisette Oropesa, Joyce DiDonato, David Daniels, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Plácido Domingo, and Luca Pisaroni. Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch supervise the production; the eminent Baroque *maitre* William Christie conducts. (Jan. 21 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

New York's flagship orchestra maps out a busy week with multiple agendas. The main event is a program with the world's most popular pianist, Lang Lang; he collaborates with Alan Gilbert and the ensemble in Bartók's incisive Second Piano Concerto, the centerpiece of a program bookended by two colorful and propulsive works, Magnus Lindberg's "Feria" and Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 in B-Flat Major. (Jan. 18-19 at 7:30 and Jan. 20-21 at 8.) ♦ Lang Lang is not only a piano phenom but also a celebrity ambassador representing a country with a booming classical-music culture. As the soloist in Liszt's rollicking Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-Flat Major, he headlines an inaugural venture for the Philharmonic, a Chinese New Year gala, which also features starring roles for the bamboo flutist Tang Jun Qiao, the Philharmonic's own principal oboist, Liang Wang (performing Chen Qigang's "Extase," for oboe and orchestra), and the Quintessence Mongolian Children's Choir; Long Yu, the music director of the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, among other groups, makes his Philharmonic conducting debut. (Jan. 24 at 7:30.) ♦ The formidable German violinist Frank Peter Zimmermann, the Philharmonic's artist-in-residence this season, will play Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the ensemble later in the month; this week, he performs with several of the orchestra's principal players in an all-Brahms chamber program (featuring the pianist Enrico Pace) that includes two of the composer's early masterworks: the melancholy Horn Trio and the ebullient String Sextet No. 1 in B-Flat Major (with his friend Alan Gilbert sitting in on viola). (Jan. 22 at 3.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "STRAVINSKY OUTSIDE RUSSIA"

Leon Botstein's latest concert with his intrepid orchestra is typically overstuffed, this time with prize Stravinsky, all written after the composer's departure from his homeland, just before the onset of the First World War—a disparate group that includes early rarities ("Zvezdoliki," "Mavra"), late twelve-tone works ("Requiem Canticles," "Canticum Sacrum"), and a repertory landmark (the "Symphony of Psalms"). The soloists include the soprano Anne-Carolyn Bird, the tenor Nicholas Phan, and the actor John Douglas Thompson (the narrator in the brief oratorio "Babel"), in addition to the Collegiate Chorale Singers. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 20 at 8.)

RUSSIAN CHAMBER CHORUS OF NEW YORK: "TCHAIKOVSKY AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES"

"Protégés" would be more accurate, since the other composers on this program—Rachmaninoff, Arensky, and Taneyev—were all devoted younger colleagues

of Tchaikovsky, who represented to them an ideal mixture of Russian authenticity and Western technique. Among the gems on the conductor Nikolai Kachanov's program are excerpts from Tchaikovsky's "Nine Sacred Pieces" and the opera "Iolanta," a choral arrangement of Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise," and Arensky's intriguingly scored Three Quartets for Chorus and Cello. (Church of St. Joseph in Greenwich Village, Sixth Ave. at Washington Place. 212-928-1402. Jan. 22 at 3:30.)

RECITALS

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG: "INVITATION TO THE DANCE"

Once a year, NYFOS's director, Steven Blier, who is also a distinguished member of Juilliard's faculty, puts on a concert with several of the school's stand-out singers. This time, he shares the limelight with the choreographer Jeanne Slater, who will train Blier's nine young vocalists to put on a kind of Broadway-classical "Glee"—performances of songs by such composers as Berlin, Gershwin, Previn, Sondheim, and Brahms (from the "Liesbeslieder" and "Neue

TABLES FOR TWO DO OR DINE

1108 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn (718-684-2290)—It's not every day that you find a restaurant with both a Michelin rating and a New York City Sanitation Grade B in the window. But, then, Do or Dine, in Bed-Stuy, is odd and aggressively irreverent in almost every way, from its name, a play on the fading motto of the neighborhood ("Bed-Stuy do or die," a rhyme made famous by Biggie Smalls and Lil' Kim), to the décor, which includes trompe-l'oeil wood-grain wallpaper, a rotating disco ball, and a poster of a fallen Sonny Liston at the feet of a triumphant Muhammad Ali, with a dialogue bubble that reads, "David Chang is my favorite food!" Cocktails are listed under the heading "Drinks," and one of the weirdest and most popular is a shot of whiskey served with a homemade pickle-juice chaser, which, through the magic of molecular gastronomy, has been transformed into something chemically and aesthetically very much like an egg yolk; you shoot the whiskey and then pop the slimy green sphere into your mouth, where it bursts into action.

The food is just as berserk, but it also happens to be mostly delicious. A starter called "E666S" consists of culantro-and-bacon-infused deviled eggs that are deep-fried and topped with red dots of sriracha, giving them the distinct appearance of small tempura breads. "George's Steak Tartare" comes with "Bedford Hill espresso aioli," but the lovely lean meat, which arrives molded into the shape of a cow, doesn't

Liesbeslieder" Waltzes), with dancing; Michael Barrett joins Blier at the keyboard. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Jan. 18 at 8. Free tickets are available at the Juilliard box office.)

"THE SONG CONTINUES . . ."

Joyce DiDonato (along with the commanding accompanist Warren Jones) is the special guest on the final program of Marilyn Horne's annual festival of song and young singers at Carnegie Hall. Such artists as the mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, the tenor Dimitri Pittas, and the pianist Brian Zeger join her in a recital that features music by Grieg, Brahms, Duparc, and the three masters of American song—Barber (Three Songs, Op. 45), Bowles, and William Bolcom (a world première). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 19 at 7:30.)

92ND STREET Y: "WILL TO CREATE, WILL TO LIVE: THE CULTURE OF TEREZÍN"

The festival, a multidisciplinary celebration of the astonishing creativity of the Jewish artists interned at the Nazi holding camp during the Second World War, concludes its music section this week. Jan. 19 at 8: The poetic Austrian baritone Wolfgang Holzmair joins London's Nash Ensemble, a favorite group at the Y, in a program featuring songs by Pavel Haas ("Four Songs on Chinese Poetry") and Hans Krása, along with a suite from Krása's renowned children's opera "Brundibár," Erwin Schulhoff's Duo for Violin and Cello, and pieces by the Czech masters Smetana (an arrangement of the "Bartered Bride" Overture) and Suk. ♦ Jan. 23 at 8: In the final concert, Holzmair is joined by the superb young pianist Shai Wosner in Viktor Ullmann's setting (for speaker and piano) of Rilke's "The Lay of the Love and Death of Cornet Christoph Rilke," as well as a selection of songs from Mahler's "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"; Wosner also plays several solo piano works by Debussy. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. For tickets and complete schedule, see 92y.org.)

"MUSIC FOR THE AMERICAN WING"

The extensive, multi-year renovation of the Metropolitan Museum's American Wing is finally

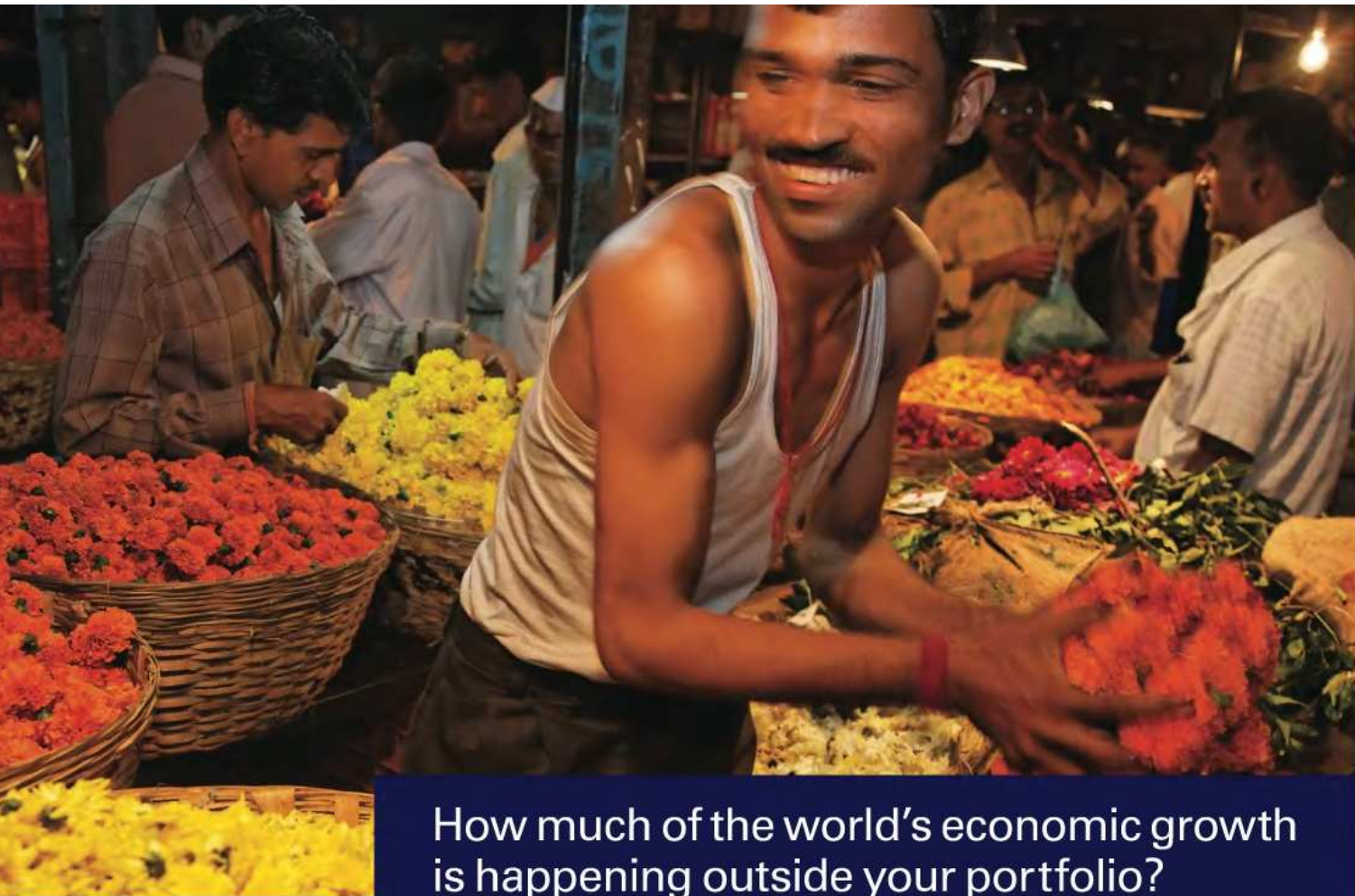


taste anything like coffee. Some of the best dishes are actually the least outlandish. The "Mac 11," two fillets of perfectly cooked mackerel served with enoki mushrooms and slivers of parsnips and carrots in a clear, tangy broth, is a welcome spot of lightness on a menu larded with the fatty, the fried, and the foie-gras-filled. There are goose-liver doughnuts, a sumptuous lamb-breast starter, and a toothsome deep-fried Cornish game hen, named, with characteristic hipster preciosity, "A Chicken and Some Waffles."

It is pretty difficult to leave Do or Dine without feeling very full and very fat, and it would be nice if the chefs devoted any energy at all to vegetables. As it stands, the only options are a bland salad and a very tasty plate of blistered shishito peppers served with four sorts of salt: green tea, wasabi, hickory, and yuzu. But it is unlikely that health-consciousness or even a sense of balance will become a preoccupation of the proprietors anytime soon. A very friendly, profoundly competent waitress informed a table on a recent evening that one of her bosses, inspired by the return of horse slaughterhouses to this country, was eager to put pony on the menu come spring. "I feel like you'll be serving human by summer," a diner remarked. The waitress smiled, put a finger to her lips, and said, "Sh-h-h." (Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$16-\$25.)

—Ariel Levy

complete, and music is called for; the two concerts presented in the Charles Engelhard Court are an extreme study in contrasts. Jan. 20 at 4, 6, and 8: The Asphalt Orchestra is a "radical street band" of brass and percussion players nurtured by the Bang on a Can composers and their record label, Cantaloupe. In three successive marches through the Court (free with museum admission), the musicians play and strut their way through music by Frank Zappa, Stew and Heidi Rodewald, and the hymn composers of the American shape-note (Sacred Harp) tradition. ♦ Jan. 22 at 7: If the Asphalt Orchestra's march captures the energy of the street, then the "Song of America" concert by the baritone Thomas Hampson evokes the distinguished tones of a



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more decorous age. With the exception of a recent setting by Michael Daugherty (of a letter written by Abraham Lincoln), the program consists entirely of gifts from the past—lovely songs by such composers as Ives, Copland, Barber (including “Nocturne”), Bowles, Thomson (“Tiger! Tiger!”), Margaret Bonds, and Elinor Remick Warren. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

EVE BEGLARIAN'S "RIVER PROJECT"

In the autumn of 2009, Beglarian, long an influential New York composer, undertook a kind of personal W.P.A. project—travelling the Mississippi River by bicycle and kayak and absorbing the sights and sounds of Middle America along the

CORIOLANUS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 20. (In wide release.)

THE FLOWERS OF WAR

Christian Bale stars in this Second World War drama, directed by Zhang Yimou, about an American playboy who joins forces with a prostitute (Ni Ni) to rescue Chinese children from Japanese invaders. In Nanjing dialect, English, Japanese, Mandarin, and Shanghaiese. Opening Jan. 20. (In wide release.)

HAYWIRE

A drama, directed by Steven Soderbergh, about an American covert operative who seeks revenge on a colleague who has betrayed her. Starring Gina

Reilly and the snap of locks—these noises resound like the rattle of diabolical spirits, and the exchange of labor and goods for money comes off as original sin itself. Bresson builds a brilliant sequence from an oppressive succession of doors—of a paddy wagon, a store, and a subway car, and the hellish series of barriers that separate a prisoner from his freedom. A spiritual filmmaker, Bresson is fascinated by violence; a non-cinephile, he revives and revises a classic moment from “Psycho” in a terrifying wink and reveals the making and the meaning of a real-life monster. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum; Jan. 18-19.)

THE ARTIST

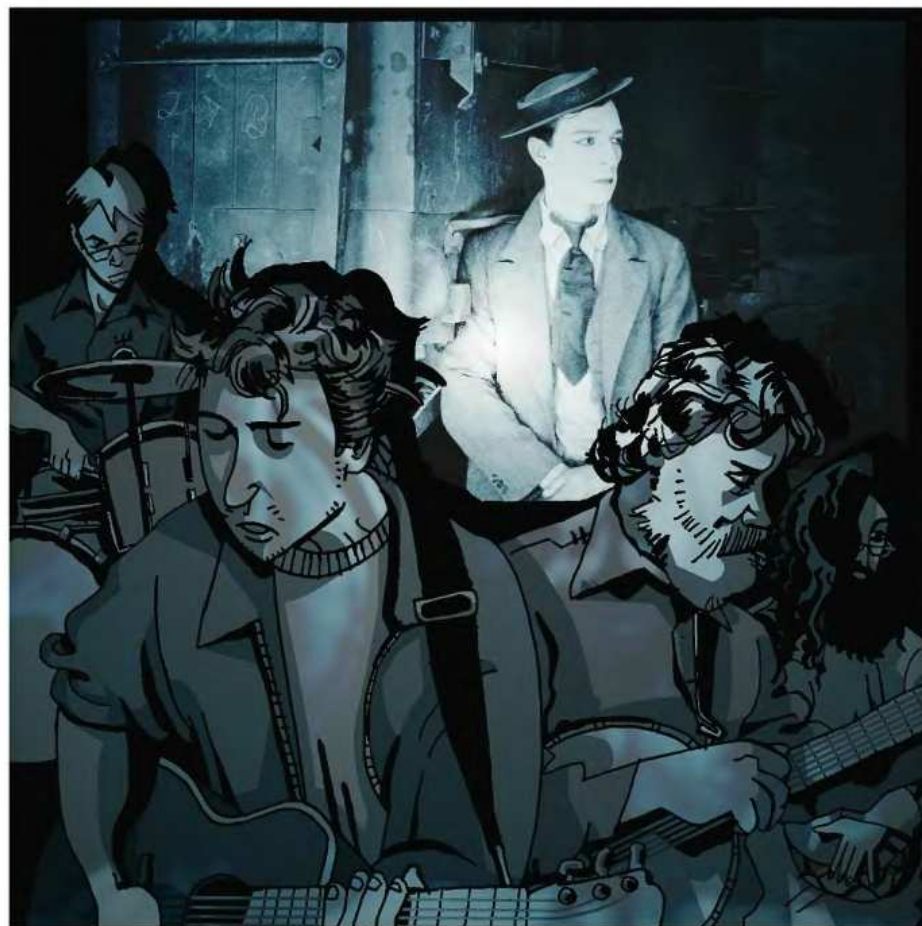
The ideal viewer of Michel Hazanavicius's film would be one who turned up knowing nothing of what was to come; or, at least, who thought that the opening minutes, in silent black-and-white, would soon be set aside, and that a noisy, colorful movie would ensue. Not so: the conceit is maintained throughout, apart from a couple of dizzying interruptions. The story is set in the period that the filmmaking re-creates; we start in the Hollywood of the late nineteen-twenties, where George Valentin (Jean Dujardin), a star of Fairbanksian dash, struggles to hold back the onset of sound, and, in so doing, falls from grace and fame. Helping to keep him alive and to stave off despair are his faithful butler and chauffeur (James Cromwell), his even more faithful hound (the peerless Uggy), and the adoration of a starlet named Peppy (Bérénice Bejo), who once crossed his path before rising to glory herself in the brave new world of talkies. In-jokes, mostly to do with voices and mouths, are strewn like jewels across the film, but the result is far more than an exercise in tangled self-reference or in retro styling; it is an unabashed crowd-pleaser, high on comic momentum, which pays homage to an era, and an industry, that took unprecedented pains to turn mass pleasure into an art. With John Goodman as a studio boss, complete with cigar.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/21/11.) (In wide release.)

EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE

An example of what happens when a literary man's fluent conceits give way to all-too-human people moving and talking in the real-world spaces of a movie. Jonathan Safran Foer's 2005 novel is about a nine-year-old boy, Oskar Schell, who has lost his father in a collapsing tower on September 11, 2001. The boy's voice, as Foer creates it, is a babbling brook of patterned hopes and questions and bits of scientific information on every imaginable subject. It never occurs to us that an actual little boy, however bright, however maddened by grief, could talk this way. In the movie, which was written by Eric Roth and directed by Stephen Daldry, Oskar (Thomas Horn) is fully there, front and center, a skinny kid with blue eyes, irritated by his living mom (Sandra Bullock) and madly in love with his deceased dad (Tom Hanks, seen generously in flashbacks). He rushes around the city trying to open a box or a door with a key that he finds among his father's things, and he never shuts up. Horn rips through the part; verbally, he's very adroit. But photographic and psychological realism destroy Oskar as a character. With all due sympathy, we find him a pain. With Zoe Caldwell, as Oskar's grandmother, and Max von Sydow, as his silent grandfather. The cinematography is by Chris Menges.—*David Denby* (1/16/12) (In wide release.)

THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO

You can't take your eyes off Rooney Mara, who plays the notorious punk hacker Lisbeth Salander in the American movie version of Stieg Larsson's page-turner. Slender, sheathed in black leather, with short ebony hair sticking up in a tuft, her fingers sticking out of black woollen gloves as they skitter across a keyboard, Mara cuts through scene after scene like a swift, dark blade. Salander is a hacker with many piercings—of herself and of others. A good part of the movie is set on a private island controlled by the Vanger clan, a wealthy Swedish industrial family peopled with criminals, perverts, solitary, exiles, dead Nazis, and one grieving old man, Henrik Vanger (Christopher Plummer), who has never got over the disappearance and presumed murder of his grandniece, forty years earlier. In one last try to find the girl, he hires the disgraced investigative reporter Mikael Blomkvist (Daniel Craig) and sets him up on the freezing island, where he's joined by Salander. The movie jumps ahead in short, spiky scenes, punctuated by beautifully edited



Califone accompanies Buster Keaton's "Go West," at Merkin Concert Hall.

way. The result is a three-evening work of “experimental Americana,” in which Beglarian and her violinist colleague Mary Rowell (famed for her work in the downtown quartet Ethel) team up with guest artists; the first evening, featuring “The Island of the Sirens,” brings them together with the wind and brass players of Loadbang (with the baritone Jeffrey Gavett) and Guidonian Hand. (Abrons Arts Center, Grand St. at Pitt St. abronartscenter.org, Jan. 21 at 8.)

MATT HAIMOVITZ AND CHRISTOPHER O'RILEY: "SHUFFLE.PLAY.LISTEN"

The cellist and the pianist bring their latest venture in populism to a suitable venue, the Highline Ballroom, where they'll play an eclectic mixture of pieces by Stravinsky, Janáček, and Piazzolla, as well as O'Riley's arrangements of tunes by Radiohead, Arcade Fire, and John McLaughlin. (431 W. 16th St. highlineballroom.com, Jan. 22 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE CITY DARK

A documentary, directed by Ian Cheney, about the psychological and physical effects of urban lighting. Opening Jan. 18. (IFC Center.)

Carano, Ewan McGregor, Antonio Banderas, Channing Tatum, and Michael Douglas. Opening Jan. 20. (In wide release.)

THE FRUIT-IGOE MYTH

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Jan. 20. (IFC Center.)

RED TAILS

Anthony Hemingway directed this historical drama, about the Tuskegee Airmen, a squadron of African-American combat pilots who fought in the Second World War. Produced by George Lucas; starring Cuba Gooding, Jr., Terrence Howard, and Method Man. Opening Jan. 20. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

L'ARGENT

Robert Bresson's last film, from 1983, adapted from a story by Tolstoy, features Christian Patey as Yvon, an oil-truck driver who is paid by a client in counterfeit bills. Arrested and imprisoned for passing the bills, Yvon loses his family, and when he gets out he is quietly enraged. Bresson captures the moral weight of small gestures in brisk, graphically precise images, and conveys the cosmic evil of daily life through one of the all-time great soundtracks, full of the rustle of bills and the clink of change, the click of a cash reg-

montages of digitized photographs and newspaper articles, and by Mara, head down in the wind, tearing through Sweden on a motorcycle like—well, like a bat out of hell. The movie mixes high-end detective work and sensational sexual scenes (including two rapes). The director, David Fincher (working with a screenplay by Steven Zaillian), stages the brutal sex for horror; the scenes are discomforting, not a turn-on.—*D.D.* (12/12/11) (In wide release.)

GREY MATTER

In the brisk, luminous serenity of middle-class Kigali, Balthazar (Hervé Krimenyi), a wry, intense young Rwandan filmmaker with a bookshelf full of Western classics and a head full of Western movies, prepares to make his first feature film, come what may, and muses about it into the lens of his video camera. Using this setup, the young Rwandan director Kivu Ruhorahoza offers a searing political view of the minor metropolis's cultural modernity and modest prosperity. He shifts from Balthazar to clips of the film that Balthazar is making, which, to the displeasure of the authorities, turns out to be a devastating reflection on recent massacres and their enduring psychic traumas. Ruhorahoza suggests that such terrifying depictions of a society that's sick with violence are incompatible with a forward-looking bureaucratic oblivion; his brilliant ending distills the paradoxes of a false normalcy into a single, stinging shot. In Kinyarwanda and French.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Jan. 19-25.)

A GRIN WITHOUT A CAT

Chris Marker's intellectually elegant film essay from 1978 (which he reworked in 1993), three hours long and composed entirely of archival footage, looks back nostalgically and ruefully at France's 1968 student revolt and situates it in an international political context, in part to understand why it veered off the road of real revolution and became merely a cultural symbol. Using Eisenstein's "Battleship Potemkin" as the cinematic paradigm for socialist uprisings, Marker deftly adduces the Vietnam War as the galvanizing source of outrage for left-wing radicalism everywhere, and Fidel Castro's successful guerrilla war as the model for how such a doctrine should be put into action. The title is Marker's epithet for May, 1968, in Paris: an illusory gesture devoid of physical force to back it up—and he blames the French Communist Party for its unwillingness to take part in a revolution. With brilliant paradoxes born of suave associations of images and a probing, whimsical voice-over, Marker brings together seemingly disparate facts and ideas in surprising, provocative ways (his take on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, in August of 1968, alone is worth the price of admission), even if his ultimate dream of a dictatorship of the proletariat remains, thankfully, nothing more than his self-abnegating fantasy.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 21-22.)

THE HUNTER

Ali (Rafi Pitts) works nights as a security guard in a Tehran factory. No wonder he looks so spaced out as he heads home to his wife, Sara (Mitra Hajjar), and their six-year-old daughter. One day, he finds them absent; disaster, born of bad luck, has befallen the family, and Ali, who blames the police, takes dark revenge. The film shifts from the tangled freeways of the city (which may look oddly familiar to audiences in the U.S.) to a leafy wilderness, where our hero is pursued by police. There is a glum humor at play here, personified by Pitts's long face; he also wrote and directed the film, and his air of lugubrious poise extends to the graceful compositions within the frame. Yet the overall effect is somewhat sapping, and touched with smugness; we are invited to honor Ali's status as a lone wolf but denied anything more than a fleeting grasp of the wider, treacherous world to which his loved ones fall prey. In Farsi.—*A.L.* (1/9/12) (IFC Center.)

THE IRON LADY

As Margaret Thatcher in old age—confined to her home and afflicted with dementia—Meryl Streep turns senescence into poetry. Apart from the great Lear interpreters, Streep has given us the best impression we've had of a potentate suffering from loss of power and fear of madness. Despite Streep's eloquence and wit, however, this bio-pic, written by Abi Morgan and directed by Phyllida Lloyd, is brutally misconceived. A good forty per cent is devoted to Thatcher in her confused dotage. Why? Thatcher may have been wrong about many things and personally disliked, even insufferable, but she changed the culture

of Britain, so why undermine her in this way? There are fleeting glimpses of her early years and some amusing details about her rise to leadership of the Conservative Party. She allows her hair to be teased into a lofty blond arc, a sort of cotton-candy diadem, and her speech, with training, gets heavier and slower; the emphasis landing on selected, morally significant syllables like a hammer hitting an anvil. Yet the movie is careless about Thatcher's actual policies and their effect on the British economy. It's as if the filmmakers believed that her voice alone caused a revolution. With Jim Broadbent, as Thatcher's whimsical husband, Denis.—*D.D.* (1/2/12) (In wide release.)

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE—GHOST PROTOCOL

It tries to out-Bond the Bonds and out-Bourne the Bournes, and it's impersonal as hell but great silly fun—sheer hurtling mechanism. Brad Bird, who directed the Pixar classics "The Incredibles" and "Ratatouille," has gone live-action for the first time, and, working with the cinematographer Robert Elswit, he occasionally attains the freedom of animation with live flesh and crashing metal. He seems particularly obsessed with falling, or the fear of falling. Tom Cruise scales the tallest building in the world (in Dubai), holding on with magnetized gloves, one of which appears to have a dying battery. The rest of the time Cruise runs, which is just as well; he's so tense and will-driven that he can't function as anything but a piston. The plot is utterly trivial: the world is about to be blown up by a "nuclear extremist." (As opposed to a "nuclear moderate"?) With Jeremy Renner, Paula Patton, and Simon Pegg.—*D.D.* (1/2/12) (In wide release.)

PINA

A documentary about the German choreographer Pina Bausch, who died in 2009. There are interviews with some of her dancers from Tanztheater Wuppertal, but the bulk of the film is consumed by their performances of her work, both onstage—where soil is unloaded and raked over the floor for "The Rite of Spring"—and outside, in the surrounding town and countryside. There is neither plot nor narration, but the director, Wim Wenders, has conjured some-

thing as breathless as a thriller; you wait in suspense to discover what fraught or flamboyant gestures will come next. These are granted a startling depth and immediacy by being shot in 3-D; dance, it appears, is ideally suited to the new advances in technology. The performers themselves are of many nationalities and, more important, ages, suggesting that, as in "The Red Shoes," once you start to dance, you never stop.—*A.L.* (12/19 & 26/11) (In limited release.)

THE PRUITT-IGOE MYTH

This devastating documentary, about the St. Louis high-rise public-housing development that went from Great Urban Hope to international disgrace, is an engulfing real-life horror story as well as a testimony to the dominance of the image in American public discourse. The pictures of the thirty-three Pruitt-Igoe buildings imploding during a planned demolition in 1972 have often been used to assert how government subsidies for the urban poor have failed. But the director, Chad Freidrichs, employs evocative archival footage and incisive firsthand reportage to brush away the clichéd and often prejudiced conventional wisdom that puts the blame for the project's demise on its black residents. He lucidly and tenaciously chronicles how government and business re-enforced de-facto segregation and did nothing to stop the collapse of the metropolitan job base, and shows that, once Pruitt-Igoe was up and running, there was little public money available to maintain it. Along with this exposé of hopeless botches and compromises, the movie contains surprising recollections of a brief paradise lost. The photographs of the brand-new Pruitt-Igoe buildings (they opened in 1954) sting with an electric poignancy; we learn that the residents viewed them as wondrous havens before they went horribly awry.—*Michael Sragow* (IFC Center.)

A SEPARATION

A compact and forbidding drama, written and directed by Asghar Farhadi. We find ourselves in the crack that has opened up in an Iranian marriage; Nader (Peyman Maadi) wants things to remain as they are, while his wife, Simin (Leila Hatami), has

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MISSION POSSIBLE



The Roger Miller who sings and plays guitar for Mission of Burma isn't exactly the king of the road. The Boston-based group was thunderously loud onstage but notoriously inconsistent; a live album was named "The Horrible Truth About Burma." Miller dissolved the original group in 1983, partly as a result of his severe tinnitus, but in the past decade he has reunited with the bassist and vocalist Clint Conley and the drummer Peter Prescott to release three more albums, all superbly titled ("OnoffOn," "The Obliterati," "The Sound the Speed the Light") and all strong arguments that the ability to produce a beautiful rush of noise can persist convincingly into middle age. When Mission of Burma plays at the Music Hall of Williamsburg on Jan. 19, expect more recent highlights, such as "1, 2, 3, Party!" and "Nancy Reagan's Head" ("I'm haunted by the freakish size of . . ."), along with the songs that made the band's name the first time around, including "Academy Fight Song," "That's When I Reach for My Revolver," and "That's How I Escaped My Certain Fate."

—Ben Greenman

plans to move abroad, where the living is easier. Stuck between them is their daughter, Termeh (Sarina Farhadi), the most perceptive presence in the film. This volatile state of affairs awaits detonation, and it arrives in the form of Razieh (Sareh Bayat), a devout woman who comes to work for the feuding couple; a string of errors and accidents sets off a shock wave of class, gender, age, faith, and death. The movie, though packed with loudmouths and other exasperated souls, is itself a model of equability, paying due attention to characters great and small. The cinematography, by Mahmoud Kalari, makes cunning use of space, insuring that the film's title reaches far beyond a question of law. In Farsi.—A.L. (1/9/12) (Film Forum and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

SHERLOCK HOLMES: A GAME OF SHADOWS Robert Downey, Jr., and Jude Law reprise their roles as the great detective and his sleuthing partner, Dr. Watson, in the director Guy Ritchie's follow-up to his 2009 hit. The stars' flinty byplay is intact, and, as in the first film, any pleasure to be had depends on one's patience with insistent mugging. The plot pits Holmes against his nemesis, Professor Moriarty (played by the game and underused Jared Harris), and has him outwitting many assassins and untangling needlessly twisted turns; it's complete trash and makes a mockery of Holmes's vaunted deductive reasoning. Ritchie's shooting style doesn't help: relying too heavily on slow motion during scenes of blistering action, he undercuts the momentum that the actors are trying to give the film.—Bruce Diones (In wide release.)

SHOW PEOPLE King Vidor's antic yet wise inside-Hollywood comedy—a late flower of the silent era, from 1928—stars Marion Davies as Peggy Pepper, a naïve Georgia peach with dramatic airs who goes to the studios in search of a career as a tragedian but makes her debut getting pies in the face. She falls in love with a slapstick glad-hander (William Haines), but, when she ascends to thespian fame under the aegis of High Arts Studio, she changes her name to Patricia Peppore and is wooed by her co-star (Paul Ralli), a nominal count (and former waiter). In the resulting complications, Vidor doesn't knock grand romantic drama (of which he was a master) but keeps its feet planted firmly on the ground with an infusion of natural passion. Meanwhile, he offers droll and tangy glimpses behind the scenes, contrasting the threadbare production of knockabout comedies and the richly appointed melodrama sets. Cameos abound: Davies takes a second role, as herself; Vidor plays himself, too; Charlie Chaplin, slight and exquisite, brings a Shakespearean grace to his self-portrayal as a humble moviegoer; and a long tracking shot of stars at a studio banquet table plays like a cinematic death row, displaying such luminaries as Renée Adorée, William S. Hart, and Mae Murray just before they were swept away in waves of sound.—R.B. (Film Forum; Jan. 23.)

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY Tomas Alfredson, who made the masterly "Let the Right One In" (2008), now turns to John le Carré's novel of 1974—a complicated study, as dank and dense as undergrowth, of betrayal in the Britain of the Cold War. A treacherous mole, inserted deep into the Secret Intelligence Service by the Soviets, needs digging out, and so George Smiley (Gary Oldman), a former spy, is summoned from retirement to lead the hunt. The tale required many hours to unfold when it screened on television, in the nineteen-seventies, and the cinematic version is, by definition, a brisker quest; perhaps, however, a certain patient pedantry was essential to Smiley's task, because the new adaptation seems duller and less enthralling. There are four main suspects, played by Toby Jones, Colin Firth, David Dencik, and Ciarán Hinds, but we don't have a chance to assess them one by one: hardly a great buildup to the final revelation. Still, the cast is expert and formidable, with roles for John Hurt, Tom Hardy, and Mark Strong, and the set decoration is a terrifying reminder of an entire era that devoted itself to brown.—A.L. (In limited release.)

WE BOUGHT A ZOO In this genial family entertainment, a widower (Matt Damon) with two kids buys a dilapidated zoo in a lush bit of country somewhere outside San Diego. The property comes with many animals, some of them ill, and a group of oddball keepers—a kind of secondary zoo, although one garlanded with Scar-

lett Johansson, who, relieved of her usual role as a mini Lana Turner, successfully plays a direct, tough-talking keeper who wears a plaid shirt and jeans and carries a heavy set of keys around with her. After his misadventures with "Vanilla Sky" and "Elizabeth-town," the writer-director Cameron Crowe has recovered the sure commercial hand that he demonstrated in "Jerry Maguire." Nothing that happens in the movie is in the least surprising, but it's all likable enough and even touching. The material is based on a true story set in Devon, England. Aline Brosh McKenna collaborated with Crowe on the screenplay.—D.D. (1/16/12) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

CONTRABAND: In wide release. **A DANGEROUS METHOD:** In wide release. **SING YOUR SONG:** IFC Center.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"The Compilation Film." Jan. 18 at 7:30 and Jan. 22 at 8: "The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceausescu" (2011, Andrei Ujica; in Romanian). ♦ Jan. 19 at 6:45 and Jan. 26 at 9:15: "The Schleyer Tape" (1977-78, Klaus von Bruch; in German). ♦ Jan. 19 at 9:15: "The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty" (1927, Esfir Shub; silent). ♦ Jan. 20 at 7:30 and Jan. 25 at 8:45: "Blockade" (2005, Sergei Loznitsa; in Russian). ♦ Jan. 20 at 9 and Jan. 25 at 7: "Revue" (2008, Loznitsa; in Russian). ♦ Jan. 21 at 2:30: "Lithuania and the Collapse of the USSR" (2008, Jonas Mekas). ♦ Jan. 21 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 4:30: "A Grin Without a Cat" (†). ♦ Jan. 22 at 3: Short-film program, including "Perfect Film" (1986, Ken Jacobs). ♦ Jan. 23 at 7: Short films by Santiago Alvarez, including "79 Springtimes of Ho Chi Minh" (1970; in Spanish). ♦ Jan. 23 at 9: "Point of Order" (1963, Emile de Antonio). ♦ Jan. 24 at 7: "Strictly Propaganda" (1991, Wolfgang Kessel and C. Cay Westnick; in German). ♦ Jan. 24 at 9: "Hitler's Hit Parade" (2003, Oliver Axer and Susanne Benze; in German).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Feb. 6: "The Silent Roar." Jan. 23 at 7:45: "Show People" (†). ♦ The films of Robert Bresson. All films are in French. Jan. 18 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10 and Jan. 19 at 1, 2:50, and 4:40: "L'Argent" (†). ♦ Jan. 19 at 7 and 8:40: "Four Nights of a Dreamer" (1971). ♦ Jan. 20-22 and Jan. 24-26 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10 and Jan. 23 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, and 9:30: "A Man Escaped" (1956).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Jacques Perrin. Jan. 24 at 7:30: "Special Section" (1975, Constantin Costa-Gavras; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Through Feb. 26: The films of the Dardenne Brothers. Jan. 20-22 at 11 A.M.: "For the War to End, the Walls Should Have Crumbled" (1982; in French). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." Jan. 17 at 8: "Ticitur Follies" (1967, Frederick Wiseman), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Jan. 18-20 at 1:30: "The Flowers of St. Francis" (1950, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian) and "The Miracle" (1948, Rossellini; in Italian). ♦ "Global Lens." Jan. 19 at 4: "Quarantina" (2010, Oday Rasheed; in Arabic), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Jan. 19 at 7, Jan. 20, Jan. 23, and Jan. 25 at 4, Jan. 21 at 7:30, and Jan. 22 at 5: "Grey Matter" (†).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Feb. 12: The films of David Cronenberg. Jan. 21 at 2: A conversation with Cronen-



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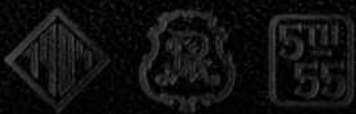
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berg, moderated by the curator David Schwartz. ♦ Jan. 21 at 5: "A History of Violence" (2005). ♦ Jan. 21 at 7:30: "Dead Ringers" (1988). ♦ Jan. 22 at 3: "Stereo" (1969) and "Crimes of the Future" (1970).

92Y TRIBECA

200 Hudson St. (212-601-1000)—"The Cinema Tropical Festival." All films are in Spanish. Jan. 21 at 6:30: "Octubre" (2010, Daniela and Diego Vega). ♦ Jan. 21 at 8:30: "Leap Year" (2010, Michael Rowe). ♦ Jan. 22 at 1: "Nostalgia for the Light" (2010, Patricio Guzmán). ♦ Jan. 22 at 3: "The Tiniest Place" (2010, Tatiana Huezo). ♦ Special screening. Jan. 19 at 7:30: "Broadway Danny Rose" (1984, Woody Allen).

READINGS AND TALKS

"LIVE FROM THE NYPL"

The writer Tariq Ali interviews the director Oliver Stone. (New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 212-930-0855. Jan. 19 at 7.)

92Y TRIBECA

Kenneth Slawenski, the author of "J. D. Salinger: A Life," talks about the reclusive writer. (200 Hudson St. 212-601-1000. Jan. 20 at noon.)

"THE MAKING OF AMERICANS"

In celebration of the opening of 155 Freeman, an arts-and-culture venue, the magazine *Triple Canopy* has organized a marathon reading of Gertrude Stein's classic work. The reading is expected to take about forty-eight hours. Lynne Tillman, Ariana Reines, Jim Fletcher, Amy Sillman, Timothy Hull, and other writers, actors, and artists have been enlisted to take part, but open slots are being set aside for walk-ins. (155 Freeman St., Brooklyn. For more information, visit canopycanopy.com. Jan. 20, starting at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

KIDS FOOD FESTIVAL

These days, children seem to start very young in sports, music lessons, and other activities, so why not cooking, too? This little gathering at Citi Pond, in Bryant Park, includes a James Beard Foundation Future Foodies Pavilion, with presentations on allergy-free cooking, making mango French toast, and other subjects. There will also be musical performances, a "balanced-plate" scavenger hunt, and tasty treats. The writer and cooking-class entrepreneur Cricket Azima (a co-founder of the festival), the nutritionist and Food Network host Ellie Krieger, and the chefs Jehangir Mehta and Sam Talbot are all expected to participate. (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, visit kidsfood-festival.com. Jan. 21-22, from 10 to 6.)

"THE AFTERLIFE"

Each installment in this new weekly comedy showcase focusses on a death-related theme. The program on Jan. 24 at 9 is led by the performers Emily Heller and Josh Gondelman, with help from the comedians Zach Sims, Mark Normand, and Ashley Brooke Roberts. Attendees should come prepared with handbags—the subject will be Hell. (Sidewalk Café, 94 Avenue A. 212-473-7373. No tickets necessary.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The Winter Antiques Show, a fixture of the New York art and society calendar, returns to the Park Avenue Armory for its fifty-eighth edition, Jan. 20-29. More than seventy top dealers from the U.S. and Europe will present their wares in elaborate, gallery-like stalls, showing everything from seventeenth-century New England furniture to Old Master paintings, weathervanes, African masks, and antiques. (Park Ave. at 66th St. 718-665-5250.) ♦ After a short

break, the auction houses get back to business with a week of austere, sensible sales of Americana. Sotheby's combines silver, folk art, porcelain, and furnishings in a two-day sale (Jan. 20-21) featuring a portrait of a comely young girl in a bright-red dress by the Connecticut folk painter Ammi Phillips, as well as a pair of silver goblets crafted for Governor William Stoughton, the colonial magistrate who presided over the Salem witch trials (buyers beware). The final sale (Jan. 22) is a curiosity, a group of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century embroideries created by well-to-do young ladies, for whom needlepoint was the ultimate sign of a proper education; the collection features several "mourning" embroideries, including one memorializing President Washington. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ As is its wont, Christie's subdivides its Americana sales into various smaller groupings, starting (on Jan. 19) with an offering of silver—led by a silver wine cooler commissioned by George Washington and subsequently given to Alexander Hamilton—and followed by a complete set of Audubon's "Birds of America" (Jan. 20), purchased by the fourth Duke of Portland and owned by his family for several generations. (It is apparently one of only thirteen sets currently in private hands.) The Audubon sale will take place on the same day as two furniture auctions (featuring a good number of Chippendale pieces, as usual); then it's on to Chinese export porcelain (Jan. 23-24). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

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ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES

THERE WILL BE MUD

Feb. 3-8

The Hungarian director Béla Tarr—whose seven-hour-long "Satantango," set in the ruins of a communal farm, is one of the landmarks of the modern cinema—says that his most recent film, "The Turin Horse," which opens here later this year, will be his last. Film Society of Lincoln Center offers a complete retrospective of Tarr's work, including his 1982 adaptation of "Macbeth," which is done in only two long takes. (212-875-5610.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

AFTER-PARTY

Feb. 4-March 28

For many young composers, classical music has given way to post-classical, a genre more open to the influences of pop, electronic, and world music. The Ecstatic Music Festival, at Merkin Concert Hall, includes performances by the Wordless Music Orchestra, Anonymous 4, and others. (kaufman-center.org.)

THE THEATRE

FATHER FIGURE

Feb. 13

Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Willy Loman in a

revival of Arthur Miller's 1949 masterpiece, "Death of a Salesman," directed by Mike Nichols, at the Barrymore. Linda Emond co-stars as Linda Loman, and Andrew Garfield, in his Broadway debut, plays Biff. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE

UNPLUGGED

Feb. 15

The great Irish fiddler Kevin Burke inaugurates the World Music Institute's "Acoustic Wednesdays" series, at Symphony Space's Thalia Theatre, which features a concert and a chat. (worldmusicinstitute.org.)

ART

GENERATION NEXT

Feb. 15-April 22

The New Museum's first triennial, in 2009, was cheekily titled "Younger Than Jesus." This year, in the wake of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, the curator Eungie Joo opts for a more pointed—if no less irreverent—theme: "The Ungovernables." Thirty-four artists and collectives, many of whom have never shown before in the U.S., will participate. (212-219-1222.)

Philip Seymour Hoffman in "Death of a Salesman," at the Barrymore.

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT RUNNING WILD



On the second Tuesday in March sixty years ago, Republican primary voters in New Hampshire had a choice of two major candidates. One was the former Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was supported by a cabal of moderate Easterners, including the two-time Presidential nominee Thomas E. Dewey and the editorial board of the *New York Herald Tribune*. His opponent, Senator Robert A. Taft, of Ohio—the older son of former President William Howard Taft—was the early favorite, and had the backing of the *Manchester Union-Leader* and of conservatives generally. Eisenhower hadn't campaigned in the state—he was still headquartered in Europe—but, when the ballots were counted, he had forty-seven thousand votes to Taft's thirty-six thousand. That didn't settle the nomination, but it did move Eisenhower persuasively forward.

The Party didn't really like Ike. He was a career soldier who had come out as a Republican only that January, and many in the G.O.P. believed that he wasn't truly one of them, although they could see that he was more electable than his chief opponent. (Many Republicans today view Mitt Romney, who won the

New Hampshire primary last week, and is now the likely nominee, in much the same way.) They did like the reliable, somewhat isolationist Taft (he opposed NATO), who favored old-age pensions and public housing. But the Party, and Taft, came to terms with Eisenhower. His choice for Vice-President, Richard M. Nixon, of California, pleased the Old Guard, who admired Nixon's Red-hunting prowess, and it satisfied the need for someone who shared Eisenhower's outlook on foreign policy, which was deeply internationalist.

The Republican Party seems to have always been divided between moderates and conservatives, but until recently the Party of Lincoln (as it liked to call itself) had never completely lost its bearings. Even when it was bitterly divided—as it was in 1964, when Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller competed—it toler-

ated loopy views, but not from its serious Presidential contenders. During the 1952 Convention, held during a steamy July week in Chicago, General Douglas MacArthur, having traded his celebrated military career for the temptations of politics, gave a keynote address in which he said that the Democratic Party "has become captive to the schemers and planners who have infiltrated its ranks of leadership to set the national course unerringly toward the socialistic regimentation of a totalitarian state." Senator Joe McCarthy, of Wisconsin, declared that the Truman Administration had "built up Russia while tearing down the strength of America," for which he blamed a "combination of abysmal stupidity and treason." All this goofy music had a sort of rhythm section provided by people like Senator William Ezra Jenner, of Indiana, who believed that a "secret invisible government" was leading the United States to destruction, and that the United Nations had managed to infiltrate the American educational system. Yet though the McCarthys and the Jenners were given time on the podium, they knew their place—and it was behind the Eisenhowers and the Tafts.

The Party wasn't one in which leading Presidential candidates facing an unprecedented deficit would promise not to raise taxes, or would promote "free enterprise," as Rick Perry and Newt Gingrich claim to do, while attacking a competitor for enriching himself by practicing tooth-and-claw capitalism. (Supporters of Perry and Gin-



grich produced and distributed the “independent” documentary “When Mitt Romney Came to Town,” which portrays him lurking in the shadows as a sort of Ted Bundy-like serial killer of the job market.) The Party has long had an attachment to social issues, but no serious Presidential candidate has been quite so unsparing about the private behavior of others as the man Tony Soprano called “Senator Sanitorium.”

Romney seems at first and second glance to belong to a more sober tradition, if only because he brings with him a penumbra of pragmatism and a moderate record as a one-term governor. But little that he says today deviates from the Party’s prevailing hard-line tenets: no new taxes, a blanket repeal of “Obama-care,” the appointment of Supreme Court Justices committed to repealing *Roe v. Wade*, a pledge to cut billions of dollars in unspecified spending for entitlements, little sympathy for gays. Latching on to these views seems to have been easy for Romney, which gave rise to the complaint that he is driven less by personal beliefs than by the demands of his party’s ideological outliers. Perhaps he inherited a flip-flop gene from his father, George, the Michigan governor and Presidential candidate, about whom, in 1967, General Eisen-

hower said, “He has been on so many sides of so many questions that one begins to wonder just where he does stand. He sounds like a man in a panic. And a man who panics is not the best candidate for President.” Republicans have left a little room for diverse views, such as the neo-isolationism and currency fixations of Ron Paul. But that’s about it for the “big tent” that the late Republican strategist Lee Atwater once celebrated; today, the only tent that comes to mind is one that houses a circus.

In 1959, Vice-President Nixon, speaking to members of California’s Commonwealth Club, was asked if he’d like to see the parties undergo an ideological realignment—the sort that has since taken place—and he replied, “I think it would be a great tragedy . . . if we had our two major political parties divide on what we would call a conservative-liberal line.” He continued, “I think one of the attributes of our political system has been that we have avoided generally violent swings in Administrations from one extreme to the other. And the reason we have avoided that is that in both parties there has been room for a broad spectrum of opinion.” Therefore, “when your Administrations come to power, they will represent the whole people rather than just one segment of the people.”

Ten months before the general election, the increasingly angry, suspicious, and divided party of Romney, Gingrich, Santorum, and Perry seems ever more immersed in its current orthodoxies. None of the candidates, though, seem the least bit interested in even addressing how they, or their party, might actually govern the “whole people” of a fractious nation.

—Jeffrey Frank

REBOOT KNOW YOUR THATCHER



In election years, Margaret Thatcher, whom Americans remember facing down the Soviets and waltzing with Ronald Reagan (he called her “the best man in England”), makes a trusty reference. Hillary Clinton, smarting from Barack Obama’s jibes at her personality in 2008, invoked Thatcher as a feminist role model. “Guess who stepped to the plate in 1990? Margaret Thatcher,” she said, before continuing, “I don’t know how likable she was.” Now Mitt Romney’s campaign has retooled Thatcher’s old slogan “Labour Isn’t Working” as an indictment of Obama’s record on jobs. Campaigning on January 6th in New Hampshire, Romney cited Thatcher’s maxim on socialism: “‘Sooner or later, you run out of other people’s money.’”

But, in Britain, Thatcher remains a singularly inflammatory figure, as evidenced by the reception of “The Iron Lady,” the film starring Meryl Streep as an aged, doddering Thatcher, watching home videos in her housecoat and drinking too much Scotch. In its opening weekend, the film took in more than three million dollars in the United Kingdom. (Helen Mirren’s “The Queen” earned about a third as much, in 2006.) To many Brits, this latest wave of fixation on Thatcher, who is eighty-six and suffers from dementia, felt strange, reviving an era, and arguments, that they thought had long been put to rest. “It is twenty-one years since Maggie’s Cabinet drove a stake through her political heart,” Lucy Thornton wrote, in the *Daily Mirror*. “But now she’s back to



MANKOFF

“But why not be happy about all the diseases you don’t have?”

haunt us, a ghostly presence on the silver screen.” In *Chesterfield*, a group of former female coal workers calling themselves the Real Iron Ladies picketed the multiplex. At a press screening, someone stood up and shouted—just after the scene in which Thatcher loses leadership of the Party—“You’re on your own now, bitch!” In the States, “The Iron Lady” is a movie, but in Britain it’s a litmus test.

So: Mrs. T or Margaret Thatcher, Milk-Snatcher? In one corner was the designer Anya Hindmarch, who had decorated the windows of her shop on Pont Street—Tory heartland—with mannequins dressed in cobalt suits, pussy-bow blouses, and pearls, clutching the sort of doughty pocketbooks with which Thatcher was once said to have



Margaret Thatcher

“handbagged” her opponents. (Thatcher lives in the neighborhood and, last summer, Sarah Palin expressed a wish to pay her a visit, which Thatcher’s advisers declined, saying that Palin was “nuts.”) “I am a lifelong fan of Margaret Thatcher,” Hindmarch told *British Vogue*. A two-page spread in the *Evening Standard* charted “the former PM’s colour legacy,” proclaiming that Streep’s outfit at the “Iron Lady” premiere had established Tory blue “as the hottest shade of the moment.”

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, however, praised Streep for “a really staggering piece of acting” but questioned the project’s timing, saying that

it was a film he wished “they could have made another day.” Lord Hurd, the Foreign Secretary under Thatcher, called “The Iron Lady” a “ghoulish spectacle,” and Lord Bell, her P.R. man, told the *Telegraph* that it was “rubbish.”

Presumably in the hope of neutralizing ambient skepticism toward Thatcher, Streep, and/or Streep-as-Thatcher, the film’s P.R. team invited a dozen of Britain’s most influential female journalists to a dinner, to be cooked by Streep. The summons provoked both excitement (“Meryl Streep is 5ft 6in. Does that mean flats for Islington kitchen table supper on Saturday night?” the writer Liz Hoggard tweeted) and puzzlement, as invitees tried to figure out why they’d been singled out for the charm offensive. “I think the assumption was that we would all be broadly sympathetic to the film,” the writer India Knight said.

After a private screening in Soho, the women were given gin-and-tonics for the road and driven to the home of Phyllida Lloyd, the film’s director. “Everyone sort of piled in the taxis and was going, ‘Oh, my God, it’s so revisionist, it’s disgraceful. What is she, Boudicca now?’” Knight recalled.

“But what are we going to say?” the columnist Suzanne Moore wondered. She and some others considered escaping for pizza.

Streep, barefoot and flanked by a dog, greeted the women at the door. There were canapés and nice wine in an upstairs sitting room. The kitchen had an Aga stove. “It was a student supper, but done in a much more swish way,” Hoggard said. “There was no L.A. behavior. Meryl seemed to be drinking as much as anyone else.”

Streep plied the journalists with chicken curry and an American apple pie; she smoked in the garden, gossiped about face-lifts, did the dishes, and, according to Knight, “listened very thoughtfully and carefully to people’s frankly dull domestic anecdotes about their children.” But the evening had its awkward moments. “Somebody with massive, detailed knowledge of the events in Thatcher’s time would sort of sniffily say, ‘Well, that’s not the way things were,’ and then we’d kind of all stare at our chicken curry and somebody would eventually defuse the tension,” Knight recalled.

“The film is beautifully shot, beauti-

fully acted, and it completely missed the point,” Polly Toynbee, a columnist for the *Guardian*, said later. “They’re nice people, and you don’t want to tell them their film’s terrible, so the dinner was pretty excruciating.”

—Lauren Collins

BIG BROTHER DEPT. LOOK OUT ABOVE



Parking rules change. For example, the New York Police Department will sometimes alter the time parameters on a reliable spot. You think your car is good there after, say, 7 P.M., but now, unnoted by you, a new sign says otherwise, and so the morning brings an unexpected summons—another sum unpaid. The city parker must be ever vigilant.

In recent weeks, in select locations around town, new signs have started popping up. In red-and-white, in the standard typeface, the signs, each of them initialled “NYPD,” read: “ATTENTION Drone Activity in Progress” or “ATTENTION Local Statutes Enforced by Drone” or “ATTENTION Authorized Drone Strike Zone 8am-8pm Including Sunday.”

At first, the mind—the noticing kind, anyway—reels. Drones? Strike zone? Even on Sundays? What about Martin Luther King, Jr., Day? Is there such a thing as alternate-side-of-the-street drone-striking? The robot wars: here so soon? You might find yourself glancing up at the sky.

Then the mind—the medicated kind—settles. The cops may have cameras everywhere, and Segways and helicopters, and robots for defusing bombs, but they do not, do they, possess or deploy unmanned drones. They probably will someday, but for now there hasn’t been anything in the news, has there, about an arsenal of drones drifting overhead, spying on us as we jaywalk or binge on trans fats or toss the Automobiles section of the *Times* without so much as a glance.

Well, actually, there was something. A year ago, the *Gay City News* made a Freedom of Information request of the Federal Aviation Administration about

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. It turned up in an e-mail to the F.A.A. from an N.Y.P.D. counterterrorism detective, who was inquiring about permission to fly drones. "Currently, we are in the basic stages of investigating the possible use of UAV's as a law enforcement tool," he wrote. In August, the *Gay City News* ran a story about the possibility of drones in New York. The implications were grand, even if the focus was narrow; the lead read, "Heads up, park cruisers."

This story, among many others that describe more advanced drone operations around the country, caught the eye of a twenty-eight-year-old photographer in Manhattan, whose name, for the purposes of this account, must be redacted. He had served two tours in Iraq as a geospatial analyst for the Army. He'd worked with satellite and drone images to provide maps for troops on the ground. It had been a disillusioning experience. "When I joined up, I was a run-of-the-mill Republican from Maine," he said last week. After his discharge, he became a radical art-school student in New York, one who was particularly dismayed when the Army began to use drones to kill suspected militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and then when he heard that drones were being tested on home soil. "It terrified me," he said. So did a reference that he found online, late last year, to a bulletin advising New York-area pilots to keep an eye open for drones from December 1st to February 29th.

Fear, he felt, was a useful tool. He sought to sow some himself, in order to stimulate discussion about the domestic use of drones. He found a municipal sign manufacturer in a state far from New York, so as not to raise any alarm, and ordered a series of drone-alert parking signs that he'd designed to look as if they'd been issued by the N.Y.P.D. Very late on several nights a few weeks ago, he set out with a crew of five to install the signs in SoHo, the West Village, Chelsea, Dumbo, and Williamsburg. Two of them did the installing; the others were on lookout. They had walkie-talkies and, since they were on an open frequency, communicated in military code.

They put up eleven such signs. Near each one, the geospatial analyst stencilled a saying from a Founding Father. On a red brick wall beside the one on Metro-

politan Avenue, for example, he left these words of Benjamin Franklin's: "They that can give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." He returned during the day to observe and photograph the scene. "A parking sign is so monotonous, but, if you're paying attention, holy crap!" he said. He was planning to head back out with a new batch soon.

Some of the originals disappeared within days. Others survived, such as the one on Mercer Street, just south of Houston—"Local Statutes Enforced by Drone"—in front of which, last Thursday, a U.P.S. truck sat parked, a ticket sprouting from its windshield like a weed. The driver looked at the sign but thought nothing of it. "I just need to deliver these packages," he said. He disappeared for a while. When he returned, he glanced at the sign again and then spent a moment looking up at the sky.

—Nick Paumgarten

UP LIFE'S LADDER MOVING DAY



After nearly eleven years in the East Village, the actor and comedian David Cross was moving on up to Dumbo. As he headed out to take the F train to his new crib, carrying a tape measure to help him determine where his stuff would go, he explained, "I'm really not one of those whiny, annoying people who complain about any change, but there's a 7-Eleven and an IHOP in the East Village now. It could be a suburban mall. Also, I was a younger man when I came here, doing younger-man things." He laughed at the obliqueness of his implicit allusion to his impending marriage to the actress Amber Tamblyn. "I'm trying to be classy about saying 'I don't go out and get laid anymore.'"

On the subway platform, a teen-age African-American girl with a pin piercing her cheek approached him. "You know who you look like?" she said.

"I do," he replied, commiserating. The intrusively bald head, the strangely winning air of petulance—who else could it be?

"You keeping it on the low, or can I scream?"

"Scream? Why would you scream? It's not that big a deal."

"I can't wait to see 'Alvin and the Chipmunks 3,'" she said, referring to the newest installment of the franchise, in which Cross reprises his role as a profoundly insincere record exec.

"Don't," he warned. "It's not very good."

"Yeah, I recognize that smile," she said. She crossed her arms expectantly: Let's see something, funny man.

Cross began to riff some deliberately lame ideas: "Chocolate cheese. No, chocolate-chocolate cheese, and fartsicles—I'll flesh that out later. A dwarf clown with Tourette's has a congenital heart condition, his father died in childbirth—you getting all this?"

Later, as he measured his new marble-topped kitchen island, high above the East River, he said, "Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans recognize me from 'Scary Movie 2' and 'Alvin,' and with whites it's 'Arrested Development.'" Yet his persona transcends demographics: "I've heard 'condescending' so many times—well over a thousand times—that I have to believe it applies. I hear 'aloof' a lot, and 'smug,' and 'a prick.' There's three hundred and ten million Americans, and I don't like most of them. They have no idea that this latest one even exists."

This latest one is "The Increasingly Poor Decisions of Todd Margaret," a scabrous sitcom that Cross created and co-wrote, which just began its second and final six-episode season on IFC. (As a British co-production, it adheres to their common twelve-and-out model.) Cross stars as Todd Margaret, a blustering boob from Portland who arrives in London to sell Thunder Muscle, a toxic North Korean energy drink. The show hinges on Todd's comeuppances: when he asserts his kinship to the Brits by claiming that his father was from Leeds, he then must close a deal in Leeds and feign local familiarity; when he gains sympathy by telling everyone that his father just died, his father walks in the door. Every lie is swiftly punished, and Todd ends up being charged with crimes ranging from murder to espionage to persistent public urination.

"This place is ridiculously big," Cross

said, standing uneasily on the threshold of his huge walk-in closet. "I have one couch, but we need nineteen more. It's a rich person's problem, I guess." He ambled over to the living-room window and took in the view. "Ellis Island!" he said. "My dad went there with his family when he came over from England, shortly after World War Two, I think."

And he was from Leeds?

"Yes," Cross said, the animation draining from his face. "I haven't talked to him since my late teens." The comedian grew up poor in the South, sometimes living with friends between evictions after his father left the family, when Cross was ten. "From what I've heard, he's on the Upper East Side—when I get close to it on my bike, that weird, tingly, Spidey Sense goes off. He'd be about, what, seventy-five now? I'm forty-seven, and he supposedly had me when he was twenty-eight. I don't know, the math may be wrong. Everything he told us was a lie." He picked up his measuring tape and turned back to the empty room.

—Tad Friend

THE BOARDS GROWN UP



"I won't grow up!" is the mantra of many a grad student and Botox injectee, but the line belongs to Peter Pan, and specifically to Cathy Rigby, the former Olympic gymnast who has played the role onstage since 1990. Last month, Rigby and her Lost Boys passed through town for an engagement at the Theatre at Madison Square Garden. Two days before opening, she celebrated her fifty-ninth birthday at Bar Americain with her husband, Tom McCoy, with whom she runs the tour's production company. She wore a chiffon scarf and bright lipstick, with earrings twinkling beneath her blond bob, and looked neither like a little boy nor like a grandmother of four.

Rigby estimates that she has played more than three thousand performances as Peter Pan. Her last stop in New York was in 2005, on her "farewell tour." After a special performance in Missouri

two years ago, she decided that she missed the role and longed to return to Neverland. But she had doubts. "I didn't want age to be a factor," she said, sipping a glass of Pinot Grigio. "I didn't want physical abilities to be an issue. I thought, O.K., how can I be a better dancer, a better flyer, a better little boy, and how can I not get injured?" She hired a trainer, a brawny ex-marine, who put her on a routine of Pilates and cardio. "When I'm on tour, the show keeps me in amazing shape, because the flying is all about core," she went on. "In the very first scene there are three songs, an aerial ballet, 'I Gotta Crow'—you're running around like a small child for the entire first act." By now, she is well versed in the role's physical demands, which include handstands, tom-tom playing, and sword fighting (tennis elbow is a concern). "When you're fighting Captain Hook, you don't just swing wildly," Rigby said. "There's a lot of form to it."

"Cathy's fifty-nine years old today, and she's never been better in this role," McCoy, a folksy-dad type, said. "It's a little frightening! I think she sold her soul to the Devil. She did something bad."

"Maybe I did something good," Rigby said.

"You must be sacrificing chickens in the back yard."

"I'm living with you, honey. That keeps me young," Rigby said, clutching his hand. The couple live in La Habra Heights, California, with two dogs, fourteen koi, twenty-two finches, and a cockatoo.

"We're going to do another tour in ten years," McCoy joked. "She'll be flying in with a walker! I'm telling you, *AARP* should do a big thing about you."

Rigby, laughing this off, ruminated on age: "It's almost a competitive thing with the twenty-year-olds, where you think, If you do ten pull-ups I'm going to do twelve. If you say I can't do it, I will anyway, as Tom will tell you. If you tell me I shouldn't sit on the top of the Empire State Building—as she had earlier that day, at a photo shoot—"I probably will anyway, and get in trouble for it." She said that she took inspiration from Pan's sense of mischief: "As we get older, we tend to put restrictions on ourselves. But I don't believe that anymore. I still believe that anything is possible, and that's

a very Peter Pan kind of wishful thinking."

They were soon joined by Rigby's son Buck Mason (from her first marriage, to the former N.F.L. running back Tommy Mason) and his wife, Dana Solimando, a dancer and choreographer. Buck is the general manager of Rigby and McCoy's production company. He had just been working out the logistics for the flying



Cathy Rigby

effects, which involved extra red tape, thanks to "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark." "This time, there are a lot of hoops to jump through with the Department of Labor," he said. Buck and Dana met thirteen years ago, when both were appearing with Rigby in "Peter Pan." "I was a pirate and an Indian and also the dog and the crocodile," Buck said. "She was Tiger Lily, but Tiger Lily is also the maid. So our show tracks went together the whole time. It was—"

"Love at first sight," Dana said.

"It really was. We spent a year sort of in the trenches together."

Over the years, all of Rigby's children have been involved with "Peter Pan." Her other son, Ryan, played a pirate. Her older daughter, Theresa, who now handles the contracts, was a Lost Boy and Wendy's daughter, Jane. Her youngest, Katie, played a mermaid and is currently the wig supervisor.

Rigby laughed. "So Peter Pan is Tiger Lily's mother-in-law. I'm the crocodile's mom. And my daughter played Jane, so she was the sister-in-law to Tiger Lily."

—Michael Schulman

THE GOOD WIFE

Can Callista Gingrich save her husband?

BY ARIEL LEVY



"The woman is always the grownup," Newt Gingrich says. "I think no matter what."

Eight days before Christmas, on the last non-holiday weekend before the Iowa caucuses, the Republican candidates for President darted across the state, dropping in at factories and shopping malls and pizza parlors, like birds surveying a beach and swooping down for food. But not Newt Gingrich. He was sitting in front of a portrait of George Washington and his horse in the gift shop at Mount Vernon, drinking a Diet Coke next to his wife and a man in an elephant costume. "I'm Callista, and this is Ellis the Elephant," Mrs. Gingrich told one person after another.

About two hundred people had lined up to have the wife of the former Speaker of the House sign a copy of "Sweet Land of Liberty," a children's book she wrote about a patriotic elephant who travels through American history, delivering lessons in rhyming couplets: "Independence was not so easily won./It would take years of fighting and fighting's not fun."

Even for Newt Gingrich, who thrives on conflict, the fighting this primary season has not been that much fun. In December, forty-five per cent of the political ads in Iowa were Gingrich takedowns;

the Super PAC Restore Our Future, which supports Mitt Romney, spent nearly three million dollars on such ads, and in one month Gingrich went from top horse to underdog. Until recently, Gingrich was fond of citing what he called Ronald Reagan's eleventh commandment—"Thou shall not speak ill of fellow-Republicans"—and he often told audiences, "Barack Obama is my only opponent." But since January 3rd, when he came in a distant fourth in the Iowa caucuses, he has found denigrating other Republicans considerably more palatable. "If there's a clear distinction with Santorum, it is that I actually know how to build a nationwide campaign," Gingrich said, on his campaign's press bus in New Hampshire last week. He reserves his real disgust for Romney: at a debate in Concord, Gingrich snarled, "Mitt, I realize the red light doesn't mean anything to you because you're the front-runner," and then suggested that Romney "drop a little bit of the pious baloney." A video released earlier this month by the pro-Gingrich Super PAC Winning Our Future depicts Romney as a heartless corporate raider, to whom "nothing mattered but greed."

At Mount Vernon, though, Gingrich was still at the top of the polls, and his smiling, grandfatherly aspect was on display. Newt, who is sixty-eight, wore a suit with a red tie and a blue lapel pin depicting Washington's Commander-in-Chief flag. Callista, who is forty-five, was dressed in a black skirt and a cherry-red Armani jacket and wore a triple strand of pearls around her neck. As a couple, the Gingriches are a bit like Jack Sprat and his wife in reverse: he is pudgy and soft-featured, with droopy jowls and hooded eyes, while she is slender, with a sharply angled nose and bright-blue eyes that are always wide open. Her hair is platinum blond and very stiff, with one remarkable lock styled into an immobile, upward swoosh.

"Where do you get your hair done?" a red-haired woman asked as she got her book signed.

"At Sugar House in Old Town," Mrs. Gingrich said quietly, referring to a salon in Alexandria. (Her stylist, Tatjana Belajic, told me she has yet to get a request for "the Callista," though that would surely change if Mrs. Gingrich became First Lady.)

"You and I have such beautiful natural color," the redhead said, chuckling conspiratorially. "Yeah, right!"

Mrs. Gingrich kept her face frozen in a smile, but she did not really look amused. "Have you met Ellis the Elephant?"

Callista Gingrich has a firm formality that can be very effective in curtailing conversations she does not wish to engage in. In April, 2010, she appeared with her husband on "Hannity" to promote a documentary they made about Pope John Paul II. (The two of them are partners in a film company, Gingrich Productions, but Callista holds the title of president. "I'm just talent—she does all the hard work," Newt told Sean Hannity.) At the end of the interview, Hannity said to Mrs. Gingrich, who was dressed in a crisp violet suit, "He won't answer this. How do you feel about him running for President?"

She replied, "We haven't talked about that yet."

"Not once? Not even over dinner?" Hannity persisted. "Are you planning on a long discussion about it, maybe in the near future?"

Callista Gingrich raised her eyebrows slightly and replied in the implacable tone of a kindergarten teacher scolding a six-year-old, "We'll discuss it early next year."

Gingrich announced his candidacy in May, and his wife's role in the campaign has been controversial ever since. At the end of the month, Gingrich outraged his staffers by refusing to cancel a cruise through the Greek isles that he and Callista had planned. The campaign had suffered a series of embarrassing reports—that he and his wife had a half-million-dollar line of credit at Tiffany, that he'd been paid nearly two million dollars for consulting work with Freddie Mac—and the staffers were concerned that a luxury cruise to Mykonos would not help make Gingrich seem like a regular guy, or like a serious candidate. Virtually all of them quit. Gingrich has called the months of June and July "the hardest in my career" and credited both his wife and her elephant with keeping him in the race. "One of the things that actually saved us, in addition to Callista's stubbornness, was Ellis the Elephant," Gingrich recently told the *Times*. He might have been speaking of his wife when he described Ellis as

"happy, positive, interesting, creative."

In the gift shop, a young woman wearing a leather jacket and a cross told the former Speaker, "I'm going to vote for you—my first vote!"

Her mother, a woman with long white hair who was wearing a fisherman's sweater and a prairie skirt, nodded and said, "We raised them right."

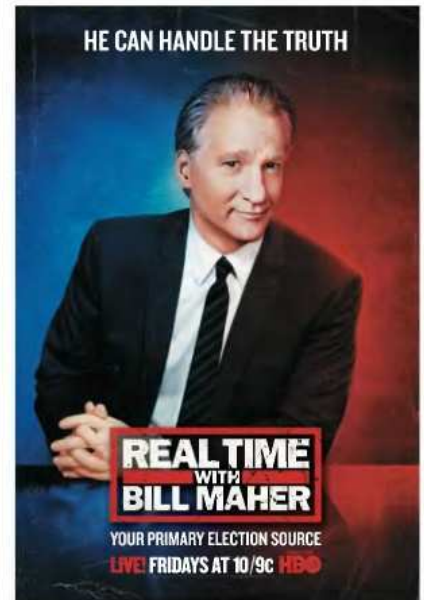
After they'd had their book signed, I asked why they supported Gingrich. "I've read a lot of his books, and he's a very intelligent person," the daughter, a student at Northern Virginia Community College, said. Her mother, who went to work for the Navy after homeschooling her four children, said she was unaware that Callista Gingrich was the former Speaker's third wife—and that he'd had an affair with her for six years before divorcing his second wife, Marianne, and that he'd had an affair with Marianne before he left his first wife, Jacqueline Battley, the mother of his children. The woman and her daughter agreed that Gingrich's committing adultery was between him and God. "But, I mean," the mother said, "I'd prefer he hadn't."

While Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum hustled between events in Iowa, Gingrich stayed home that entire weekend and acted as his wife's date. On the evening after her book signing, he received a round of applause as he entered the Fairfax High School auditorium, near their house in McLean, Virginia, and took a seat in the fourth row. Fairfax is in one of the wealthiest counties in America, and the thousand-seat auditorium looked more like a well-kept theatre than a place for teen-agers to put on Christmas pageants. The hall was nearly full of people who'd come to hear a concert by the City of Fairfax Band, in which Callista Gingrich plays French horn. She looked elegant in a long black skirt, a black jacket with a jewelled clasp, and pearls, seated behind a row of red poinsettias at the edge of the stage. Before the lights went down, she gave her husband a wave and a smile, and then the band launched into the snappy suite from the animated Christmas movie "The Polar Express." A boy in the row in front of Gingrich looked back at the former Speaker, turned to his friend, and whispered, "He might be the next Presi-

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dent!" As the band began playing "Silent Night," Gingrich drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, he attended Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the largest Catholic church in the country, where Callista sang with the choir, a well-rehearsed group of paid musicians in royal-blue robes. Gingrich converted to Catholicism at sixty-five, and has said that his wife played a crucial role. "When Newt became a Catholic, it was one of the happiest moments of my life," Callista told me.

"Newt does things for her," Rick Tyler, a former Gingrich campaign spokesman, told me. "He never played golf before Callista was around, even though that's what you do as a politician, but he plays now, because she does. You would never find him at the Kennedy Center at the opera, but now he's a member." In New Hampshire, Gingrich described having his wife on the campaign trail as "extraordinary—it's like everything else about hanging out with her." He added, "If she wasn't with me, who would fix my hair in the morning?"

On the press bus, he told me that Callista is "the grownup" in their relationship. "The woman is always the grownup," he said. "I think no matter what."

I asked Callista, who was sitting next to him, if she agreed. "Most days," she said, and laughed.

Though Callista is central to Gingrich's life, her public role in his campaign has been largely ornamental. She accompanies him on the trail, smiling behind him at events; in December, she appeared with him in a Christmas video to ask, "Is there anything more inspiring than American towns and neighborhoods brightly lit for the holidays?" But she does not have a stump speech, and though she's happy to exchange pleasantries with reporters, she has not been granting interviews, with the exception of a brief on-camera conversation with the Christian Broadcasting Network. The resulting story, which also included interviews with Rick Perry's wife, Anita, and Jon Huntsman's wife, Mary Kaye, was called "A Tale of Three Wives." Until recently, the title appeared on the home page of Gingrich's campaign Web site, leading many visitors to wonder if they could click through to an explanation of the candidate's complicated marital history.

But, of course, this is not a topic Gingrich wishes to highlight. His "personal baggage," as his opponents call it, is one of his biggest liabilities with conservative religious voters. Mitt Romney likes to emphasize that he is a "man of steadiness and constancy," married for forty-two years to his high-school sweetheart, Ann. One of Rick Santorum's ads shows him strolling through a garden with his arm around his wife, and explains that they've been married twenty-one years and homeschooled seven children. Callista Gingrich is a reminder of her husband's wayward past, which may explain why she is the only one of the Republican candidates' spouses to keep quiet.

Gingrich's spokesman, R. C. Hammond, a tall, bald young man, told me that it was just the first campaign team who felt that Callista ought to be kept out of the spotlight. The current operation, a handful of mostly young true believers, views her as "a very important part of the campaign," Hammond said. "I've referred to her many times as our chief morale officer." I asked if it was time to present her to the public, and Hammond said, "People who think we're running a normal campaign think that, but that's not what we're about." What exactly is Gingrich running, then? "I work here," Hammond said, dryly, "and I still can't figure it out."

At the Al-Jon scrap-metal plant in Ottumwa, Iowa, Gingrich, too, insisted that the ordinary rules of campaigning didn't apply to him. "I am running the most insurgent campaign since Ronald Reagan!" he told the twenty reporters who'd assembled in a back room, after watching him give a speech in front of a giant car-crushing machine. "The establishment deeply wishes I would go away, and I hate to tell them this, but I'm not leaving." Asked if he was fighting for the survival of his campaign, Gingrich replied, "No more than I was every day for the last eight months. It's just a normal everyday business for us."

Callista, who had stood by silently through the speech, was seated to the side of the room when I asked Gingrich how he viewed the role of the potential next First Lady. "She is a very disciplined, professional person," he said. "She's a classical pianist by training"—she majored in music at Luther College,



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- Lipitor is FDA-approved to reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in patients who have heart disease or risk factors for heart disease. These risk factors include smoking, age, family history of early heart disease, high blood pressure and low good cholesterol.

Talk to your doctor to keep getting the medication that's been working for you. Visit lipitor4you.com or call 1-866-9-LIPITOR (1-866-954-7486) to enroll.

* For eligible patients, terms and conditions apply. See opposite page.



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Please see additional important information on next page.

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IMPORTANT FACTS



LIPITOR
atorvastatin calcium
tablets

(LIP-ih-tore)

LOWERING YOUR HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High cholesterol is more than just a number, it's a risk factor that should not be ignored. If your doctor said you have high cholesterol, you may be at an increased risk for heart attack and stroke. But the good news is, you can take steps to lower your cholesterol.

With the help of your doctor and a cholesterol-lowering medicine like LIPITOR, along with diet and exercise, you could be on your way to lowering your cholesterol.

Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:

- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:

- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:

- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack, stroke, certain types of heart surgery, and chest pain in patients who have heart disease or risk factors for heart disease such as:

- age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-C, family history of early heart disease

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients with diabetes and risk factors such as diabetic eye or kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:

- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems.** Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Call your doctor right away if you have:

- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Allergic reactions including swelling of the face, lips, tongue, and/or throat that may cause difficulty in breathing or swallowing which may require treatment right away
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow
- Allergic skin reactions

Common side effects of LIPITOR are:

- Diarrhea
- Upset stomach
- Muscle and joint pain
- Changes in some blood tests

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:

- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:

- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
- Talk to your pharmacist.
- Go to www.lipitor.com or call 1-888-LIPITOR.

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Manufactured by Pfizer Ireland Pharmaceuticals, Dublin, Ireland
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Printed in the USA.

Distributed by Parke-Davis, Division of Pfizer Inc.
New York, NY 10017 USA
June 2009

Rx only

in Decorah, Iowa. "She's helped make seven documentaries. Just a very talented, competent person. She works very, very hard." I asked when we'd be hearing from her, and Gingrich looked over at his wife and said, "I don't know. What do you think?"

"When R.C. says yes," she said brightly.

"We're waiting for R.C. to unleash her," Gingrich said with a smirk.

It is unlikely, however, that Hammond has much say in whether Callista Gingrich goes public. According to current and previous staff members and friends, Mrs. Gingrich wields a great deal of decision-making power. Of the notorious Greek cruise, one former Gingrich strategist told me, "She said, 'Either go on this vacation or we're done.'" There were rules, he said, about "how many nights he could be away and what time he had to be home for dinner—which led to a huge abuse of private planes which we could not afford. There's a sense that, I'm not gonna have a third failed marriage."

Will Rogers, Gingrich's Iowa strategist until last May, said he left the campaign because he could not get the candidate to commit the requisite time to meeting voters. "I would send requests through channels, and they would largely go unrequited. When people are providing really good opportunities to meet face to face with county chairmen and you're not getting a response, it's very frustrating."

Matt Gunderson, a good friend of Callista's since junior high school, told me, "One of the sad parts of the initial stages of the campaign is that she was perceived as being an obstacle, perceived as being cold and stiff." Unlike the other candidates' spouses, she has never had to face the scrutiny of a campaign, or of life with an elected official. "There's a level of cautiousness in her personality—not the most overly ambitious personality you're going to run into," Gunderson said. "So when you look at the daunting task of a Presidential campaign, you go, Ugh, really?"

Her job as a campaign spouse is largely arduous and dull. She spends most of the day onstage, staring at her husband as he makes the same speech in Manchester, then Bedford, then Concord, then Merrimack, while photographers squat at her feet, taking pic-

tures. With each iteration, she must look freshly impressed. Asked what she thinks about while she's standing there, she replied, "I think, if anything happens to him, I could probably finish the speech." There is very little room to be anything other than dutiful.

The former strategist had a different assessment. "She's the single most self-centered person I've run into in politics—it's all about her. They do these movies together, and she does a word count: she has to have the same number of words on camera as he does or they have to reshoot." (A spokeswoman for Gingrich Productions denied this.) The strategist allowed that the marriage has been good for Newt: "This is the most adult relationship the guy's ever had." But he suggested that it hasn't been good for his campaign. "The core problem was that he was not willing to do the things he'd have to do to run for President. And Callista did not want him to run for President. That's why he had to buy her so much damn jewelry."

Karen Olson, who says she has had a "sibling-like" relationship with Callista since the second grade, travelled with the Gingrich campaign for several months this summer. "Newt is madly in love with Callista, and he would do anything for her," she said. "The disgruntled people who left, they thought he was supposed to drop everything and do whatever they said. It was like, no, it's not going to work that way!" She felt it was "beyond their imagination" that a marriage could be such an equal partnership. "It's easy to blame the spouse," Olson continued. "I will tell you this: if she really hadn't wanted him to do it, he wouldn't have run."

In the unlikely event that Callista Gingrich did become First Lady, she would be unusually well suited for the position. She is good with children, bending down to touch their hands in Manchester, hoisting them onto her lap to meet her elephant at Mount Vernon. She told me that if she were First Lady she would focus on promoting music education—precisely the kind of uncontroversial passion that plays well with everyone, like Laura Bush's

crusade against illiteracy. She has an old-fashioned politeness that borders on primness, and she ends many interactions with the words "God bless." Throughout his political career, Newt Gingrich has tried to summon voters' nostalgia for a bygone and probably imaginary America; he has spoken longingly of the kind of small Midwestern town where "a lot of Norman Rockwell still exists." Callista is from that place.

She does not seem like a forty-five-year-old, or at least not like a forty-five-year-old of this era. She has the style and smile of an astronaut's wife, even in her downtime. Once, in Cedar Rapids, I happened to run into her in the women's bathroom at the airport. In her suit and pearls, with her stiff coiffure, she looked as if she had just exited a beauty parlor in 1962. "I don't think she owns a pair of jeans," R. C. Hammond joked. "Casual Friday is not something that happens a lot around Callista." This is the way she was brought up. Matt Gunderson told me that Callista's mother, Bernita Bisek, "was probably the last woman to wear slacks in public in our town."

Bisek still lives in the house where she raised Callista, in Whitehall, Wisconsin, population 1,589. "There are less stores here now than when we moved here," Bisek, who is seventy-nine, told me. "There used to be a ladies' dress shop, and there was what they called the farmers' store—furniture, drygoods." When her daughter was born, in 1966, she named her Callista because "before I got married

I worked at the Merchants Bank in Winona, Minnesota, and the president's wife's name was Callista, and she was the nicest lady, a very pretty lady." She gave her the middle name Louise, after her mother. "We call her Cally Lou for short," Bisek said. "It started out

when she would do something wrong when she was little: she'd look at me and I'd say, 'Cally Lou!' Later on, Newt thought that was cute, so he started calling her Cally Lou, too."

Bisek was a secretary, and her husband, Allie, worked for twenty years in a packing plant. "Then it locked up, and he went to work at a place where they made car switches," Bisek said. "Money was always tight." When Callista took an inter-





est in the piano, in the fourth grade, it wasn't easy to buy her an instrument. "I had one of those little electric organs, and when she did start taking lessons she practiced on that first." By junior high, she was singing in the choir during the school year and playing the organ in church all summer, and she had also taken up the French horn. Her involvement in politics came largely through music: sometimes she would sing on parade floats for Representative Steve Gunderson, her friend Matt's older brother.

She and Karen Olson, who also played the piano, went to Luther College together, and Olson told me that Callista practiced the piano six hours every day. "We were in a sorority called Delta Alpha Delta—the anti-sorority sorority, in that there was no such thing as hazing, and anyone who wanted to be in got in. I wouldn't quite call us outcasts, but strong-willed women who didn't play a normal game." Olson said that she and Callista both decided to pursue careers outside of music. Callista was accepted in a graduate program in broadcast journalism at Emerson College, in Boston. But before she left, Olson told me, "Matt Gunderson said, 'You should just go out and do an internship with Steve this summer.'" She decided to go.

At home, Bisek had hand-sewn all her daughter's clothes and "used to knit her little vests"—even when, in junior high,

"some of her friends were going into name brands." It was not until Callista went to work for Gunderson that she started buying her own clothes. "When she went out east, she said to me one day, 'Well, you know, I have to pay a lot for my clothes because I'm used to your homemade clothes, and if I want something that's going to wear like yours does I have a hard time finding it,'" Bisek said. "We thought she would work that internship and then be back again, but it never happened." Steve Gunderson indicated that Callista was not politically ambitious; she was "probably just more curious about the process." But, he said, Callista is a "very determined person." At the end of the internship, he asked her to stay on, and she agreed. As Olson put it, "You don't look a good job as a gift horse in the mouth." Callista told me, "I sometimes wonder how my life would have been different had I gone to Boston."

According to Olson, Callista "did not really date" in college. "She was not so skinny growing up. Not fat, but . . ." Olson searched for the right words. "She has grown into her beauty." Bisek told me that Callista was always independent. "She did go with this one man a few years," she said. "He also worked for one of the politicians out there, and he was a nice person, her age—we liked him. I think the deal was she had forgotten something at his apartment and she went

to get it, and he had another girlfriend there, and that was the end of that."

Callista met Newt Gingrich while she was working for Gunderson, and, after she took a job as a clerk with the House Agriculture Committee, they began their affair. Her parents learned about it only when they returned from a camping trip and found dozens of messages from reporters on their answering machine. "I got a call from Callista saying, 'You probably will be getting questions asked,'" Bisek told me. "She said that she was dating Newt then. It was a shock, you know, obviously." At that time, Gingrich was leading the charge against Bill Clinton for his dalliance with Monica Lewinsky, an intern more than twenty years his junior. As it happened, Callista was a congressional staffer twenty-three years Gingrich's junior, the same age as his daughter Jackie. "There was an age difference, and I said, 'Maybe you should give it some further thought,'" Bisek told me. "She said, 'I've thought about it.' But then, you know, the age difference is exactly what her grandma and grandpa Bisek's was."

Olson told me, "I certainly remember saying, 'Callista, please be careful—nobody wants to see anybody get hurt.'" But she said that she felt concern rather than disapproval. "We grew up where there was a moral code, so I don't think anybody thought, 'Oh, this doesn't matter; it's no big deal. But we're also fairly nonjudgmental, because that would be presumptuous.'" (When Olson came out as a lesbian, she told me, Callista was similarly open-minded.) Olson was surprised that her friend had fallen in love with the architect of the Contract with America: "Initially, you certainly go, 'Wow, this doesn't make a lot of sense.' But, as we've gotten to know him, he is not only married to my friend, he *is* my friend."

It is not lost on Bernita Bisek that Gingrich left his two previous wives. When I asked her if it worried her, she said, "It does, some. But you can't do anything, anyway. You think about it, you know, but you don't let it overwhelm you. You only have one child."

If Cally Lou Bisek marched through childhood wearing hand-sewn trousers, proudly playing her horn, the boy who became her husband was, he has said, "very lonely" and "pretty weird as a

kid." His mother, Kathleen, married his father, Newton McPherson, when she was sixteen and left him a few days afterward. Nine months later, on June 17, 1943, Newton Leroy was born. He was three when his mother remarried, to a man he has described as "angry" and "totalitarian," an Army officer named Robert Gingrich, with whom he had a volatile relationship. Once, when Gingrich was fifteen, he stayed out past curfew. When Newt got home, Bob Gingrich has said, he "grabbed him by the lapels, and I smashed him against the wall. Newt was bug-eyed. Then I dropped him. There was no need to shout. He didn't do it again."

Family life was unstable. They moved often, and by the time Gingrich was sixteen he had lived in Pennsylvania, Kansas, France, and Germany. Recently, at a campaign event organized by a Web site called CafeMom, he talked about living with his mother's depression and bipolar disorder: "My whole emphasis on brain science comes, indirectly, from dealing, um . . ." He winced, and started crying. "See how I'm becoming emotional?" he said, with difficulty, then continued. "From dealing with the real problems of real people, in my family. So it's not a theory—it's, in fact, my mother."

As a student at Baker High School in Columbus, Georgia, Gingrich fell in love with his geometry teacher, Jacqueline Battley. She taught him to drive. "He was her little boy," Gingrich's mother has said. They were married in 1962, after his freshman year at Emory, when Gingrich was nineteen and Battley was twenty-six. The couple had two daughters, and after Gingrich got his Ph.D. in history, from Tulane, they settled in Carrollton, Georgia, where Gingrich taught at West Georgia College. "We lived on a dead-end street across from campus," Jackie Gingrich Cushman, their daughter, told me. "My sister and I would wait for him in front of the house, and you could literally hear him whistling on the way home. You could hear the happy tune before you saw the happy man." She whistled a few bars of "The Popcorn Song," one of his favorites. "It's a real happy, lively tune."

But Gingrich had broader ambitions. A colleague at the college said that even then he wanted to be Speaker of the House, and Gingrich has said he realized

early that, for a man like him, "your job is to spend your lifetime trying to change the future of your people." He ran for Congress twice and lost before his successful 1978 campaign, which he organized around the slogan "Let Our Family Represent Your Family." After he was elected, he moved the family to Fairfax, Virginia. One year later, he met Marianne Ginther at a political fund-raiser in Ohio, and within weeks, she told the journalist John Richardson, he asked her to marry him. It was "way too early, and he wasn't divorced yet," she said. "I should have known there was a problem."

Before the campaign, Jacqueline had been treated for uterine cancer. "He walked out in the spring of 1980," she told the *Washington Post*. That September, she was taken to the hospital to have a tumor removed. "I went into the hospital for my third surgery," she said. "The two girls came to see me, and said, Daddy is downstairs and could he come up? When he got there, he wanted to discuss the terms of the divorce while I was recovering from the surgery." (The tumor turned out to be benign.) "To say I gave up a lot for the marriage is the understatement of the year."

Gingrich married Ginther six months after his divorce became final. With her at his side, he became the political success he'd always hoped to be, masterminding the end of forty years of Democratic rule in the House. As he has put it, "I found a way to immerse my insecurities in a cause large enough to justify whatever I wanted it to." Gingrich was grandiose enough to warn the representatives in his party that they had to advance a conservative agenda as he defined it or he would have them replaced by younger, more malleable politicians. The process worked, but it was not a gentle one, and it made him many enemies. Gingrich, though, seems to be impervious to other people's anger. At a campaign stop at the Hy-Vee grocery store in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, a man with a gray beard, wearing a camouflage shirt and cap, told me he'd come from hunting just to tell the former Speaker what he thought of him. The man stationed himself in front of a display of dinner rolls, and when Gingrich strode past he clasped the Speaker's hand and said quietly, "You know what? You're a fucking asshole." Gingrich smirked and replied, "It's a free country, and you're en-

titled to your opinion." He patted the hunter on the shoulder and then reached for the next hand.

Gingrich has said he identifies with the Scottish hero Robert the Bruce: "The guy who would not, could not, avoid fighting." With his first marriage, he rebelled against his parents, who never approved of the age difference between him and Battley. (His stepfather boycotted their wedding.) To pursue Marianne Ginther, he had to abandon the family he'd put at the center of his campaign, infuriating even his former partisans. And with Callista he put himself in another impossible situation that he'd need to fight his way out of. According to Ginther, he asked Callista to marry him before he told Ginther he wanted a divorce—while he was championing the Personal Responsibility Act. "He believes that what he says in public and how he lives don't have to be connected," Ginther said. "If you believe that, then, yeah, you can run for President."

Gingrich's policy positions generally accord with those of religious voters, and, increasingly, so does his rhetoric; Gingrich Productions made a two-part documentary called "Rediscovering God in America," which argues that "'our Creator' is the source of our liberty, prosperity, and survival as an exceptional nation." Yet in Iowa he polled no better with evangelicals than he did with anybody else, and in New Hampshire he lost the religious vote by a wide margin.

At the CafeMom event, a woman in the audience who identified herself as evangelical told Gingrich that she needed to be convinced he'd undergone a "fundamental change of the heart" and that his admissions of moral failings weren't just politically expedient.

Gingrich appeared sincere when he replied, "I am a sadder and slower person than I was twenty-five years ago."

His sister, Candace Gingrich-Jones, told me that she has seen a difference in Gingrich, which she attributes in part to his marriage. "Callista is a very sweet person, and she can be silly," she said. "I don't know if you can picture this, but they make each other giggle." Asked on his campaign bus in New Hampshire if he had any regrets about Iowa, Gingrich said, "Well, I think I should probably have ordered the pork tenderloin one

morning,” and his wife indulged him with a big laugh.

Many conservative voters, particularly evangelicals, do not want to see just evolution or mellowing, though; they want to see repentance for what they view as profound transgressions. “Initially, my reaction to Newt Gingrich and to Callista is that the third wife doesn’t get to be the First Lady,” Penny Nance, the president of Concerned Women for America, told me. “I came at it completely believing that evangelical women would not even consider him, and I’ve been surprised by their willingness to listen and forgive. I attended an event he had here with evangelicals, and there were some pretty tough questions. The most interesting thing to me was not the answers but how he handled them. The old Newt that I knew would not have handled it very well, but this Newt did. He really tried to divine what was at the heart of the question and didn’t come across as rude or arrogant.” Still, she cautioned, “We cannot allow Newt Gingrich or anyone else’s moral failure to be used as an excuse by others for their own wrongdoing and saying ‘Hey, I can still be President!’”

Mike Huckabee, the former governor of Arkansas, who won Iowa in the 2008 Presidential primaries with enormous support from religious conservatives, told me that he believed Gingrich’s penitence was real. But, he said, “I hear from friends who are conservative women who say, ‘I will not vote for Newt Gingrich.’ I say, ‘Why?’ ‘He’s walked out on two wives.’ And these are hard-core Republican women—conservative activists, women who put signs up in their yards, make phone calls. And they have bluntly said, ‘I will not vote for him.’ Not ‘I have questions about voting for him’ but ‘I will not vote for him.’ That sort of rocked me back on my heels.” Huckabee added, “I don’t hear that ever from male voters, by the way. What does that tell you? Men are pigs.”

In fact, there has been an aggressive response from religious men, too. Jason (Molotov) Mitchell, a Christian television producer who has linked Obama to Nazism, released a video in which he accused Gingrich—“the Kim Kardashian of the G.O.P.”—of being “the walking, talking definition of untrustworthy,” sneered at Callista for being “quite the

missionary,” and asserted that “Newt and Callista are the last role models we want our sons and daughters looking up to.”

Tony Evans, the senior pastor of the Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, a nine-thousand-member, primarily African-American church in Dallas, told me, “I teach our congregation that we should make our political decisions like we make all our other decisions: based on how closely aligned the candidates are to the Bible.” I asked Evans how we could assess the sincerity of Gingrich’s reform. “You can look at how long they have been married to their current mate, you can look at the support of their current mate, and you can even find out in a sense from past mates if they think this person has changed and reformed—because they know them better than anybody else. See, you’ve got to do extra credit because you failed before.” In Gingrich’s case, Evans suggested, that extra credit ought to entail a public discussion of his marital past, ideally one that Callista would participate in. “It’s not enough to just say, ‘Yeah, I did it.’ Her speaking out would accent what he is saying and could be helpful—would be helpful, probably.”

In New Hampshire, Gingrich seemed surprisingly confident for a man at the bottom of the polls. “My goal is to come in first in South Carolina,” he said on the day of the New Hampshire primary, “and I think that’s doable.” Several days earlier, the casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson had given five million dollars to the Super PAC Winning Our Future, which will spend \$3.4 million deluging South Carolina with anti-Romney ads in the course of just two weeks. “This election is wide open,” Gingrich said.

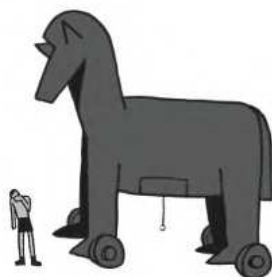
There were, however, many more sign-wielding Ron Paul enthusiasts than Newt supporters standing in front of Gingrich’s events. On the night before the primary, he had scheduled a stop at his New Hampshire headquar-

ters, a storefront on Elm Street in Manchester. The building was packed with volunteers and curious locals eager to meet the candidate; strangely, though, nobody was making last-minute phone calls to voters. One woman in her seventies told me that she was voting for Romney but had driven forty minutes to see Callista Gingrich: “I want to know how she gets her hair to stay like that.” Out on the street, several dozen protesters had gathered, some holding “We Are the 99%” signs, others singing “Ron Paul, Ron Paul” to the tune of “New York, New York,” a few dressed in pink pig costumes. Elm Street temporarily had the giddy feel of the parking lot outside a Grateful Dead concert. Several hours after Gingrich was supposed to materialize, his campaign abruptly cancelled the event; the head of “risk management” told me that embarrassment was a bigger threat than physical harm.

In the primary, Gingrich took fourth place, with nine per cent of the vote, but he seemed undeterred. Karen Olson told me, “I think they’re still hanging pretty tight to the possibility” that Gingrich will be the nominee. “Whether they’re letting themselves see the chink in the armor, I don’t know.”

Before he left for South Carolina, Gingrich gave a speech to supporters at the Radisson in Manchester. Callista was at his side, wearing a bright-red skirt suit and pearls, nodding in approval as her husband said the same things he’d been saying all week: That he wanted to give Americans “paychecks, not food stamps.” That he would be the second coming of Ronald Reagan. That he would change “the entire pattern of how Washington operates.” Callista watched and smiled and listened, the things she has to do the most these days. On the campaign bus, asked if her mind ever wanders at these events, she had replied, “No,” with a cheeky smile. “I hang on his every word.”

As the reporters laughed, Newt stood to leave and said, “I think there are moments when, like the rest of you, she says, ‘Will he please quit, so we can go home?’” ♦



OUTSOURCE THIS!

BY GARY SHTEYNGART

@Shteyngart Like most busy mega-celebrities, I've decided to outsource my tweets.

#Outsourced2India Namaste, everyone! This is the Real Gary Shteyngart from NYC, USA!

#Outsourced2India Savoured some excellent aloo parathas at the test match against Pakistan.

#Outsourced2India I meant to say, enjoyed a bang-up Fillet O'Cheese at the NJ Giants Sporting Centre. Go, squadron!

#Outsourced2India Looking out my window I can see the No. 6 train, pulling out of Union Square Terminus.

#Outsourced2India So many people clinging to the No. 6 train today! They must be heading to their villages for Diwali holiday.

#Outsourced2India Just found out they're out-outsourcing the Real Gary to Italy because the rupee is strong & euro about to collapse.

#Outsourced2Italy Ciao, tutti! I am the Gari Autentico. I make the tweet about my real life in a new york.

#Outsourced2Italy O Madonna! My mistress and my mother shes fight about where to make the ski, Cervinia or Monte Bianco.

#Outsourced2Italy Brought laundry to my mama, she also wash the shoe, and we plan my 63rd birthday party with the cake and the stripper.

#Outsource2Italy Oggi I go to the bank but they say I have none the money. I vote Berlusconi 10 years, how this happen?

#Outsourced2Italy Porca miseria! My mistress is the Calabrese she make a violence on my face and now my wife she see.

#Outsourced2Italy I buy the lighter from the Nigerian at the mercato and give to my Filipina and now she is on fire. Che disastro!



#Outsourced2Italy Autentico Gari commence the 6-week ski in Monte Bianco. I out-out-outsource to Belarus. Ciao, ragazze.

#Outsourced2Minsk Hello. It is Real Gary. I am depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Still depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Drunk and depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Just drunk.

#Outsourced2Minsk Best friend Oleg throw me out of his Lada. He beat me. I beat him. Depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Drunk with Oleg. Now he is Best Friend FOREVER. I am so happy. Depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Ice fishing with BFF Oleg. He throw me in hole. I beat him. Depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Wife leaving

for Moscow to be "hand model." Very depressed.

#Outsourced2Minsk Got 10 years in labor camp for wearing wrong shirt to parade. Whatever. Outsourcing continues to Korea.

#Outsourced2Seoul Annyeong haseyo! This is the Real Gary Shteyngart, ranked 1,546th important American writer.

#Outsourced2Seoul Today Pastor Choi say Jesus have 2.2 billion followers, I have only 5,165. I feel a big shame in front of pastor.

#Outsourced2Seoul I must get Science of Tweeting Ph.D. at Dongguk University. This give me "leg up."

#Outsourced2Seoul Stayed up 72 hours studying @AlecBaldwin tweets. He is top successful American, probably went to Harvard.

#Outsourced2Seoul Going out to Lotte World with pretty Ewha graduate Hong, Eun-hee!

#Outsourced2Seoul Find out Hong, Eun-hee parents want only Korea Tech graduate for Eun-hee and also Methodist. I feel a big shame.

#Outsourced2Seoul Appa compare me with my cool younger brother Dong Min (Dougie) who already tweet for Jennifer Weiner. I feel a big shame.

#Outsourced2Seoul Umma say I must make tweet funnier. Today my leg crushed by truck because I was thinking abt work! HA HA Now in hospital.

#Outsourced2Seoul Tweet boss say I am not A-team. I am maybe B-team or C-team. I feel a big shame in front of him. Also family.

#Outsourced2Seoul Standing on Mapo Bridge over Han River. I have no wife, no car, no top college degree, no leg. Wish I could outsource myse

#Outsourced2Seoul Last tweet was over 140 characters. Please accept my sincere apologies for this horrible mistake. Goodbye, cruel wo ♦

OUT THE WINDOW

The view in winter.

BY DONALD HALL

Today it is January, midmonth, midday, and mid-New Hampshire. I sit in my blue armchair looking out the window. I am eighty-three, I teeter when I walk, I no longer drive, I look out the window. Snow started before I woke, and by now it looks to be ten inches; they say we might have a foot and a half. There are three windows beside me where I sit, the middle one deep and wide. Outside is a narrow porch that provides shade in the summer, in winter a barrier against drifts. I look at the barn forty yards away, which appears to heave like a frigate in a gale. I watch birds come to my feeder, hanging from clapboard in my line of sight. All winter, juncos and chickadees take nourishment here. When snow is as thick as today, the feeder bends under the weight of a dozen birds at once. They swerve from their tree perches, peck, and fly back to bare branches. Prettily they light, snap beaks into seed, and burst away: nuthatches, evening grosbeaks, American goldfinches, sparrows . . .

The feeder used to dangle from a maple branch farther away. Always when winter moved into March, bears would wake and tear the feeder down, crushing it in clumsy hunger. In spring there is still bear scat between house and barn, but the bears, shy of white clapboard and green shutters, let my feeder be.

Most days, squirrels pilfer from the birds. I'm happy to feed the squirrels—tree rats with the agility of point guards—but in fair weather they frighten my

finches. They leap from snowbank to porch to feeder, and stuff their cheek pouches with chickadee feed. They hang on to a rusty horseshoe, permanently nailed to the doorjamb by my grandparents, which provides a toehold for their elongated bodies. Their weight tilts the feeder sideways, scaring away the flightier birds while the bravest con-



After a life of loving the old, by natural law I turned old myself.

continue to peck at a careening table. No squirrels today. In thick snow, they hide in tunnels under snowdrifts, and a gaggle of birds feed at the same time.

As daylight weakens, snow persists. In the twilight of 4 P.M., the birds have gone, sleeping somewhere somehow. No: a nuthatch lands for a last seed. The cow barn raises its dim shape. It was

built in 1865, and I gaze at it every day of the year. A few years ago, when we had an especially snowy winter, I thought I would lose the barn. A yard of whiteness rose on the old shingles, and I could find no one to clear it off. The roof was frail and its angles dangerously steep. Finally friends came up with friends who shovelled it, despite its precariousness, and the following summer I hired a roofer to nail metal over the shingles. Shingle-colored tin disposes of snow by sliding it off. Now I look at the sharp roof of the carriage shed at the barn's front, where a foot of snow has accumulated. The lower two-thirds has fallen onto drifts below. The snow at the shed's metal top, irregular as the cliff of a glacier, looks ready to slide down. In the bluing air of afternoon, it is vanilla icing that tops an enormous cake. A Brobdingnagian hand will scrape it off.

Suddenly I hear a crash, as the snowplow strikes the end of my driveway. High in the cab sits my cousin Steve, who expertly backs and lurches forward, backs and lurches forward. The driveway is oval, with Route 4 flattening one end, and Steve executes the top curve with small motions of snow-budging, building great drifts back far enough from the driveway so that there's room for cars—and for Steve to pack away more snow when he needs to. It's his first visit for this snow-storm, and his plowing is incomplete. He will return with exact skill in the middle of the night, when the snow stops, and tidy the path among the drifts. When he thuds into the driveway at 3 A.M., I will hear him in

my sleep and wake for a moment, taking pleasure from Steve's attack on drifts in the black night.

My mother turned ninety in the Connecticut house where she had lived for almost sixty years, and spent her last decade looking out the window. (My father died at fifty-two.) For my moth-

R. KIKUO JOHNSON

er's birthday, my wife, Jane Kenyon, and I arrived at her house early, and at noon my children and grandchildren surprised Gramma Lucy with a visit. We hugged and laughed together, taking pictures, until I watched my mother's gaiety collapse into exhaustion. I shooed the young ones away, and my mother leaned back in her familiar Barcalounger, closing her eyes until strength returned. A few months later she had one of her attacks of congestive heart failure only a week after her most recent. An ambulance took her to Yale-New Haven Hospital. Jane and I drove down from New Hampshire to care for her when she came home. She told us, "I tried not to dial 911." She knew she could no longer live alone, her pleasure and her pride. We moved her to a nursing home not far from us in New Hampshire.

She died a month short of ninety-one. Her brain was still good. A week before she died, she read "My Ántonia" for the tenth time. Willa Cather had always been a favorite. Most of the time in old age she read Agatha Christie. She said that one of the advantages of being ninety was that she could read a detective story again, only two weeks after she first read it, without any notion of which character was the villain. Even so, her last months were mostly bleak. Her knees kept her to bed and chair, and the food was terrible. We visited every day until she died. A year later, Jane, at forty-seven, was dying of leukemia, and showed me poems she had been working on before she took sick. One was "In the Nursing Home," about my mother at the end. Jane used the image of a horse running in wide circles, the circles growing smaller until they ceased.

Twenty years later, my circles narrow. Each season, my balance gets worse, and sometimes I fall. I no longer cook for myself but microwave widower food, mostly Stouffer's. My fingers are clumsy and slow with buttons. This winter I wear warm pullover shirts; my mother spent her last decade in caftans. For years, I drove slowly and cautiously, but when I was eighty I had two accidents. I stopped driving before I killed somebody, and now when I shop or see a doctor someone has to drive me. If I fly to do a poetry reading, my dear com-

panion Linda, who lives an hour away, must wheelchair me through airport and security. I read my poems sitting down. If I want to look at paintings, Linda wheelchairs me through museums. New poems no longer come to me, with their prodigies of metaphor and assonance. Prose endures. I feel the circles grow smaller, and old age is a ceremony of losses, which is on the whole preferable to dying at forty-seven or fifty-two. When I lament and darken over my diminishments, I accomplish nothing. It's better to sit at the window all day, pleased to watch birds, barns, and flowers. It is a pleasure to write about what I do.

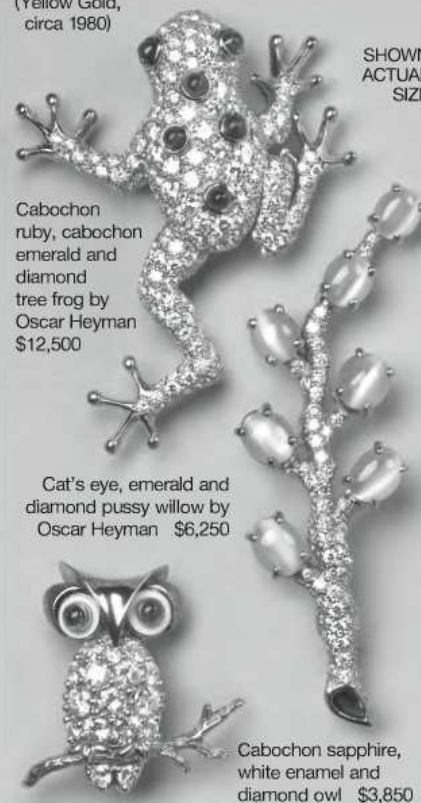
Generation after generation, my family's old people sat at this window to watch the year. There are beds in this house where babies were born, where the same babies died eighty years later. My grandmother Kate lived to be ninety-seven. Kate's daughter, my mother, owed her early death to two packs a day—unfiltered Chesterfields first, then filtered Kents. My mother was grateful to cigarettes; they allowed her to avoid dementia. Before senescence my grandmother looked out the window at Mt. Kearsarge, five miles to the south. As I gaze in the same direction, I see only a triangle of foothill, because softwood has grown so tall that it gets in the way. When Kate was a child here, elms blocked the foothill. They grew tall on both sides of Route 4, some of them high enough to meet over the center of the road. When she was ninety-four, she stumbled on the porch outside the window. Her fractured shin put her in the hospital—Kate, who had never taken to bed except to bear children. Her hospital stay affected her mind. Three years later, in the Peabody Home, I sat beside her listening to Cheyne-Stokes breathing. I was holding her hand when she died.

After months of snow and snowbirds, I look out the window at flowers and a luxury of green leaves and always at the wooden ancient hill of the barn. For the last ten years in her house, my mother sat in her chair looking out a window, but she did not see what I see. She was born in this New Hampshire farmhouse, growing

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(Yellow Gold, circa 1980)

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up when the barn was heavy with Holsteins, but turned old in my father's territory, on a street corner in the suburb of Hamden. She looked not at a barn but at other six-room houses built in the twenties. Twice a day, she watched children walk by with their backpacks, ambling to school in the morning, returning in the afternoon. They attended Spring Glen Elementary School on Whitney Avenue, to which I had trudged for eight years. Midday in winter, she watched it snow, and watched the Connecticut birds, cousins to New Hampshire's, fly to the feeder outside her window.

With arthritic knees she hobbled to the kitchen to warm up canned clam chowder. From April through September, sitting by her window at night, she listened to WTIC from Hartford, carrying Boston Red Sox games. In late middle age, she had been a substitute teacher, and she was proud that a Red Sox broadcaster had been her pupil. Her father, in New Hampshire, followed the Red Sox by reading the *Boston Post*, which arrived two days after the games. My mother heard baseball as it happened, from the small radio beneath her ear, next to the ashtray. (In another room, an enormous steam-powered television showed a continual blank screen; she did not want to move from her chair.) The radio games replaced her window of schoolchildren and birds. During the months between baseball seasons she spent her nights reading the *Reader's Digest*, Henry David Thoreau, *Time*,

Robert Frost—and Agatha Christie.

My summer nights are NESN and the Boston Red Sox.

When I was a child, I loved old people. My New Hampshire grandfather was my model human being. He wasn't old. He was in his sixties and early seventies when I hayed with him, only seventy-seven when he died, but of course I thought he was old. He was a one-horse farmer—Riley was his horse—with an old-fashioned multiple farm. He raised cattle and sheep and chickens, with hives for bees and a sugarhouse for boiling sap into maple syrup. He worked every day all year, mostly from 5 A.M. to seven or eight at night—milking, lambing, fencing, logging, spreading manure, planting, weeding, haying, harvesting, each night locking up chickens against foxes. Summers I helped with farmwork and listened to him reminisce. All year he walked rapidly from one task to another, in his good nature smiling a private half smile as he remembered stories, or recited to himself the poems he had memorized for school.

After a life of loving the old, by natural law I turned old myself. Decades followed each other—thirty was terrifying, forty I never noticed because I was drunk, fifty was best with a total change of life, sixty extended the bliss of fifty—and then came my cancers, Jane's death, and over the years I travelled to another universe. However alert we are, however much we think we know what will happen, antiquity remains an unknown, unanticipated galaxy. It is alien, and old

people are a separate form of life. They have green skin, with two heads that sprout antennae. They can be pleasant, they can be annoying—in the supermarket, these old ladies won't get out of my way—but most important they are permanently other. When we turn eighty, we understand that we are extra-terrestrial. If we forget for a moment that we are old, we are reminded when we try to stand up, or when we encounter someone young, who appears to observe green skin, extra heads, and protuberances.

People's response to our separateness can be callous, can be good-hearted, and is always condescending. When a woman writes to the newspaper, approving of something I have done, she calls me "a nice old gentleman." She intends to praise me, with "nice" and "gentleman." "Old" is true enough, and she lets us know that I am not a grumpy old fart, but "nice" and "gentleman" put me in a box where she can rub my head and hear me purr. Or maybe she would prefer me to wag my tail, lick her hand, and make ingratiating dog noises. At a family dinner, my children and grandchildren pay fond attention to me; I may be peripheral, but I am not invisible. A grandchild's college roommate, encountered for the first time, pulls a chair to sit with her back directly in front of me, cutting me off from the family circle: I don't exist.

When kindness to the old is condescending, it is aware of itself as benignity while it asserts its power. Sometimes, the reaction to antiquity becomes farce. I go to Washington to receive the National Medal of Arts, and arrive two days early to look at paintings. At the National Gallery of Art, Linda pushes me in a wheelchair from painting to painting. We stop by a Henry Moore carving. A museum guard, a man in his sixties with a small pepper-and-salt mustache, approaches us and helpfully tells us the name of the sculptor. I wrote a book about Moore, and knew him well. Linda and I separately think of mentioning my connection but instantly suppress the notion—egotistic, and maybe embarrassing to the guard. A couple of hours later, we emerge from the cafeteria and see the same man, who asks Linda if she enjoyed her lunch. Then he bends over to address me, wags



"You sounded so fat just then!"

his finger, smiles a grotesque smile, and raises his voice to ask, "Did we have a nice din-din?"

In spring when the feeder is down, I stowed away in the toolshed until October, I watch the fat robins come back, blue jays that harass them, warblers, blackbirds, thrushes, orioles, redwings. Starlings strut in the grass pulling worms. A robin returns every year to refurbish her nest after the wintry ravage. She adds new straw and mud. Soon enough she lays eggs, sets on them with short excursions for food, then tends to three or four small beaks that open for her scavenging. Before long, the infants stand, spread and clench their wings, peer at their surroundings, and fly away. I cherish them, and look for farther nests, small clots in branches of oak or Norway maple visible from my window. The blackest crows peck through my grass. Most strange and wonderful are the hummingbirds that helicopter by the porch, wings blurred with incessant whirring. They enter the horns of hollyhocks, gobble some sweet, and zig off to zag back again for another lick.

Late March or April onward, depending on the year, I watch the flowers erupt and subside. Snowdrops crack the wintry earth, crocuses, and dazzling daffodils. Tulips rise in extravagant crimsons and golds, metallic fleshy shapes that ask to be filled. In June, peonies bloom at the edge of my porch, a column of them, as their buds swell green until they burst into white and feathery soccer balls—and then a thunderstorm shatters the blossoms. There are lilies of the valley and, across the yard, a patch of old single roses that some years are few and some years put forth a hundred blossoms—first white ones, then pink, then red, lofting beside the road's gutter as two centuries ago they rose beside a trail for oxen.

One day, I look out the window to see great machines at work. A farmer neighbor comes to harvest the grass that has grown dark and thick in my fields. The first contraption cuts the hay. Another rakes it, and another shapes it into huge circular bales, which a last machine lifts with great clamps onto a truck that replaces the old hayrack. My neighbor collects for his cows in winter, and returns a second time and a third as new grass rises. I watch out the window.

These are the fields where my grandfather and I, seventy years ago, cut hay with a horse-drawn mower, trimmed the shaggy edges by hand with scythes, pitched it onto a horse-drawn hayrack, and stacked it in high lofts of the barn. Cow manure, spread on the fields in April, fed the grass for a century and a half. Decades after my grandfather died, the goodness wore out, exposing New Hampshire's sandy soil. My neighbor spreads lime late in spring.

Flowers by turn rise and fall all summer—foxglove, sweet alyssum, bee balm. I watch two wild turkeys gobble as they strut stiffly up the slope toward the barn. Behind them four small offspring hurry to keep up. Daylilies ascend the hill beyond them, the same bright-orange wildflowers that grow in ditches and in clearings beside cellar holes. Indian paintbrush raise late flags. Cornflowers bloom, and leaves of swamp maples flare the first reds of autumn.

Whatever the season, I watch the barn. I see it through this snow in January, and in August I will gaze at trailing vines of roses on a trellis against the vertical boards. I watch at the height of summer and when darkness comes early in November. From my chair I look at the west side, a gorgeous amber laved by the setting sun, as rich to the eyes as the darkening sweet of bees' honey. The unpainted boards are dark at the bottom, and rise toward the top in a brownish yellow that holds light the longest. At barn's end is the horse's window, where Riley stuck out his head to count the pickups and Fords on Route 4. I study the angles of roof, a geometry of tilting, symmetrical and importantly asymmetrical, endlessly losing and recapturing itself. Over eighty years, it has changed from a working barn to a barn for looking at. Down the road, I see the ghosts of elm trees, which met overhead when Route 4 was the Grafton Turnpike. A hundred and fifty years transformed them from green shoots to blighted bark. Out the window, I watch a white landscape that turns pale green, dark green, yellow and red, brown under bare branches, until snow falls again. ♦

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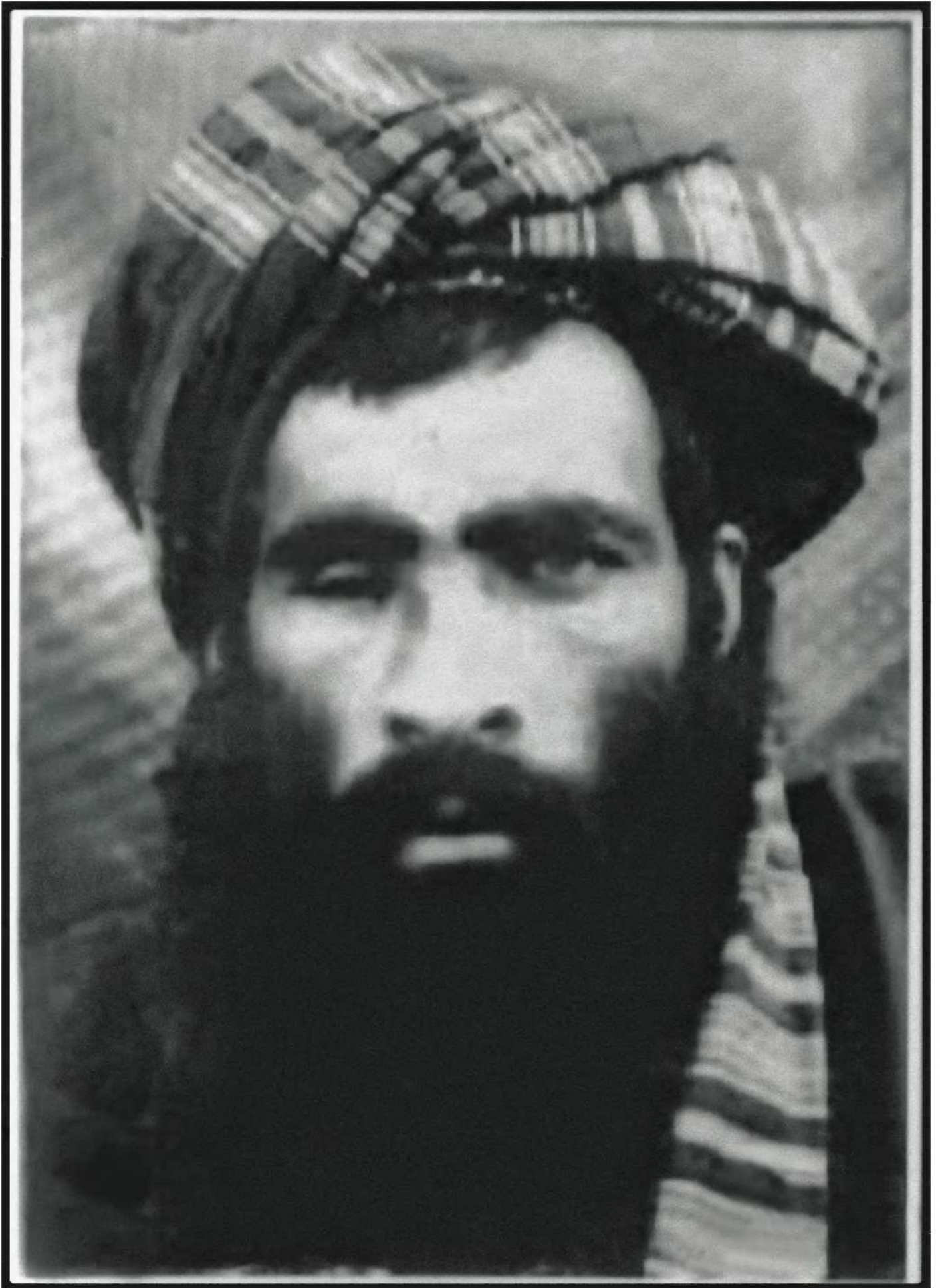
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Mullah Mohammad Omar, the leader of the Taliban, in the late nineteen-nineties. He lost an eye while fighting the Soviets.

LOOKING FOR MULLAH OMAR

Will the United States be able to negotiate with a man it has hunted for a decade?

BY STEVE COLL

During his reign as the Amir of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, from 1994 to 2001, Mullah Mohammad Omar made a mark on the architecture of Kandahar, an irrigated desert city of about half a million people in the south of the country. He commissioned a tall mosque for Eid celebrations; the building, which is shaped like an egg, is painted light blue, and is visible from miles around. Omar also built a tiled palace with fountains and a swimming pool. The Amir's most ambitious project, however, was a mosque and shopping center downtown called the Jamia Omar. He chose the former location of Kandahar's main cinema, which had been demolished by Taliban cadres who denounced movies as blasphemy. Construction was under way when the United States invaded Afghanistan and forced Omar into hiding. Ever since, the site has been an eyesore—a jumble of unpainted arches and half-built pillars with steel poles sticking out.

Last year, American military commanders allocated funds to help President Hamid Karzai's government complete the Jamia Omar. The decision reflected recent American counterinsurgency strategy in the war. In 2009, President Obama ordered thirty thousand additional troops to Afghanistan in an effort to break the Taliban's reviving rebellion. Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, has been a focus of the campaign, and American commanders have sought to visibly convey the authority of the current government. Last October, a senior NATO official, while briefing reporters, explained that "refurbishing Mullah Omar's mosque" was a sign of American progress, because it demonstrated "the level of control we have."

One morning in December, I drove past the construction site and saw a dozen turbaned men on scaffolds, swinging hammers. In Kandahar's mu-

nicipal compound, about half a mile away, after crossing through barriers manned by guards and bomb-detection specialists, I found Mohammad Nasim Ziayi, the city's deputy mayor, who oversees the redevelopment.

Ziayi wore a pressed gown with pens protruding from a vest pocket. Mounted on a wall behind his desk was a large black-and-white photograph of a clean-shaven man with a mournful gaze. This was Ghulam Haider Hamidi, Ziayi explained; he had been the mayor of Kandahar until one morning last July, when a Taliban assassin with a bomb hidden in his turban sneaked into the building and detonated himself. Hamidi died on the way to the hospital.

Ziayi told me that Mullah Omar's original blueprint for the Jamia Omar has been revised by the Karzai administration. The new plan includes a mosque for women, and although the center will still be called the Jamia Omar, it will commemorate Omar bin al-Khattab, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, who is revered in the Sunni Islamic tradition as the second caliph to reign after the Prophet's death. As a civic initiative, the mosque "is a good thing," Ziayi said. "The good work that was done by the Taliban—we should accept that."

As he walked me to my car, jumpy young bodyguards holding assault rifles accompanied us. I asked if Ziayi could imagine sharing power with the Taliban in Kandahar. Since 2010, the Obama Administration has engaged in exploratory peace and reconciliation talks with senior Taliban leaders, in the hope of reducing Afghanistan's violence while promoting political stability as American troops depart. It is conceivable that Mullah Omar could be coaxed out of hiding to participate in the negotiations.

"If the Taliban were willing to work

shoulder to shoulder with other Afghans for the public, that would be welcomed," Ziayi said. "But from what I know they don't want that. They want everything for themselves."

In December, 2001, as Taliban control over Afghanistan collapsed, Mullah Mohammad Omar left Kandahar and reportedly crossed into Pakistan, seventy miles away. There has been no confirmed sighting of him since, and his success in eluding American and Afghan pursuers has deepened the mystery that has long surrounded him. Of the jihadi leaders who entered into international consciousness after 2001—including Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—Omar's life remains the least well documented. He has not issued videotaped speeches over the Internet, as Al Qaeda's leaders have done. Essential elements of his biography, such as the year and the place of his birth, remain uncertain, and there are only two photographs of him in circulation. In recent years, the Taliban have issued biannual, state-of-the-revolution essays under Omar's name, but it is not clear if he actually writes them.

The Taliban's Amir maintains a spectral presence amid Afghanistan's violence and politics. His health, his whereabouts, and his intentions are subjects of continual rumor and argument in Kabul, the Afghan capital. Last July, someone hacked into the Taliban's Web site and announced Omar's death "after an illness of the heart." A Taliban spokesman quickly issued assurances that Omar was "alive and nothing has happened to him." Even so, at least a few senior Afghan officials harbor doubts about his well-being. Arsala Rahmani, a former Taliban minister and now a senior member of the Karzai government's High

Peace Council, which has conducted talks with Taliban interlocutors, told me, "We don't know if he's still alive or what his position is."

Other former Taliban, as well as independent researchers, believe that Omar is living in Pakistan. Alex Strick van Linschoten, a Dutch scholar who has been based in Kandahar since 2007 and has conducted extensive interviews with Taliban leaders and sympathizers, told me that he believes Mullah Omar is "in a safe house in Karachi," the Pakistani port city, and that Omar's movements and activities are closely monitored by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency. The Taliban-connected individuals with whom Strick van Linschoten has spoken recently described Omar "as essentially a prisoner," he said. "All access to him is controlled by the I.S.I. or some sub-version of that."

Anand Gopal, a journalist who has worked in Kandahar in recent years, and who has completed, with Bette Dam, an investigation into Mullah Omar's biography, said that he, too, has concluded from interviews that the Taliban leader is in Karachi and effectively under house arrest. Similar reports have circulated within the American government since at least 2007. At a counterterrorism meeting between India and the United States that year, the senior Indian official in

attendance reported, "We now know that Mullah Omar is under Pakistani protection," according to a State Department cable released last year by WikiLeaks.

More than half a dozen American officials I spoke with concurred that Omar is almost certainly in Pakistan and likely under some form of monitoring by the I.S.I., although they differed in their assessments of the extent of Pakistan's control and influence. Their views range from a belief that Omar is essentially under house arrest to a judgment that he enjoys considerable freedom of movement and action within Pakistan. Omar has been able to travel occasionally between Karachi and Quetta, a Pakistani city in Baluchistan, near the Afghan border, according to the intelligence reporting available to American officials. The extent of I.S.I. influence over Omar has been a subject of recent discussion within the American intelligence community, the officials I spoke with indicated.

There is no question that the I.S.I. played a major role in funding and arming the Taliban during the movement's rise to power in Afghanistan, in the nineteen-nineties, and maintained close contacts with Mullah Omar throughout that period. Pakistan's military leaders saw the Taliban then as a

means of establishing a regime in Kabul that would be supportive of Pakistan's interests and hostile to its rival, India. After September 11th, Pakistan helped the United States overthrow Omar's regime, but Pakistan allowed former Taliban leaders to take refuge on its soil. More recently, Pakistan's security services have seemed to reinforce their ties to the Afghan Taliban leadership in anticipation of the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. This could create a vacuum in the country, or a civil war in which the Taliban would be a party and Pakistan would be seeking influence. The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has so degenerated that it does not seem surprising that the Pakistani Army may be sheltering the commander of a guerrilla force that claimed the lives of more than four hundred American soldiers in Afghanistan in 2011, even as Pakistan accepted hundreds of millions of dollars of American aid.

The Taliban are a diverse movement. There are an estimated twenty-five thousand armed insurgents in Afghanistan, with differing degrees of loyalty to the Taliban. Mullah Omar is not the only influential leader. Last year, a United Nations unit that monitors sanctions on the Taliban, and is led by Richard Barrett, a former British intelligence officer, concluded that "while Mullah Omar remains the titular head of the movement and has more authority than any other Taliban leader, his orders no longer determine the military campaign." Jalaluddin Haqqani, a former C.I.A. ally turned anti-American warlord, runs a powerful militia known as the Haqqani network, based in North Waziristan; he is one of several important regional Taliban leaders whose forces operate independently of Omar's authority. Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir, the Afghan Taliban's over-all military commander, also enjoys substantial influence. After years of quietude and exile, Mullah Omar has less control over younger Taliban fighters. Front-line commanders are "not sure if he's a free man," Antonio Giustozzi, an Italian scholar who has written extensively about the Taliban's evolution, said. "If he plays a role, it's more like a moral figure overseeing the movement."



"The knuckle sandwich looks good."

Still, over the last decade Mullah Omar has issued voluminous instructions to his followers, and no other Taliban leader articulates the war's cause as he does. That is why the Obama Administration regards him as a critical figure in its efforts to organize peace talks between the Taliban and the Karzai regime. "There was no doubt in our mind that, both symbolically and pragmatically, he held all the keys to unlocking the Taliban problem," said Vali Nasr, who was, until last April, a senior adviser on Afghanistan and Pakistan at the State Department. "There is no legitimacy to a Taliban decision without him. . . . He is the Ho Chi Minh of the war."

The late Presidential envoy Richard Holbrooke, for whom Nasr worked, started the Obama Administration's effort to forge a political settlement with the Taliban. The work has continued under Holbrooke's successor, Marc Grossman. This winter, the Karzai government and a Taliban spokesman publicly endorsed plans to open a new Taliban political office in Qatar, to aid negotiations. The hope is that, in addition to easing Afghanistan's violence, talks might draw the Taliban away from Al Qaeda, diminishing the chance that it could ever reestablish itself in Afghanistan. Talks with Taliban middlemen who claim to represent Mullah Omar have yet to produce a significant achievement, such as a ceasefire on the Afghan battlefield. The talks have, however, led Obama's advisers to focus again on a man who disappeared from American foreign policy for much of the past decade. "I've come to the conclusion that Mullah Omar is still the big boss," a senior Administration official told me. "All threads still lead back to him."

The most credible sources on Omar's biography date his birth to between 1959 and 1962, perhaps in a village outside Kandahar. It is better established that he spent his boyhood in nearby Uruzgan province, in the very poor district of Dehrawut. His father, Maulvi Ghulam Nabi Akhund, was an itinerant teacher who instructed village boys in the Koran and received alms from their families. He died when Omar was very young, according to a

detailed biography published by a jihadi magazine and to recent interviews with family members conducted by Gopal and Dam.

Omar's widowed mother married Akhund's brother, a common practice in rural Afghanistan. This uncle raised Omar; he, too, worked as a roving religious instructor in Uruzgan. He was "a domineering figure, by most accounts," according to Gopal. The family owned no land or property, the jihadi biography reports. Omar grew into a tall, lean, dark-eyed young man with bushy black eyebrows and a thick beard.

He attended religious schools and then, by some accounts, moved to Kandahar as a teen-ager, during the nineteen-seventies. It was a period of relative tranquillity. The city's youth were divided into "two strains," Gopal said. Delinquents from aristocratic tribes, known as *payluch*, smoked hashish and acted with "privileged idleness." The other strand of kids, the *talibs*, or religious students, "were from second-rung tribes who couldn't afford to lollygag around and smoke hashish all day. They would congregate at mosques." Omar belonged to their world.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the *payluch* and the *talibs* mobilized separately as anti-Communist insurgents. Omar and his group fought credibly and persistently, but they did not rise to senior leadership in the rebellion. They were part of a network of fighters and religious judges who operated Islamic courts in rural areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan. The judges mediated disputes among rebel commanders, in an effort to keep everyone focussed on the Soviet enemy.

The Taliban tried to mark themselves off from other fighting groups. In a new book, "An Enemy We Created," Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn draw on interviews with Omar's former colleagues, writing, "Religious classes were offered for those not actively participating on the front lines. . . . They came across to other groups as more serious, more intense, or almost bookish."

Kinship, friendship, and shared battlefield experiences tightened the bonds among Omar's group. He was reportedly wounded in battle three times, the last while he served as a commander at Sangesar, a village to the west of Kandahar. "The Russians pushed forward and soon we could see them from our trenches," recalled Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, who later served as the Taliban's

ambassador to Pakistan, in a memoir. The area was "littered with bodies. . . . The battle turned into a hand-to-hand fight, with grenades flying over our heads." The Russians lobbed in shells. Shrapnel struck Omar in the face and took out his right eye.

The Soviet forces pulled back. That night, the comrades held "a marvelous party," and Omar, his face bandaged, sang a *ghazal*, or traditional poem, as Zaeef recalled it:

My illness is untreatable, oh, my
flower-like friend
My life is difficult without you, my
flower-like friend.

Omar received medical treatment in Pakistan. He also may once have attended a Pakistani training camp for anti-Soviet rebels, but there are no other records of him travelling outside Afghanistan during this time.

After the Soviet withdrawal, Omar retired to Sangesar to serve as the imam of a crumbling one-story mosque. He preached, taught, and raised a family. He had no political profile and displayed no ambition to acquire one. Kandahar was sliding into chaos, however. By 1994, former commanders of the anti-Soviet jihad had carved the city and neighboring districts into criminal fiefs. They ruled through brigands who operated highway checkpoints where they shook down civilians, and sometimes kidnapped them.

Taliban veterans formed a search committee to choose a man who could lead a challenge to the offenders. Zaeef argued for someone who had no political baggage. The committee arrived one evening at Omar's home. One of Omar's wives had just given birth to a son; family and neighbors had gathered to recite Koranic verses. Zaeef and his colleagues joined in, stayed for dinner, and then





The madrassa in Sangesar, Afghanistan, in 2000, where Mullah Omar stayed and studied during the war with the Soviets.

asked for a moment with Omar after the other guests had departed.

“We told him that he had been proposed as a leader who could implement our plan,” Zaeef recalled. “He took a few moments to think after we had spoken and said nothing more for some time. This was one of Mullah Mohammad Omar’s common habits. . . . Finally he said that he agreed with our plan and that something needed to be done.”

Around this time, a warlord abducted and raped several young women near Sangesar. As the story goes, Omar and some fellow-veterans seized the accused man, executed him, and hung his

corpse from a tank barrel. In a radio broadcast attributed to Omar and translated by a sympathetic Arab author, he remembered gathering some of his religious students in a circle and telling them:

The religion of Allah is being stepped on. The people are openly displaying evil. . . . They steal the people’s money, they attack their honor on the main street; they kill people and put them against the rocks on the side of the road, and the cars pass by and see the dead body . . . and no one dares to bury him in the earth. . . . It is not possible to continue studying in these situations, and those problems will not be solved by slogans that are not backed up. We, the students, want to stand up against this corruption.

The Taliban extended their vigilante campaign, and, by the end of 1994, Omar ruled Kandahar. The movement ultimately took power across Afghanistan with the aid of guns and money from Pakistan’s spy service, but from the start the promise of swift justice was Omar’s calling card. His relevance in Afghanistan today still arises in significant measure from the perception that the Taliban can deliver justice where other Afghan leaders have failed.

The Taliban “was the creation of a group” of war veterans, “not of one man,” said Maulvi Qalamuddin, a for-

GETTY



Photograph by Robert Nickelsberg.

mer minister for the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice in what was called the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. “But they admired Omar and chose him. Nobody was thinking at the time that this would grow so large.”

One of the few public spectacles recorded in Mullah Omar’s political life took place in the spring of 1996, several months before his movement took power in Kabul. Omar had organized a conference of about fifteen hundred Afghan religious scholars in Kandahar, to affirm the sanctity of his leadership. The Amir arrived one day at a small

mosque, downtown, surrounded by rosebushes. Inside, sealed within three boxes—one made of gold, one of wood, and one of steel—was Kandahar’s most famous religious relic, a cloak reputedly worn by the Prophet Muhammad. Political leaders displayed the cloak at rare moments of grave danger, to encourage prayers that might ward off drought or disease. Omar asked to borrow the garment. He carried it to a campaign-style rally that his advisers had organized on Kandahar’s outskirts.

“We helped Mullah Omar to take the cloak out, but he did not use it the way we wanted,” recalled Mullah Masood Akhundzada, the cleric who is today charged with the cloak’s safekeeping. At the rally, from a rooftop, Omar waved the relic in the air before a large crowd of men. At one point, he wrapped the cloak across his shoulders. The convention of scholars sealed his coronation by declaring that henceforth he would be known as the Amir ul-Momineen, the Leader of the Faithful, a title assumed periodically by powerful leaders in Islamic history. More than fifteen years later, Omar still signs his published statements as the “Servant of Islam and Leader of the Faithful.”

“Mullah Omar himself is a simple person,” Akhundzada said, when we met one afternoon at a large madrasa he runs not far from the mosque. He served green tea and cans of Red Bull. Akhundzada is a portly man with a quick laugh and the energy of a natural entrepreneur; his family has made a living for centuries from endowments raised to protect the Prophet’s cloak. “He is not a deep religious figure. He is controlled by others. They’ve made him into a big figure, but he’s not really a hard-liner. He’s being used.” It irked him that Omar had used the Prophet’s cloak, a pure symbol of faith, to attract a big crowd to his rally, in order to consolidate political power. “If he had not had the cloak, he would not have had a crowd,” he said.

Omar staged horrific spectacles of public punishment in Afghanistan after the Taliban took national power. The stoning of adulterers, the amputation of thieves’ hands, and the executions before excited crowds in stadiums shocked the country’s traditional

political élites. Many of those families and military leaders came from Afghanistan’s Persian- and Turkic-influenced north or were educated internationally. The Taliban are mainly Pashtuns, an ethnic group that makes up about half of Afghanistan’s population, who live primarily in the south and east. The justice that Omar enforced played best in Pashtun agricultural villages such as those dotting the river valleys around Kandahar. In many of these places, illiteracy has been entrenched for decades; the education of boys has often taken place in small religious schools; and girls have long been consigned to segregation and subjugation.

Omar “had a rural mind,” a former senior officeholder in the Taliban government told me. The Amir and his key advisers did not attend any of the great international schools of Islamic jurisprudence, such as Cairo’s Al-Azhar University, where global Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood incubated. They were “cut off, religiously and politically,” the former officeholder said. They were “traditionalist people, not revolutionary people.”

Osama bin Laden arrived in Afghanistan from Sudan in May of 1996. He met Omar for the first time that autumn. Bin Laden moved his family to Kandahar, pledged loyalty to the Amir, accepted Taliban hospitality, and began to organize training camps. Over the next several years, the Taliban’s brutal punishments and Al Qaeda’s international terrorist attacks transformed Mullah Omar into a role he hadn’t prepared for: a global pariah.

The Amir was “a very calm man,” recalled Habibullah Fouzi, a former Taliban ambassador to Saudi Arabia, but he “insisted on solving every problem in light of Sharia,” or Islamic law. “He was very determined,” Fouzi said, but “he did not know the outside world.”

Omar was never a self-denying zealot; he listened to music occasionally, even as his regime enforced bans on public music concerts and the sale of tapes and CDs. As allowed by Islamic tradition, he had four wives and fathered many children, some of whom are presumed to still live with him. He held meetings in sparsely furnished rooms at the Gov-

ernor's House in Kandahar or at his home, where he might sit on the edge of a cot while his visitors sat cross-legged on the carpeted floor. He refused to meet with almost all non-Muslim emissaries, but he made exceptions; a Spanish-born envoy of the United Nations met Omar once, as did a Chinese ambassador. During his rule, the Taliban destroyed ancient Buddhist statues in Afghanistan because Omar regarded the stone imagery as idolatry.

Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistani Army chief who seized power in 1999 and tried to coax the Taliban toward moderation, found Omar to be a frustrating ally. "How do you negotiate with such a man?" Musharraf wrote later in a memoir. "He was (and still is) caught in a time warp, detached from reality."

Omar's former colleagues describe him as a good listener who rarely interrupted others during meetings, but when Prince Turki al-Faisal, then Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief, flew to Kandahar to plead with Omar to turn in bin Laden, the Taliban leader "stalked out in fury," according to Musharraf's version of the story; variations of the meeting have been recounted by others. The Amir came back "a few minutes later, his hair dripping with water, his shirt and sleeves drenched." Omar declared, "I went into the other room and poured cold water on my head to cool off. If you had not been my guest I would have done something dire to you." Negotiating with the Amir, Musharraf recalled, was "like banging one's head against a wall."

Decimated by two decades of war, isolated by international economic sanctions and indifference, the Afghan state over which the Taliban ruled during the late nineteen-nineties was primeval. Omar rarely left Kandahar, and communicated by letter and courier. While making and explaining his decisions, he sometimes mentioned his dreams. Militias under Omar's command burned villages and murdered civilians during campaigns in Bamiyan province, the heartland of Afghanistan's Shia population, and on the Shomali Plains, north of Kabul. Drought led to famine in some parts of the country. Taliban police con-

scripted boys for war against northern anti-Taliban militias and banned girls from schools. Omar accepted international food and medical aid and allowed United Nations humanitarian-relief operations, but he imposed strictures that limited their effectiveness.

Omar lived for a time in a large home on a busy road in Kandahar. In August of 1999, an unknown group drove a truck bomb to his gate and set off a massive explosion. Omar escaped, but one of his sons died. It was after this attack that bin Laden and other Arab supporters funded Omar's new residential palace, with its less than ascetic decorative touches.

In Washington, intelligence officers puzzled over Omar's relationship with bin Laden. "Eventually, we came to believe that Al Qaeda, if anything, had coöpted the Taliban leadership and had taken advantage of their stunning ignorance of world affairs," Henry Crumpton, who was an operations officer at the C.I.A.'s counterterrorism center at the time, told me. Bin Laden swore formal allegiance to the Amir; the Saudi's money and his deferential cultivation of Mullah Omar allowed Al Qaeda to use Taliban territory as a base for international violence, but Omar did not necessarily understand how the United States and Europe might react. "We found him to be not very charismatic, not very smart, although he was first among equals," Crumpton said.

Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, from their interviews with former Taliban leaders, found it difficult to arrive "at any firm conclusion" about whether Omar was informed in advance about the September 11th attacks. The authors couldn't rule out the possibility, but they judged it "doubtful."

They interviewed a senior Taliban leader who said, referring to bin Laden, "The Taliban advised him that he should not misuse Afghan soil and that he should control himself; it would

make Mullah Mohammad Omar upset. . . . But he'd go ahead and do it anyway and then come and promise not to do it again. But then it would happen another time. Keeping bin Laden was, for the Taliban, like tending to a fire."

After 9/11, the United States announced its intention to destroy the Taliban government if Omar did not turn bin Laden over to America. "I told him America would definitely attack," Zaeef recalled. But, in the Amir's assessment, "there was less than a ten-per-cent chance that America would resort to anything beyond threats."

When it became clear that he was wrong, Omar told his colleagues, according to a former Taliban leader, "You just care about your posts and your money, your ministries, but I don't care about mine. My position is bigger than yours, but I don't care about it. . . . I am ready to lose my leadership, but not to hand over Osama to the Americans or send him to another country."

American commanders tried to kill Omar several times late in 2001. In one case, the C.I.A.'s operations center reported that it had tracked what "could be" Omar's "personal vehicle" in a convoy outside Kandahar, according to Tommy Franks, the American general who then led Central Command. Franks wrote in a memoir that at his headquarters, near Tampa, while feeling a "rush of adrenaline," he took charge of a drone carrying Hellfire missiles and two Navy F/A-18 Hornet jets armed with five-hundred-pound bombs. He tracked the Taliban convoy, hoping that the vehicles would stop moving. If they did, he calculated the chances of a successful strike would rise from about thirty per cent to ninety per cent. The convoy halted once, but the attack planes weren't ready. Later, the vehicles stopped again, and the men inside, including at least one who appeared to be a leader, entered a large building. Franks prepared to bomb it, but a C.I.A. officer declared, "Don't shoot. We think this building is a mosque," which would make it a target to avoid under rules of engagement issued by President George W. Bush.

"I clenched my fists and swore silently," Franks recalled. By the time he



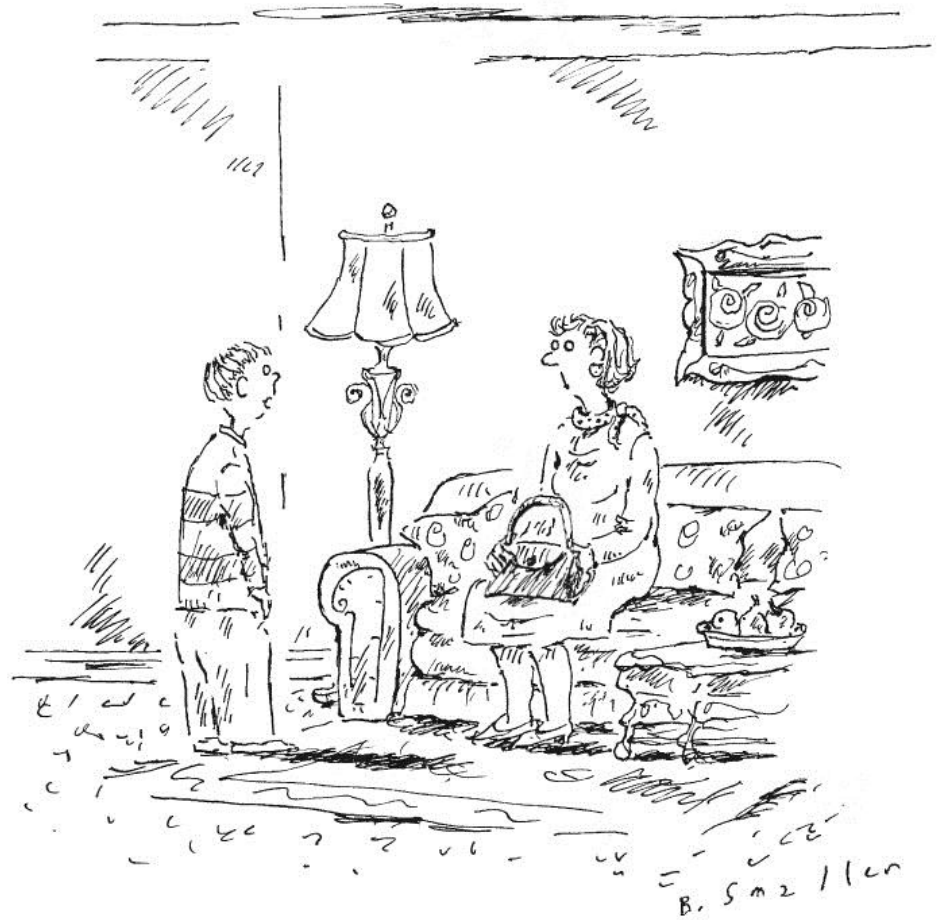
ordered the attack, having concluded that the building he had in his sights was a permissible target, the men he was after—whoever they were—had already departed, and he had lost the trail.

On another occasion, Zaeef believes, American intelligence tracked his satellite phone as he travelled to a meeting with Omar; bombs just missed him. In the final days of Taliban control over Kandahar, a strike against Omar's residential palace killed another of his sons, but just missed the Amir, according to the recent research by Gopal and Dam. By the end of 2001, when anti-Taliban militias supported by the C.I.A. had taken full control of Kabul and Kandahar, Omar had escaped.

Mullah Omar's whereabouts remained an official "tasking" for intelligence collection after the fall of the Taliban, but he was no longer a pressing priority. American intelligence agencies and Special Forces teams in Afghanistan focussed mainly on capturing and killing Al Qaeda's international volunteers. "Yes, we were very interested in him, and, yes, we would have liked to have found him, but I don't think we were getting a lot of traction" after 2002, recalled John McLaughlin, who was then the C.I.A.'s deputy director. "The attraction of going after Al Qaeda was just so great. The Taliban at that point did not appear to be a lethal threat."

"Sadly, in terms of our policy, I don't think we thought much about them at all," Crumpton, who led the C.I.A.'s campaign in Afghanistan in late 2001, recalled. "We killed a lot of them, many thousands of them, including some of the key leaders. They were whipped. What was left did melt away locally. The senior guys went into Pakistan."

Omar kept a very low profile. By some accounts, he appeared at a mosque in Quetta, Pakistan, in 2003, stirring local excitement. By then, the Bush Administration was bogged down in Iraq, and its "perspective on Mullah Omar at that time was 'He's done. He got beat. He got run out of town,'" recalled Tom Lynch, a retired Army colonel who served as a military adviser at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in



"When I grow up, I want to go into medicine and help people who can pay out of pocket."

2004. "Even though he's not dead and buried, the Pakistanis said they're taking care of it."

Gradually, it became clear that they weren't. Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security, placed agents inside Taliban-exile circles in Pakistan; their reports, as well as intelligence collected directly by the United States, showed that, by 2004, Omar had reorganized the Taliban's military and political command from inside Pakistan. Omar prepared annual strategy documents to map his plans for a revived insurgency and to communicate those plans to followers. By 2006, aggressive Taliban units had infiltrated Kandahar and Helmand. There was increasing evidence that Omar was back in active command, with I.S.I. support.

Afghanistan's intelligence service reported to the United States that, around 2005 or 2006, Omar had received "up to thirty million dollars

from Pakistan" to fund the Taliban's refurbishment and recruitment of fighters, according to a former official who read the reporting. "Mullah Omar was given money so that people could see him in charge again," the former official recalled. "Omar is not Khomeini. Mullah Omar is not Che Guevara. . . . For Mullah Omar to be valid, to be relevant," he needed to be able to fund the Taliban's payroll. According to research by Giustozzi, the Taliban may also have reactivated private donor networks of sympathetic businessmen and religious charities in the Persian Gulf.

In 2007, Vice-President Dick Cheney visited Pakistan and pressured Musharraf's government to crack down on the Taliban. During the trip, security forces arrested Mullah Obaidullah, a close adviser to Omar who had served as the Islamic Emirate's defense minister. Obaidullah "had a location document" with an address listing his

house number and city district in Quetta, another former official said. "He'd obviously been issued that by the I.S.I. or the Army" as a form of identification.

Around this time, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked David Kilcullen, an Australian specialist in counterinsurgency, to assess the Taliban's resurgence. Kilcullen initially assumed that the Afghan intelligence reports that the I.S.I. was "running the war" were just "a convenient excuse," he said, to deflect attention from the mounting problems within Karzai's government, such as widespread corruption and weak administration.

Kilcullen came to conclude that Pakistan was "actually on the other side" of the war in Afghanistan, but he found this was "an extremely unpopular point of view" inside the Bush Administration, which remained committed to counterterrorism and strategic military partnership with Paki-

stan's security services. When Kilcullen offered his opinion at one interagency meeting, "people laughed at me," he recalled.

Pervez Musharraf denied adamantly that Pakistan had anything to do with the Taliban's revitalization. The I.S.I. is a "disciplined service staffed by seasoned military officers who follow my orders," Musharraf told Nancy Pelosi, then the Speaker of the House, early in 2007, according to a cable published by WikiLeaks. The accusation that the I.S.I. was sheltering Mullah Omar was inaccurate, Musharraf added. "I do not believe Omar has ever been to Pakistan," he said.

When President Obama ordered more troops to be deployed in Afghanistan, his advisers analyzed Mullah Omar's role in the war. On a Saturday in February of 2010, I met Richard Holbrooke for lunch at Washington's Four Seasons Hotel. I asked him about the Taliban's leadership.

"I think Mullah Omar is incredibly important," Holbrooke replied. "The more I look at this thing, the more I think he is a driving, inspirational force whose capture or elimination would have a material effect."

I asked if he believed he could negotiate a viable peace agreement with Omar.

"I don't think we can negotiate with Mullah Omar, personally," he said. "That's why I think eliminating Mullah Omar is so critical. Right now, if you could choose between Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden, I personally would lean toward Mullah Omar."

Holbrooke died ten months later. Last spring, the Obama Administration located and killed Osama bin Laden at a compound near Pakistan's leading military academy, in the town of Abbottabad. The circumstances in which bin Laden was found suggest that he might have enjoyed support from elements of the Pakistani security services, although no proof of this has surfaced.

American officials tend to credit reports that Mullah Omar may be under I.S.I. protection or monitoring, in part because of the history of Pakistan's support for the Taliban. To Pakistan's nationalistic generals, Mullah Omar's religious extremism may be distasteful, but Taliban influence in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan has nonetheless served Pakistan's cause against India. The generals fear that India will use economic aid and political support for Afghanistan to encircle Pakistan, establish consulates and business outposts, and use these to funnel aid to separatist groups such as those fighting to achieve independence for the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. The Taliban offer a counterforce in this proxy struggle. Since 2007, Pakistani Taliban have been in revolt against the Army and have sought to establish a revolutionary Islamic regime in the country, and the situation has become more complex. Influencing the Taliban, and directing their attention away from Pakistan and toward Afghanistan, has also become, for the generals, a matter of self-preservation.

"With Mullah Omar, the Pakistanis are in a better position to control the Taliban," Vali Nasr, Holbrooke's for-



mer adviser, said. "He's such a pivot person. If you have him, if you hold him, you control the whole organization."

During the past several years, in exploratory peace talks with the Karzai government and the Obama Administration, a number of Taliban figures have claimed to speak for Omar and to have his blessing. During 2011, the most active negotiator with the United States and European governments was Tayyib Agha, who worked as a translator and aide to Omar during the late Islamic Emirate period, and who is now seen as a credible if junior figure in the Taliban's political councils in Pakistan.

Obama's advisers hold differing opinions about the prospects for negotiations. Some believe that the Taliban remain committed to taking full power and will use the negotiations only to win prisoner releases and buy time. Others hope that negotiations might produce ceasefires or divide Taliban leaders. The most ambitious vision is of a settlement eventually embraced by Karzai's government, Pakistan, and NATO in which a large section of the Taliban would convert into a peaceful political party, to stand in elections, take seats in parliament, and perhaps share in regional administration of Taliban strongholds in the south and east.

As for Omar, although the most hopeful advocates of the peace process think he might eventually endorse a settlement, it is very doubtful that the Afghan public would accept Omar's return to major office. A dignified retirement or exile might entice him, however. "He is one person—he is not a problem," Arsala Rahmani, the former Taliban official who now works in the High Peace Council, said. "We could send him to Mecca, and he could participate each year in the hajj." Nor does it seem likely that an outright Taliban military victory will restore Omar's rule, certainly not until after 2014, when American troops are scheduled to reduce their presence to an advisory role in support of Afghan troops. Even then, Afghan forces may be able to keep the Taliban out of Kabul and other major cities.

One interlocutor for Omar who has

attracted considerable attention from the Karzai government and the Obama Administration is Abdul Ghani Baradar. He knew Omar when they were boys in Uruzgan, and they fought together during the nineteen-eighties. Baradar was deputy chief of the armed forces when the Taliban controlled Afghanistan, and was regarded as one of the movement's more competent leaders. Baradar has long been inside the circles of personal trust that have characterized the Taliban's leadership.

Baradar is from the royalty-tinged Popalzai tribe, the same tribe as Karzai. (Omar is a member of the less prominent Hotak tribe.) Baradar engaged in sporadic reconciliation talks with Karzai's government until 2010. Early that year, Pakistan's security services arrested Baradar outside Karachi. Since then, he has been held in a Pakistani prison, reportedly near the capital of Islamabad.

The Karzai government believes that the I.S.I. detained Baradar in order to stop him from negotiating independently for a possible political settlement, on behalf of Mullah Omar. Some officials in the Obama Administration share this belief, and, at the request of the Karzai regime, they have been trying to help extract Baradar from Pakistani detention. While pursuing this strategy, the Obama Administration has also tried to reassure Pakistan's Army that its interests would be addressed during any negotiations.

In Pakistan, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the Army chief and a former I.S.I. director, is the key decision-maker on matters involving Afghanistan. Last summer, in Islamabad, Kayani met with American officials and posed a number of questions about how they might carry out talks with Taliban leaders living in Pakistan, according to individuals familiar with the exchange. One of Kayani's questions was: Who, exactly, among the Taliban's leaders, did the United States believe would be eligible to make a deal with Kabul? Kayani's other questions concerned the timing, sequencing, and roles for different governments in any full-blown peace process.

Last fall, Tom Donilon, Obama's national-security adviser, and Marc Grossman flew to Abu Dhabi, to meet

with Kayani. Grossman transmitted a white paper that attempted to address some of the general's questions, according to officials familiar with the document. Grossman and Donilon made two requests: They asked that Pakistan issue a public statement urging the Taliban to join peace negotiations with the Afghan government, and they asked Kayani to release Mullah Baradar from prison, so that Baradar could return to Afghanistan.

Kayani has so far declined the appeals. The sinking relations between the United States and Pakistan reached another low in November, after American aircraft mistakenly killed Pakistani soldiers in an incident along the Pakistan-Afghan border.

The Obama Administration refers to its own policy as "fight and talk." The American government currently offers a ten-million-dollar reward for information leading to the discovery of Mullah Omar's location; Omar remains subject to targeting by missile attack or bombing under the laws of war, Administration officials said.

Yet, at the same time, the Administration is urging Pakistan to propose a system of safe passage and security guarantees under which other senior Taliban leaders presumed to be living in Pakistan might travel to the proposed new Taliban political office in Qatar. Under such a system of safe passage, the Afghan government would recommend specific individuals for special treatment; the United States would agree not to target them as enemy commanders. Another concern is how the Taliban leaders' families would be given guarantees of protection from Pakistani retaliation if the leaders took negotiating positions that Pakistan did not like. The families of Taliban leaders living in Pakistan depend on its government for security, travel documents, access to schools, and licenses to run businesses. Taliban leaders do not want to negotiate with the United States and the Karzai government in circumstances where Pakistan might use these dependencies to coerce their decision-making.

Kayani, for his part, has told his American counterparts that he is confused about whether the Obama Administration wants Mullah Omar alive

or dead. One former Administration official said that, among President Obama's advisers, "there just wasn't agreement about the answer."

One morning in Kandahar, I drove to Sarposa Prison, which lies along the Herat highway. It is a vast facility with high, mud-brick walls topped by razor wire. Shabby motorcycle-repair shops and tea stalls face its entrance. When I arrived, Afghan security forces were hoisting a flag above a sandbagged bunker on the roof of one shop. The bunker, it turned out, guarded the entrance to an escape tunnel that the Taliban had dug last year under Sarposa's walls. The conspirators chiselled for five months and freed about five hundred Taliban commanders and fighters.

Inside, I found the deputy warden, Colonel Nawroz Rahmani, in a white-washed building situated in a dirt courtyard. Rahmani is a career Army officer; as we talked, he sounded dispirited by his assignment.

After the Taliban prisoners' escape, he said, the prison had quickly filled up again. It now held more than twelve hundred criminals and Taliban suspects, more than twice the number it was intended to accommodate. To sleep, prisoners pack themselves side by side on concrete floors. The overcrowding reflected Kandahar's reviving crime problem, Rahmani said, but also the failures of the local court system. "The judges and the prosecutors can't handle the cases," he said, and each week more prisoners arrive than are sent to trial or released on parole. "We have sent our requests to the director of prisons in Kandahar, listing the problems we are facing," he said. They had received no reply.

Cases clog Kandahar's dockets because often the only way to resolve them is to pay bribes; those who cannot afford the payments languish at Sarposa. The Karzai-appointed judiciary in Kandahar recruits "people who have master's degrees in corruption," a veteran practitioner in the system told me. "They don't want professional prosecutors and justices. They want people

who will send back income to Kabul."

Since 2001, American military commanders and aid officials have often declared that their goal is the establishment of "the rule of law" in Afghanistan. The reality in Kandahar has been that "the justice system either was too weak to protect people from predatory behavior by the powerful, or was predatory itself," wrote Shafiqullah Afghan, a former adviser to the United Nations, in a recently published survey of the region's courts and prosecutors.

The biannual essays issued under Mullah Omar's name emphasize corruption and injustice—problems that echo the grievances that brought the Taliban to power. Last year, the Amir instructed Taliban commanders and mediators:

If you receive any report about a given person, first, make a meticulous investigation about him. Never harass people on the basis of fake and biased reports. . . . When you face a common man, think as if you were a commoner in his place, and as if you had no weapon. . . . No one affiliated with the Islamic Emirate is allowed to extort money from people by force. . . . Protection of life and property is one of the main goals of the jihad.

Taliban insurgents and suicide bombers are today responsible for three-quarters of the civilian casualties in Afghanistan's war, and Taliban assassins often strike their victims with little due process, so Omar's injunctions ring hollow to many of his Afghan opponents. Yet his calls retain

some credibility in Kandahar and surrounding districts. The Taliban still operate mobile courts in many rural areas in the south and east. "Even now, people who take their cases to them are afraid of them," the veteran of the justice system told me. Yet the Taliban's proceedings to resolve civil matters, such as

land disputes and inheritance claims, are "cheaper, faster and stronger" than anything provided by the Karzai government, Shafiqullah Afghan wrote in his recent survey:

In the Taliban system, no bribes are accepted or needed. In the government system, hundreds of sentences are pronounced without ever being executed; in the Taliban system, decisions are always enforced without delay.

Mullah Akhundzada, the guardian of the Prophet's cloak in Kandahar, told me, "There are very few who join the Taliban because of religious ideas. Most of the people who join are under pressure. Where the Taliban take influence over areas, the people in those areas really have no choice but to join. Also, people don't like the government. It's not a trusted, worthy government. There is corruption. There is no governance here."

The surge of American troops into Kandahar over the last year has improved local security. The Taliban are still able to mount spectacular attacks, but their day-to-day influence in the city is limited. Many Kandaharis are doubtful, however, that these gains will be sustained once American soldiers pull back. The gains in local security have been periodically undermined. Last week, the Pentagon acknowledged that U.S. marines in southern Afghanistan were shown in a video urinating on the corpses of Taliban fighters—another in a series of heavily publicized allegations of abuse by NATO forces.

"People are afraid," Akhundzada told me. The Taliban "can kill you as you are walking down the street, and no one will punish them. All these explosions—with children killed—and no one is ever arrested, tried, or executed. For the last ten years, the United States, Canada, and other powers have not been able to defeat the Taliban," he said. "People now believe the Taliban are unbeatable."

If the Taliban outlast NATO's presence in Afghanistan, their ambition to rule again could engender a wider civil conflict in the country, which would pit ethnic militias from the north against the Taliban in a revival of the devastating war of the nineteen-nineties. Such a conflict would likely spill into Pakistan, further destabilizing that country. To prevent such an outcome, Obama has been drawn into a seemingly near-hopeless project—talking indirectly to a man with a ten-million-dollar bounty on his head, whose intransigence during negotiations a decade ago led to the initial American intervention. The obstacles are daunting: Pakistan seems determined to bide its time, and may undermine the reconciliation process; Karzai's government has shown no ability to fashion negotiating break-



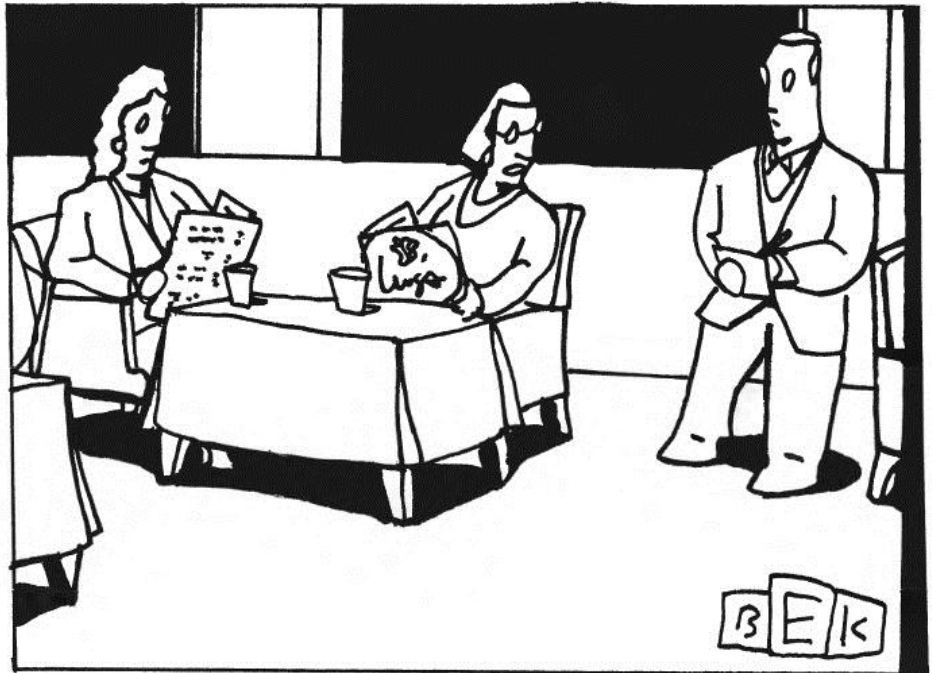
throughs, despite several years of trying; and the Taliban have yet to offer a single compelling compromise.

The Administration has limited resources and domestic political support to expend on Afghanistan. One danger is that it will substitute the long-shot diplomacy of reconciliation talks with Omar and his closest aides for the step-by-step, messier effort to build more inclusive, less corrupt power sharing among the many Afghans who oppose the Taliban—work that is already hard enough.

Yet the Taliban are an indigenous movement, and the grievances they exploit are widely held among Pashuns. Even where negotiations to end insurgencies don't yield a decisive agreement, they nonetheless can reduce violence, spur important defections, or favorably change the contours of a war by altering guerrilla alignments. The case of international talks to reduce the Darfur conflict is an example of such a partial success. Even the most ardent guerrilla leaders sometimes reach a time in middle age when hurtling into battle in a pickup truck while dodging enemy bombers loses its appeal. Although it is difficult to imagine Mullah Omar ever travelling to a five-star hotel in Qatar to negotiate with American diplomats, the lures of legitimacy and political influence may eventually tempt others in the Taliban's aging leadership. In the Afghan war, in any event, the United States ran out of attractive options a long time ago.

Night after night, raids by American Special Forces target mid-level Taliban commanders for death or arrest. The raids have fragmented the leadership. The loss of veteran commanders and the imprisonment of established leaders such as Mullah Baradar have contributed to disunity in the Taliban's upper ranks, according to Gopal and other researchers with extensive Taliban contacts.

The culling of Taliban field commanders may also reduce the odds that a credible, unified Taliban leadership could ever enter into a political settlement with the Kabul government. With Omar and other historical Taliban leaders in hiding, "today's Taliban



"I'll have the dressing on the side in a handblown glass container on a bamboo cloth with a sprig of something delicate placed gently nearby."

is immature young people," as Qalamuddin, the former Islamic Emirate minister, put it.

One afternoon, I drove out to a Kandahar compound that has been used to house Taliban field commanders who have defected to the Karzai regime. In a one-story house with dirt floors, where flies swirled in air perfumed by hashish smoke, I found Haji Toorjan, a young Taliban leader from Arghandab, a district on Kandahar's northwestern outskirts.

Toorjan told me that he had joined the Taliban when he had no beard. He said he was now twenty-six. He defected last year with about two dozen other soldiers. Afghanistan's intelligence service publicized his decision as an indicator that momentum in the south was swinging Karzai's way.

Toorjan said that he now regrets his choice. The Karzai administration has not fulfilled promises to provide him and his men with security, jobs, and income. In the meantime, the Taliban have targeted some of his relatives in Arghandab for revenge killings. American forces have detained other relatives, he complained.

Tacked to the mud walls of Toorjan's

hut were a dozen color posters depicting prosperous city streets, pristine Swiss chalets, and large suburban American homes with mowed lawns. From where we sat, the photographs looked like science fiction. "My friends put these up, to raise our morale," Toorjan told me. "I don't have any hope in my life. I don't know how many days I will be alive. . . . I don't know why I came. Maybe my brain was not working."

As we talked, Toorjan chain-smoked. I asked if he still felt personal loyalty to Mullah Omar. He said that he did. "He is honest and he has unblemished faith. When he makes promises to us, he keeps his word. Mullah Mohammad Omar is doing better with government people who surrender to the Taliban than the government here is doing with people who surrender to it."

I wondered if he thought Omar might forgive him if he now returned to fight again on the Taliban's side. Toorjan replied that he did not think the Amir's magnanimity would extend that far. "If I go there," he said, "my head will be taken from me." ♦

One smuggler wore a trilby, white with a black band. Another looked like Little Richard. The third was the most worrisome. He had heavy shoulders and a lidless, unsmiling gaze. When a fly landed on his eyebrow, he flicked it off *with* his eyebrow. We were in Mahajanga, a dusty, sweltering port on the northwestern coast of Madagascar. The restaurant, Baobab, had eight tables, lime-green walls, no other customers, and an unlimited supply of flies. They drowned in the *limonade* that the smugglers ordered for the table. Cell phones buzzed and lit up. Negotiations in Malagasy. The third smuggler, Mr. Tough, glared. Who was this tall American with an entourage who had walked in off the street asking for *angonokas*?

He was Eric Goode, a fifty-three-year-old Manhattan hotel and restaurant owner. The animal he wanted to buy was one of the world's rarest tortoises: *Astrochelys yniphora*, known locally as *angonoka* and in English as the plowshare tortoise. Its last remaining habitat was ninety miles down the coast, in scattered patches of remote scrubland around Baly Bay. Poaching, possessing, and selling plowshares are all illegal under Madagascan law, and trading in them is banned by international treaty, which only increases their value on the global black market. Determined collectors in Europe and the United States are said to pay up to a hundred thousand dollars for an adult plowshare.

Goode looked like a determined collector—sweaty, single-minded, furtive, with small, piercing blue eyes and several days' accumulation of salt-and-pepper stubble. He had three people with him: a young biologist from California named Andrea Currylow; a Malagasy translator named Riana Rakotondrainy; and me. As he spoke, he kept asking, with his hands, about the size of the tortoises that the Baobab smugglers could procure. But the smugglers didn't trust him.

"I saw you on TV," the man in the trilby said. "A documentary about W.W.F."

Goode held out his arms. "Do I look like a wrestler?"

The deliberate misunderstanding did not fool them. Everybody knew that the World Wildlife Fund was involved in protecting endangered species in Madagascar. The smugglers expressed disdain for foreign conservationists who tried to tell Malagasies what they could and could

LETTER FROM MADAGASCAR

SLOW AND STEADY

A Manhattan night-life baron's race to save an ancient species.

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN



Eric Goode in Madagascar with a plowshare, one of the rarest tortoises in the world. Coveted



REPORTAGE BY GETTY

by collectors on the illegal market, the plowshare faces extinction in the wild. Photographs by Jonathan Torgovnik.

not sell. The Americans were the worst, they said. More phone calls. When Goode said that he was prepared to pay two hundred dollars for a small plowshare, the smugglers seemed to relax. Mr. Tough, who wore a tight-fitting navy polo shirt, had apparently decided that Goode was harmless—just another desperate turtle geek. The tortoises were coming, he said. Did Goode plan to take the animals back to America? Yes? Then he should wrap them in diapers, which would absorb the urine. They would pass uneventfully through baggage screening. Did he have any idea what these tortoises were worth in America? If he preferred, they could be delivered to him “at J.F.K.” That would cost much more, of course. Did he ever find himself in Bangkok?

He did. In fact, Goode had recently made a documentary about Bangkok—the smugglers’ primary market—and other hubs of the illegal-wildlife trade, including Hong Kong and Singapore. But he didn’t mention that.

Mr. Tough went off on a red motor scooter. Across the busy boulevard, Goode could see his friend and employee Maurice Rodrigues secretly filming from inside a café. Goode had sent him away when this deal suddenly started to come together, after a casual inquiry. But Rodrigues had not gone back to their hotel, as ordered. What would these guys do if they discovered they were being filmed?

The man in the trilby established that the white woman with us was not Goode’s wife, his daughter, or his girlfriend. In that case, he announced, he would like to buy her. How much? Banter along these lines followed. Goode had brought Currylow, whom he had

met at a turtle conference in Florida, to Madagascar in the hope of persuading her to do her Ph.D. field work in Baly Bay on the plowshare. Little Richard mentioned that plowshares were known to relieve congested lungs. If you kept one under your bed, your breathing got better. *C’est vrai*. They were good for longevity generally. That was one of the reasons they were so popular.

Mr. Tough returned. He parked the scooter next to the Baobab, on a side street, and lifted the seat so that Goode could see into a bin below it. Two baby plowshares sat in a blue plastic bag. Their shells seemed to glow, each scute deep gold, hexagonal, in a dark-brown frame. Their color enhances the plowshares’ price in China, where gold is considered good luck. Goode took each animal gently out of the scooter. They looked healthy. They were, he estimated, between one and two years old. He set them back and told the men he wanted more tortoises, and would meet them again later in the day.

Back at the Hotel Piscine, on the Mahajanga waterfront, a conference was in progress. Its topic: Madagascar’s tortoises and turtles. Goode, one of the sponsors, had slipped out to conduct a survey of the local black market in plowshares. Now he approached a senior government participant, the minister of environment and forests, for official permission to complete the plowshare purchase. The minister, General Herilanto Raveloharison, a bearded former policeman, seemed taken aback. Was this American trying to embarrass him? He gave his permission, but decreed that the police had to be involved. This would be a sting.

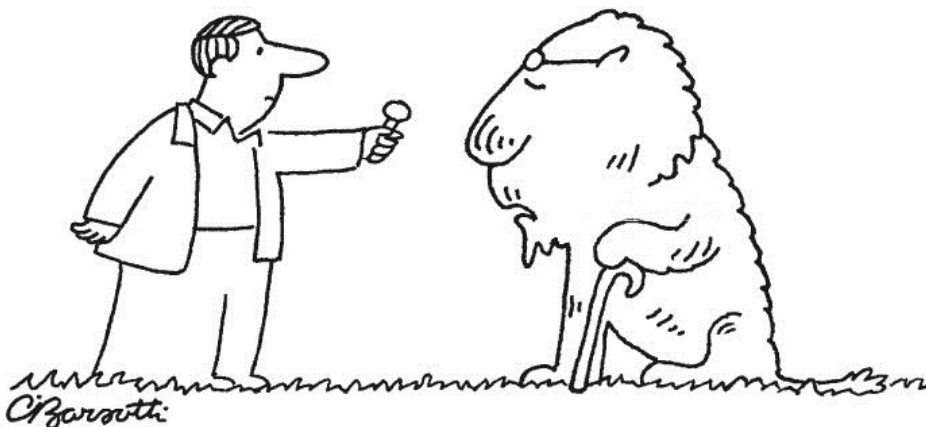
They would catch the smugglers in the act.

When Goode and I returned to the Baobab, the mood among the smugglers seemed darker. Where was our translator? (She had declined to return.) My own view was certainly darker, knowing that a police raid might be imminent. I kept thinking about a fiasco that had occurred not far from Mahajanga in the nineteen-nineties. Four Germans on a reptile-collecting expedition had been accosted by gendarmes who suddenly opened fire, killing two of the Germans and a fellow-cop, and shooting out the eye of a third German. I did not want to be caught in the middle of a raid by the local gendarmerie.

The smugglers were irritable. No, the tortoises were not there. An old blue Renault pulled up outside. We were told to get in. Three guys, including Little Richard and the man in the trilby, squeezed in with us. As we drove off, I saw a ministry official who had been posted as surveillance looking carefully past our car, a cell phone to her ear. We drove by a church. I tried to commit our route to memory. We turned in to a deserted, dead-end street, stopping outside a house with “Coifur” painted in red on a wall. The house was set back from the street, behind heavy foliage. Mr. Tough parked his scooter by the wall and opened the seat.

There were four plowshares in the bin, but the two new animals were smaller. Goode produced a fat wad of cash. The smugglers seemed soothed by the sight of it. Goode took only the two larger plowshares, wrapping them carefully in a plastic bag. We all shook hands. *Enchanté, enchanté*. Goode and I hurried off on foot.

Like most people, only more so, Eric Goode operates in several worlds. He started out in New York, in the seventies, as an artist, constructing vitrines à la Joseph Cornell. Keith Haring curated his first group show. In 1983, Goode and three partners opened Area, the art-house night club. Haring painted the skate ramp. Andy Warhol did the T-shirts. David Hockney did the pool. Jean-Michel Basquiat painted the windows. A recent *Times* story about the heyday of Area included a photograph of a young Goode vamping with a young Madonna. He opened



“In my youth I was a libertarian.”

other clubs with other partners. He built and bought trendy hotels—the Maritime, the Bowery, the Jane, Lafayette House—and restaurants, including Time Café, the Bowery Bar, and the Waverly Inn. These chic establishments have made Goode a wealthy man. He used to date Naomi Campbell.

In a parallel life, where little or none of the above is known, he is a herpetophile of utmost seriousness. He tramps through swamps and deserts and mountains looking for turtles, tortoises, snakes, lizards, frogs, crocodilians. Most of his closest friends are scientists and other herpers. Chelonians—turtles and tortoises—are Goode's grand passion. And there is, it must be said, something chelonian about him: a retiring, preoccupied, self-effacing air, genial but carapaced and solitary. He has no academic training, and yet Peter Pritchard, perhaps the world's leading turtle zoologist, told me, "Eric is a very, very knowledgeable tortoise man." Pritchard added, "And he's got a very good touch with breeding rare animals in captivity."

Goode has been collecting reptiles since he was six. His mother, Marilyn, says that he and his four siblings "were allowed to be kind of feral" on the family's land, near Sonoma, California, and they all grew up unafraid of snakes and spiders. Their father, now retired, was a schoolteacher. Eric got hooked on chelonians young, Marilyn says, under the tutelage of a herpetologist at Berkeley. "He was always sort of an obsessive personality." He used to board some of his most treasured tortoises with her in California: *Geochelone sulcata*, the African spurred tortoise; *Astrochelys radiata*, the radiated tortoise, now considered critically endangered, from Madagascar.

These days, Goode owns a five-acre compound in Ojai, California, devoted to the care and breeding of endangered turtles and tortoises. Called the Behler Chelonian Center (the late John Behler was a reptile curator at the Bronx Zoo), the facility, which opened in 2005, does not publish its address. Its inhabitants are worth millions on the rare-wildlife market. Inside the Spanish-style walls, a maze of elaborate, climate-controlled greenhouses and carefully planted outdoor pens house five hundred-plus animals of more than two dozen species, with a swelling population of hatchlings.

Galápagos giant tortoises crop the lawn. Burmese stars, Egyptians, Chacos from Argentina, all snooze, munch, estivate under leaf cover, bask, and breed, sometimes noisily, with males groaning and shells clattering.

The micro-environments for the Mexican spotted wood turtle and the Philippine pond turtle are intricately different. A misting device tries to replicate the clammy morning fog on the northeast coast of Libya. Bio-security is taken seriously—each cleaning brush is marked and kept separate from others, to prevent a transfer of microbes from one continent to the pen of an animal from another. There's a quarantine room for new arrivals, a herpetology library, a full-time reptile veterinarian, and a rotation of researchers and interns from India, China, Madagascar, Burma, Cambodia. In the kitchen, Latino workers whip up quantities of a "chelonian carnivore gelatine," devised by a German professor of genetics, that contains fish, snails, beef heart, low-fat milk, shrimp with shells, a bit of clay.

Twenty closed-circuit cameras let Goode watch the doings in Ojai from his office on Bleecker Street. His girlfriend, Miye McCullough, works alongside him, as a research assistant at the Turtle Conservancy, his nonprofit.

Marilyn Goode considers the center in Ojai a folly. "You can't be God," she told me. "You can't mimic Madagascar." She wishes that Eric would concentrate on protecting the Pacific pond turtle, *Actinemys marmorata*, "the only native freshwater turtle we have in Northern California." His mother's objections to his keeping animals, Eric says, are never far from his mind. "She's in there telling me to be good," he says, with a rueful smile.

The first plowshare I saw was at the Behler Center. It was an adult female, recently arrived from a rescue center in Hong Kong. She was strikingly tall. Perhaps sixteen inches long, she seemed nearly as high, like a walking Hussar helmet. She had a curving spear of shell jutting out from between her front legs, under her chin. This spear, called the gular scute, had once put someone in mind of a plow. (Some Asians call the plowshare the samurai tortoise.) It looked uncomfortable. Males, jousting for the

favor of females, use it to flip other males onto their backs. Compared with the youngsters that Goode bought in Mahajanga, the adult in Ojai had a shell that was pale and dull, but her marginal scutes—the ring of plates closest to the ground—were magnificent, flared and overdraped like heavy theatre curtains. The armor on her front legs, designed to fend off attackers when she closed up shop, was similarly impressive. She was busy chewing a mouthful of opuntia cactus, but seemed also to be meeting my gaze, in the seen-it-all, dinosaurian way of many tortoises. Chelonians actually predate many dinosaurs. They have been lumbering around for more than two hundred million years, and have changed very little in all that time. Nobody knows how long individual plowshares live. Captain James Cook took away a radiated tortoise, the plowshare's closest relative, and gave it to the King of Tonga, in 1777. It died in 1966.

The Behler Center got eight plowshares, all confiscated animals, from Hong Kong last June, and two from Taiwan in 2010. In the world of turtle and tortoise people, this was an astonishing acquisition. There had been only two legal plowshares in America. One was in the Honolulu Zoo. The other was a big male being kept by a dentist in Atlanta named Bill Zovickian. Both had arrived before the passage of the Endangered Species Act, in 1973. Among Goode's plowshares, the only adult was the female I saw. Goode hopes to breed her with Zovickian's male. The Asian facilities had wanted to rid themselves of the security headaches that keeping plowshares entails. To receive them, Goode had to get special permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which implements a multilateral treaty known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES. The treaty forbids all cross-border commercial trade in certain species, including the plowshare.

Before he got his plowshares, Goode began investing in their protection in the wild in Madagascar. His main partner there was the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, a British charity, founded by the late author and naturalist Gerald Durrell, which has a zoo in Jersey, off the Normandy coast, and works in many countries to prevent extinctions. Durrell's

plowshare project, launched in 1986, includes a breeding center about fifty miles inland from Baly Bay, where it has produced hundreds of hatchlings from animals confiscated mostly from villagers, who kept them as pets, and, in recent years, from poachers and smugglers. In 1998, the Durrell Trust helped create a national park in Baly Bay for plowshare protection, and it has reintroduced several dozen tortoises to the wild there. Goode's contributions have included a patrol boat and the funds to pay a team of forty guards to combat poaching. These efforts in the "range country" helped persuade U.S. Fish and Wildlife to let Goode have the ten plowshares from Asia.

Working in Madagascar naturally requires working with the Madagascar government. The current regime seized power in a coup in 2009, and is not recognized by the United States. It is led by a former disk jockey and mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, named Andry Rajoelina, who is thirty-seven. His reign has been marked by dizzying economic decline—Madagascar, never rich, is now one of the world's poorest countries—and by rampant corruption, including a great upsurge in both wildlife smuggling and illegal logging in the country's few remaining rain forests.

Goode has tried nonetheless to build a relationship with the government. He wants to sign a lease agreement, remunerating Madagascar in exchange for its permission to keep animals that legally belong to it—he now has specimens of all four endemic Madagascar tortoises in Ojai. He even wrote a blank check to the then minister of environment and forests, to be hand-delivered by Russ Mittermeier, the president of the Virginia-based nonprofit Conservation International, inviting the government to name its terms. The check was not accepted. The government of Madagascar isn't necessarily opposed to what are known as "ex situ assurance colonies" of the country's critically endangered species. It simply barely functions.

Madagascar is famed for its "megadiversity." It's the world's fourth-largest island, bigger than California, and sits two hundred and fifty miles off the southeast coast of Africa. Evolution took its own course in Madagascar.

Eighty per cent of its animal and plant species are endemic—they occur nowhere else. Humans arrived about two thousand years ago, long after the earth's major (nonfrozen) landmasses had been settled. They found none of the usual African megafauna—elephants, antelopes, lions, giraffes—but they did find giant tortoises (*Aldabrachelys abrupta*, *Aldabrachelys grandidieri*) and the largest bird that ever lived (*Aepyornis maximus*, the elephant bird, about ten feet tall). These species are long vanished, hunted and habitat-deprived into extinction, along with at least sixteen species of lemur, including one the size of a gorilla.

The rate of extinctions in Madagascar is high, owing mainly to catastrophic deforestation—the country has lost ninety per cent of its forests to logging and slash-and-burn agriculture. Increasing extinctions are a global phenomenon—we are now embarked, according to science, on what some call a "sixth wave" of mass extinctions, with perhaps half of the world's estimated ten million species of animals, plants, and fish predicted to vanish in the next century, and this wave (the fifth happened sixty-five million years ago and wiped out the dinosaurs) is being driven primarily by the activities of one species: us. Evolutionary hot spots like Madagascar provide a laboratory for the study of imperilled ecosystems, and a compelling workplace for conservationists from all over.

Turtles and tortoises have been particularly vulnerable to human depredation. They move slowly. They grow slowly, and are slow to reproduce. They're tasty, and protein-rich. Turtle meat has been a cherished item on Chinese menus for millennia, and turtles are used in traditional Asian medicine. The incredible hardiness of many species—some tortoises can live for a year without food or water—has sometimes worked against them. On long sea voyages before the days of refrigeration, a ship's hold might be filled with tortoises, all flipped on their backs and awaiting the pot.

Madagascar was a main stop on Arab trade routes, and its tortoises left in droves. Plowshares also lost much of their habitat to agriculture. By the mid-twentieth century, the plowshare was believed to be possibly extinct. Then, in

1971, James Juvik, an American geographer, discovered small populations in the scrublands around Baly Bay. Subsequent studies produced a rough estimate of six hundred animals remaining in the wild. Conservationists, notably Gerald Durrell, went into action on the plowshare's behalf. As the plight of the plowshare got some attention, and it received the most restrictive CITES listing, the perverse economics of rarity kicked in among collectors, and the price for a plowshare went through the roof.

There were two tortoise researchers Goode hoped to meet during this trip to Madagascar—Miguel Pedrono, a French conservation ecologist, and Lora Smith, an American herpetologist. They had each spent years studying the plowshare in the wild, and Goode was eager to get their advice. They were reportedly in Baly Bay, Goode's next destination. He chartered a small plane and, accompanied by Rodrigues, Currylow, and Angelo Ramy Mandimbihassina, a field coordinator for the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, we flew southwest.

From the air, much of Madagascar is a disturbing sight. Deforestation has led to severe erosion of a soil that was never known for its fertility. Large rivers run bright red through parched hills. "Madagascar is bleeding," people say. It is also burning, perpetually. Cattle herders light bush fires to try to improve the grazing. Farmers cut down and burn trees to make space for rice fields, which soon exhaust the land. Homemade charcoal is the preferred domestic fuel in a country where seventy-five per cent of the population lacks electricity. There is always, always smoke in the air.

The remoteness of Baly Bay, ninety rough miles from a paved road, unreachable by land in the wet season, has been a blessing for the plowshare, which has found refuge in patches of dense bamboo scrub. But it also allows poachers, working for the smugglers whom we found in the Baobab restaurant, to ply their trade largely undetected.

On the flight, Mandimbihassina, who wore a baseball cap and has a wide, leprechaunish grin, started pointing out what he called "bad villages," where smugglers lived, around Baly Bay. There seemed to be quite a number. He translated some of

the village names on my map. Here was “Many Termites.” That godforsaken area down there? He laughed. That was “Big Dog Poop.”

We landed at a dirt airstrip, where a Toyota Land Cruiser fetched us down to Soalala, a dilapidated waterfront settlement. We took a skiff across the bay, to a palm-shaded village on the western

be released to mix with the local *angonokas*. There had been four tortoises, but one had been stolen. We set off on a narrow trail that got narrower, and soon were in the dense bamboo scrub that had, in recent decades, saved the plowshare. It was slow going. Suddenly, while pushing through thick brush, we stumbled on two people who didn’t

lived out here, studying plowshares, in different parts of Baly Bay, for long stretches—two years—in conditions that would not have been easy. She now worked at a research institute in Georgia. He lived in Antananarivo. They had come back, on their own initiative, after hearing that increased poaching was causing the plowshare population to fall.



The tortoise-breeding center in Ampijoroa. Collectors are said to pay up to a hundred thousand dollars for an adult plowshare.

shore. We were now approaching *angonoka* habitat. We hiked inland to a camp called Beaboaly—“Big Termite,” Mandimbihasina said—where some of the guards employed by Goode and the Durrell Trust stayed. It was just a clearing with a few huts, a couple of thatched pavilions, and a well with a diesel pump. There was no one around. Goode went straight into the huts, searching, he said, for “Miguel and Lora’s tracks.” He was still hoping to consult the elusive researchers. There was no sign of them. Mandimbihasina suggested that we hike to a quarantine pen where the Durrell Trust kept three *angonokas* that had been confiscated in the Comoros Islands. Because of the exotic parasite load they might be carrying, they could not

seem happy to see us. The tangle of logs at our feet was the quarantine pen. Goode had found Miguel Pedrono and Lora Smith.

They were briskly polite but determined to leave. Goode was determined to talk to them. After a brief tête-à-tête with the three quarantined tortoises, which seemed healthy but far too large for the pens they were in, Goode hurried back to the camp at Beaboaly, where he insisted that Pedrono and Smith, who were bound for Soalala, give him a few minutes.

“What should we be doing?” Goode asked. “What would be most useful?”

Pedrono was swarthy, unshaven, truculent. Smith was mild, maybe fifty, and seemed preoccupied. Each of them had

“We’re here to find out what’s going wrong,” Pedrono growled.

Goode pressed his question.

“Maybe armed guards,” Pedrono said, with a Gallic shrug. “Outsiders. Not more of this, no.”

He nodded at a loose group of men who were quietly arriving in the gathering shadows. These were the plowshare guards Goode employed, unarmed. They kept their distance from the conversation. They earned two and a half dollars a day. (The country’s median income is roughly a dollar a day.) One of their colleagues had been arrested in March, accused of smuggling plowshares. He was now sitting in jail in Mahajanga.

“I trust you above everybody,” Goode said, using naked flattery, almost plead-

ing. Pedrono, who has written a standard text, called "The Tortoises and Turtles of Madagascar," seemed to soften slightly.

Would defacing shells discourage smuggling?

"Marking them won't fix much," Pedrono said. "Marked animals can be bred."

Goode asked about the Durrell Trust.

"They should stick to captive breeding," Smith said, diplomatically. "They have been having success with that." Pedrono said that they really had to be getting back to Soalala.

Goode said, "I know that the best thing to do sometimes is nothing." This was a core conservationist truth. But Goode isn't really built to do nothing.

We spent that night on the ground. The next morning, we went looking for plowshares, accompanied by a couple of guards. The tortoises were estivating, hiding from the heat, waiting for the rains and the mating season, and we didn't find any. Goode, with help from Mandimbihasina, interviewed the guards about their work, asking what they needed. More pay, cell phones, new mosquito nets, chairs, perhaps an observation tower. Baly Bay National Park is five fragments of *angonoka* habitat scattered around the bay. It's nearly a hundred and fifty thousand acres, with no amenities and many miles of uninhabited ocean coast. A few teams of unarmed guards with a single boat have no hope, really, of defending the area against determined poachers. Fortunately for the plowshare, the Sakalava people, who inhabit the area, consider eating the tortoise *fady* (taboo). But the temptation to pick one up and sell it must be fierce.

We hiked out of Big Termite and caught a boat to Cap Sada, another shard of the national park. It was a long walk through low-tide shallows to the shore. There was less vegetation on Cap Sada, and eight or nine of us—we had been joined by several guards based there—tried to walk in straight lines, ten metres apart, peering under clumps of scrub and bamboo. The heat was brain-melting, and thickets kept forcing me off my track, into Goode's line.

Off to our right, a guard called out, "*Angonoka!*" Deep in a thicket, under some bushes, he had found a large female. We pulled her out. She was grand,

and had been marked by researchers for identification with little notches in her marginal scutes. She looked grumpy. Picked up for inspection, she urinated, which, in the height of the dry season, was not good for her health. A while later, another guard found another plowshare, even deeper in a seemingly impenetrable thicket. This one was a big male, also marked. Lora Smith had lived in a thatch hut at Cap Sada in the early nineties, and marked a hundred and forty-five plowshares. When Smith lived here, the collecting boom had not begun, and the big worry was habitat loss. We retreated to the guards' base camp, where there was a patch of shade.

Goode believes that at least a thousand plowshares have been smuggled out of Baly Bay in recent years. Most

were babies, which are relatively easy to transport. The wild population was clearly in decline. To get an accurate count, Goode wanted to mark every wild plowshare with big numbers and letters engraved into the carapace with a Dremel tool. But had the species already passed the point beyond which it could self-replicate?

The best way to find wild tortoises to mark was with trained dogs. But, if Goode brought a team of dogs and their handlers here, the poachers would quickly see the efficacy of dogs. For that matter, it might not be doing the plowshares any favors to hunt them all down for the sake of an accurate census and to mark them—too many local onlookers would also learn where they were. The poaching had been accelerated by the In-

GOING HOME

I love to speak with Leonard
He's a sportsman and a shepherd
He's a lazy bastard
Living in a suit

But he does say what I tell him
Even though it isn't welcome
He will never have the freedom
To refuse

He will speak these words of wisdom
Like a sage, a man of vision
Though he knows he's really nothing
But the brief elaboration of a tube

Going home
Without my sorrow
Going home
Sometime tomorrow
To where it's better
Than before

Going home
Without my burden
Going home
Behind the curtain
Going home
Without the costume
That I wore

He wants to write a love song
An anthem of forgiving
A manual for living with defeat

A cry above the suffering
A sacrifice recovering
But that isn't what I want him to complete

I want to make him certain
That he doesn't have a burden
That he doesn't need a vision

That he only has permission
To do my instant bidding
That is to SAY what I have told him
To repeat

*Going home
Without my sorrow
Going home
Sometime tomorrow
Going home
To where it's better
Than before*

*Going home
Without my burden
Going home
Behind the curtain
Going home
Without the costume
That I wore*

I love to speak with Leonard
He's a sportsman and a shepherd
He's a lazy bastard
Living in a suit

—Leonard Cohen

ternet, which connected the Asia market with local suppliers. If the goal was to help the plowshare survive, it really might be best to do nothing.

Back in Soalala, Goode went to see the director of the park, a genial man named Jean Claude Rakotonirina. He acknowledged that the park was not popular with some local villagers. They resented being told that they could not graze their cattle in the park, or hunt there, or set fires. They had been living on this land for countless generations.

Goode was discouraged. There was a small but real chance that, by paying guards to watch for plowshares, he was financing a smuggling network. The poaching situation was so bad that Durrell had stopped reintroducing animals to the wild for two years. In 2009, four plow-

shares, after being raised to the age of fifteen in captivity, had been brought to Baly Bay and were immediately stolen, before they were even released. (There were no more reintroductions until last month.) Goode was a co-author on a forthcoming paper about the state of the battle to save the plowshare. As soon as he got to a working phone, he said, he was going to call his fellow-authors. "I'm going to cancel the paper," he said. "We don't know what we're talking about."

Goode is adept at talent recruitment. He met Rodrigues when the Bronx Zoo sent him to help with some Fly River turtles in an aquarium at one of Goode's restaurants. Rodrigues turned out to be a serious turtle guy, a fellow-obsessive. They hit it off, and Goode made Rod-

rigues both the food and beverage director at the Maritime Hotel and a co-director of the Turtle Conservancy. In the boondocks of Madagascar, Rodrigues was trying to solve seafood-delivery problems on Ninth Avenue. He was worrying about Halloween. "It's our biggest night of the year," he told me. "We need to be ready." Rodrigues is forty-one and the father of three, but, if he senses or spots a creature of interest, he turns into a boy of five. At the hotel desk in Mahajanga, he suddenly lunged past me to pluck a gecko from a pillar. "*Phelsuma madagascariensis*," he said. "I think."

Walking with herpers is not like walking with other humans. A snake appeared in a path one day and, before I could recoil, Goode had dived on it, seized it, and lifted it, writhing, to his face for a close, half-smiling inspection. "The great thing about snakes," he murmured, "is how many still haven't been identified." One night, wearing a miner's lamp, he came to show me a chameleon he had found, saying, as he arrived at my door, "Ow! God damn it. He just bit me so hard. Look at this guy." Goode is fearless with animals and tireless on the trail, but without the least whiff of machismo. When he relaxes, the easy, mannered intimacy of the nocturnal player, the avant-gardist, the grownup club kid, comes into focus.

Rodrigues wants to equip every plowshare in the wild and in captivity with a tracking device. "We should be able to sit in the States and watch on an iPad where every animal is in real time." This was utopian fantasy, I thought—poachers would strip off any radio transmitter they found, and the microchips that it is possible to insert require a scanner to read. There is no chelonian LoJack.

Goode found more tractable challenges at the Durrell Trust's Chelonian Captive Breeding Centre, in Ampijoroa. Richard Lewis, a British ornithologist and Durrell's chief in Madagascar, showed us around. There were more than two hundred plowshares on the premises, kept mostly in an array of red-dirt pens with low cement walls. "Imagine the market value," Lewis said, with a shudder. There were motion sensors and an alarm system, but the electricity supply, Lewis said, was dodgy. Their backup was a car battery.

Goode walked into the sun-dappled

complex. Surrounded by so many plowshares, he seemed both hyper-alert and blissed out. *Opuntia* cactus, sprouting brilliant, dark-pink flowers, lined the pathways. "This is found only in the New World," Goode said quietly, indicating the cactus. "Tortoises love it." He stepped into a pen where a big male *angonoka* was chewing on a dry teak leaf. He knelt to inspect the marginal scutes, inviting Currylow to join him. "It looks like a feral dog got at this one, see? Maybe fire." Goode lifted the tortoise, weighing it in his hands, then set it down gently. "Some of these adults may be over a hundred years old."

There were cages for the younger plowshares, with overhead fencing against airborne predators—harrier hawks, buzzards. Some of the older tortoises had leash holes drilled in their lower shells; they had probably once been used as yard-cleaning pets. One was lacking a gular scute—it had been sawed off. Clutches of eggs, buried shallowly by their mothers, had been covered with little wire cones. The cones were to mark the spot and also to fend off predators, particularly hog-nosed snakes, which came in the wet season. Goode studied the shade and sunlight patterns around the clutches. He asked Lewis, "Have you figured out the cutoff temperature?" He meant the temperature above which, in most cases, incubating eggs produce females, and below which they produce males. The majority of chelonians don't rely on chromosomes for sex differentiation but on incubating temperature. The reason for that is a standing question in evolutionary biology. "We're still trying to figure it out with *radiata*," Goode said. "We think anything above eighty-six Fahrenheit, you get a female. But we've endoscoped dozens." Endoscopic sexing of hatchlings and juveniles lets breeders know whether they're getting males or females without having to wait for them to mature—with plowshares, the external differences may not appear for fifteen years. Endoscopic turtle sexing will not become common practice in Madagascar any time soon. Meanwhile, climate change may wreak havoc with wild turtles and tortoises, steadily skewing the populations unsustainably female.

The combat between male plowshares in their mating season was supervised at

Ampijoroa, with the losers re-righted and the winners delivered to a pen filled with females. The fighting is believed to be necessary for successful breeding. Without it, male plowshares seem not to get in the mood.

The breeding center had a quarantine hut, which was crammed with plastic buckets full of tortoises confiscated in a recent bust at the Mahajanga airport. A Bangkok-bound local woman with a passport full of visa stamps from Thailand had been hiding ninety-three animals—seventy-nine *radiata* and fourteen plowshares—wrapped in diapers in her luggage. The quarantine hut was dim and rather dank. Goode suggested that the tortoises needed sun, "at least in the morning. They need to thermoregulate."

Goode was both learning and teaching at Ampijoroa. This was the only plowshare captive-breeding program in the world, and he hoped to emulate its success *ex situ*. At the same time, he knew a lot about breeding tortoises that the workers at Ampijoroa, collectively, did not. Scientists in impoverished Madagascar would never have the resources to do high-tech genetic or veterinary work. But the protocols and facility at Ampijoroa could be improved. One of his biggest concerns was record-keeping. "In Ojai, we've become maniacal about tracking animals," he said. "Every year, we weigh every animal and measure and photograph the carapace and the plastron, and test them constantly. . . . If we lose a plowshare, I'll be devastated. And so will our credibility. You have to *watch* them."

Ampijoroa suffered a grievous loss in 1996, when thieves broke in and stole seventy-four tortoises. Nearly half of those tortoises later turned up in the Netherlands, under murky circumstances, and then were transferred, amid more murk, to the care of the Bronx Zoo. Madagascar demanded their return. The Durrell Trust, afraid they might bring in disease, did not want them back at Ampijoroa,

and so they were returned into the care of a Dutch commercial animal trader in Antananarivo named Olaf Pronk.

Pronk, who has been buying and selling animals since his school days in Holland, is not trusted by the big international conservation organizations. When I visited him in Antananarivo, he faulted the organizations for pushing counterproductive bans on trade. "The philosophy has been 'Let's put it on CITES, and show our fundraisers we're doing something,'" he said. We were sipping lemonade at a picnic table in his red dirt compound. "Prohibition and enforcement don't go together in the *West*," he told me. "Look at illegal drugs. And they certainly don't go together in Madagascar." The smugglers were deeply entrenched. He employed a full-time fixer just for airport work, so he knew all the players. There were honest cops and customs officers—that was why some seized plowshares ended up with Durrell—but they weren't sufficient.

His point was well illustrated by the smuggling operation that Goode had exposed in Mahajanga. No arrests were made.

"Plowshares are perhaps the best example of the failure of traditional conservation among reptiles," Pronk said. "And it's depressing to watch the potential extinction of such an enigmatic species while you're still alive." He sighed. "I have no commercial interest in this species. But I think there is a commercial solution to the plowshare situation. Make a legal market. The best way to reduce illegal trade is to make a legal trade. Set conservative quota limits, limits everyone can agree on, that pose no risk to the wild population. Prices will stay high. But collectors will always take the legal animal because they want to show it to other people. That's part of the joy of reptile collecting. It's not like a canary in a cage."

He took a sip of lemonade. "The desire to own a plowshare is sick," he said. "But it won't go away. So the solution must lie somewhere else."

When Goode returned to New York, his businesses demanded his time. He was renovating the Bowery Bar—now called the B Bar—and trying to revive the popularity of an aging Japanese restaurant at the Maritime Hotel. But his head was still in Madagascar. One evening, he sat in a booth at the Waverly Inn,



intently considering, between brief visits from the restaurant's chef, its manager, and its maître d', Pronk's "commercial solution." Goode is a businessman, keen to solve problems, not an "endangered-tortoise technocrat"—as his foundation's chief scientist, Ross Kiester, calls those who find their calling jealously administering species-protection programs.

"Maybe a quota of plowshare hatchlings, bred at Ampijoroa," Goode said. "Maybe ten or twenty per cent of their annual births could be microchipped and sold on the open market. That might slow down the illegal trade. The funds generated could support more *in situ* conservation." He knew that in the conservation world the political headwinds against such radical innovations would be fierce. So what? He had recently suggested, half-seriously, in an online forum among turtle scientists, that "reverse poaching" might be useful—smuggling captive-bred chelonians back into their range countries for freelance release into the wild.

For now, he was going to pour resources into Durrell's captive-breeding program. Ampijoroa needed expansion, modernization, a nursery for hatchlings, a larger quarantine facility, and much more training. With Kiester and Paul Gibbons, his veterinarian in Ojai, he wrote a detailed proposal, which Durrell refined. The work would not be cheap, but funding was the least of it. Goode would return in January with two teams of experts. He would work on the husbandry and record-keeping upgrades. The second team would go to Baly Bay with radio transmitters and attach them to as many *angonokas* as they could find. If poachers tore them off, that would at least be information. Goode was talking to Lora Smith, now back in Georgia, and copying reports to Miguel Pedrono, hoping to draw the two researchers into his network of collaborators.

Meanwhile, Goode had pressing business in Ojai. The big male plowshare from the Atlanta dentist, Bill Zovickian, had arrived. Goode and Zovickian, I had come to understand, went way back. "In the late sixties, I saw *radiata* up for sale for the first time, and I really wanted to get them," Goode told me. "But Bill Zovickian got them." Later, Goode heard about a shipment of *Pyxis arachnoides*—spider tortoises, also from Madagascar, then classified as vulnerable. (They're now critically endangered.) It was the first ship-



"If you don't hurry up, you're never going to be the first openly gay anything."

ment of spider tortoises to reach the U.S. in decades, and Goode pounced first. "I'm ashamed to say," he told me, "I flew to Oklahoma and paid twenty thousand dollars in cash in a paper bag for those *pyxis*." Today, he has specimens of all three *pyxis* subspecies in Ojai. Goode, for all his conservationist efforts and high-mindedness—the Turtle Conservancy, unlike most zoos, does no business with wildlife dealers—has always been a ferocious collector. He has the sickness that Pronk talked about—Pronk probably has it, too—the sickness that drives much of the global reptile trade, if not the entire wildlife trade. Of course, the collector's passion is also what builds great museums, and great libraries. It helps drive art and science.

And breeding rare animals successfully is both a collector's dream and direct-action conservationism. On the personal side, Goode's girlfriend, Miye McCullough, believes that keeping tortoises is healthy for Goode. "You have to be really, really patient with them, and vigilant," she said. "It forces him to slow down, when his other life"—she

meant his business and social life in New York—"is so fast."

In California, the plowshare mating was not going well. I got reports over the phone. "He seemed interested at first," Goode said. "But then he didn't really know what to do. He's been alone for twenty-seven years. This female is not very outgoing, and she's a lot smaller than him. In fact, he's huge, so we have to be careful."

What about combat foreplay?

"I tried using a male radiated. I thought we might get some interspecies fighting. But he wasn't into it. I tried using a pair of mating radiateds. I put them next to him. Some good turtle porn. That didn't work."

I could hear Marilyn Goode whispering, "You can't be God."

But the fate of an ancient, marvellous beast could be hanging in the balance.

"I'm going to be real patient with this," Goode said. "Maybe the female is waiting for the rainy season in Madagascar." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/VIDEO

Turtle smuggling in Madagascar.

FICTION

LABYRINTH

BY ROBERTO BOLAÑO



They're seated. They're looking at the camera. They are captioned, from left to right: J. Henric, J.-J. Goux, Ph. Sollers, J. Kristeva, M.-Th. Réveillé, P. Guyotat, C. Devade, and M. Devade.

There's no photo credit.

They're sitting around a table. It's an ordinary table, made of wood, perhaps, or plastic, it could even be a marble table on metal legs, but nothing could be less germane to my purpose than to give an exhaustive description of it. The table is a table that is large enough to seat the above-mentioned individuals and it's in a café. Or appears to be. Let's suppose,

for the moment, that it's in a café.

The eight people who appear in the photo, who are *posing* for the photo, are fanned out around one side of the table in a crescent or a kind of opened-out horseshoe, so that each of them can be seen clearly and completely. In other words, no one is facing away from the camera. In front of them, or rather between them and the photographer (and this is slightly strange), there are three plants—a rhododendron, a ficus, and an everlasting—rising from a planter, which may serve, but this is speculation, as a barrier between two distinct sections of the café.

The photo was probably taken in 1977 or thereabouts.

But let us return to the figures. On the left-hand side we have, as I said, J. Henric, that is, the writer Jacques Henric, born in 1938 and the author of "Archées," "Artaud Travaillé par la Chine," and "Chasses." Henric is a solidly built man, broad-shouldered, muscular-looking, probably not very tall. He's wearing a plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled halfway up his forearms. He's not what you would call a handsome man; he has the square face of a farmer or a construction worker, thick eyebrows, and a

COURTESY JACQUES HENRIC



dark chin, one of those chins which need to be shaved twice a day (or so some people claim). His legs are crossed and his hands are clasped over his knee.

Next to him is J.-J. Goux. About J.-J. Goux I know nothing. He's probably called Jean-Jacques, but in this story, for the sake of convenience, I'll continue to use his initials. J.-J. Goux is young and blond. He's wearing glasses. There's nothing especially attractive about his features (although, compared with Henric, he looks not only more handsome but also more intelligent). The line of his jaw is symmetrical and his lips are full, the

lower lip slightly thicker than the upper. He's wearing a turtleneck sweater and a dark leather jacket.

Beside J.-J. is Ph. Sollers, Philippe Sollers, born in 1936, the editor of *Tel Quel*, author of "Drame," "Nombres," and "Paradis," a public figure familiar to everyone. Sollers has his arms crossed, the left arm resting on the surface of the table, the right arm resting on the left (and his right hand indolently cupping the elbow of his left arm). His face is round. It would be an exaggeration to say that it's the face of a fat man, but it probably will be in a few years' time: it's the face of a man who enjoys a good meal. An ironic, intelligent smile is hovering about his lips. His eyes, which are much livelier than those of Henric or J.-J., and smaller, too, remain fixed on the camera, and the bags underneath them help to give his round face a look that is at once preoccupied, perky, and playful. Like J.-J., he's wearing a turtleneck sweater, though the sweater that Sollers is wearing is white, dazzlingly white, while J.-J.'s is probably yellow or light green. Over the sweater Sollers is wearing a garment that appears at first glance to be a dark-colored leather jacket, though it could be made of a lighter material, possibly suede. He's the only one who's smoking.

Beside Sollers is J. Kristeva, Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian semiologist, his wife. She is the author of "La Traversée des Signes," "Pouvoirs de l'Horreur," and "Le Langage, Cet Inconnu." She's slim, with prominent cheekbones, black hair parted in the middle and gathered into a bun at the back. Her eyes are dark and lively, as lively as those of Sollers, although there are differences: in addition to being larger, they transmit a certain hospitable warmth (that is, a certain serenity) which is absent from her husband's eyes. She's wearing a turtleneck sweater, which is very close-fitting, though the collar is loose, and a long V-shaped necklace that accentuates the form of her torso. At first glance she could almost be Vietnamese. Except that her breasts, it seems, are larger than those of the average Vietnamese woman. Hers is the only smile that allows us a glimpse of teeth.

Beside la Kristeva is M.-Th. Réveillé. About her, too, I know nothing. She's probably called Marie-Thérèse. Let's suppose that she is. Marie-Thérèse, then, is

the first person so far not to be wearing a turtleneck sweater. Henric isn't, either, actually, but his neck is short (he barely has one at all), while Marie-Thérèse Réveillé, by contrast, has a neck that is long and entirely revealed by the dark garment she is wearing. Her hair is straight and long, with a center part, light brown in color, or perhaps honey blond. Thanks to the slight leftward turn of her face, a pearl can be seen suspended from her ear, like a stray satellite.

Next to Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is P. Guyotat, that is, Pierre Guyotat, born in 1940, the author of "Tombeau pour Cinq Cent Mille Soldats," "Éden, Éden, Éden," and "Prostitution." Guyotat is bald. That's his most striking characteristic. He's also the handsomest man in the group. His bald head is radiant, his skull capacious, and the black hair at his temples resembles nothing so much as the laurel leaves that used to wreath the heads of victorious Roman generals. Neither shrinking away nor striking a pose, he has the expression of a man who travels by night. He's wearing a leather jacket, a shirt, and a T-shirt. The T-shirt (but here there must be some mistake) is white with black horizontal stripes and a thicker black stripe around the neck, like something a child might wear, or a Soviet parachutist. His eyebrows are narrow and definite. They mark the border between his immense forehead and a face that is wavering between concentration and indifference. The eyes are inquisitive, but perhaps they give a false impression. His lips are pressed together in a way that may not be deliberate.

Next to Guyotat is C. Devade. Caroline? Carole? Carla? Colette? Claudine? We'll never know. Let's say, for the sake of convenience, that she's called Carla Devade. She could well be the youngest member of the group. Her hair is short, without bangs, and although the photo is in black-and-white, it's reasonable to suppose that her skin has an olive tone, suggesting a Mediterranean background. Maybe Carla Devade is from the South of France, or Catalonia, or Italy. Only Julia Kristeva is as dark, but Kristeva's skin—perhaps it's a trick of the light—has a metallic, bronzelike quality, while Carla Devade's is silky and yielding. She is wearing a dark sweater with a round neck, and a blouse. Her lips and her eyes betray

more than a hint of a smile: a sign of recognition, perhaps.

Next to Carla Devade is M. Devade. This is presumably the writer Marc Devade, who was still a member of *Tel Quel's* editorial committee. His relationship with Carla Devade is obvious: man and wife. Could they be brother and sister? Possibly, but the physical dissimilarities are numerous. Marc Devade (I find it hard to call him Marc, I would have preferred to translate that "M" into Marcel or Max) is blond, chubby-cheeked, and has very light eyes. So it makes more sense to presume that they are man and wife. Just to be different, Devade is wearing a turtleneck sweater, like J.-J. Goux, Sollers, and Kristeva, and a dark jacket. His eyes are large and beautiful, and his mouth is decisive. His hair, as I said, is blond; it's long (longer than that of the other men) and elegantly combed back. His forehead is broad and perhaps slightly bulging. And he has, although this may be an illusion produced by the graininess of the image, a dimple in his chin. How many of them are looking directly at the photographer? Only a few: J.-J. Goux, Sollers, and Marc Devade. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Carla Devade are looking away to the left, past Henric. Guyotat's gaze is angled slightly to the right, fixed on a point a yard or two from the photographer. And Kristeva, whose gaze is the strangest of all, appears to be looking straight at the camera, but in fact she's looking at the photographer's stomach, or, to be more precise, into the empty space beside his hip.

The photo was taken in winter or autumn, or maybe at the beginning of spring, but certainly not in summer. Who are the most warmly dressed? J.-J. Goux, Sollers, and Marc Devade, without question: they're wearing jackets over their turtleneck sweaters, and thick jackets, too, from the look of them, especially J.-J.'s and Devade's. Kristeva is a case apart: her turtleneck sweater is light, more elegant than practical, and she's not wearing anything over it. Then we have Guyotat. He might be as warmly dressed as the four I've already mentioned. He doesn't seem to be, but he's the only one wearing three layers: the black leather jacket, the shirt, and the striped T-shirt. You could imagine him wearing those clothes even if the photo had been taken in summer. It's quite possible. All we can say for sure is that Guyotat is dressed as if he were on his

way somewhere else. As for Carla Devade, she's in between. Her blouse, whose collar is showing over the top of her sweater, looks soft and warm; the sweater itself is casual, but of good quality, neither very heavy nor very light. Finally, we have Jacques Henric and Marie-Thérèse Réveillé. Henric is clearly not a man who feels the cold, although his Canadian lumberjack's shirt looks warm enough. And the least warmly dressed of all is Marie-Thérèse Réveillé. Under her light, knitted V-neck sweater there are only her breasts, cupped by a black or white bra.

All of them, more or less warmly dressed, captured by the camera at that moment in 1977 or thereabouts, are friends, and some of them are lovers, too. For a start, Sollers and Kristeva, obviously, and the two Devades, Marc and Carla. Those, we might say, are the stable couples. And yet there are certain features of the photo (something about the arrangement of the objects, the petrified, musical rhododendron, two of its leaves invading the space of the ficus like clouds within a cloud, the grass growing in the planter, which looks more like fire than grass, the everlasting leaning whimsically to the left, the glasses in the center of the table, well away from the edges, except for Kristeva's, as if the other members of the group were worried they might fall) that suggest a more complex and subtle web of relations among these men and women.

Let's imagine J.-J. Goux, for example, who is looking out at us through his thick submarine spectacles.

His space in the photo is momentarily vacant and we see him walking along Rue de l'École de Médecine, with books under his arm, of course, two books, till he comes out onto Boulevard Saint-Germain. There he turns his steps toward the Mabillon Métro station, but first he stops in front of a bar, checks the time, goes in, and orders a cognac. After a while, J.-J. moves away from the bar and sits down at a table near the window. What does he do? He opens a book. We can't tell what book it is, but we do know that he's finding it difficult to concentrate. Every twenty seconds or so he lifts his head and looks out onto Boulevard Saint-Germain, his gaze a little more gloomy each time. It's raining, and people are walking hurriedly under their umbrellas. J.-J.'s blond hair isn't wet, from which we can deduce that it began to rain after he

entered the bar. It's getting dark. J.-J. remains seated, and now there are two cognacs and two coffees on his tab. Coming closer, we can see that the dark rings under his eyes have the look of a war zone. At no point has he taken off his glasses. He's a pitiful sight. After a very long wait, he goes back out onto the street, where he is gripped by a shiver, perhaps because of the cold. For a moment he stands still on the sidewalk and looks both ways, then he starts walking in the direction of the Mabillon Métro station. When he reaches the entrance, he runs his hand through his hair several times, as if he'd suddenly realized that his hair was a mess, although it's not. Then he goes down the steps, and the story ends or freezes in an empty space where appearances gradually fade away. Who was J.-J. Goux waiting for? For someone he's in love with? Someone he was hoping to sleep with that night? And how was his delicate sensibility affected by that person's failure to show up?

Let's suppose that the person who didn't come was Jacques Henric. While J.-J. was waiting for him, Henric was riding a 250-cc Honda motorcycle to the entrance of the apartment building where the Devades live. But no. That's impossible. Let's imagine that Henric simply climbed onto his Honda and rode off into a vaguely literary, vaguely unstable Paris, and that his absence on this occasion is strategic, as amorous absences nearly always are.

So let's set up the couples again. Carla Devade and Marc Devade. Sollers and Kristeva. J.-J. Goux and Jacques Henric. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Pierre Guyotat. And let's set up the night. J.-J. Goux is sitting and reading a book whose title is immaterial, in a bar on Boulevard Saint-Germain; his turtleneck sweater won't let his skin breathe, but he doesn't yet feel entirely ill at ease. Henric is stretched out on his bed, half undressed, smoking and looking at the ceiling. Sollers is shut up in his study, writing (pinkly snug and warm inside his turtleneck sweater). Julia Kristeva is at the university. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is walking along Avenue de Friedland near the intersection with Rue Balzac, the headlights of the cars shining in her face. Guyotat is in a bar on Rue Lacépède, near the Jardin des Plantes, drinking with some friends. Carla Devade is in her apartment, sitting on a chair in the kitchen, doing nothing. Marc

Devade is at the *Tel Quel* office, speaking politely on the phone to one of the poets he most admires and hates. Soon Sollers and Kristeva will be together, reading after dinner. They will not make love tonight. Soon Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Guyotat will be together in bed, and he will sodomize her. They will fall asleep at five in the morning, after exchanging a few words in the bathroom. Soon Carla Devade and Marc Devade will be together, and she will shout, and he will shout, and she will go to the bedroom and pick up a novel, any one of the many that are lying on her bedside table, and he will sit at his desk and try to write but fail. Carla will fall asleep at one in the morning, Marc at half past two, and they will try not to touch each other. Soon Jacques Henric will go down to the underground parking garage and climb onto his Honda and venture out into the cold streets of Paris, becoming cold himself, a man who shapes his own destiny, and knows, or at least believes, that he is lucky. He will be the only member of the group to see the day dawning and the disastrous retreat of the night wanderers, each an enigmatic letter in an imaginary alphabet. Soon J.-J. Goux, who was the first to fall asleep, will have a dream in which a photo will appear, and he'll hear a voice warning him of the Devil's presence and of hapless death. He'll wake with a start from this dream or auditory nightmare and won't be able to get back to sleep for the rest of the night.

Day breaks and the photo is illuminated once again. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and Carla Devade look off to the left, at an object beyond Henric's muscular shoulders. There is recognition or acceptance in Carla's gaze: that much is clear from her half smile and gentle eyes. Marie-Thérèse, however, has a penetrating gaze: her lips are slightly open, as if she were having difficulty breathing, and her eyes are trying to fix on (trying, unsuccessfully, to *nail*) the object of her attention, which is presumably moving. The women are looking in the same direction, but it's clear that they have quite different emotional reactions to whatever it is they are seeing. Carla's gentleness may be conditioned by ignorance. Marie-Thérèse's insecurity, her defensive yet inquisitorial glare, may result from the sudden stripping away of various layers of experience.

Any moment now, J.-J. Goux might

start to cry. The voice that warned him of the Devil's presence is still ringing, though faintly, in his ears. He is not, however, looking to the left, at the object that has attracted the women's attention, but directly at the camera, and an infinitesimal smile is creeping over his lips, a would-be ironic smile confined, for the moment, to the safer domain of placidity.

When night falls over the photograph again, J.-J. Goux will head straight for his apartment, make himself a sandwich, watch television for exactly fifteen minutes, not one more, then sit in an armchair in the living room and call Philippe Sollers. The phone will ring five times and

J.-J. will hang up slowly, holding the receiver in his right hand, raising his left hand to his lips, and touching them with two fingers, as if to check that he's still there, that the person there is *him*, in a living room that's not too big, not too small, crowded with books, and dark.

As for Carla Devade, having lost her acquiescent smile, she'll call Marie-Thérèse Réveillé, who will pick up the phone after three rings. In a roundabout way, they'll talk about things they don't really want to talk about at all, and arrange to meet in three days' time at a café on Rue Galande. Tonight Marie-Thérèse will go out on her own, to nowhere in particular,





"All of our flow charts are backing up!"

and Carla will shut herself in her room as soon as she hears the sound of Marc Devade's key sliding into the lock. But nothing tragic will happen for now. Marc Devade will read an essay by a Bulgarian linguist; Guyotat will go to see a film by Jacques Rivette; Julia Kristeva will stay up late reading; Philippe Sollers will stay up late writing, and he and his wife will barely exchange a word, shut away in their respective studies; Jacques Henric will sit down at his typewriter, but nothing will occur to him, so after twenty minutes he'll put on his leather jacket and his boots and go down to the underground parking garage and look for his Honda; for some reason the lights in the garage don't seem to be working, but Henric can remember where he left his bike, so he walks in the dark, in the belly of that whale-like garage, without fear or apprehension of any kind, until about halfway there he hears an unusual noise (not a knocking in the pipes or the sound of a car door opening or closing) and he stops, without really understanding why, and listens, but the noise is not repeated, and now the silence is absolute.

And then the night ends (or a small part of the night, at least, a manageable part) and light wraps the photo like a bandage on fire, and there he is again, Pierre Guyotat, almost a familiar presence now, with his powerful, shiny bald head and his leather jacket, the jacket of an anarchist or

a commissar from the Spanish Civil War, and his sidelong gaze, veering off to the right, as if into the space behind the photographer, as if directed at someone near or at the bar, perhaps, standing or sitting on a stool, someone whose back is turned to him unless, and this is not unlikely, there is a mirror behind the bar. It may be a woman. A young woman, perhaps. Guyotat looks at her reflection in the mirror and looks at the back of her neck. His gaze, however, is far less intense than the gaze of this woman, which is plumbing an abyss. Here we can reasonably conclude that, while Guyotat is looking at a stranger, Marie-Thérèse and Carla are looking at a man they know, although, as is usually (or, in fact, inevitably) the case, their perceptions of him are entirely different.

Let's call these two beyond the frame X and Z. X is the woman at the bar. Z is the man who is known to Marie-Thérèse and Carla. They don't know him very well, of course. From Carla's gaze (which is not only gentle but protective) it could be inferred that he is young, although from Marie-Thérèse's gaze it could also be inferred that he is a potentially dangerous individual. Who else knows Z? No one, or at least there is nothing to suggest that his presence is of any concern to the others. Maybe he's a young writer who at some stage tried to get his work published in *Tel*

Quel; maybe he's a young journalist from South America, no, from Central America, who at some point tried to write an article about the group. He may well be an ambitious young man. If he's a Central American in Paris, in addition to being ambitious he may also be bitter. Of the people sitting around the table, he knows only Marie-Thérèse, Carla, Sollers, and Marc Devade. Let's say he once visited the *Tel Quel* office and was introduced to those four. (He also once shook hands with Marcelin Pleynet, but Pleynet's not in the photo.) He has never seen the others in his life, or only (in the cases of Guyotat and Jacques Henric) in author photos. We can imagine the young Central American, hungry and bitter, in the *Tel Quel* office, and we can imagine Philippe Sollers and Marc Devade, wavering between puzzlement and indifference as they listen to him, and we can even imagine that Carla Devade is there by pure chance; she has come to meet her husband, she has brought some papers that Marc forgot on his desk, she's there because she couldn't stand being alone in the apartment a minute longer, etc. What we can't imagine (or justify) in any way at all is Marie-Thérèse's presence in the office. She is Guyotat's partner, she doesn't work for *Tel Quel*, and she has no reason to be there. And yet there she is, and that is where she meets the young Central American. Is she there on that day because of Carla Devade? Has Carla arranged to meet Marie-Thérèse at the office because she knows that Marc will not be coming home with her? Or has Marie-Thérèse come to meet someone else? Let's return, discreetly, to the afternoon when the Central American came to the office on Rue Jacob to pay his respects.

It's the end of the workday. The secretary has already gone home, and when the bell rings it's Marc Devade who opens the door and lets the visitor in without meeting his eye. The Central American crosses the threshold and follows Marc Devade to an office at the end of the corridor. He leaves a trail of drops on the wooden floor behind him, although it stopped raining quite some time ago. Devade is, of course, oblivious of this detail; he walks ahead, talking about something or other—the weather, money, chores—with that elegance that only certain Frenchmen seem to possess. In the office, which is spacious and contains a desk, several chairs, two

armchairs, and shelves full of books and magazines, Sollers is waiting, and as soon as the introductions are over the Central American hails him as a genius, one of the century's most brilliant minds, a compliment that would be par for the course in certain tropical nations on the far side of the Atlantic but which, in the *Tel Quel* office and the ears of Philippe Sollers, verges on the preposterous. In fact, as soon as the Central American makes his declaration, Sollers catches Devade's eye and both of them wonder whether they've let a madman in. Deep down, however, Sollers is eighty per cent in agreement with the Central American's appraisal, so once he has set aside the idea that the visitor might be mocking them the conversation proceeds in an amicable fashion, at least for a while. The Central American speaks of Julia Kristeva (he winks at Sollers as he mentions that eminent Bulgarian), he speaks of Marcelin Pleynet (whom he has already met), and of Denis Roche (whose work he claims to be translating). Devade listens to him with a slightly wry smile. Sollers listens, nodding from time to time, his boredom increasing with every passing second. Suddenly, a sound of footsteps in the corridor. The door opens. Carla Devade appears, wearing tight corduroy trousers, flat shoes, and a disconsolate smile on her pretty Mediterranean face. Marc Devade gets up from his chair; for a moment the couple whisper questions and answers. The Central American has fallen silent; Sollers is mechanically flipping through a British magazine. Then Carla and Marc walk across the room (Carla taking tentative little steps, holding her husband's arm), and the Central American stands up, is introduced, obsequiously greets the newcomer. The conversation immediately resumes, but the Central American's chatter veers off in a new direction, unfortunately for him (he changes the subject from literature to the matchless beauty and grace of French women), at which point Sollers completely loses interest. Shortly afterward, the visit is brought to a close: Sollers looks at his watch, says it's late; Devade shows the Central American to the door, shakes his hand, and the visitor, instead of waiting for the elevator, rushes down the stairs. On the second-floor landing he runs into Marie-Thérèse Réveillé. The Central American is talking to himself in Spanish, not under his breath but out loud. As their

paths cross, Marie-Thérèse notices a fierce look in his eyes. They bump into each other. Both apologize. They look at each other again (and this is surprising, the way their eyes meet again *after* the apology), and what she sees, beneath the expedient mask of bitterness, is a well of unbearable horror and fear.

So the Central American, Z, is there in the café when the photo is taken, and Carla and Marie-Thérèse have recognized him, they've remembered him; perhaps he has just arrived, perhaps he walked past the table at which the group is sitting and greeted them, but, except for the two women, they had no idea who he was; this happens quite often, of course, but it's something that the Central American still can't accept with equanimity. There he is, to the left of the group, with some Central American friends, or waiting for them, maybe, and deep within him there's a seething anger nourished by affronts and grudges, fuelled by bitterness and the chill of the City of Light. His appearance, however, is equivocal: it makes Carla Devade feel like a protective older sister or a missionary nun in Africa, but it catches at Marie-Thérèse Réveillé like barbed wire and triggers a vague erotic longing.

And then night falls again and the photo empties out or disappears under a scribble of lines traced by the mechanism of night, and Sollers is writing in his study, and Kristeva is writing in her study next door—soundproofed studies, so that they can't hear each other typing, for example, or getting up to consult a book, or coughing or talking to themselves—and Carla and Marc Devade are leaving a cinema (they've been to see a film by Rivette), not talking to each other, although a couple of times Marc and then Carla, who's more distracted, greet people they know, and J.-J. Goux is preparing his dinner, a frugal dinner consisting of bread, pâté, cheese, and a glass of wine, and Guyotat is undressing Marie-Thérèse Réveillé and throwing her onto the sofa with a violent thrust that Marie-Thérèse intercepts in midair as if she were catching a butterfly of lucidity in a lucidity net, and Henric is leaving his apartment, going down to the parking garage, and he stops again as the lights go out, first the ones near the metal roller door that opens onto the street, and then the others, till there is only the light down at the far end,

illuminating his multicolored Honda, flickering helplessly, and then it fails as well. And it occurs to Henric that his motorcycle is like an Assyrian god, but for the moment his legs refuse to walk on into the darkness, and Marie-Thérèse shuts her eyes and opens her legs, one foot on the sofa, the other on the carpet, while Guyotat pushes into her, the panties still around her thighs, and calls her his little whore, his little bitch, and asks her what she did during the day, what happened to her, what streets she wandered down, and J.-J. Goux is sitting at the table and spreading pâté on a piece of bread and lifting it to his mouth and chewing, first on the right side, then on the left, unhurriedly, with a book by Robert Pinget open beside him to page 2 and the television switched off but the screen reflecting his image, a man on his own with his mouth closed and his cheeks full, looking thoughtful and absent, and Carla Devade and Marc Devade are making love, Carla on top, illuminated only by the light in the corridor, a light they usually leave on, and Carla is groaning and trying not to look at her husband's face, his blond hair a mess now, his light eyes, his broad and placid face, his delicate, elegant hands, devoid of the fire she's longing for, ineffectually holding her hips, as if he were trying to keep her there with him, but he has no real sense of what she might be fleeing from or what her flight might mean, a flight that goes on and on like torture, and Kristeva and Sollers are going to bed, first her, she has to lecture early the next day, then him, and both of them take books that they will leave on their bedside tables when sleep comes to close their eyes, and Philippe Sollers will dream that he is walking along a beach in Brittany with a scientist who has discovered a way to destroy the world; they will be walking westward along this long, deserted beach, bounded by rocks and black cliffs, and suddenly Sollers will realize that the scientist (who is talking and explaining) is himself and that the man walking beside him is a murderer; this will dawn on him when he looks down at the wet sand (with its souplike consistency) and the crabs skittering away to hide and the prints the two of them are leaving on the beach (there is a certain logic to this: identifying the murderer by his footprints), and Julia Kristeva will dream of a little village in Germany where years ago

she participated in a seminar, and she'll see the streets of the village, clean and empty, and sit down in a square that's tiny but full of plants and trees, and close her eyes and listen to the distant cheeping of a single bird and wonder if the bird is in a cage or free, and she'll feel a breeze on her neck and her face, neither cold nor warm, a perfect breeze, perfumed with lavender and orange blossom, and then she'll remember her seminar and look at her watch, but it will have stopped.

So the Central American is outside the frame of the photograph, sharing that pristine and deceptive territory with the object of Guyotat's gaze: an unknown woman armed only, for the moment, with her beauty. Their eyes will not meet. They will pass each other by like shadows, briefly sharing the same hazardous ambit: the itinerant theatre of Paris. The Central American could quite easily become a murderer. Perhaps, back in his country, he will, but not here, where the only blood he could possibly shed is his own. This Pol Pot won't kill anyone in Paris. And actually, back in Tegucigalpa or San Salvador, he'll probably end up teaching in a university. As for the unknown woman, she will not be captured by Guyotat's asbestos nets. She's at the bar, waiting for the boyfriend she'll marry before long (him or the next one), and their marriage will be disastrous, though not without its moments of comfort. Literature brushes past these literary creatures and kisses them on the lips, but they don't even notice.

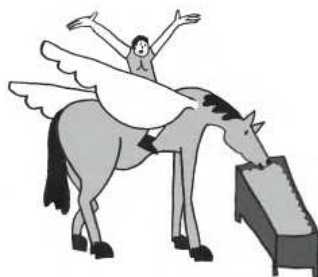
The section of restaurant or café that contains the photo's nest of smoke continues imperturbably on its voyage through nothingness. Behind Sollers, for instance, we can make out the fragmentary figures of three men. None of their faces can be seen in their entirety. The man on the left, in profile: a forehead, one eyebrow, the back part of his ear, the top of his head. The man on the right: a little piece of his forehead, his cheekbone, strands of dark hair. The man in the middle, who seems to be calling the shots: most of his forehead, traversed by two clearly visible wrinkles, his eyebrows, the bridge of his nose, and a discreet quiff. Behind them, there is a pane of glass and behind the glass many people walking about curiously among stalls or exhibition stands, bookstands perhaps, mostly facing away from our characters (who have their backs to them in turn), except for a child with a round face

and straight bangs, wearing a jacket that may be too small for him, looking sideways toward the café, as if from that distance he could observe everything going on inside, which, on the face of it, seems rather unlikely.

And in a corner, to the right: the waiting man, the listening man. His face appears just above Marc Devade's blond hair. His hair is dark and abundant, his eyebrows are thick, he is thin. In one hand (a hand resting listlessly against his right temple) he is holding a cigarette. A spiral of smoke is rising from the cigarette toward the ceiling, and the camera has captured it almost as if it were the image of a ghost. Telekinesis. An expert could identify the brand of cigarette that he's smoking in half a second just by the solid look of that smoke. Gauloises, no doubt. He's gazing off toward the photo's right-hand side—that is, he's pretending not to notice that the photo is being taken, but in a way he, too, is posing.

And there is yet another person: careful examination reveals something protruding from Guyotat's neck like a cancerous growth, which turns out to be made up of a nose, a withered forehead, the outline of an upper lip, the profile of a man who is looking, with a certain gravity, in the same direction as the smoking man, although their gazes could not be more different.

And then the photo is occluded and all that is left is the smoke of a Gauloise floating in the air, as if the viewfinder had suddenly swung to the right, toward the black hole of chance, and Sollers comes to a sudden halt in the street, a street near Place Wagram, and feels in his pockets as if he had left his address book behind or lost it, and Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is driving on Boulevard Malesherbes, near Place Wagram, and J.-J. Goux is talking on the phone with Marc Devade (J.-J.'s voice is unsteady, Devade isn't saying a word), and Guyotat and Henric are walking on Rue Saint-André des Arts, heading for Rue Dauphine, and by chance they run into



Carla Devade, who says hello and joins them, and Julia Kristeva is coming out of class surrounded by a retinue of students, quite a few of whom are foreign (two Spaniards, a Mexican, an Italian, two Germans), and once more the photo dissolves into nothingness.

Aurora borealis. Terrible dawn. As they open their eyes, they are almost transparent. Marc Devade, alone in bed, snug in gray pajamas, dreaming of the Académie Goncourt. J.-J. Goux at his window, watching clouds float through the sky over Paris and comparing them unfavorably with certain clouds in paintings by Pissarro or the clouds in his nightmare. Julia Kristeva is sleeping and her calm face seems an Assyrian mask until, with a very slight wince of discomfort, she wakes. Philippe Sollers is in the kitchen, leaning on the edge of the sink, and blood is dripping from his right index finger. Carla Devade is climbing the stairs to her apartment after having spent the night with Guyotat. Marie-Thérèse Réveillé is making coffee and reading a book. Jacques Henric is walking through a dark parking garage, which echoes to the sound of his boots on the concrete.

A world of forms is unfolding before his eyes, a world of distant noises. The possibility of fear is approaching, the way wind approaches a provincial capital. Henric stops, his heart speeds up, he tries to orient himself. Before, he could at least glimpse shadows and silhouettes at the far end of the garage; now it seems hermetically black, like the darkness in an empty coffin at the bottom of a crypt. So he decides to keep still. In that stillness his heartbeat gradually slows and memory brings back images of the day. He remembers Guyotat, whom he secretly admires, openly pursuing little Carla. Once again, he sees them smiling and then he sees them walking away down a street where yellow lights scatter and regroup sporadically, without any obvious pattern, although Henric knows deep down that everything is determined in some way, everything is causally linked to something else, and human nature leaves very little room for the truly gratuitous. He touches his crotch. He is startled by this movement, the first he has made for some time. He has an erection and yet he doesn't feel sexually aroused in any way. ♦

*(Translated, from the Spanish,
by Chris Andrews.)*

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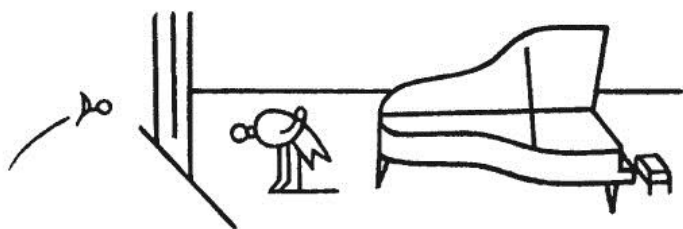


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ON TELEVISION

HORSEY SET

The upscale temptations of "Luck" and "Downton Abbey."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

Here are a few things I know little about: gambling, horses, the manly bonds of career drinkers, the lonely hotel rooms of businessmen, and the sly mathematical ecstasy of statistics. In other words, I'm almost certainly not the critic to determine the authenticity of "Luck," the new HBO series by David Milch, who is himself a horse owner and has wagered at the track for nearly half a century.

Still, I can say that the show has a musky, appealing sensuality to it, a stink of leather and aged Scotch. Starting with the pilot, filmed at the Santa Anita racetrack and directed by Michael Mann, the show's camera noses into everything, lapping up the dirty allure of the stables, the twitchy degenerates filling the bleachers, the champions gloating for the cameras, and particularly the races themselves, sequences in which the camera gets so close that it might as well be a horse itself. When it comes to story, unfortunately, "Luck" is a drag. Like David Simon's "Treme," "Luck" has lofty, loving aims: it yearns to celebrate an exotic subculture, one whose argot can feel as impenetrable as Klingon. At Milch's Santa Anita, rich men wager on poorer, younger bodies (those of both the horses and the jockeys)—a theme so fascinating that I kept placing my own bets that it would pay off. But, starting with the pilot, the drama makes a bad gamble: it takes for granted that we'll care about the fates of its shutoff, curmudgeonly power brokers, yet never gives us much reason to do so. Like so many love letters, it's

hard to decipher if you haven't already made the leap.

I take no pleasure as I type these words. To the contrary, I feel the ghastly critical chill of admitting that I was bored by such obvious prestige television, created by people whose work I admire. Milch was behind "NYPD Blue" and "Deadwood"; as a risk-taker in a world of easy bets, he's venerated for good reason. The series gleams with HBO handsomeness. It stars Dustin Hoffman and Nick Nolte (and Dennis Farina and Joan Allen: the cast is so impressive that I giggled when Alan Rosenberg showed up). And yet I couldn't help feeling that I was missing something.

Much of the problem is the macho ensemble, which barks insults like comics at a roast. There's the muttering codger Walter Smith (Nolte), the irascible trainer Turo Escalante (John Ortiz), and the stuttering rageaholic jockey-agent Joey Rathburn (Richard Kind). Then there's Dustin Hoffman's Chester (Ace) Bernstein, an ex-con financier who spends the bulk of his time seething in lavish hotel suites, rattling ice in a glass. Like Emily Thorne on "Revenge," Bernstein is working a long scam against the men who wrecked his life, a scheme that we learn about through Socratic dialogues with his chauffeur-consigliere, Gus Demitriou (Farina). Visually, the show frames Bernstein as a weighty cable antihero: the Tony, the Walter, the Don. But he never evolves into more than a constipated rich guy who communicates in pained glances, curt demands, and other signifiers of manliness. In one negotiation, Bernstein

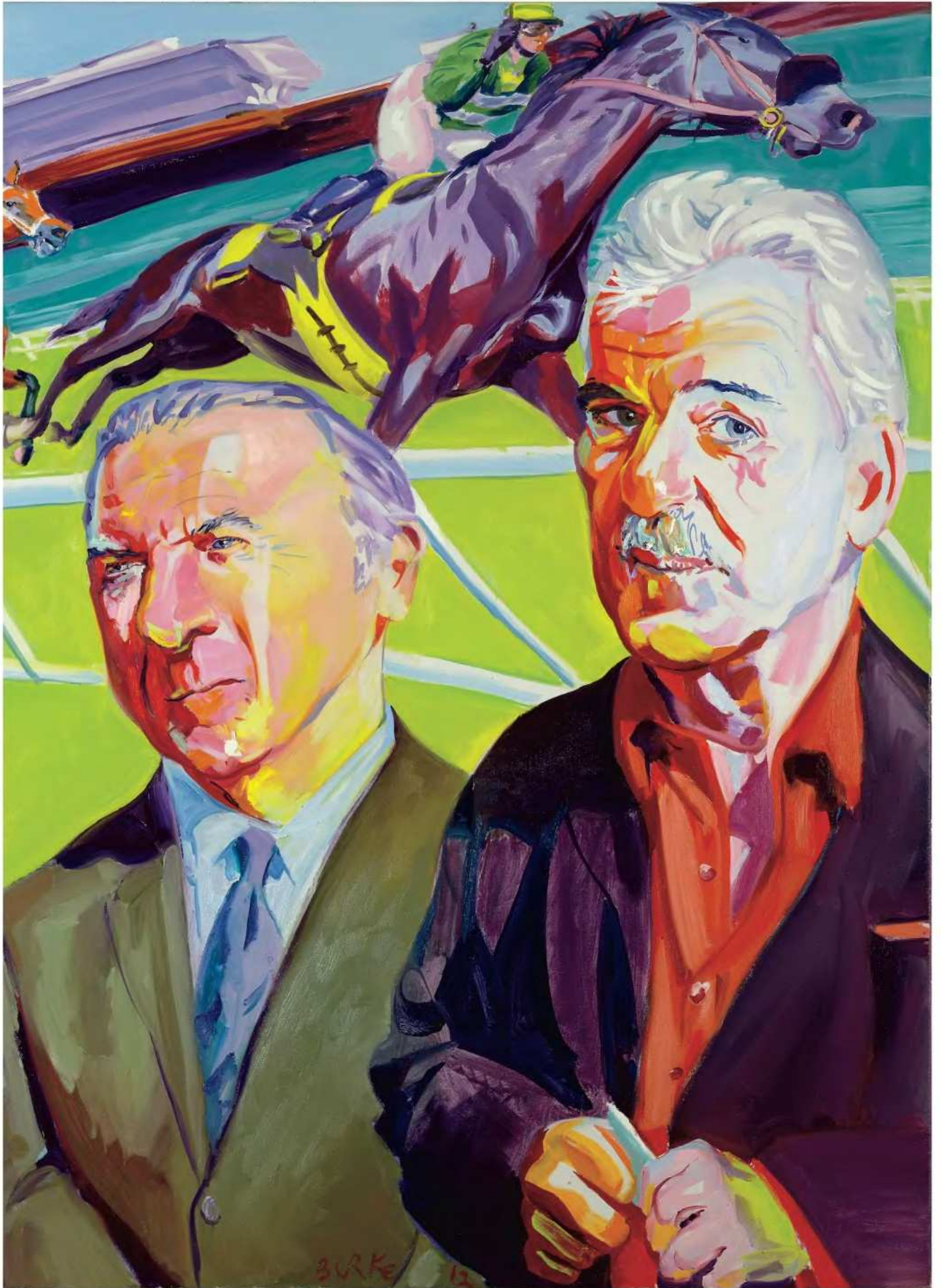
name-checks Miles Davis in order to telegraph his worth to another man. In another, Bernstein's decadent antagonist (British accent, check; flowery Biblical references, check) offers him anal sex with his stable of slave girls. When Bernstein declines, the scene seems intended to suggest that he's a restrained romantic—a low standard, even for an antihero. (Let's simply skirt the subject of the other female characters, who are angelic and/or dull, except for the cable-nudity contribution of two pissed-off cougars.)

Milch is famous for his aggressively stylized, arcane dialogue, and the scripts overflow with faintly "Guys and Dolls"-ish exchanges, which lean heavily on constructions like "How long my time in Siberia?" and "No icing error, this." That oddness can be effective. But, just as often, it feels affected or expository—once you slash through the verbal kudzu, there's surprisingly little subtext. Some performances do kick in (especially the charismatic, roosterish Ortiz, and Kerry Condon, who makes the most of her thinly written Irish jockey), but the show's air of menace eventually fizzles, despite propulsive synth chords insisting that trouble is on the way.

Milch has more success with the show's quartet of lovable "railbirds": the cranky cripple, Marcus (Kevin Dunn); the cocky Lonnie (Ian Hart); the goofy Renzo (Ritchie Coster); and the handsome Jerry (Jason Gedrick), who is hooked on gambling in a way that the show at once glamorizes and finds sickening. While their camaraderie isn't always as funny as it's meant to be, it's a relief to root for these bickering small-timers, who share an innocent fantasy of the big time. In the first episode—although this is a spoiler, and I'm making this aside as lengthy as possible, in order to warn anyone who doesn't want to know anything about the plot, it's the basic premise of the show—the four win a jackpot. They join forces, aiming to step into the winner's circle among the track's storied owners, a place they've ogled from afar.

But the sweetest moments feature horses, not humans. At one point, a trainer gives a new owner a carrot, advising him, "Keep your hands open." A gorgeous closeup of the horse follows, with its huge liquid alien eyes. Mann films the races with affection, capturing the stalls from above, then diving right onto the

ABOVE: PHILIPPE WEISBECKER; OPPOSITE: PHILIP BURKE



Dustin Hoffman, as an ex-con financier, and Dennis Farina, as his chauffeur, in David Milch's new series, "Luck."



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track, where we see the jockeys play aggressive games with one another, and then back out to the audience, whose faces crack open with fear and excitement. In the most thrilling of these sequences, the camera captures the ripple of flesh and the flaring red nostril of a horse in motion. The jockey is ecstatic, bonded with her steed. The owner's eyes tear up. As classical music plays, we enter slow motion, the lens alighting on face after face. There's a cut to a stack of money knocked against a table with an exaggerated sound effect, like a jail door banged shut. The scene is so portentous, so monumental, that I nearly switched sides—the sheer boldness was seductive. But then yet another scene featured a long, mumbling monologue to a horse. I wanted to take it seriously, but all I could think was: Mister Ed.

Like "Luck," *"Downton Abbey"* arrives wrapped in the shiny foil of cachet TV (PBS, WWI, tea and corsets!). But the British series, about the aristocratic Crawley family and their titular home, goes down so easily that it's a bit like scarfing handfuls of caramel corn while swigging champagne. To let us know that we're safely in the Masterpiece zone, Laura Linney, clad in a black cocktail dress, introduces each episode with a tense grin, as if welcoming us to a PBS fund-raiser, which I suppose she is.

I could pick at small elements of the show, especially the extraordinary obstacles placed in the way of about fifteen separate couples. (There's enough unrequited love to make "The Remains of the Day" look like "Caligula.") A few villains have hearts as black as coal; a few of the decent people could use a good noogie. A threat of blackmail is overheard through a heating duct. And, despite the show's reasonably nuanced examination of social class, there's a suspicious ping of nostalgia that one detects over time. But I can't lie: when I reached the final DVD in my preview package and realized that it was missing the Christmas finale, I let out an animal howl. With its perfectly crafted zingers, waves of pure heartbreak, and a visual thread count so dense it may actually qualify as a controlled substance, *"Downton Abbey"* is situated precisely on the Venn diagram where "prestige" meets "guilty pleasure": it's as much cake as it is bread. And, sue me, I like cake.

The first season began with the Titanic disaster; the second plunges us into the trenches of the First World War, emphasizing the ways in which battle causes class distinctions to at once dissolve and become more starkly apparent. As veterans return from the front, *Downton* becomes an auxiliary hospital, an event that confronts its wealthier inhabitants with the uselessness of their lives. (Well, most of them; Maggie Smith's fabulously haughty dowager isn't having any mournful breakthroughs.) The season begins slowly, but with each episode the pace intensifies; and just when you feel that you can't take another dignified refusal there's a resonant insight. "Flattered" is a word posh people use when they're getting ready to say 'no,' one suitor in a cross-class flirtation says.

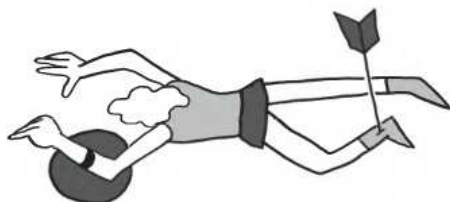
While I loved plenty of the "downstairs" plots (particularly a dark turn involving the innocent chambermaid Daisy), the meatiest bits feature the three wealthy Crawley daughters, reared like veal, though sharp as vipers. (O.K., not Sybil, the youngest; she's a sweetie.) I've always adored Edith, a homely gossip, who has a few oddball adventures, but my favorite is Mary, who began the show as a cold snob, then unfolded like a fan as she fell in love and faced ruin, without ever altering her essential nature. Everyone in the series has an opinion about Mary: one character mocks her as "the cold and careful Mary Crawley"; another disdains her as "an uppity minx who is the author of her own misfortunes." For me, the sight of Mary's beautiful white mask of a face as she drifts into an alliance with a newspaperman with shades of Rupert Murdoch inspires both pity and fascination. And the fate of Matthew, the middle-class heir to *Downton*, has the sweep of the best melodrama—helped along by the elegant performance of Dan Stevens. There's no denying the show has aspirational fantasy as its hook: I've even heard the Crawleys compared to the Kardashians. But I prefer to think of *"Downton"* as an experimental take on *"Fiddler on the Roof."* Just think of the Earl of Grantham as Tevye, with his three rebel daughters, plus a much better roof. *L'chaim, m'lord.* ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/GO/CULTUREDESK
More on "Downton Abbey."

BRIEFLY NOTED

Perlmann's Silence, by *Pascal Mercier* (*Grove*). At an academic conference in Italy, Philipp Perlmann, a recently widowed linguistics professor, has lost faith in academic work. He contemplates passing off as his own a paper that he's been translating by a Russian colleague, Vassily Leskov, but Leskov himself arrives unexpectedly, and Perlmann makes panicked plans for a coverup, going so far as to consider murder or suicide. The premise calls to mind Patricia Highsmith, but Mercier's novel dwells less on suspense than on existential crises. Occasionally, the need to convey Perlmann's stasis slows things down too much, but the book is absorbing. Mercier, himself a professor, understands the soft sniping that sustains academic rivalries and draws wry comedy from them.

The Quality of Mercy, by *Barry Unsworth* (*Nan A. Talese*). This sequel to Unsworth's Booker Prize-winning novel "Sacred Hunger," much of which was set on an eighteenth-century slave ship, trades the high seas for the courtroom, where a series of cases bearing on the legal status of black men in British society plays out. At the center of these cases is Frederick Ashton, an abolitionist whose younger sister falls in love with a ruthless industrialist, "a man who believed so strongly in his own purposes as to appear stricken by them." Other characters, including an Irish fiddler and a young northern coal miner, are characterized with equal penetration. Unsworth directs our sympathy toward workers and slaves, "whose lives were all toil," and attributes the social ills arising from capitalism to a failure of compassion on the part of those with money and property. Gradually, though, this theme comes to control the novel's action, and its



characters seem increasingly like vessels for Unsworth's message.

Haiti, by *Laurent Dubois* (*Metropolitan*). "There are tons of idiots who have never used their ten fingers for anything, and who wander around constantly repeating, inanely: 'Haitians are very lazy,'" the Haitian writer Louis-Joseph Janvier wrote in 1882, in a long and passionate rejoinder to his nation's critics. Written very much in Janvier's spirit, this excellent, engaging history seeks to strip away centuries of mocking and reductive bias. Dubois's Haiti is a land of ceaseless activity, a ferment of suppression and insurrection exacerbated by the mercenary intrusions of foreign powers—in the past century, chiefly the United States. Dubois also traces a parallel history of bold social experiments on the part of everyday Haitians, such as *lakou*, an inventive system of communal living and farming. Throughout, he makes clear how economic pressures and political crises have left even the country's better leaders hamstrung, without downplaying their failures in fulfilling Haiti's great promise.

A Train in Winter, by *Caroline Moorehead* (*Harper*). In January, 1943, two hundred and thirty women of the French Resistance, imprisoned under the Vichy regime for offenses ranging from pamphleteering to violent sabotage, were loaded into cattle cars bound for the Birkenau concentration camp, in Poland. Just forty-nine lived to see the end of the war, enduring starvation, disease, physical abuse, and exposure. The survivors owed their lives to a combination of luck and bonds of friendship so strong, as one of the women remembered it, "that to die oneself would be no worse than to see one of the others die." Moorehead's account stresses the women's persistence and moral courage, but she also captures the chilling ambivalence that many felt in the "flat, empty" years that followed the war: "Having so badly wanted to live, they found they no longer cared whether they did so or not."

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BOOKS

OFF THE MAP

Michel Houellebecq's naked nomads.

BY JAMES WOOD

There is a beautiful short story by D. H. Lawrence called "The Man Who Loved Islands." Its protagonist is a wealthy scholar, who prefers to work and live alone. To facilitate his isolation, he acquires a small island and becomes lord and master of its few inhabitants. Eventually, the landowner starts quarrelling with his workers, and decides to move to a smaller, even less populous island. In time, he moves again, to an uninhabited island somewhere in the north, and is finally completely solitary. But in his alienation he begins to dwindle, and the cold climate gradually hunts him down: "In the silence, it seemed he could hear the panther-like dropping of infinite snow." This is pretty much where Lawrence ends his tale, with his selfish islander almost buried alive by snow, terminal and defeated.

The characters in the French novelist Michel Houellebecq's fictional universe are, in Lawrence's sense, men who love islands. They are isolated, damaged, and alone. In Houellebecq's best-known novel, "The Elementary Particles" (2000), Bruno and Michel, half brothers abandoned by their careless parents, seem incapable of ordinary human relations: Michel quits his job as a microbiologist and goes for weeks without seeing anyone; at the end of the novel, he abandons the only woman who has ever loved him and leaves France for the unpeopled Atlantic dazzle of the west coast of Ireland. Bruno is even more tormented, a flasher, a pervert, and a racist, with pedophilic tendencies; he, too, finally spurns the love of a sympathetic woman, and ends up in a mental hospital. Daniel, the protagonist of "The Possibility of an Island" (2006), is a well-known comedian but a private failure, who cannot sustain relationships with women.

So it is business as usual that Jed Martin, the hero of Houellebecq's new novel, "The Map and the Territory"

(Knopf; translated from the French by Gavin Bowd), spent his boyhood without "a single close friend, and didn't seek the friendship of others." Jed's mother committed suicide when he was six; he is sent away to boarding school, though his motherlessness protects him from the bullying that usually befalls the Houellebecquian male. He survives his childhood, and goes to art school in Paris. On the morning of the opening of an exhibition of student work, "he realized that he hadn't said a word for almost a month, except the 'No' he repeated every day to the cashier (rarely the same one, it has to be said) who asked him if he had the Club Casino loyalty card." At this exhibition, his work catches the eye of Olga Sheremoyova, a beautiful and worldly Russian woman. The two begin what seems a happy relationship, but within thirty pages or so it is all over, and Jed returns to his customary alienation. He spends seven years working on a series of paintings: "During these years, he didn't meet many people, and formed no new relationship—whether sentimental or simply friendly."

Houellebecq's men are unattractive, unsociable, frigid, sexually unconfident, physically under-equipped, erotically bored (or some combination of these negatives); they are panhandlers in the sexual souk, and spend much of their time trying to grab what wares they can, by way of porn, prostitutes, or swingers' clubs. The new novel has less sex in it than Houellebecq's previous works—which is probably one reason that it was awarded the Prix Goncourt in 2010, the relieved judges eager to encourage the author's newfound "respectability"—but even Jed Martin, whose libido certainly has a lower pilot light than his fictional coevals, uses prostitutes. (Houellebecq mentions "a Lebanese escort whose sexual performances amply justified the ecstatic reviews she received on the site

Niamodel.com.”) Jed’s first girlfriend, Geneviève, financed her studies by turning tricks for two hundred and fifty euros an hour, “with a supplement of one hundred euros for anal sex.” Jed, we are told, didn’t mind a bit. Of course not. After all, this is the kind of world where an unattractive woman—a publicist who helps to make Jed’s reputation

unillusioned truth-telling of moments like these:

Another couple came over and sat beside them; the woman, a redhead of about 20, was wearing a black PVC mini-skirt. She watched as Christiane licked his cock; Christiane smiled at her and pulled up her tee shirt to show off her breasts. The other woman hiked up her skirt revealing her cunt, her pubic hair was also red. Christiane took her hand and guided it to Bruno’s penis. The woman began

heard of any treatment; yet she licked these balls, and caressed them, without seeming at all bothered.

Houellebecq is not always humorless about all this dirty striving. There is a funny scene in “Platform” (2003) when the protagonist reads John Grisham’s “The Firm” in bed, and laments how unerotically it is. At last, he masturbates to



Houellebecq has become famous for both the pornographic fervor of his prose and the theorizing he likes to do around his sex scenes.

as an artist—is described by the novelist as “this poor little runt of a woman, with her unexplored vagina.” In Houellebecq’s world, the unexplored vagina is not worth having.

Houellebecq’s misogyny is related to the cynical brutality and cheerless lucidity with which he writes about sex. His fiction seems motivated by a need to expose all that is mechanical, alienated, onanistic, and disembodied about male desire. When Houellebecq’s fiction first became widely known in English, about a decade ago, there was something exciting and seemingly daring about the unlovely nudity of his writing: here was a (gentler) heterosexual counterpart to Dennis Cooper’s gay snuff fiction. Perhaps there was even a sad nobility to the

to masturbate him while Christiane continued to lick the glans. In a matter of seconds he shuddered with a spasm of pleasure and came all over her face. “I’m sorry,” he said, “really sorry.” She kissed him and pulled him close to her, he could smell the spunk on her cheeks. “It doesn’t matter,” she said gently, “it really doesn’t matter. Do you want to go?” she said a little later. He nodded sadly, his excitement had completely dissipated. They dressed quickly and left immediately.

The sexual life of a man can be broken down into two phases: the first when he prematurely ejaculates, and the second when he can no longer manage to get a hard-on. During the first weeks of my relationship with Esther, I noticed that I had returned to the first phase—despite believing, for a long time, that I had begun the second. . . . On the whole, however, my body wasn’t that badly preserved, I didn’t have a trace of fat, I even had a few muscles; but my ass sagged, and especially my balls, they sagged more and more, and it was irrevocable, I had never

the only sex scene he can find: “I was jerking off in earnest now, trying to visualize mixed-race girls wearing tiny swimsuits in the dark. I ejaculated between two pages with a groan of satisfaction. They were going to stick together; didn’t matter, it wasn’t the kind of book you read twice.” And he can be aphoristic and tart: “Orgasm is a matter of custom, as Pascal would undoubtedly have said if he had been interested in such things”; “Anything can happen in life, especially nothing.”

Houellebecq has become famous both for the pornographic fervor of his writing and for the theorizing he likes to do around his sex scenes. Essentially, he argues that contemporary sex-

uality, though it sails under the colors of liberation and left-ish utopia, is just a continuation of the capitalist, neoliberal market, in which there are always winners and losers. His male characters, by and large, are the losers. (They are losers either because they aren't getting any sex or because they are getting the wrong kind of sex, piggishly overeating at the trough.) Sex is an extension of the domain of the struggle, to use the title of his first novel (translated into English, in 1998, as "Whatever"). As the narrator of that novel explains:

It's a fact, I mused to myself, that in societies like ours sex truly represents a second system of differentiation, completely independent of money; and as a system of differentiation, it functions just as mercilessly. . . . Just like unrestrained economic liberalism, and for similar reasons, sexual liberalism produces phenomena of *absolute pauperization*. Some men make love every day; others five or six times in their life, or never. . . . It's what's known as "the law of the market." In an economic system where unfair dismissal is prohibited, every person more or less manages to find their place. In a sexual system where adultery is prohibited, every person more or less manages to find their bed mate. In a totally liberal economic system certain people accumulate considerable fortunes; others stagnate in unemployment and misery. In a totally liberal sexual system certain people have a varied and exciting erotic life; others are reduced to masturbation and solitude.

Put aside, for the moment, the question of whether this analysis is really plausible on its own terms. (In the nineteenth century, to take an example richly documented by novelists, did the prohibition against adultery mean that people managed to find their bed mates—or did it mean that some people simply suffered the wrong bed mates?) What is interesting is that it allows Houellebecq to offer a critique of contemporary society that is both progressive and conservative: neoliberal individualism is indicted from the left, and the sins of contemporary sexuality are indicted from the right, because Houellebecq likes to blame the selfish alternative experimentation of the nineteen-sixties and seventies for the sexual tyranny he finds in the present.

He often gives his characters absent or cruelly careless parents; the monstrously unmaternal mother of Michel and Bruno, in "The Elementary Particles," who casts off her children and keeps a sexual open house for drive-by hippies, can be seen as a vengeful portrait of Houellebecq's own

HERE

I must quit sleeping in the afternoon.
I do it for my heart, but all too soon
my heart has called it off. It does not love me.
If it downed tools, there'd soon be nothing of me.
Its hammer beat says *You are*, not *I am*.
It prints me off here like a telegram.
What do *I* say? How can the lonely word
know who has sent it out, or who has heard?
Long years since I came round in her womb
enough myself to know I was not home,
my dear sea up in arms at the wrong shore
and her loud heart like a landlord at the door.
Where are we now? What misdemeanor sealed
my transfer? Mother, why so far afield?

—Don Paterson

mother, whose neglect of him he has never forgiven. It seems that when he was five months old, in the nineteen-fifties, his mother sent him off to Algeria, to live with his grandparents. Then she apparently spent many years trying out various philosophies and religions—what her son, in the book "Public Enemies," an exchange of letters with Bernard-Henri Lévy, disdains as "spiritual channel-hopping." He tells Lévy that he finds, in "the chaotic, absurd life" of his mother—whom he has seen no more than fifteen times in his life—"something terribly, appallingly *contemporary*." In Denis Demonpion's biography of Houellebecq, "Houellebecq Non Autorisé" (which Houellebecq has bitterly denounced), the novelist says that his parents' grotesque self-centeredness "was one of the precursors of the vast movement of familial dissolution which was going to follow." His parents, to hear him tell it, practically gave birth to the sixties.

The power of Houellebecq's critique has less to do with its persuasiveness as social theory than with the spectacle it offers of the author's bared wounds. His relentless prosecution of his parental abandonment and his wild historicizing of what is only a personal fate give him license to decoct an uneasy mixture of Rousseau and Schopenhauer. From Rousseau, he gets the conviction that the self is constituted by mendacity and egotism. In the Second Discourse, Rousseau talks of the amour-propre that corrupts

the self in civil society—the tendency we have to look around us and measure our worth competitively against that of others. In his natural state, man was without this urge for hierarchy, Rousseau says. As Michel complains in "The Elementary Particles," "Individualism gives rise to freedom, the sense of self, the need to distinguish oneself and to be superior to others." Sex, stripped of its link with reproduction, "still exists—not as a pleasure principle, but as a form of narcissistic differentiation." In the same passage, Michel switches, tacitly, to Schopenhauer. Desire "is a source of suffering, pain and hatred." Michel says that the "utopian solution—from Plato to Huxley by way of Fourier—is to do away with desire and the suffering it causes by satisfying it immediately."

Houellebecq seems to suggest that this "utopian" solution only increases suffering, by encouraging a universal indulgence of desire. Eating creates more hunger. It is not difficult to see Houellebecq, in this scheme, as a counter-utopian, a revolutionary who wants to do away with desire properly, and who almost succeeds—by making sex so repulsive in his books that no one would want to practice it anymore. (The logical problem here is that, for a man who wants to get beyond the tyranny of sex, Houellebecq seems unable to avoid endlessly representing it.) Certainly, there is a consistent sentimentality in Houellebecq's novels around love as the great

sexless desideratum. Love will not have much to do with sex, largely because Houellebecq cannot imagine a loving, sexually active couple of long standing. Indeed, for all his vaunted atheism, he brushes rather close to traditional religious preachments: the solace of sex is as nothing compared with the transports of love. It is just that his male characters, damaged in the sexual wars, lack the emotional nerve necessary for the prolonged little daily battles of love. As soon as they are offered a real relationship, they run away from it. In "The Map and the Territory," Jed acts like every other Houellebecquian man at the moment of decision. When Olga tells him that she is returning to Moscow and suggests that he come with her, he flits away.

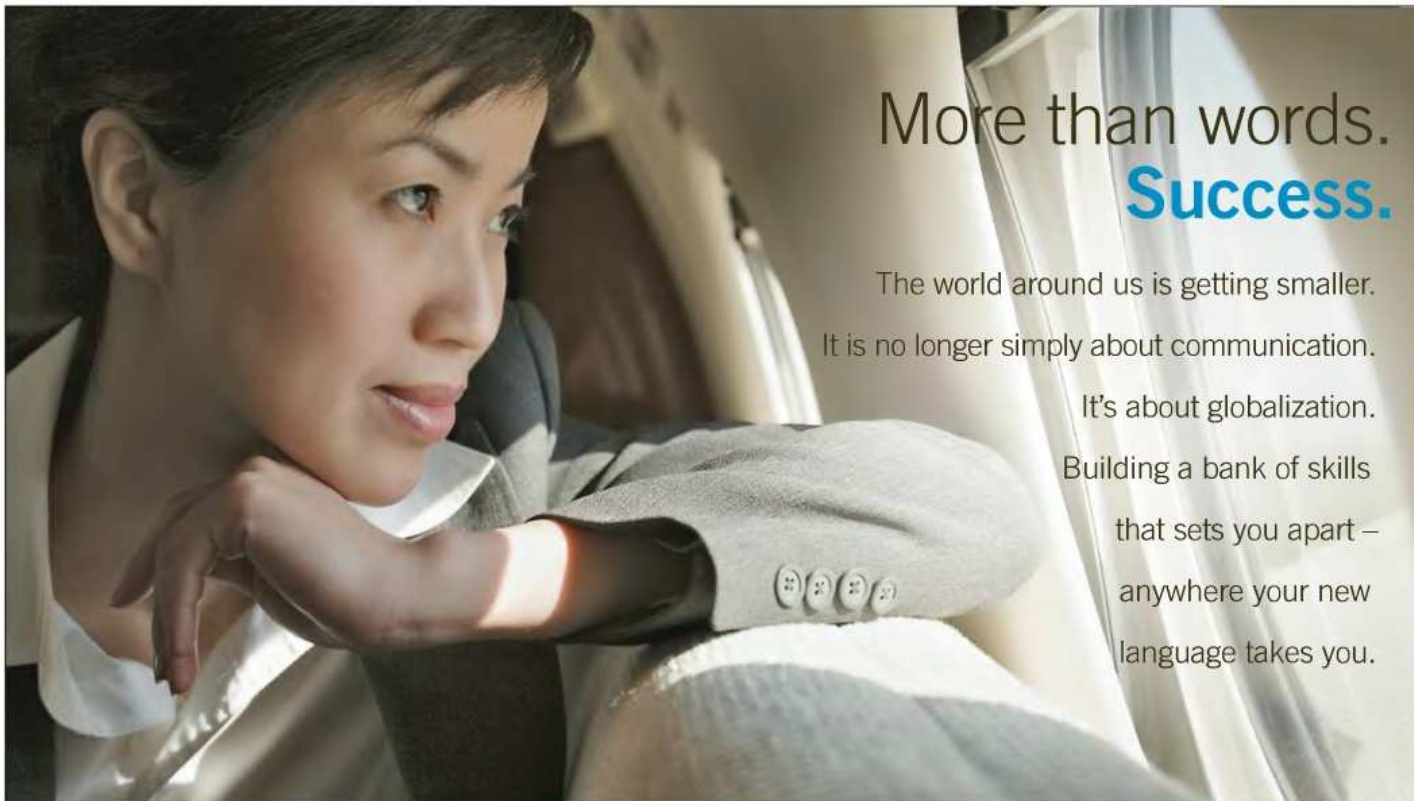
Is Michel Houellebecq really a novelist, or is he just a novelizing propagandist? Though his thought can be slapdash and hasty, it is at least earnest, intensely argued, and occasionally thrilling in its

leaps and transitions. (At times, he resembles the theorist Slavoj Žižek, who is all wattage and not enough light.) But the formal structures that are asked to dramatize these ideas—the scenes, characters, dialogue, and so on—are generally flimsy and diagrammatic. Characters, usually women, are killed off with flip-pant dispatch, backstories pencilled in with bald strokes, scenes cursorily sketched, conversation often ludicrously implausible or monotonously self-therapeutic. (Excited, five years ago, by "The Elementary Particles," I reread it recently with stolid boredom: great chunks of it sound the way one imagines the droning monologues of a sex-addiction meeting.) In this respect, "The Map and the Territory" is undeniably richer than any of Houellebecq's previous works. The new novel is essentially a novelistic biography of a contemporary painter, from childhood to death. We follow Jed Martin to art school, to his first exhibition, to his relationship with Olga, and through the extraordinary success of his career.

Pretty quickly, one can tell what interests Houellebecq and what doesn't. Jed's sad and isolated childhood is halfheartedly thrown at us, as if Houellebecq didn't quite believe in it, either, and were merely slotting in the motherboard from his previous work:

Anne, Jed's mother, was from a lower-middle-class Jewish family—her father the local jeweler. At twenty-five she married Jean-Pierre Martin, then a young architect. It was a marriage of love, and a few years later she gave birth to a son they named Jed in homage to her uncle, whom she had loved. Then, a few days before her son's seventh birthday, she committed suicide—Jed only learned about this many years later, through the indiscretion of his paternal grandmother. Anne was forty, her husband forty-seven.

Likewise, Jed's relationship with Olga generates little heat, but some atrocious prose (a faithful copy, by Gavin Bowd, of the original shopworn French): "Then they looked at one another, for a few seconds, speechless, and Jed had no doubt: the look she plunged into his own was well and truly one of *desire*. And from his expression, she could tell immediately



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that he knew this." But Houellebecq is fruitfully detained by what is entirely new in this book: Jed's work and his life as an artist. The best writing here occurs when Houellebecq is describing the three phases of Jed's artistic production; the prose slows to inhabit and animate a rival art form.

Jed makes his name by photographing Michelin road maps and superimposing concrete images from the territory covered by the maps onto the photographs:

For the exhibition he had chosen a part of the Michelin map of the Creuse that contained his grandmother's village. He had used a very low camera angle, at thirty degrees from the horizontal, while setting the tilt to the maximum in order to obtain a very high depth of field. It was then, by using Photoshop layers, that he had introduced the background blurring and the bluish effect on the horizon. In the foreground were the pond at Breuil and the village at Châtelus-le-Marcheix.

It is at this exhibition that he meets Olga, who works in public relations for Michelin, and is naturally fascinated by an artist who mainly photographs Michelin maps. Before long, Michelin starts promoting and selling Jed's work. Affectless and apparently unperturbed, Jed has no purist objection. Besides, his work both sells and impresses the critics. Marilyn, the runty publicist (she of the dismally unexplored vagina), arranges a tremendous show, and the art critics quiver with adulation; Houellebecq does a funny parody of the kind of exquisite exclamatory verbiage that you can find any day in the French press.

Jed's next phase is a series of forty-two paintings depicting typical contemporary professions, from a horse butcher and a *bar-tabac* manager to Steve Jobs and Bill Gates (this canvas is called "Bill Gates and Steve Jobs Discussing the Future of Information Technology"). Jed's gallery owner has the bright idea of getting the world-famous novelist Michel Houellebecq to write a long catalogue essay for this exhibition, and Jed goes to Ireland to woo the reclusive writer. There are playful scenes in which Houellebecq teases his readers and critics by presenting a writer who seems to have been dreamed up by his most savage enemies: Jed finds a solitary, aimless misanthrope in an Irish house full of unopened boxes. This smelly, red-faced drunk shuffles about in his pajamas and

says things like "I spend most of my days in bed; I most often eat in bed, watching cartoons on Fox TV." For all that, the painter is drawn to the writer, and proposes to paint his portrait.

"The Map and the Territory" can't quite decide what kind of novel it is going to be, and moves around restlessly, picking up subjects and briefly favoring them, before returning them to their lightly disturbed corners. Nothing is systematically or rigorously examined—which is to say that nothing is subjected to the longevity of narrative. Despite the fine descriptions of some of Jed's work, his artistic career has no persuasive inner logic, and seems merely the intermittent emanation of a detached and isolated soul; one couldn't say that this is a deep or revealing book about the making of art. Nor could you argue that the book has anything very interesting to say about the contemporary art scene, despite its obvious satirical ambition. There are robust and sometimes amusing descriptions of media celebrities (most of them given their real-world names) and of Parisian parties: "He found himself in front of Pierre Bellemare, dressed in Tergal petrol-blue trousers and a white shirt with a jabot covered in grease stains—his trousers were held up by wide braces in the colors of the American flag. Jed warmly held his hand out to the French king of teleshopping." But, if this sort of thing is what you're after, there are novelists who do it more sharply than Houellebecq. His portrait of the art world appears to fill the space in his fiction usually occupied by sex, and the art market works much like the sex market, with winners and losers.

Jed is one of the winners, both artistically significant and financially rewarded: his pictures start selling for half a million euros apiece. As soon as Jed is officially hot, offers come from businessmen and industrialists, as you knew they would, for him to paint their portraits. "We're at a point where success in market terms justifies and validates everything, replacing all the theories," Jed's gallery owner says, not very originally. Near the end of the book, Jed's painting of Michel Houellebecq is sold to "a Hindu cellphone magnate" for six million euros. Likewise, the scenes with Jed and the character named Michel Houellebecq don't rise to anything much; they are

funny, but the reader would be wrong to assume that, just because the author appears in his own novel, postmodern pressure is being brought to bear on the book's formal procedures.

There is one theme that the book almost makes something of: over a long dinner on Christmas Eve, Jed's aging and ailing father, who made a lot of money as the head of a construction business, confesses to his son that he, too, once had artistic ambitions. He tells Jed about his student days in Paris, when "everything seemed possible," and when he belonged to a group of students committed to violent attacks on the reputation of Mies van der Rohe. This is a revelation to Jed, who had never imagined his father as a young creator: "He'd never heard him speak like this, even as a child—and never again, he immediately thought, would he ever hear him speak like this." It is a touching moment, but, like many of the scenes in this book, is not suggestively developed, pressed on, or reprised; instead, it dissolves in the dead air of

Jed Martin's nullity. And, like most of Houellebecq's novelistic scenes, it is not a dialogue but blocks of monologue. When Jed's father dies, Jed's grief for a neglectful father he never knew is distractingly overshadowed by Jean-Pierre Martin's decision to commit suicide in Zurich, and Houellebecq's slightly obsessive hatred for the assisted-suicide organization, which he names Koestler. Standing on the street in Zurich, Jed realizes that Koestler is close to a brothel. He notices that no one is going in to the brothel, whereas Koestler seems to be doing great business: men keep on loading coffins into a van: "The market value of suffering and death had become superior to that of pleasure and sex, Jed thought." We are, alas, back in the Houellebecquian world of dubious conclusion-mongering.

It is instructive to compare D. H. Lawrence and Michel Houellebecq. Both writers make sex take the freight of a larger vision of life. Both inveigh powerfully against the damage that modernity

has done to sex's healthy centrality. Both have a passionately puritanical side, and are caught between a somewhat contradictory desire to represent sex and to idealize it. But Lawrence's larger vision of life is rich and substantial and ramifying, whereas, until the publication of this latest novel, Houellebecq has had no vision of ordinary life at all—indeed, he has often seemed to want to get beyond life entirely, to wish it away in a Schopenhauerian mass suicide, to conjure a post-human future of sexless cloning. ("The Map and the Territory" ends with Jed, like Lawrence's man who loved islands, locked away in splendid and deathly isolation, on a uselessly vast rural estate.) And while Lawrence had a limitless faith in the novel's explanatory powers, in fiction's enormous capacity to be what he called "the bright book of life," Houellebecq, despite the occasional successes of this new book, is still an unconvincing and incoherent novelist, who seems afraid to trust imaginary drama with the full weight of actual crisis. ♦

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THE ART WORLD

SPOT ON

Damien Hirst's global show.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The art of Damien Hirst puts me in mind of a *New Yorker* cartoon by Peter Steiner, from 1997. One of two vultures on a bare branch argues, "Sure, dead is important. But it has to taste good." That finicky gourmand speaks to my sense of "The Complete Spot Paintings, 1986–2011," an archipelago of shows in all eleven spaces of Larry Gagosian's empire of galleries, upon which the sun never sets: three in New York; two in London; and one each in Paris, Geneva, Rome, Athens, Hong Kong, and Beverly Hills. (If you visit all of them before the shows close, you will be awarded a signed spot print. I'm not making this up.) Deliberate deadness distinguishes Hirst's art, not only in the famous pickled shark but in everything he makes, including the three hundred and thirty-one paintings now globally on display: grid arrangements of colored disks, in household gloss paint, on white grounds, all but the earliest few of them executed by the artist's employees. Their formulaic concept amounts to intellectual formaldehyde. But tastiness applies, too, in the pleasantly disorienting effects of colors that appear to be distributed at random: bright or muted or warm or cool, all ajumble. If there's no harmony, there's also no monotony. No two canvases are the same, Hirst says. They range in size from tiny to immense, and in number of spots from one to more than twenty-five thousand. I can enjoy looking at one for a while, but to like them would entail identifying with the artist's cynicism, as herds of collectors, worldwide, evidently do. Hirst will go down in history as a peculiarly cold-blooded pet of millennial excess wealth. That's not Old Master status, but it's immortality of a sort.

Hirst was born in Bristol in 1965, and grew up in Leeds. His supposed father, a car salesman, left the family when Hirst was twelve. His mother, who informed him that his true sire was

another man, has said that she tried in vain to control her son. He was arrested three times for shoplifting. But he persevered at school and, after an initial rejection, entered Jacob Kramer College, in Leeds. While there, he drew cadavers in the anatomy department of the University of Leeds; they made a lasting impression. He then spent two years as a construction worker in London. Having been turned down by Central Saint Martins, he was admitted, in 1986, to Goldsmiths, at the time an incubator of Conceptualist japery, and stayed for three years. In 1988, he organized a show of student and alumni work, entitled "Freeze," in a disused London warehouse, initiating a cohort that would become the Young British Artists. The Y.B.A.s combined conceptual-art savvy with a will to bedazzle and provoke the widest possible audience. Their keynote was elegantly crafted effrontery. A definitive work in "Freeze," by Mat Collishaw, presented, aglow on a light box, a photograph of an apparent bullet wound. Looking rather painterly, it split an aesthetic difference between "Yuck!" and "Wow!" When not milking death, Y.B.A. art savored sex and squalor, ideally in combination. A later work by Tracey Emin, "My Bed" (1998), incorporating rumpled and stained sheets and detritus including condoms and dirty underwear, is a touchstone of the movement second only to Hirst's shark.

Hirst and his peers—the tricky but relatively dignified sculptor Rachel Whiteread and the painter Gary Hume, among them—were embraced by the mega-collector Charles Saatchi and promoted by the prestigious curators Nicholas Serota, of the Tate, and Norman Rosenthal, of the Royal Academy of Arts. Storms of public outrage were music to the artists' ears, and the avidity of collectors, as the art market recovered from a steep recession in the early nineteen-nineties and commenced to soar,

swelled their purses. Their vulgarity and their strength are identical: conceiving of contemporary art as a game and playing it to win. (In this regard, there's mythic bite to Hirst's career: the working-class lad who gulls the toffs and makes them like it.) They constituted a racy cultural export for Britain like nothing since the Sex Pistols. In 1999, a show at the Brooklyn Museum of works owned by Saatchi, "Sensation," briefly roiled New York. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani made headlines by denouncing Chris Ofili's painting of the Virgin Mary festooned with lumps of elephant dung. Hirst's contribution included a huge glass enclosure, within which houseflies continually hatched from maggots and were exterminated by a zapper. The show so blatantly courted hatred that amusement was the only sane response. Its impact evanesced. In general, Y.B.A. art made scant headway on this side of the Atlantic, in the art world or in public notice. It was too transparently desperate—unlike the pricey frivolity, backed by real artistic command, of our own Jeff Koons. The pleasures of indignation tend to be spoiled, for Americans, by obvious intentions to incur it, given the native abundance of spontaneous occasions.

Certainly no self-regarding sophisticate around here will likely rise to the bait of Hirst's spot paintings as David Hockney seemingly has. He is advertising an upcoming show of his own, at the Royal Academy, with a poster that reads, in part, "All the works here were made by the artist himself, personally." Oh, please. Andy Warhol would seem to have mooted the issue of authorial touch half a century ago, with his workshop-silk-screened Marilys and other mass-cultural icons and phenomena. Since then, artists by the hundreds have cultivated the appearance of no-hands procedure, either by using mechanical means

or, like Roy Lichtenstein or Photo-Realist painters, by feigning them. Color-chart paintings by Gerhard Richter—one phase in the great German's philosophical and spectacular excavation of the medium—are often plausibly cited as precedents for Hirst's spots.

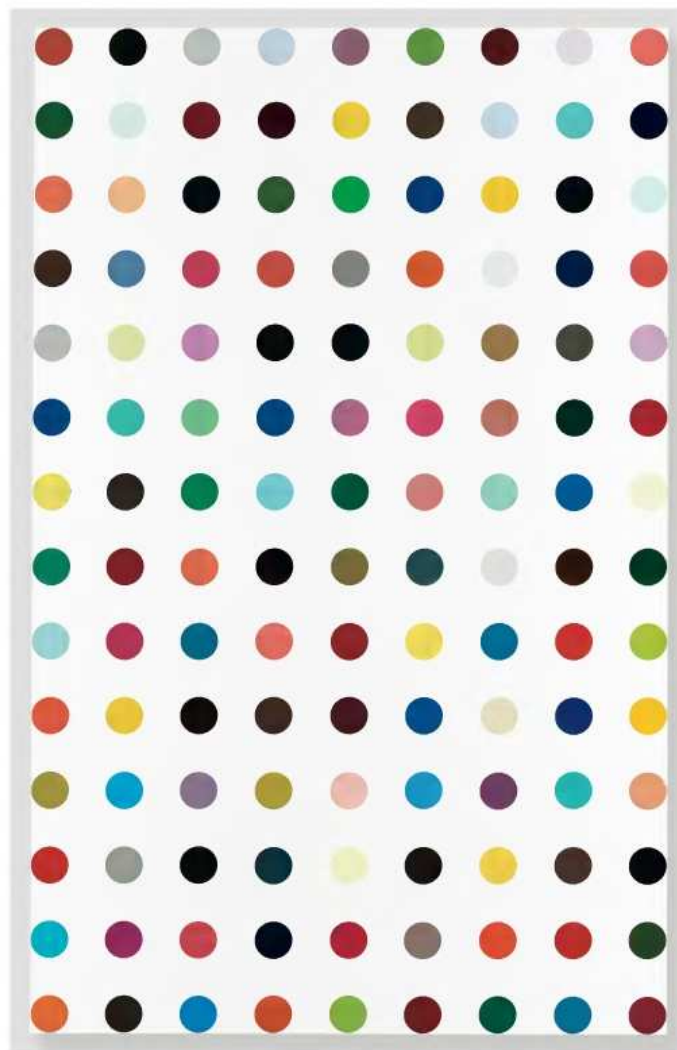
Come to that, nothing that Hirst does lacks an art-historical pedigree. He has recycled tropes from Marcel Du-

champ, Surrealism, Francis Bacon, Minimalism, and numerous near-contemporaries. His immersed animal corpses stem directly from Koons's basketball-flotation tanks. Hirst is originally unoriginal, to put it positively: a master of supererogation. His work comprehends all manner of things about previous art except, crucially, why it was created. It smacks less of museums than of art-school textbooks. What may pass for meaning in the spot paintings is the sum of their associations in

the history of abstraction. The more you know of that, the cleverer the paintings might make you feel. Buying one, you can hang it on your wall like a framed diploma from Smartypants U.

Duchamp remarked that art is created partly by its maker and partly by its audience. Hirst dumps pretty much the entire transaction into the audience's lap. The result is art in the way that some exotic financial dealings are legal: by a whisker. Just as no law forbids the sale of bundled credit-default swaps on bundled subprime mortgages, no agreed-on aesthetic principle invalidates paintings that are churned out by proxy and then bid up at auction as fungible commodities. The "Why?" in such matters comes down to a historic, all-purpose, great "Why not?" A sense of frictionless impunity must be exciting if you're on the supply side of the economy and the culture. If you aren't, it feels wrong. The deadness of Hirst's product lines—flipping the bird to anyone who naïvely craves more and better from art—upsets a lot of people. I deem their ire misdirected. Don't shoot the messenger. Hirst honestly vivifies a situation in which the power of money celebrates itself by shedding all pretext of supporting illiquid values. When, in 2007, Hirst made a media event of fashioning and marketing a diamond-encrusted skull, "For the Love

of God," he as much as shouted the awful truth. (Whether or not the bibelot sold and, if so, fetched its asking price of fifty million pounds—some have doubted Hirst's word on it—is an interesting but tangential question.) In the course of one fair and square taunt after another, Hirst surely marvels at what he is abetted in getting away with. "The Complete Spot Paintings," to his credit, makes no bones about what a certain precinct of the world has come to. What it comes to next is somebody else's move. ♦



"Moxisylyte" (2011), one of the hundreds of spot paintings.

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LOYALTY OATHS

Ralph Fiennes's "Coriolanus."

BY ANTHONY LANE

One edition of "Coriolanus," issued to German schools in 1934, likened Shakespeare's hero, the Roman general Caius Martius Coriolanus, to the Führer. Coriolanus wishes to lead the people back to health, pupils were told, "just as Adolf Hitler in our days wishes to lead our beloved German fatherland." Little wonder that, after the end of the Second World

"Coriolanus" to the screen. He himself plays the general, and directs the film; the dialogue is all Shakespeare's, pared and peeled back by John Logan, who is best known as the writer of "Gladiator." Fiennes and Logan will be hoping to lure admirers of that movie to their own project, though it won't be easy. At no point did we relinquish our sympathy



Fiennes as the Roman general in the most oppressive of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

War, the play was included on a blacklist, for use by American officers, of works that should not be performed in occupied Germany. "Coriolanus" was not staged there again until 1952. In later years, though, when Bertolt Brecht reconfigured the play, he sided, as you would expect, with the righteous demands of that same throng, against their trampling overlord. All of which is a tribute to the original work, written around 1608—to the mystery of its author's own tastes, to the clashing reactions that it continues to provoke, and to the undimmed fire and danger of its verse.

Ralph Fiennes has now brought

for Russell Crowe, even as he scissored off the heads of his opponents, whereas Coriolanus would never stoop to courting our affection. Not since "Schindler's List" has Fiennes's icy stare been put to better use; his eyes seem all the colder for being set in a razored skull, which wears more blood than hair. We get the impression of a flesh machine, trimmed not just of flab but of spiritual fat, and at ease only when being torn and tested in action. I half expected, when he showed his cuts, to see the subcutaneous rods and valves that Arnold Schwarzenegger exposed when he sliced his arm in "Terminator 2." Fiennes's film is

rich in gore, and he is in the thick of it.

The plot is fuelled by loyalty, and, as in "Troilus and Cressida," by the shocking speed with which it can be transferred. (Fiennes has played both Troilus and Coriolanus onstage.) The general, as a servant of the state, earns plaudits for the battle that he wages—at times single-handed—against the Volscians, sworn foes of Rome. There is a deafening fight in the city of Corioles, which is where Caius Martius acquires his honorary name, and confronts Aufidius (Gerard Butler), his opposite number in the Volscian ranks—"a lion that I am proud to hunt." The two warriors, grappled in mutual hatred, crash through a window in each other's brutal embrace; neither here nor in the nighttime revelling of tattooed troops does Fiennes seek to mask the glint of the homoerotic.

Certainly, our hero has little time for his wife, Virgilia (Jessica Chastain), who waits with fragile patience for his return from the front. When he does come back, she can barely speak (he calls her "My gracious silence"), not least because Volumnia (Vanessa Redgrave), Coriolanus's terrifying mother, gets there first, greeting him as he kneels before her and, later, bandaging his wounds. Every mother-in-law joke you've ever heard, along with every Oedipal fantasy, is distilled into this formidable figure, and Redgrave, herself both the product and the matriarch of an acting dynasty, makes the freakishness of parental fervor sound entirely natural. That low and throaty tone of hers, never quite unsexy (listen to her flirt with Tom Cruise, of all people, in the first "Mission: Impossible"), compounded by a lifetime of schooling in Shakespearean cadences, means that, when Volumnia says she would rather lose eleven sons in combat than have one "voluptuously surfeit out of action"—in other words, stay home and slob out—we believe her.

Yet Coriolanus is expelled from Rome. This happens because, despite his valor in the field, he cannot get his head, or his tongue, around the politics of peace. (Shakespeare saw how profoundly uncomfortable soldiers can be with all that is unsoldierly. Hence the lack of soliloquy here; only civilians with too much time on their hands would bother to talk to them-

selves.) The general is put up for consulship and, worse still, is asked to make the kind of soothing rhetorical noises that go with the job. Even when calmed by his diplomatic colleague Menenius (Brian Cox), however, and advised by Volumnia to attempt “the soft way,” he hardens up, and lashes out:

You common cry of curs! whose breath I hate,
As reek o’ the rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men.

You cannot read “Coriolanus,” or see it at the theatre, without noticing the stench of animal word-muck that wafts across it. So rank does it become, in Fiennes’s version, that you want to hold your nose. Why should this be? Largely because the camera can pull us near to human mouths, and to the foulness that issues forth; the movie, scruffy and unfocused in its first minutes, gets going as we follow a hungry rabble toward a grain depot, guarded by a line of law enforcement. Suddenly, the line parts, and out comes Coriolanus, with a brisk stride. We feel a real thrill, and a shaft of panic, at such an entrance, as if we ourselves were in the throng. He is in our face, calling his fellow-Romans scabs, curs, hares, geese, and, as a polite valediction, fragments. In closeup, these sneers no longer seem like deliberate verbal patterning, as they do on the page, but more like the spittle of a foaming soul. They also prepare us for the astonishing betrayal, two-thirds through the tale, when Coriolanus, in lonely exile, and brimming with resentment, switches to the Volscian side. From there, in league with Aufidius, he pre-

pare to march on his motherland. When you have venom to unleash, there’s no place like Rome.

The movie unfolds in a modern setting, and in modern dress. This will obviously be disappointing to any Gerard Butler fans who hoped to see their man reprise his majestic outfit from “300,” which consisted of helmet, cloak, and pull-up Spartan diaper, but the rest of us will be mightily relieved. Fiennes shot much of “Coriolanus” in Belgrade, a place that rang, all too recently, to the rousing of partisan crowds. Indeed, he splices in existing news footage of chaotic crushes outside the Serbian parliament, and of tanks on the move. Not that Serbia itself is named; we are asked to think, rather, of any tinderbox that houses discontent. It is the boast of every democracy that it could never allow, let alone sponsor, the upsurge of a Coriolanus; and it is the voices of Shakespeare that hiss in our ears and tell us not to be so sure.

If Fiennes’s “Coriolanus” falters, it is less in its sense of historical possibility than in its desire to parcel out the story in modish, media-saturated scraps. The gunplay has the jitters, as if Corioles were a location option in “Call of Duty: Black Ops.” That seems fitting enough, but we also get panel discussions in TV studios, video feeds, and a genuine British news anchor declaiming iambic pentameters as if from an autocue—all a trifle forced, as if Fiennes were concerned that we might be embarrassed, or bored, by the spectacle of the bare play. He need not worry; the sinew of Shakespeare’s late verse is so flexible and accommodating that it sounds more urgent than any headline. “There is no more mercy in him than

there is milk in a male tiger,” Menenius says of Coriolanus, and, when Brian Cox utters the line, four hundred years after it was written, it still earns a horrified laugh. The scene around him could not be simpler: a cold morning, and a checkpoint on a desolate road. Just the place for another mention of beasts.

Of course, you need the right speaker. As Aufidius, Butler makes a suitably shaggy lout, but he swallows some of the poetry, as does John Kani in the role of Cominius, the hero’s superior, whereas Cox is in his element. He doesn’t get to deliver the famous fable in which Menenius compares the state, at wearisome length, to a body; Fiennes and Logan amputate the whole thing, rightly judging that it would stall the headlong narrative, but, in compensation, they do give Cox a fine, ingratiating chat with Volumnia and Virgilia that belongs, in the text, to another female character. Fiennes’s “Coriolanus,” bristling with chops and changes such as these, has precisely the drive and the desperation that the play invites. It is the most oppressive of the great tragedies, and, “Macbeth” aside, the leanest, and the task that Fiennes has set himself is to liberate it from the theatrical while preserving the dramatic bite. In that, he succeeds, with brio, and, if you don’t find yourself warming to this “Coriolanus,” that may not be the fault of the film, but because the man at its heart does not want us, let alone our warmth. He turns his back on civilization, and walks out: “There is a world elsewhere.” ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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VOLUME LXXXVII, NO. 45 January 23, 2012. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 14 & 21, June 13 & 20, July 11 & 18, August 15 & 22, and December 19 & 26) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Elizabeth Hughes, vice-president and publisher; Beth Lusko, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, chief executive officer; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president; John W. Bellando, chief operating officer & chief financial officer; Jill Bright, chief administrative officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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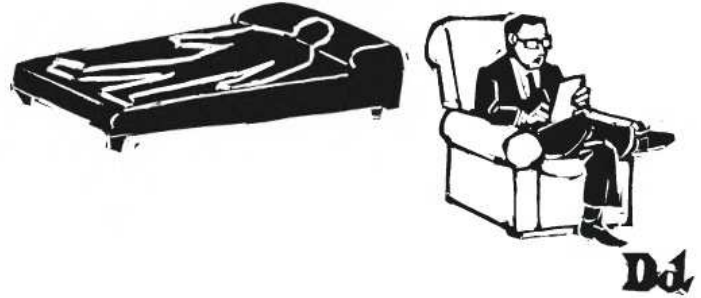
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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, January 22nd. The finalists in the January 9th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 6th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"They say jolliness skips a generation."
Jotham Burrello, Ashford, Conn.



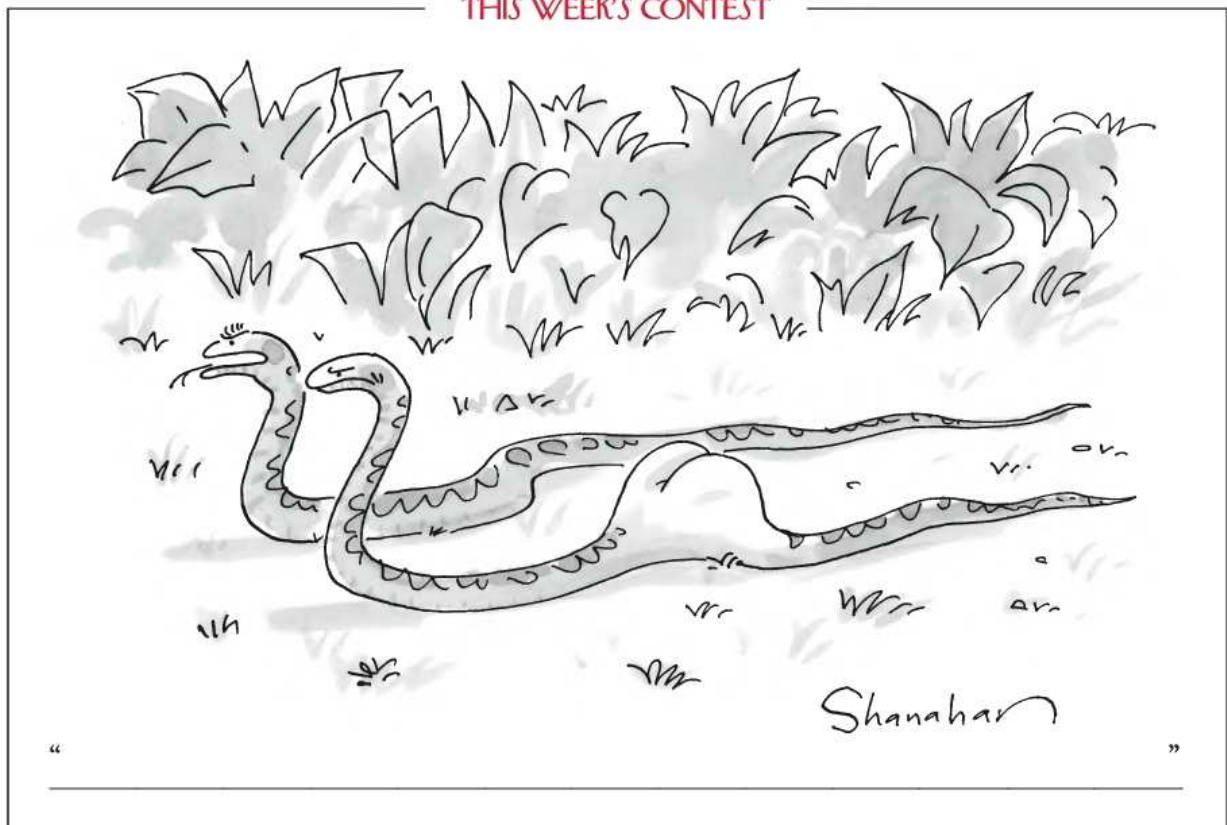
THE FINALISTS

"Have you always felt like a victim?"
Lee Wilkof, Terryville, Conn.

"Sorry, I drifted off there. What did you say after I've been shot?"
Todd Pettigrew, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia

"Unfortunately, your time is up, but I think we have a general outline of the problem."
Heather Lee, Walnut Creek, Calif.

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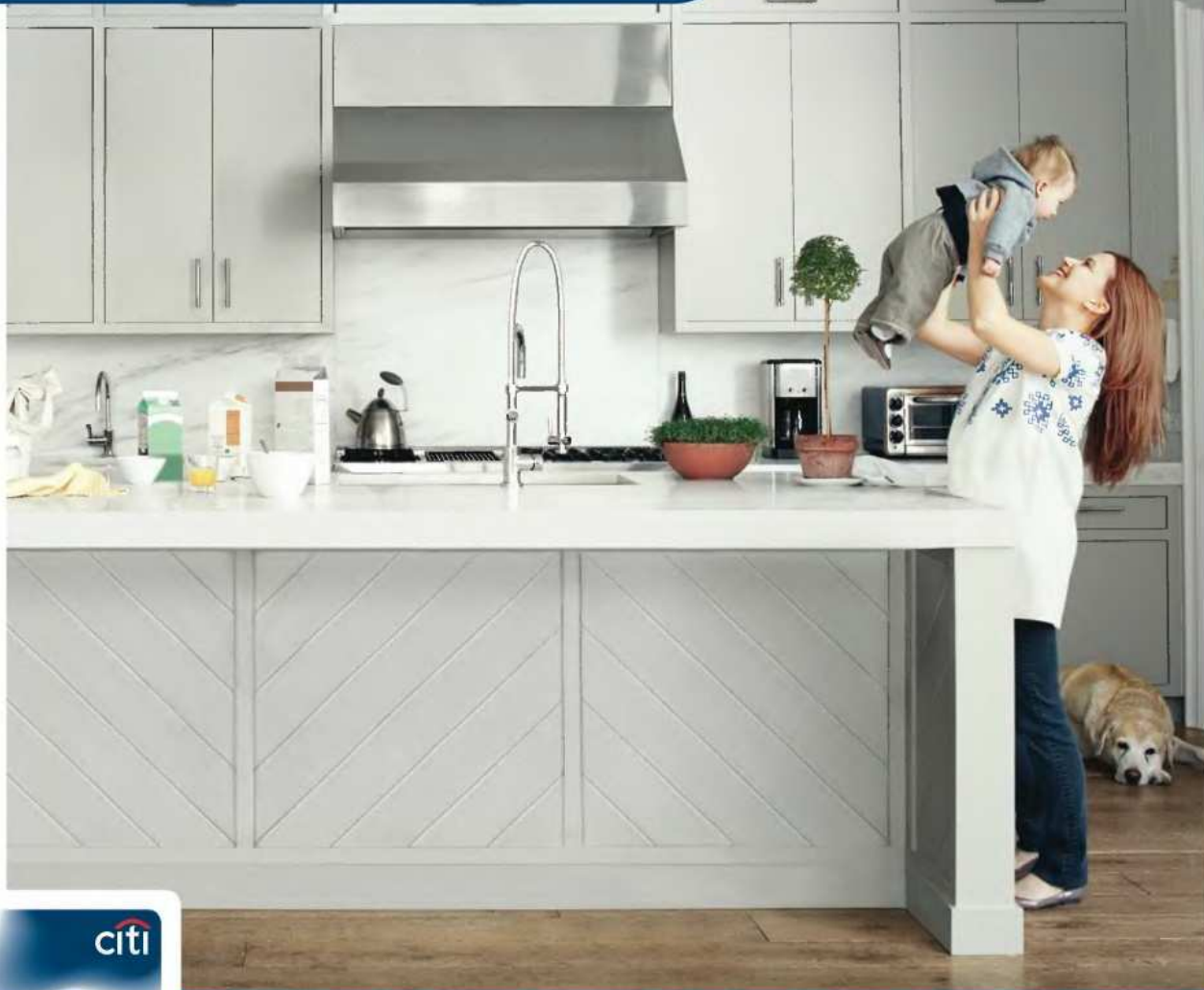
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