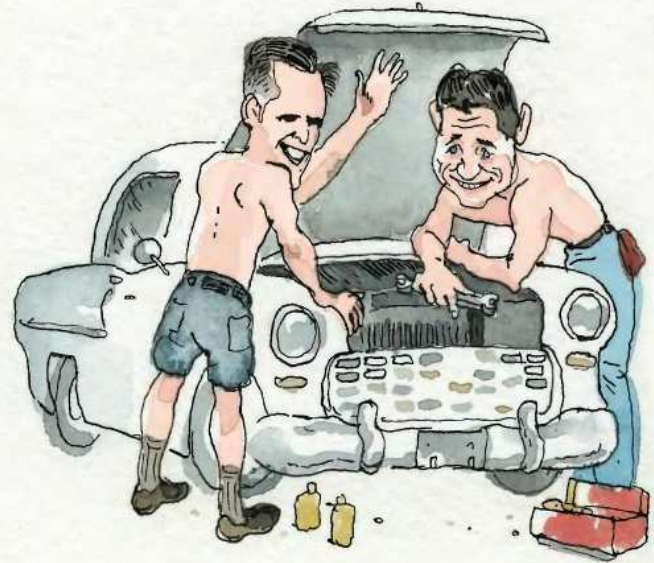
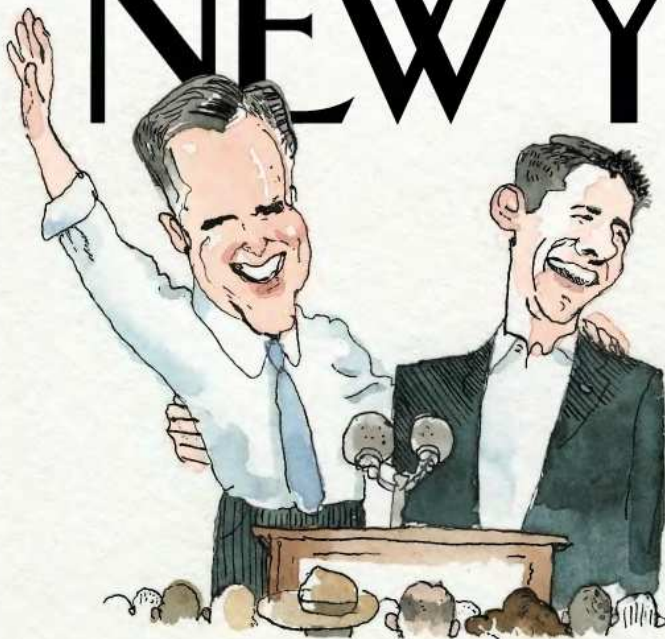


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Joanna Kavenna (Books, p. 76) has published three novels: “Inglorious,” which won the Orange Award for New Writers, “The Birth of Love,” and, more recently, “Come to the Edge.”

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

The Political Scene: Analysis, podcasts, cartoons, video, and more about the 2012 campaign, at newyorker.com/politics. / The New Yorker Out Loud: *Sarah Stillman* and *Evan Ratliff* talk about the use and abuse of confidential informants. / Ask the Author: *David Remnick* answers readers’ questions about Israel and Iran. / Blogs: Daily Comment by *Amy Davidson*; *John Cassidy* on politics; *Richard Brody* on movies; the Borowitz Report; essays on books at Page-Turner; slide shows at Photo Booth; and more. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and cover jigsaw puzzles. / Our complete archive, back to 1925.



THE MAIL

VICE-PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

Ryan Lizza's piece on Representative Paul Ryan, of Wisconsin, now the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate, brings up Ryan's fascination with Ayn Rand ("Fussbudget," August 6th). I believe that Rand's highly dualistic thinking is having a negative influence on our current political conversation. Rand's fictional world consists of self-sufficient business-owner heroes and government "looters" who confiscate their wealth and thwart their dreams. A look at today's headlines might have disabused her of this view. In fact, it was the C.E.O.s of Enron, Tyco, HealthSouth, and Peregrine, among others, who looted their corporations and shareholders. Ryan likewise sees a dualistic world of "individuals" and "collectivists," and seeks to free the wealthy from government looting—that is, to free them from the need to support the less fortunate. It would be wonderful if the real world consisted only of people capable of supporting their families on their own. Unfortunately, Ryan's philosophy, like Rand's, is at odds with the real world.

Laurence Mailaender
New York City

It's too bad that the young Paul Ryan was not around to enjoy the days of truly small government. In 1929, my father, an engineer, lost his job when his company abruptly cancelled plans for an oil refinery he had been helping to design. He received no severance pay, and there was no opportunity for formal job retraining, no unemployment insurance, and no welfare. He was simply told to pack up his slide rule and go home. My father took any work he could find to help us survive—from fighting wildfires to digging ditches. Our food came from my grandparents' vegetable garden and chicken house. There was no Social Security or Medicare for them. One good thing: in those days, you could not lose your medical benefits if you lost your job, but only because there weren't any to begin with. Health care was simple:

if you could afford it, you got it; if not, you were forced to skip it—with sometimes fatal results. Ryan mentions that he has three small children. Has he asked his grandparents if they feared losing their children to measles, whooping cough, or polio? Does he think that the government should be involved in research at institutions like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention? If Ryan had been a small-business owner—like the ones he likes to talk about—in the days before there was any kind of social safety net, he might have found that if his customers could not pay their bills neither could he. His bank would not have been able to extend a loan, because it had closed, and his savings in it were gone. We can do with a lot less government, but only if we are willing to go backward.

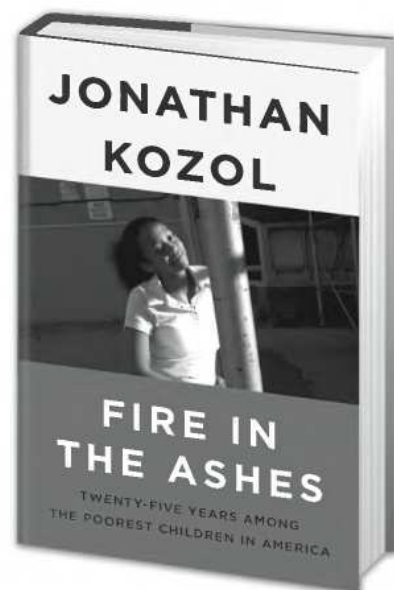
Bernice L. Youtz
Tacoma, Wash.

I enjoyed reading about my hometown of Janesville, Wisconsin, in Lizza's article. I don't recall that the town, fifty years ago, was dominated by an "Irish Mafia" of three families (although there were some parochial-versus-public-school rivalries—mostly friendly). I do remember, however, that there were literally no African-Americans living there, and only one family of Hispanic ethnicity. Of the three Jewish families who were longtime residents, one, the Feingolds, had a son who went on to become the distinguished U.S. Senator Russ Feingold, whose bipartisan attempt, with Senator John McCain, to limit the way in which corporations can influence elections has been grievously overturned, thanks to the libertarian paradox that corporations, too, are "persons."

Kurt Heinzelman
Austin, Texas

•
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE GOOD JOB

The young black playwright Thomas Bradshaw has made his name with boundary-pushing plays about race, such as “Southern Promises” and “Strom Thurmond Is Not a Racist.” The Flea premieres Bradshaw’s “Job,” an adaptation of the Book of Job. Benjamin Kamine directs. (See page 6.)

NIGHT LIFE CAPITOL IDEA

In the nineteen-seventies, Port Chester’s Capitol

Theatre, which was designed by Thomas Lamb and opened in 1926 as a cinema and vaudeville palace, became a concert hall, and presented shows by Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead, Pink Floyd, and others. The theatre fell on slightly harder times in recent years, but it has been restored, and Bob Dylan christens it this week. (See page 7.)

ART OPEN INTERVAL

As a rule, the Metropolitan Museum is closed on Mondays. But holidays are an exception, including this Labor Day, when, weather

permitting, a select number of visitors can also obtain timed-entry tickets to Tomás Saraceno’s rooftop installation, “Cloud City.” (See page 9.)

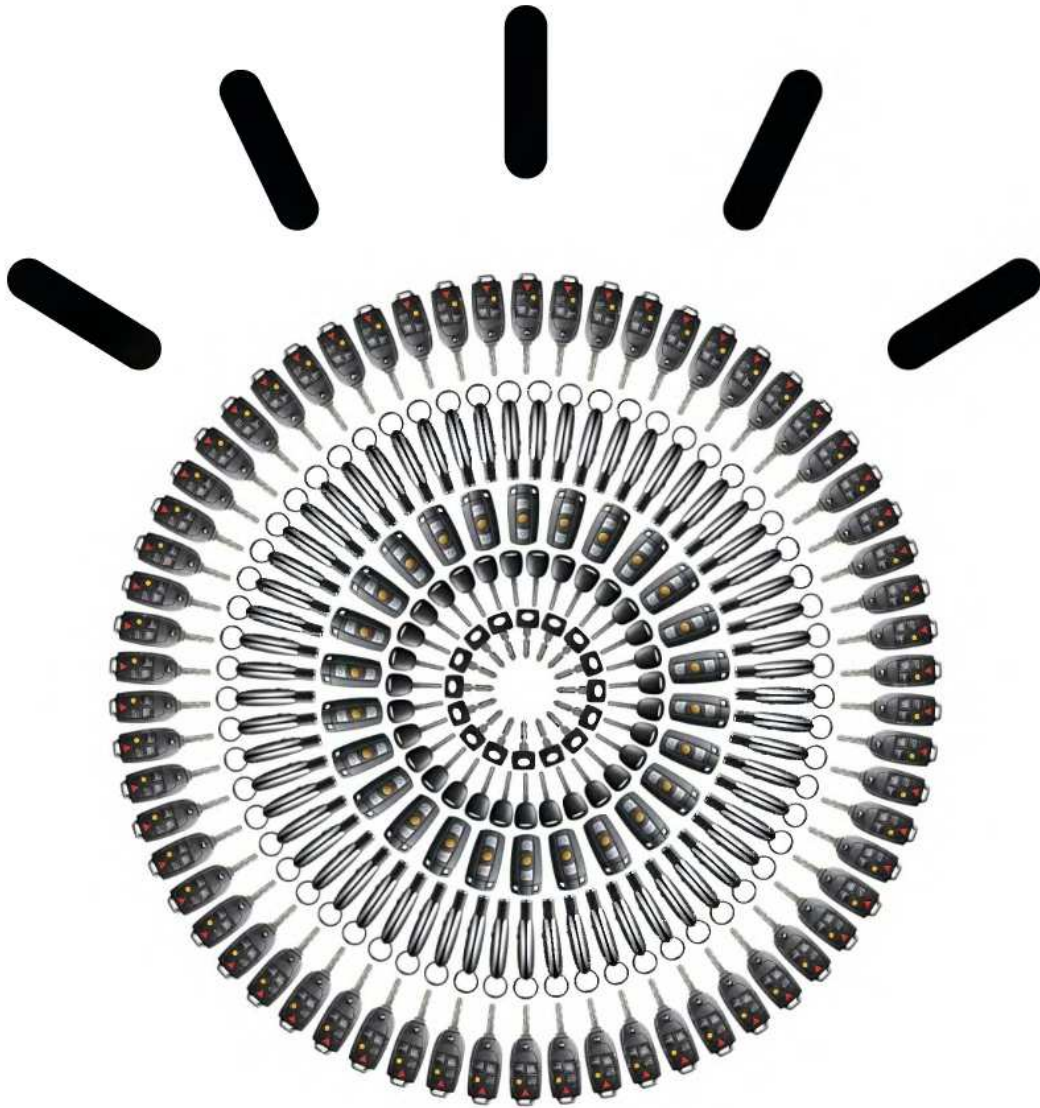
CLASSICAL MUSIC WORKERS’ UNION

Every Labor Day weekend, Bargemusic lets down its hair and hosts a new-music festival. The superb performers at this year’s concerts include members of the Knights and of the Declassified, a group of young professionals who are alumni of Carnegie Hall’s prestigious Ensemble ACJW. (See page 11.)

MOVIES BOND MARKET

On the fiftieth anniversary of the launch of the 007 movie franchise, IFC Center highlights the seven sixties classics that feature Sean Connery. The festival includes a weeklong run of the first of them, “Dr. No,” which was directed by Terence Young, who was also responsible for “From Russia with Love” and “Thunderball.” (See page 15.)

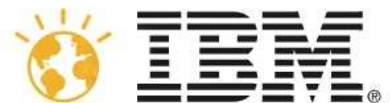
A sculpture by Jo Davidson, at Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park. Photograph by Gus Powell.



How a car dealer is driving a safer business.

As the world becomes more interconnected, threats and risks are growing exponentially. Fortunately, on a smarter planet, we have the tools to help protect critical data and business continuity. Gruppo Intergea is a midsize company with about 460 employees that sells cars in Northern Italy. They wanted to improve the security of their IT infrastructure — a critical part of their daily operations. With help from IBM and its Business Partners, Gruppo Intergea implemented a smart security solution that can proactively scan their data across their network to identify threats and block them before they can damage business operations. So Gruppo Intergea can be protected not only from known security threats, but also from other vulnerabilities that may not have been on their radar. As a result, their network can stay up, and their data stays safer. To see how IBM and its Business Partners can help your midsize business work smarter, visit ibm.com/engines/auto. Let's build a smarter planet.

Midsize businesses are the engines of a Smarter Planet.



CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK GO-TO MAN

David Vaughan, the author of the standard histories of the work of Merce Cunningham and Frederick Ashton: this national treasure, eighty-eight years old, stands ready to help you with dance-research questions, every



Wednesday between 1 and 5 P.M., at the New York Public Library's dance collection, at Lincoln Center. Vaughan saw his first ballet in 1937. He moved to the U.S., from London, in 1950, started working for the Cunningham company in 1959, and was its archivist until last year, when the troupe, having donated its entire, massive archive to the dance collection, gave its last performance. "At that point," Jan Schmidt, the collection's curator, says, "we pounced on him." Once a month, at the library, Vaughan will present a historic film. On Aug. 29, it will be Cunningham's "Channels/Inserts," which has, I believe, Cunningham's most burning male-female duet. On Sept. 26, he will show a 1962 telecast of Ashton's "La Fille Mal Gardée," with the original cast. "I've always cried all through it," Vaughan says. Get there early.

—Joan Acocella

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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

BIRD IN THE HAND

Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas wrote and directs this play, centered on the owner of a tropical-bird theme park in Florida. A Fulcrum Theatre production. Previews begin Aug. 29. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-868-4444.)

CHAPLIN

A musical about the life of Charlie Chaplin (Rob McClure), with music and lyrics by Christopher Curtis and a book by Curtis and Thomas Meehan. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

DETROIT

Lisa D'Amour wrote this comedy, directed by Anne Kauffman, about the increasingly close relationship between two couples who are new neighbors. Amy Ryan, David Schwimmer, Darren Pettie, Sarah Sokolovic, and John Cullum star. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

Manhattan Theatre Club opens its season with an adaptation, by Rebecca Lenkiewicz, of the 1882 Ibsen play, about a doctor who discovers toxic contamination in his town's water. Boyd Gaines and Richard Thomas star; Doug Hughes directs. Previews begin Sept. 4. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: ALIVE AND KICKING

The Broadway shows spoofed in the latest installment of this musical satire include "Porgy and Bess," "Evita," "Death of a Salesman," and "The Book of Mormon." Created and written by Gerard Alessandrini, who co-directs with Phillip George. In previews. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

IF THERE IS I HAVEN'T FOUND IT YET

Michael Longhurst directs this play by Nick Payne, about the complicated life of an overweight fifteen-year-old girl. Starring Annie Funke, Brian F. O'Byrne, Michelle Gomez, and Jake Gyllenhaal, in his American stage debut. A Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

JOB

At the Flea, Benjamin Kamine directs Thomas Bradshaw's new play, an adaptation of the Book of Job. Previews begin Aug. 31. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

MARY BROOME

Jonathan Bank directs the first New York revival of this 1911 comedy, written by Allan Monkhouse, in which a maid gets pregnant by her employer's son. In previews. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111.)

THE TRAIN DRIVER

Signature Theatre presents the New York premiere of a play by Athol Fugard, about a conductor searching for the identities of a mother and child whom he killed in a train accident. Fugard also directs. In previews. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

NOW PLAYING

BULLET FOR ADOLF

Woody Harrelson and Frankie Hyman, the co-authors of this raucous hipster comedy, met in Houston in the early eighties, which may be the best explanation for why the play, directed by Harrelson, is set there. A young white guy (Brandon Coffey) and a young black guy (Tyler Jacob Rollinson), who work together mixing cement for a nostalgic old German (Nick Wyman), move in together, and start partying with the German's teen-age daughter (Shannon Garland), two

foxy black women (Marsha Stephanie Blake and Shamika Cotton), a Latino-Czech madman who calls himself a "nigger" (Lee Osorio), and a rav-ing metrosexual (David Coomber). The focus of the play is the characters' eccentricity, but, despite good performances, they're fairly run of the mill, and the dialogue, while sometimes funny, is not colorful enough to carry a long play with a weak story. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

HARRISON, TX: THREE PLAYS BY HORTON FOOTE

It's always good to be back in Harrison, Texas, the world of Horton Foote, populated by the lonely, the graceful, the suffering, and the meddling, and, often, by the great actors Hallie Foote, Horton's daughter, and her husband, Devon Abner, so authentic and at home that they seem to actually live there. This trilogy of one-acts, unrelated except by setting, gives us Foote by way of Goldilocks—the first, "Blind Date," is comic but thin; the second, "The One-Armed Man," is potent but abrupt; the third, "The Midnight Caller," about social upheaval at a women's boarding house in the fifties, is poignant, funny, devastating, and just right. Under the direction of Pam MacKinnon, the actors—especially the veterans, including the wonderful Jayne Houdyshell—generally manage the delicacy of Foote's writing with aplomb, and the power of all three works only increases after the show is over. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HEARTLESS

Signature Theatre presents the world premiere of a new play by Sam Shepard, about the dark secrets of a Los Angeles woman. Daniel Aukin directs a cast that includes Julianne Nicholson, Jenny Bacon, Gary Cole, Betty Gilpin, and Lois Smith. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

INTO THE WOODS

In Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's musical (in a Public Theatre production), the musings of the preadolescent Narrator (played by Noah Radcliffe, who alternates in the role with Jack Broderick) give way to the characters, archetypes culled from fairy tales, including Little Red Riding Hood (the adorable Sarah Stiles), Rapunzel (Tess Soltau), the Witch (Donna Murphy), Cinderella (Jessie Mueller), Cinderella's Stepmother (the outstanding Ellen Harvey), the Baker (Denis O'Hare), and his Wife (the wonderful Amy Adams). Part of the fun of Act I is being in on Sondheim and Lapine's blatantly Freudian reading of these stories. Since the director, Timothy Sheader (co-directing with Liam Steel), treats this production as something of a sex farce, the Wolf (the multitalented, charismatic Ivan Hernandez) gets a lot of play, particularly after he "eats" Little Red Riding Hood and her granny (Tina Johnson), who, unlike the Witch, are not ambivalent about male attention. But quirks are not character. Nor is our familiarity with fairy tales enough to make any of these figures whole. (Reviewed in our issue of 8/27/12.) (Central Park. Enter at 81st St. at Central Park W. 212-539-8750. Through Sept. 1.)

NEW GIRL IN TOWN

In 1957, when George Abbott and Bob Merrill's musical played on Broadway for the first time, it was nominated for several Tonys, including one for its choreography, by Bob Fosse; Thelma Ritter and Gwen Verdon shared the Tony for best actress. In 2012, though, the story, based on Eugene O'Neill's 1921 play "Anna Christie," seems old-fashioned and lacking in nuance—a young woman with a secret, sordid past (Margaret Loesser Robinson) moves to a port town to start over, quickly falls in love, and then, when her new lover (Patrick Cummings) learns of her past, nearly loses everything. Despite the underdeveloped story, the harmonies are sweet and the dancing entertaining and professional. Directed by Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

Also Playing

THE BOOK OF MORMON: Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **BRING IT ON:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

CLOSER THAN EVER: York Theatre at St. Peter's, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820.
CLYBOURNE PARK: Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. Through Sept. 2. **COCK:** The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. **EVITA:** Marquis, Broadway at 46th St. 877-250-2929. **THE GERSHWINS' PORGY AND BESS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 800-745-3000. **GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **NEWSIES:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2717. **ONCE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ONE MAN, TWO GUVNORS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Sept. 2. **PETER AND THE STARCATCHER:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 877-250-2929. **ROCK OF AGES:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SILENCE! THE MUSICAL:** Elektra, 673 Eighth Ave., at 43rd St. 212-352-3101. **SPIDER-MAN: TURN OFF THE DARK:** Foxwoods, 213 W. 42nd St. 877-250-2929. **WAR HORSE:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

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

BEACON THEATRE
 Broadway at 74th St. (212-465-6500)—Aug. 29-30: The long-running world-music pioneers and goth favorites Dead Can Dance disbanded in 1998, but the Aussie duo has reemerged with "Anastasis," an exploration of musical dialects from East to West that picks up where the mystical pair left off.

THE BELL HOUSE
 149 7th St., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Aug. 30: The Glasgow-based Vaselines first gained widespread attention in the early nineties, after Nirvana covered three of their songs and Kurt Cobain called the band's leaders, Eugene Kelly and Frances McKee, his favorite songwriters. (Cobain later named his daughter, Frances, after McKee.) Two years ago, the group returned, after a long hiatus, with the album "Sex with an X," an irresistible collection of catchy garage pop highlighted by funny, insightful lyrics and understated harmonies. With the duo Schwervon! and their punky pop sensibilities and high-spirited between-song banter.

BOWERY BALLROOM
 6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 30: The avant-pop rockers Xiu Xiu have a long-standing penchant for the disturbing. Their latest album, "Always," is no exception. The feral punk anthem "I Luv Abortion" raised feminists' eyebrows at the political blog ThinkProgress, and most of the album's lyrics are brutal suicide notes. (There are also rich ballads, such as "The Oldness," that don't resort to shock tactics.) What saves Xiu Xiu from mere melodrama is the intelligence of the group's front man and sole remaining original member, Jamie Stewart, in his role as a synth programmer. Aug. 31: The twenty-seven-year-old CalArts graduate Julia Holter named her sophomore record "Ekstasis," the Greek word for the idea of displacement, or trance. Holter painstakingly crafted the album in the course of nearly three years, and her quasi-liturgical pop ballads are strikingly advanced.

The music evokes Kate Bush and Laurie Anderson, while the clever lyrics cite Anne Carson, Virginia Woolf, Frank O'Hara, Euripides, and the film work of Alain Resnais, among other references.

CAPITOL THEATRE
 149 Westchester Ave., Port Chester, N.Y. (877-435-9849)—Sept. 4: Bob Dylan, whose thirty-fifth studio album, "Tempest," will be released the following week, fifty years after his debut.

CITY WINERY
 155 Varick St. (212-608-0555)—Aug. 29: Joan Osborne, in residence here this summer, continues to swim happily in the river of blues and soul, which buoyed her when she was first start-



Julia Holter brings her atmospheric songs to the Bowery Ballroom.

ing out as a performer. Her latest album, "Bring It On Home," produced by Jack Petruzzelli, her longtime guitarist and musical director, includes a blistering version of Slim Harpo's "Shake Your Hips," and that energy informs her live shows. Aug. 30-Sept. 1: The great Philadelphia-born, Tarrytown-raised guitarist David Bromberg is also a formidable arranger and raconteur. He appears here with a big band.

DAVID RUBENSTEIN ATRIUM
 Broadway at 63rd St. (212-546-2656)—Sept. 4: Short, Martin, and Chase they are not, but the musical project known as Tres Amigos have their own loose-limbed charm. Justin Poindexter (guitar), Eddie Ray Barbash (washboard and sax), and Sam Reider (accordion) serve up a sprightly mixture of folk, country, mariachi, and more.

DEATH BY AUDIO
 49 S. 2nd St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Aug. 29: A night of loft-shaking punk rock, headlined by Naomi Punk, whose sludgy tunes often give off a deranged carnival vibe and stretch into epic-feeling, alternative-flavored rambles. The electrified riffing of the Brooklyn three-piece band Nude Beach could be equally at home on a Southern-rock bill, and comes complete with a gravel-voiced front man and countrified electric-guitar

solos. The loud noise-punk band Sleepies keeps audiences on their toes with dissonant instrumental sections and breakneck tempo changes, while the electrified pop band ShoXX seems more influenced by dance music than by punk. Aug. 30: Mac DeMarco's debut EP, "Rock and Roll Night Club," was a confusing introduction to this Edmonton-born, Vancouver-based recording artist. The songs leaned heavily on a disconcertingly ironic sleaze factor, with tracks like "Baby's Wearing Blue Jeans" and "European Vegas." If the singles from his upcoming October release, "2," on Captured Tracks, are any indication, DeMarco has matured and mellowed, and upgraded his recording equipment as well. Sept. 1: The hard-rocking Toronto trio METZ.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
 431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Aug. 31: Rodriguez. In one of the most unlikely pop-music stories of recent years, Sixto Rodriguez, who goes professionally by his last name, is getting some of the recognition he sought forty years ago and failed to find. In the early seventies, the Detroit musician—a kind of urban Donovan—released two counterculturally informed and folkily psychedelic albums that went absolutely nowhere. But somehow his records found their way to South Africa, where he achieved a legendary status among young listeners. Two fans recently decided to try to track down their musical hero, a quest documented in the new film "Searching for Sugar Man." They found Rodriguez working construction in his native Michigan, and the rest is history, delayed but not deleted.

HOUSE OF VANS
 25 Franklin St., Brooklyn (No phone)—Aug. 29: A heavy-hitting hard-rock bill featuring the Norwegian rockers Turbonegro, whose bumpy career started in 1989, with an ill-advised stint performing in blackface. That period was short-lived, and by the mid-nineties they achieved international fame with a streamlined, arena-rock sound. Their sense of humor helped, and they haven't lost it; their latest single is "You Give Me Worms." Baroness, out of Savannah, Georgia, is a group of hard-rock balladeers who beef up their borderline schmalz with fast metal riffing and the occasional Pink Floyd-ish drone. The Boston metalheads Doomriders and the supercharged New Jersey punks Night Birds fill out this testosterone-fueled celebration.

MERCURY LOUNGE
 217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 31: A few years ago, three Yale students came together to form the folk ensemble Plume Giant. Now, having just graduated, the harmony-happy expert fiddlers celebrate the release of their first full-length album, "Callithump." Two bands with a flair for string plucking lend support: Tall Tall Trees and the Black Swans.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Sept. 2: The punk-metal band Leftöver Crack, whose members live in one of the last remaining squats in the city (C-Squat), has a reputation for provocative and subversive songs.

PIANOS
 158 Ludlow St. (212-505-3733)—Aug. 31: METZ (see Death by Audio).

RUMSEY PLAYFIELD
 Central Park, mid-Park at 69th St. (800-745-3000)—Aug. 29: With influences ranging from Balkan folk to Mexican funeral music, Beirut are the princes of indie gypsy pop. Brandishing trumpet, accordion,

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and ukulele, to name just a few instruments, the band takes world music in a new, hip direction.

TERRA BLUES

149 Bleecker St. (212-777-7776)—Aug. 30: Willie Jaye Laws is a guitarist and singer who places special emphasis on his Texas roots, keeping alive the musical traditions of T-Bone Walker, Doug Sahn, Albert Collins, and Stevie Ray Vaughan. But he and his band also find some deep blues in songs that previously seemed quite pale indeed, among them the Rolling Stones' "Angie."

285 KENT

285 Kent Ave., Brooklyn (No phone)—Aug. 29: In September, the acclaimed New York avant-chamber group Zs celebrates its tenth anniversary.

POP NOTES SIX-STRING THEORY

Robert Cray has been one of the most reliable pleasures of soul and blues for almost three decades now, an assessment that sounds like faint praise but shouldn't. Cray is still mostly remembered for his 1986 release, "Strong Persuader," which remains one of the best albums of his career, because it would have been one of the best albums of anyone's career. Cray released five studio LPs in the ensuing decade and has maintained an enviable recording and touring schedule, and, while that professionalism steadily increases his body of work, it also means that individual albums tend to pass by somewhat anonymously.

It would be a mistake if that same fate befell his sixteenth album, "Nothin but Love" (Mascot). The leadoff track, "Won't Be Coming Home," has a familiar story—woman leaves man, man can't get past it—stretched over a menacing keyboard line and a surging chorus. As always, it's bolstered by Cray's writing, which has the compression of short fiction: "Two days later I get a letter/A picture of a room in some hotel/Sitting framed up on the table/A picture I know so well." One of the things that made "Strong Persuader" not just a pleasure but a classic was the unreliability of its narrators: the tortured cuckold of "Smoking Gun," the self-doubting ladies' man of "Right Next Door (Because of Me)." That's the case here as well. Why

peter Tom Harrell and the saxophonist Vincent Herring, salute one of the kings of bebop, Charlie Parker.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 28-Sept. 2: It's become nearly impossible to chart a predictable path for the enterprising pianist and composer Kenny Werner; here his guests include two jazz internationalists steeped in their native cultures, the Beninese guitar sensation Lionel Loueke and the Puerto Rican saxophonist Miguel Zenón.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 28-Sept. 2: The Brazilian transplants Trio da Paz, along with the singer Maucha Adnet, the vibra-



does the narrator of "Worry" feel that passive anxiety is the only option available to him as a loved one descends into a life of ill repute?

Musically, Cray remains on firm footing. There are, as always, nods to his forebears—Albert Collins in the slashing, squealing solos, Otis Redding in the forceful vocals—but he's been doing this long enough, and well enough, that he's mostly just himself. On recent albums, Cray has sometimes fallen victim to the Curse of the Ambitious Composition. "Truce," the closing track from his 2009 album, "This Time," was a jazzy, understated, and borderline soporific five-and-a-half-minute portrait of a fraught relationship. What it lacked is what "Nothin but Love" has in abundance, and that's forward motion. "Fix This" glides along on a reggae lilt and tasteful piano, until it reaches its chorus, all soul organ and full-throated vocals. "Side Dish" uses food metaphors to sketch out the facts of infidelity (it's elevated above novelty by superb playing and by the plaintive closing line, "Please take me back"). And even though "I'm Done Cryin'" is nearly nine minutes long and a message song at that—it chronicles the emotional effects of job loss—it's taut and straightforward, a letter from the economic front.

—Ben Greenman

To commemorate the occasion, the group will release "Score," a four-disk boxed set featuring its pioneering experimental work from the mid-aughts. Here they will unveil a new lineup, which features the founding member Sam Hillmer, the downtown composer Patrick Higgins, and the drummer Greg Fox, formerly of Liturgy and currently of Guardian Alien.

WARSAW

261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Sept. 1-2: The Power of the Riff, a metal-oriented festival that began in Los Angeles two years ago, makes its first East Coast foray with a diverse lineup. Highlights include the doom-metal pioneers Pentagram, which formed in Virginia in 1971, and the early-eighties New York hardcore group Agnostic Front, whose concise 1984 masterpiece, "Victim in Pain," contained eleven songs and clocked in at just over fifteen minutes. The festival is rounded out by younger bands, including the experimental metal outfit Sunn O))), which specializes in slow and drone-filled compositions.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 28-Sept. 1: A quintet of neo-boppers, including the trum-

phonist Joe Locke, and the saxophonist Harry Allen, celebrate the music of Stan Getz and João Gilberto.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 28-Sept. 2: Ron Carter, the grand master of the jazz bass, fronts a big band, with punchy arrangements by Bob Freedman, that leaves plenty of space for the leader's adroit improvisations and those of the featured soloists, including the guitarist Russel Malone.

THE KITANO NEW YORK

66 Park Ave., at 38th St. (212-885-7119)—Sept. 1: In the seventies, as a sharp post-bop pianist who also happened to be female, Joanne Brackeen was an anomaly. This pioneering player remains as vigorous and questing as ever; here she leads a trio that includes the drummer Adam Cruz.

SMALLS

183 W. 10th St. (No phone)—Lucky is the horn soloist who has Mulgrew Miller as his accompanying pianist; on Aug. 31 and Sept. 1, the hard-bop trumpeter Joe Magnarelli is the beneficiary.

SOPIA'S RESTAURANT

221 W. 46th St. (212-719-5799)—On Mondays and Tuesdays, in Club Cache, a downstairs room at this Italian restaurant adjacent to the Hotel

Edison, Vince Giordano and his eleven-piece band, the Nighthawks, take dancers back in time to the twenties and thirties.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 28-Sept. 2: The Jenny Scheinman quartet. The violinist Scheinman tends to set herself off against equally strong instrumental partners; here, the pianist Jason Moran will spark her driving, lyrical playing.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—“Tomás Saraceno: Cloud City.” Through Nov. 4. ♦ “Bellini, Titian, and Lotto: North Italian Paintings from the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.” Through Sept. 3. ♦ “Naked Before the Camera.” Through Sept. 9. ♦ “Ellsworth Kelly: Plants.” Through Sept. 3. ♦ “Chinese Gardens: Palace Pavilions, Scholars’ Studios, Rustic Retreats.” Through Jan. 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)—“Alighiero Boetti: Game Plan.” Through Oct. 1. ♦ “Century of the Child: Growing by Design, 1900-2000.” Through Nov. 5. ♦ “Quay Brothers: On Deciphering the Pharmacist’s Prescription for Lip-Reading Puppets.” Through Jan. 7. ♦ “Eyes Closed/Eyes Open: Recent Acquisitions in Drawings.” Through Jan. 7. ♦ “Projects 98: Slavs and Tatars.” Through Dec. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

MOMA PS1

22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens (718-784-2084)—“Lara Favaretto: Just Knocked Out.” Through Sept. 10. ♦ “Esther Kläs—Better Energy.” Through Sept. 17. ♦ “Solo Projects by Rey Akdogan, Edgardo Aragón, Ilja Karilampi, and Caitlin Keogh.” Through Sept. 17. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3587)—“Rincke Dijkstra: A Retrospective.” Through Oct. 3. ♦ “Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949-1960.” Through Sept. 12. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—“Yayoi Kusama.” Through Sept. 30. ♦ “Sharon Hayes: There’s So Much I Want to Say to You.” Through Sept. 9. ♦ “Oskar Fischinger: Space Light Art—A Film Environment.” Through Oct. 28. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—“Jean-Michel Othoniel: My Way.” Through Dec. 2. ♦ “Ulrike Müller: Herstory Inventory.” The Lesbian Herstory Archive, founded in the mid-seventies and housed in a Park Slope brownstone, includes an extensive collection of T-shirts; the Austrian-born, New York-based Müller invited a hundred artists to make drawings of them. Displayed near the museum’s elevators, the works range from the silly to the serious, and the literal to the abstract, by artists both established (Amy Sillman, Faith Ringgold) and up-and-coming (A. K. Burns, Dawn Kasper). Also on view are items selected by Müller from the museum’s collection, including an Eskimo woman’s knife and a nineteenth-century porcelain cast of a woman’s hand. Through Sept. 9. (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)—“Creatures of Light: Nature’s Bioluminescence.” Through Jan. 6. ♦ “Spiders Alive!” Through Dec. 2. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—“Urban Archives: The Rituals of Chaos.” Sparked by the work of the Mexican photojournalist Enrique

Metinides, the curator Monica Espinel investigates the pleasures and terrors of the urban experience in a provocative show of photography and video. Metinides’s sensational shots of accidents and crime scenes ground the exhibition in the kind of matter-of-fact disasters that appealed to both Weegee and Warhol, but much of the other material here suggests a more vibrant and complex experience of city life, whether it’s in Kingston, São Paulo, Algiers, or SoHo. Peter Moore, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Alvin Baltrap documented dance and art work that made use of abandoned or under-used spaces in New York. Sophie Calle’s portraits of Bronx residents, originally hung at Fashion Moda, in 1980, were tagged with graffiti by “unexpected and providential collaborators” who broke into the South Bronx gallery the night before Calle’s show opened. Through Jan. 6. ♦ “Revolution Not Televised.” Through Oct. 17. (Open Thursdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY

1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—“Gordon Parks: 100 Years.” Through Jan. 6. ♦ “Christer Strömholm: Les Amies de Place Blanche.” Through Sept. 2. ♦ “President in Petticoats! Civil War Propaganda in Photographs.” Through Sept. 2. ♦ “Weegee: Murder Is My Business.” Through Sept. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—“Édouard Vuillard: A Painter and His Muses, 1890-1940.” Through Sept. 23. ♦ “Sanford Biggers and Jennifer Zackin: A Small World.” Through Oct. 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—“Robert Wilson/Philip Glass: Einstein on the Beach.” Through Nov. 4. ♦ “Josef Albers in America: Paint-

ing on Paper.” Through Oct. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEO DEL BARRIO

Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-831-7272)—“Caribbean: Crossroads of the World.” Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—“Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation 3/Contemporary Native North American Art from the Northeast and Southeast.” This thoughtful overview of contemporary art by indigenous peoples—the final installment of a three-part show—features more than eighty artists whose work is divided between modernist gestures and pointed political commentary. The show avoids facile generalizations and pigeonholing by emphasizing individual voices. Some themes inevitably recur: smallpox-infected blankets are invoked by Marie Watt, whose poignant abstraction, which recalls textiles by Anni Albers, is composed of recycled satin bindings; and Michelle LaVallee contributes a damning installation titled “Final Proof,” which includes Hudson Bay blankets and the “Chronicles of Canada,” a thirty-two-book history of Canada’s colonization. Other artists reference non-Native art and popular culture: Jordan Bennett updates Duchamp by combining a bicycle wheel and a dream catcher, and Skawennati’s computer-generated animation about a time-travelling Mohawk strikes an optimistic chord, envisioning a more egalitarian future. Through Oct. 21. ♦ “Space-Light-Structure: The Jewelry of Margaret De Patta.” Through Sept. 23. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday and Friday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF BIBLICAL ART

Broadway at 61st St. (212-408-1500)—“The Adoration of the Magi by Bartolo di Fredi: A Masterpiece Reconstructed.” Through Sept. 9. (Open

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK NEW YORK, METZ



In the past ten years, independent bands have inched back toward the musical aggression that was something of a default position for the community in the late eighties and early nineties. METZ, a trio from Toronto, has fully revived this confrontational, skilled and energetic approach. The guitarist-vocalist Alex Edkins, the drummer Hayden Menzies, and the bassist Chris Slorach have made one of the year's best albums, a self-titled *début* for Sub Pop that will be released in October. The band has described the album as an "audio equivalent of the film 'Fitzcarraldo' by Werner Herzog," which is effectively nonsense, except that both art works contain plenty of sweating. It is a punishing, noisy, exhilarating thing, a deeply impolite racket that will only sound better live at Pianos on Aug. 31 and at Death by Audio on Sept. 1. The band has also described its sound as "Aggressive Perfector—Blue Bomber—Fu Manchu—Core," which is probably what you should tell your parents (or, as the case may be, your children) that you're going to see. Just so they won't worry.

—Sasha Frere-Jones

Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

MUSEUM OF CHINESE IN AMERICA
215 Centre St. (212-619-4785)—"America Through a Chinese Lens." Through Sept. 10. (Open Mondays and Fridays, 11 to 5, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"Ghosts in the Machine." Through Sept. 20. ♦ "Pictures from the Moon: Artists' Holograms 1969-2008." Through Sept. 30. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN
Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx (718-817-8700)—"Monet's Garden." Through May 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (917-275-6975)—"Lunch Hour NYC." Through Feb. 17. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 10 to 8, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

QUEENS MUSEUM OF ART
Flushing Meadows-Corona Park (718-592-9700)—"Caribbean: Crossroads of the World." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Ada Bobonis: Stages, Mountains, Water." Through Jan. 6. ♦ "Her Stories: Fifteen Years of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective." Through Oct. 7. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, noon to 5.)

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM
12 Fulton St., at Water St. (212-748-8600)—"Compass: Folk Art in Four Directions." Through Oct. 7. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—"Caribbean: Crossroads of the World." Through Oct. 21. ♦ "2011-2012 Artists in Residence: Njideka Akunyili, Meleko Mokgosi, and Xaviera Simmons." Through Oct. 12. (Open Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

"STAFF PICKS"

The concept—employees picked their five favorite photographs from the gallery's inventory—may sound uninspired, but it's not. Instead, it's a great opportunity to see works that may not have been out of a box since they were acquired, much of it by New York photographers who have always been the gallery's backbone, including Lisette Model, Leon Levinstein, Louis Faurer, and William Klein. Among the discoveries: Bill Burke's shot of a boy poking his head into a silver cone at a speaker shop in Phnom Penh, Homer Page's picture of a man lost behind his racing form, and Gordon Parks's portrait of Alexander Calder as a disembodied hand hanging a mobile. Through Sept. 8. (Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Short List

JAMES LEE BYARS: Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Aug. 31. **BRUCE NAUMAN:** Gagolian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Aug. 31. **"JANET CARDIFF AND GEORGE BURES MILLER: THE MURDER OF CROWS":** Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-933-5812. Through Sept. 9.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

PAOLO PELLIZZARI

The Italian photojournalist shows a series of color panoramas whose subjects range from George W. Bush in the Oval Office to a swarm of Tour de France bicyclists pedalling through a small-town traffic circle. Most of Pellizzari's prints are nearly four feet across, but they cover so much visual acreage that the scale feels oddly compressed and figures seem miniaturized (a single, even larger

print whets the appetite for more). The best images have the generous sweep and the intriguing detail of history paintings, and one—of the skier Han Xiaopeng suspended in midair at the Winter Olympics in Torino—captures such a decisive moment that it looks more like a dream than like a document. Through Aug. 31. (Anastasia, 166 Orchard St. 212-677-9725.)

"INSIDE THE BANANA"

The text accompanying this slickly nonsensical seven-person show offers a tip for enjoying it: "Jettison any thought of thinking about why." Liberated from the quest for meaning or theme, you're bound to get a kick out of Adriana Lara's Brobdingnagian bunch of grapes (green balloons) suspended from the ceiling and Jordan Wolfson's shelf lined with lobster claws collaged with lewd images. Darren Bader—an artist as baffling as he is compelling—contributes a giant fortune cookie titled "Gary Comer's Favorite Hires During That Tenure." The digital animator Tabor Robak sets his stylized video game in, of all places, the Vatican. Best in show goes to the perversely erotic photographs of Torbjørn Rødland, through whose lens a cluster of shuttles is every bit as seductive as a woman's finger dipped in a tumbler of lager. Through Sept. 22. (Algae Greenspon, 71 Morton St. 212-255-7872.)

Short List

JONATHAN ALLMAIER: Fuentes, 55 Delancey St. 212-577-1201. Through Sept. 30. **ANDREW GBUR:** Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. and 195 Chrystie St. 212-982-1930. Both shows open Aug. 30. **JESSICA RATH:** Hanley, 136 Watts St. 646-918-6824. Through Sept. 1.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

OSCAR TUAZON

With the Brooklyn waterfront undergoing rapid transformation into an urban greenway, the Los Angeles artist's work blends into the surrounding construction almost too well. Which may be the point: his three hybrids of sculpture and architecture exude such a confident presence that they feel like permanent fixtures in the landscape. Each structure incorporates tree trunks: one acts as a water fountain, another supports a basketball hoop, and a third pierces a cement cube, paying homage to both Donald Judd and Gordon Matta-Clark. Through April 30. (Public Art Fund at Brooklyn Bridge Park, Furman St. at Old Fulton St. 212-223-7800.)

DANCE

"CHANNELS/INSERTS"

The dance historian David Vaughan—who, in the course of five decades, served as an administrator, a tour manager, and, eventually, an archivist for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company—shares his insights at a screening of "Channels/Inserts" (1981), at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. The piece was conceived by its creators, Cunningham and the filmmaker Charles Atlas, as a dance specifically to be seen on film, with generous use of crosscutting techniques. Atlas described it as a party going on in two different rooms at once. This is the first of a series of films to be presented by Vaughan this fall. (40 Lincoln Center Plaza. 212-870-1630. Aug. 29 at 2.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

METROPOLITAN OPERA SUMMER HD FESTIVAL

In what is becoming an end-of-summer Peter Gelb tradition, the Met presents a series of free broadcasts of the HD films it shows in movie theatres, on a jumbo screen very close to home—Lincoln

Center Plaza. Seating is first come, first served. Aug. 29 at 8: Karita Mattila's first appearance in Jürgen Flimm's production of "Salome," in 2004, sent seismic shocks through the New York opera world. Here's a chance to see her 2008 repeat of the role; Patrick Summers conducts. ♦ Aug. 30 at 7:45: The 2009 revival of Cesare Lievi's charming production of "La Cenerentola" stars the more than capable Elna Garanča, Lawrence Brownlee, and Alessandro Corbelli; Maurizio Benini. ♦ Aug. 31 at 7:30: Gounod's "Faust," with Jonas Kaufmann (in the title role), Marina Poplavskaya, and René Pape; Yannick Nézet-Séguin. ♦ Sept. 1 at 8: Bartlett Sher's recent production of Rossini's seldom heard "Le Comte Ory" may be visually distracting, but its cast is supreme, with Juan Diego Flórez, Diana

lyn. Aug. 29 and Aug. 31-Sept. 1 at 8 and Sept. 2 at 2. For tickets and more information, see bargemusic.org.)

OPERA SLAVICA: "JENŮFA"

Susan Marie Pierson, a distinguished American dramatic soprano whose life and career were severely affected when she was injured in an automobile accident, in 2010, is making a cautious but noteworthy return to opera by starring in this intimate production (with chamber orchestra) of Janáček's noble work, in which she takes the role of Kostelnička. William Hobbs conducts a cast of young performers who have productively spent their summer studying Czech. (Bohemian National Hall, 321 E. 73rd St. operaslavica.org. Aug. 30-31 at 7.)

**TABLES FOR TWO
CATCH**

21 Ninth Ave. (212-392-5978)—Why have one hostess when you can have four? At Catch, a typically cavernous restaurant in the meatpacking district—surely the only neighborhood in New York where you wish the restaurants would take up a little less space—the answer is that more is always more. Hence the velvet rope and two bouncers on the way in, the juiced-up samba version of "Move on Up" playing inside, the twenty-five-dollar tequila cocktail, and the grab-bag menu of dishes from around the world, governed by the principle that most, though not all, of it should be seafood.

Spinning on the lazy Susan at any given point, there might be the Italian-American classic cioppino stew (thick with tomato pulp but served in a stingy shallow bowl), some sushi rolls (including a dried-coconut-encrusted Zulu roll), a chunk of "simply cooked" salmon or mahi-mahi (served à la carte, with the sauce, naturally, on the side), and, with any luck, a crispy whole snapper (done in the traditional Thai style, curved in on itself and covered in chili and garlic). It's the best thing on the menu, but it's also seventy-two dollars.

—*Amelia Lester*



For those without expense accounts, simpler pleasures are hard to find. The hot, soft pretzels with honey-mustard butter don't have a lot to do with seafood, but no one will complain. On the appetizer menu, there are some spicy tuna rice cakes that are appropriately crispy on the bottom and satisfyingly laborious for the jaw muscles, like good pizza crust, or nougat. Hamachi tartare with pear and potato chips works better than expected; in fact, this cleanest of fish provides a neat staging ground for the delightfully weird intermingling of salty and sweet, crunchy and mushy. The high-low dessert offerings sound like they should be cheap, but they aren't, of course. The big draw of the cookie bucket is the fried Oreos, which doesn't really taste like anything, except maybe tempura. The s'mores pizza is heavy on the cinnamon and comes with a little tub of burnt-marshmallow ice cream, from which you're instructed to scoop your own. It's diverting, though not delicious, and, like the over-all dining experience, feels dated, and a little too determinedly "downtown." (Open every night for dinner. Entrées \$26-\$90.)

Damrau, and Joyce DiDonato in the leading roles; Benini. ♦ Sept. 2 at 8: David McVicar's solidly traditional production of "Il Trovatore" stars the impressive Sondra Radvanovsky, Marcelo Álvarez, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Dolora Zajick; Marco Armiliato. ♦ Sept. 3 at 7:30: The final showing in the series is of last season's "Anna Bolena," which David McVicar crafted as an opening-night vehicle for Anna Netrebko. She leads the cast, which also includes Ekaterina Gubanova and Ildar Abdrazakov; Armiliato. (Lincoln Center Plaza. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC LABOR DAY FESTIVAL

Every Labor Day weekend, the barge expands its occasional series of "Here and Now" concerts to sponsor a mini-festival of contemporary music. This year's collection of performers (slightly different on each night) includes members of the dynamic Brooklyn chamber orchestra the Knights, performing a new improvisational work of their own; members of the newly minted modern-music group the Declassified, all alumni of Carnegie Hall's Ensemble ACJW, playing pieces by Caleb Burhans and Ted Hearne; the threemember maven Rob Schwimmer, offering his own work; the soprano Lauren Goldsmith, singing songs by Libby Larsen, William Bolcom, and Ned Rorem; and the sterling pianist Steven Beck, performing solo selections by the formidable Milton Babbitt and Elliott Carter. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brook-

SOHEIL NASSERI

Ten years ago, this young pianist was a dedicated bon vivant; since then, he's matured into a hardy survivor of the keyboard world, with superb technique and a poetic touch. His upcoming program at Merkin Concert Hall is serious and substantive: a clutch of works by Beethoven (including the Sonata No. 28 in A Major and the Bagatelles, Op. 119) and Brahms's "Handel Variations," preceded by selections from "The Vanishing Pavilions," a vast work by the American modernist Michael Hersch. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 4 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

MAVERICK CONCERTS

The Maverick's Labor Day weekend spread is a typical amalgam of ambition and style. Sept. 1 at 6: Alexander Platt, the series' music director, conducts the summer's annual chamber-orchestra concert, "La Bonne Chanson," a celebration of French song named for the masterpiece by Fauré, which will be performed by the baritone Andrew Garland in the rarely heard version with piano and strings. The mezzo-soprano Mary Nesslering is on hand to sing not only Ravel's luminous "Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé" but also the world première of Harold Meltzer's "Variations on a Summer Day," a setting of the eponymous

poem by the great Francophile Wallace Stevens; Garland also sings (accompanied by the pianist Alan Murchie) a selection of songs by Debussy, Poulenc, Duparc, Franck, and Ned Rorem. ♦ Sept. 2 at 4: The Jupiter String Quartet, a powerful and elegant young ensemble that will appear with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center next season, makes its Maverick debut with a program that features music by Webern and Beethoven (the "Harp" Quartet); the group joins the pianist Ilya Yakushev in Franck's intense and luxuriant Piano Quintet. Yakushev also performs Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit" in a prelude concert at 3. (Woodstock, N.Y. maverickconcerts.org.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN

The Shanghai Quartet, a favorite group at the string-quartet shrine, has a weekend to itself, offering two concerts. The first includes hearty works by Beethoven (including the Quartet in F Minor, "Serioso") and Smetana (the Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, "From My Life"); the second features Mozart's Quartet in B-Flat Major, K. 589, and Dvořák's Piano Quintet in A Major (with the Van Cliburn laureate Haachen Zhang, who will also perform a solo work by Chopin). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Sept. 1 at 6:30 and Sept. 2 at 3.)

TANNERY POND CONCERTS

Christian Steiner's almost private series, held in an acoustically satisfying old Shaker tannery barn on the grounds of the Darrow School, rarely lacks star quality. The radiant soprano Elizabeth Futral, joined by the clarinetist Todd Palmer and the pianist Ran Dank, takes pride of place in a concert featuring three beloved songs of Schubert (including "Du Bist die Ruh") and a complete performance of Ricky Ian Gordon's "Orpheus and Euridice," a "song cycle in two acts," which freely adapts the ancient myth; Dank begins the evening with Schubert's Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 664. (New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-1696. Sept. 1 at 8.)

**MOVIES
OPENING**

THE AMBASSADOR

A documentary directed by and featuring Mads Brügger, who impersonates a diplomat in the Central African Republic. Opening Aug. 29. (In limited release.)

BREATHING

Karl Markovics directed this drama, about an Austrian boy (Thomas Schubert) who, after his release from a juvenile detention center, delves into family secrets. In German. Opening Aug. 31. (Cinema Village.)

FOR A GOOD TIME, CALL . . .

Lauren Anne Miller and Ari Graynor star in this comedy, as roommates in New York who work as phone-sex operators. Directed by Jamie Travis; co-starring Justin Long. Opening Aug. 29. (In limited release.)

THE GOOD DOCTOR

Orlando Bloom stars in this drama, as a physician whose care for a young patient (Riley Keough) turns obsessive. Directed by Lance Daly; co-starring Rob Morrow and Taraji P. Henson. Opening Aug. 31. (In limited release.)

LAWLESS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 29. (In wide release.)

LITTLE BIRDS

Elgin James directed this drama, starring Juno Temple and Kay Panabaker as teens from the Salton Sea area who follow three young men to Los Angeles. Co-starring Kate Bosworth and Leslie Mann. Opening Aug. 29. (In limited release.)

ORNETTE: MADE IN AMERICA

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 31. (IFC Center.)

THE POSSESSION

Ole Bornedal directed this horror film, about a little girl whose behavior turns strange under the influence of a dybbuk. Starring Jeffrey Dean Morgan, Kyra Sedgwick, Madison Davenport, and Natasha Calis. Opening Aug. 31. (In wide release.)

SIDE BY SIDE

A documentary, directed by Chris Keneally, featuring Keanu Reeves in conversation with direc-

MATTHEW HOLLISTER

tors (including Martin Scorsese, Steven Soderbergh, and David Fincher) about the conversion to digital filmmaking. Opening Aug. 31. (In limited release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

Does film criticism become redundant when a movie reviews itself in its own title? Or should we take that preemptive assessment as a challenge? Certainly, there are things that amaze in Marc Webb's addition to the comic-book franchise: the scene, for instance, where Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield), freshly enhanced with arachnoid powers, destroys the inside of a subway car without even trying, and with no hint of malice. Garfield looks charmingly helpless at such times, and audiences will swoon accordingly; far more uncomfortable, though, are his moments of mush, when the whole business of becoming web-based seems to prey upon his soul. The film recycles a lot of material from previous projects: Peter still has vanished parents, and he still lives with his Uncle Ben and Aunt May, now played by Martin Sheen and Sally Field, respectively. New to the game are Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone), a schoolmate with whom he falls in love, and Dr. Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans), a one-armed scientist who, in an effort to while away those dull days, turns himself into a lizard the size of a plow horse. His battle with our hero, tracked by a cop (Denis Leary) who also happens to be Gwen's father, is noisy and extensive, yet little seems to be at stake beyond a slight worsening of New York traffic conditions, and the whole enterprise grows ominously heavy on its feet. Spider-Man is at his best, his happiest, and his most entertaining when he follows the example of Sinatra: swing easy.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/9 & 16/12.) (In wide release.)

BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

Startlingly fresh and powerful. In the Gulf of Mexico, on the "wrong side of the levee," an ethnically mixed community of raffish survivors live in rubbishy shacks and cling to a damp bit of turf that they affectionately call the Bathtub. The six-year-old heroine, Hushpuppy, played by an astonishing local schoolchild, Quvenzhané Wallis, has an exuberant, vertical thatch of hair and a small mouth that expresses both amusement and the fiercest determination. Hushpuppy's father, Wink, played by Dwight Henry, another local non-actor—a baker, with an acetylene voice—is drinking hard, fighting against illness. The two regard each other warily, furiously, like characters in a Faulkner novel trapped in each other's compulsions and needs. As eco-disaster threatens, Hushpuppy sees ice fields melting; she has a vision of frozen prehistoric beasts breaking free and menacing her mucky habitat. The young director, Benh Zeitlin, launches the fantastic from an initial mode of crowded poetic realism; from the middle of the movie to the end, reality and fantasy flow into each other seamlessly. The moods hang together, and much of the picture is savagely happy and wild. Based on a play by Lucy Alibar, who wrote the screenplay with Zeitlin. The cinematography is by Ben Richardson.—*David Denby* (7/23/12) (In wide release.)

BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE

An erratic light comedy with a spellbinding wild streak, centered on occult rites, New York City at Christmastime, and a magical cat named Pyewackett. It's hard to resist Kim Novak, in slinky beatnik chic, as she bewitches a straight-arrow publisher played by James Stewart; she's part of a witch-and-warlock underground operating merrily in Greenwich Village. Among its other members, the booming Hermione Gingold and the furtively funny Elsa Lanchester are perfectly matched oddballs; so are the serenely adleppated Ernie Kovacs, as an authority on sorcery, and Jack Lemmon, as an ebulliently volatile young sorcerer. Stewart, playing the foil, deserves better material, and the movie's midsection is perfunctory. But the fun quotient is high, and there's an undeniable frisson to the way the movie's magic subculture echoes the closeted gay world of the fifties: it's easy to view the Zodiac Club as a gay bar. Daniel Taradash adapted John Van Druten's

play; Richard Quine directed. Released in 1958.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; Aug. 31.)

THE BOURNE LEGACY

The running man returns—not Jason Bourne but a new character, Aaron Cross (Jeremy Renner), another hard-ass special-ops agent who defies his superiors and keeps on moving when they try to eliminate him, racing from continent to continent and across shantytown rooftops, through crowded marketplaces, down alleyways. Matt Damon, who played Bourne, was lean in the role, but Renner's strong torso is slightly rounded. He looks like a shotgun shell, well-packed and deadly. He's physically very capable, but we don't feel anything when we look at his face. Tony Gilroy, who worked as a screenwriter on all three of the earlier "Bourne" films, directs this time, in a more settled style than that of Paul Greengrass, who generated the continuous motion of the last two entries. Yet the movie—which, like the prior installments, depends more on realism (gravity, not pixels) than on fantasy—is dynamic enough, with a few classic sequences. With Edward Norton and Stacy Keach, as ruthless military-intelligence types, and Rachel Weisz, as the research doctor who becomes Cross's accomplice.—*D.D.* (8/13 & 20/12) (In wide release.)

THE CAMPAIGN

This mixed bag of a comedy lampoons the political process by means of a Dumb (Zach Galifianakis) and Dumber (Will Ferrell) premise. As directed by Jay Roach, it takes easy shots at the insincerity of populist messaging—the duelling candidates are depicted as mere puppets of bigger interests (thinly veiled Koch-brothers knockoffs, played very well by John Lithgow and Dan Aykroyd). But, despite the obviousness of its political points, the film has a scattershot, breezy appeal. Galifianakis plays his emasculated tabula-rasa character with a winningly sympathetic streak, and Ferrell's crackpot oafish performance, though familiar, is appropriately anarchic. Nevertheless, the movie ultimately undercuts its laughs with a rampant cynicism.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

COMPLIANCE

A fascinating, enraging (in a good way), morally instructive fable. The setting is a fast-service chicken franchise in Ohio. The sixtyish Sandra (Ann Dowd), the restaurant's manager, receives a phone call from a man (Pat Healy) who identifies himself as a police officer. He says that Becky (Dreama Walker), one of the teen-agers working the front counter, has stolen some money from a customer's purse, and he asks Sandra to detain her and, eventually, to strip-search her. Other members of the restaurant staff, all fond of Becky but obedient, take part in the girl's humiliation. Is he actually a cop? A prankster? A psychology professor doing an experiment? None of this would have worked if every moment of hesitation and then resolution didn't feel—as it does—absolutely authentic. The naturalistic writing and acting are superb. This is a small movie, but it provides insight into large and terrifying events, such as the voluntary participation of civilians in the monstrous crimes of the last century. The material is based on actual cases from the past decade. Written and directed by Craig Zobel.—*D.D.* (8/27/12) (In limited release.)

COSMOPOLIS

The director David Cronenberg has adapted Don DeLillo's 2003 novel into a languid, deadpan, conceptualist joke. His hero is Eric Michael Packer (Robert Pattinson), a twenty-eight-year-old asset manager of unfathomable wealth, who steps into his stretch limo and announces his intention to cross Manhattan for a haircut. As his progress gets stalled by traffic, various people visit him in the limo, including twerpy investment advisers, an old lover (Juliette Binoche) who entertains him on the seats, and his private "theorist" (Sandra Morton), who explains that money no longer has a narrative quality but "talks to itself." The interior of the car is designed in shades of black and dark gray, with chrome trim and blue, glowing screens. Despite the constrictions, Cronenberg keeps the space handsome and active, and much of the movie is dreamy and funny in an off-centered way. Eric, it turns out, is losing hundreds of millions in a bad bet against the yuan; eventually, the car is engulfed by an increasingly madcap anti-capitalist rally. With

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK PULP FRICTION

The debate over violence in children's entertainment was already raging in 1955, when Frank Tashlin made it the fulcrum of his Jerry Lewis–Dean Martin vehicle "Artists and Models" (screening at BAM on Aug. 30). Lewis plays a comic-book-crazed



writer of unpublishably mild children's stories who erupts in his sleep with lurid tales, which his roommate (Martin), a penniless artist, transcribes and sells to a pulp publisher who is struggling to compete with television's violent fare. Tashlin, a pop visionary, puts unhinged pop visions at the core of modern life, presenting Lewis's nocturnal ravings as instinctive scientific ingenuity that gets the attention of the F.B.I. and Soviet spies. "Don't shoot," one of them says. "Remember, we need his dreams." But the villains are ultimately thwarted by the dreamer's sexual instinct, and a parody of "Rear Window" (one of Tashlin's many Hitchcockian winks) emphasizes the comedy's connection between sex and violence. Suppress depictions of lust and horror and you suppress imagination itself—which, however, is often better left imagined.

—Richard Brody

Paul Giamatti, raspy and dishevelled, as a vengeful man whom Eric wronged. The cinematography is by Peter Suschitzky.—*D.D.* (8/27/12) (In limited release.)

THE DARK KNIGHT RISES

After the events of July 20th in Aurora, Colorado, Christopher Nolan's new film can never be seen in quite the same way. Unjustly or otherwise, its fictional mayhem will always be tinged, or tainted, with thoughts of the genuine suffering that was borne that night. In the face of impassioned arguments—over gun control, the effect of screen violence, and the possible mimicking of comic-book villains—any idea of simple fun has been drained away. But how much fun was the movie in the first place? The story is dense, overlong, and studied with references that will make sense only to those intimate with Nolan's previous excursions into Batmanhood. This time, Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale), dragged from a wasteful retirement, takes on a brute named Bane (Tom Hardy), who is masked and barely comprehensible. Running alongside this battle is the tale of Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway), a jewel thief with feline overtones, and the emergence of Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a youthful cop, as a fresh force for unswayable good in Gotham. Fans will hail the return of Gary Oldman, Michael Caine, and Morgan Freeman to the fray, together with the trusty Bat-pod, which gives perhaps the sleekest performance of all. Whether Bale has done enough with our hero to make him interesting, as opposed to joyless and reclusive, over the course of three films is open to debate; whether Bane, however, is a match for Heath Ledger's Joker, in "The Dark Knight," is a comparative exercise that should now be laid quietly aside.—*A.L.* (7/30/12) (In wide release.)

KILLER JOE

Anybody who trusts in the serenity that comes with age will be taken aback by William Friedkin's new movie; four decades after "The French Connection" and "The Exorcist," here is one of his most brutal works to date. Matthew McConaughey stars as the Joe of the title: a Texas lawman who—when off duty, at least—regards the law as something to be broken with a vengeance. For a handsome fee, he will murder on demand—good news for his latest client, a wastrel named Chris (Emile Hirsch), who hopes to have his own mother disposed of for the sake of an insurance claim. Also snared in the plot are Chris's father (Thomas Haden Church), sister (Juno Temple), and stepmother (Gina Gershon), all far more concerned by the mechanics of the plan than by its moral foulness. That everything should go wrong is no surprise, but the wrong turns are taken so viciously—Gershon, in particular, is appallingly treated, in closeup—that they lead the film, adapted from the play by Tracy Letts, to the brink of abusive farce. All of this is intended to crown the sense of danger in McConaughey's drawling, unhurried performance; in the event, however, the menace feels betrayed and dimmed by a director's perpetual wish to shock.—*A.L.* (8/6/12) (In limited release.)

MOONRISE KINGDOM

The latest Wes Anderson film takes place in 1965, on a fictional island off New England. At Camp Ivanhoe, Scout Master Ward (Edward Norton) runs a disciplined troop—at least, until one member, Sam Shakusky (Jared Gilman), goes missing. Sam meets up with his beloved, the twelve-year-old Suzy Bishop (Kara Hayward), and together they flee into the wild, as matching outcasts; he has no parents, and she feels estranged from hers, who in turn seem estranged from each other. Such is the leitmotif that courses through the tale, echoing worries from earlier Anderson films: a sharp sense of orphanhood, affecting young and old alike, and redeemed only by the chance to belong—to a choir, to a clan, or to the heart of a fellow-loner. Fine use is made of Benjamin Britten, whose music so often conjoins the voices of children in a common effort; it sets the tone for the movie's gusto, crisp and quirky, while its sadness belongs to those who feel marooned and beyond the reach of harmony—the honors going to Bill Murray, as Suzy's despairing father, and Bruce Willis, in the role of the island's police chief. The result is as bookish and as brightly hued as you might expect, but there is a new strain of tenderness here,

and, more surprising still, a touch of old-fashioned madcap in the climax. With Tilda Swinton, resplendently costumed, as a busybody by the name of Social Services.—*A.L.* (6/4 & 11/12) (In wide release.)

ORNETTE: MADE IN AMERICA

Shirley Clarke's 1985 documentary about the seminal jazz innovator Ornette Coleman joins an impressionistic portrait of the musician with an informative overview of his life, work, and ideas. It also poses painful questions about a mid-career artist whose restless curiosity is yoked to the glory and burden of a public persona—questions that apply as well to Clarke and her methods. The film's fractured, collage-like composition is anchored by Coleman's 1984 visit to his home town of Fort Worth, where he received official tributes and performed his orchestral work with the local symphony and his own band. Dramatized reconstructions of his youth, filmed performances from the sixties onward, and discussions with him and other musicians and associates (including William Burroughs and Brion Gysin) mesh with Clarke's diverse array of video manipulations and her flamboyant, rapid-fire editing, which break through the reportorial evidence to evoke the visions and fantasies from which Coleman's music arises. (His discussion of an earlier plan for sexual abstinence is as chilling as it is revealing.) Clarke relates

church is run by the boy's grandfather, Enoch Rouse (Clarke Peters), who's carrying a terrible secret that comes bursting out late in the film. Structurally, the movie is a mess, yet Lee creates moods of outright rapture in the church. He seems to be asking whether repeated, emotionally gratifying affirmations of faith are reconciling people to stasis and failure. It's a bitter question, and he doesn't offer an answer, but not many filmmakers would have the courage even to pose it.—*D.D.* (8/13 & 20/12) (In limited release.)

SLEEPWALK WITH ME

In this amiable first-person comedy, Mike Birbiglia (as director, co-writer, and star) gives his endearing persona the hard sell. He plays Matt, a standup comedian with a story to tell, and he tells it straight to the camera, to punctuate its dramatization in flashbacks. Matt's problem is love—in particular, marriage, which looms as the logical step in his eight-year relationship with Abby (Lauren Ambrose), a singer. But he's just not sure, and his doubts are tangled up with his career frustrations (he's working as a bartender at a small-time comedy club), his view of his parents' relationship (which he doesn't envy), and his own increasingly risky incidents of sleepwalking. Despite crisply anecdotal scenes of wry performance (notably, by James Rebhorn and Carol Kane, as the parents, and Alex Karpovsky, as a comic



Jia Zhangke's 2004 drama, "The World," screens at Film Society of Lincoln Center.

Coleman's grandly transformative multimedia projects (including one involving satellite transmissions) to her own; his troubled effort to rehabilitate a Lower East Side building highlights the free-flowing connection of art and life.—*Richard Brody* (IFC Center.)

PARANORMAN

A young boy who sees dead people needs to save his town from a deadly curse. That's the spooky setup of this beautifully precise stop-motion animated feature. The directors, Chris Butler (who also wrote the dark, agile screenplay) and Sam Fell, have crafted something special; their clever sight gags and wicked sensibility add some creepy, memorable scares to a wholesome story that encourages individuality. The film avoids the pandering of many animated features, bringing an acerbic edge and a thrilling intelligence to its story. The persuasive voice work is by Kodi Smit-McPhee, Tucker Albrizzi, Anna Kendrick, and the inimitable Elaine Stritch, among many others.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

RED HOOK SUMMER

Spike Lee's new film, which is nominally about a boy from Atlanta who spends the hot months in Brooklyn with his grandfather, is a clear failure, yet Lee is getting at things that mystify him, and parts of the film are moving. The picture is a lament for a community that got stuck in time—a group of African-Americans, living in the Red Hook housing projects, who gather around a small, wood-paneled Baptist church called Lil' Peace of Heaven. The

rival, Birbiglia lays the charm on thick while keeping the intimacy at arm's length. The crux of the story offers sharp practical wisdom in the modernist vein, regarding the comedian's confrontation with the danger and the challenge of self-revelation, but it's served up too smoothly and sweetly. Birbiglia may have doubts about love, but he seems desperate to be liked.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

SPARKLE

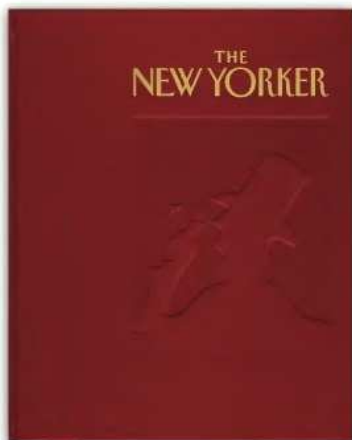
A lower-decibel "Dreamgirls" wannabe, set in the nineteen-sixties, about an ambitious trio of sisters (Jordin Sparks, Tika Sumpter, and Carmen Ejogo) and their by-the-numbers climb to Motown-like fame. The film is a remake of the soapy 1976 musical and is noteworthy only for featuring Whitney Houston's last screen appearance. She plays the sisters' church-going single mother, who has found God after years of substance abuse, and her performance can be, at times, cringe-inducing (some of her line readings seem somnambulant). But when Houston does her big musical number, which she delivers on the church steps in a long, flowing cape and backed by a full choir, she gives the film the emotional lift it was waiting for. The flat, plodding direction, by Salim Akil, does little to jazz up the proceedings, and although there are some nice retro visuals, the movie is a roll call of genre clichés.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE STORY OF A CHEAT

Few directors risk upstaging their movies with credit sequences as effervescent as the one with which

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Sacha Guitry (who also wrote the script and stars) opens this 1936 comedy: in a miniature satire on life behind the scenes on a movie set, he introduces the cast and crew, tipping his hand regarding the tricks of the trade. The play meshes with the cynical story that follows, of a poor boy with a Machiavellian streak who takes to heart an apprenticeship as a croupier in decadent Monte Carlo and becomes a first-class cardsharp. The cheat lives like a natural Chaplinesque aristocrat of humble origins who owes his fortune to his physical gifts and his poker face—and whose exploits, like those of the famous stage actor Guitry, would have been lost to history without the art of recording. The movie is something of a one-man show: Guitry adapted the screenplay from his own novel, and fills the film with his mordant voice-over. In this lively act of self-preservation, he bends elaborately theatrical artifice toward the cinema's primordial documentary function. In French.—R.B. (Film Forum; Sept. 1.)

TED
 The debut feature by Seth MacFarlane ("Family Guy") stars Mark Wahlberg as John, a Boston man who has spent his life coping with a wish come true. As a lonely eight-year-old boy, he dreamed that his Teddy bear would come to life and be his friend; by some miracle, it did so, and became famous—and now, at thirty-five, John is still living with the consequences. The formerly sweet and cuddly bear (voiced by MacFarlane) has matured into a perpetually adolescent, loutish party animal and dragged the sharp-witted and capable man into a dissolute adulthood of bong hits and bad TV. John has a girlfriend nonetheless—Lori (Mila Kunis), a successful young executive whose patience with his behavior and Ted's antics is wearing thin—and, to keep her, he needs to help his dependent find his own place in the world. The best thing in the movie is MacFarlane's clever underpinning of the talking plush toy's snarky-motormouth personality: with a shrewd and encyclopedic outpouring of pop-culture references, he renders the absurd conceit reasonable and funnels Ted's story into the universal drama of a Hollywood has-been. It's the comedy that never comes to life—the heavy-handed gags all but invite a laugh track—and a sentimental dénouement at Fenway Park is done by number. The movie's stuffing of creative smarts is still lifeless.—R.B. (In wide release.)

TO ROME WITH LOVE

Woody Allen's new movie, a Roman idyll, gently but surely moves back and forth between romantic comedy and satirical farce. We're in the realm of miraculous transformation—transformation through sex, through ambition, through chance, through illusion, through fame suddenly and unaccountably falling on someone's shoulders like a ton of baked lasagna. There are thirteen major characters and several minor ones—Americans and Italians mixing it up on the streets and in hotel beds. The stories never overlap, nor are they set in the same time frame. But the movie is held together visually by the many shades, indoors and out, of the glorious Roman gold ochre and thematically by the idea of seizing the moment—the magic you make for yourself by not being afraid. With Ellen Page, as a memorably dishonest actress; Allen, as a retired opera director who seizes a chance for entrepreneurial glory; Judy Davis, as his skeptical but loving wife; Fabio Armiliato, as the mortician with a genius for singing Puccini in the shower; Penélope Cruz, as a knowing call girl; and Alec Baldwin, Jesse Eisenberg, Alessandro Tiberi, and Alessandra Mastrorandi. The cinematography is by Darius Khondji.—D.D. (7/2/12) (In limited release.)

THE WORLD

The fourth feature by the Chinese director Jia Zhangke, from 2004, lives up to the ambition of its title. It turns World Park, in Beijing, a theme park of tacky reduced-scale reproductions of cultural wonders (from the Taj Mahal to the Eiffel Tower), into a derisive microcosm of China. The central drama involves Tao (Zhao Tao), an actress in the park's bland folklore pageantry, and her boyfriend, Taisheng (Chen Taisheng), a security guard, who ponder whether to marry while struggling to make a living and, above all, to escape their country. Their story connects with that of colleagues and friends, including a country boy who takes a dangerous job and a sweatshop manager who hasn't seen her hus-

band (an illegal immigrant in France) in ten years. Meanwhile, sham prevails, and not just within the theme park: a busy factory produces only knock-offs of American merchandise and the workers toil for funny money that buys nothing in the world economy and leaves even a plane ride an impossible dream. Cell phones and walkie-talkies convey an oppressive mood of surveillance, and the prospect of emigration (with its precious documents, real or fake) provides the only moment of true happiness. Jia's tenderness for his characters is infused with a quiet rage: as the wide-screen views freeze them in a confining emptiness, dead zones of action and dialogue suggest a land where imagination itself has been suppressed. In Mandarin.—R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Aug. 31 and Sept. 3.)

YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE

The fifth of the Bonds, it can easily be differentiated from the others because it's the one set in Japan. It's a product, but probably the most consistently entertaining of the Bond packages up to the time—not as startling as parts of "Goldfinger" but much superior to "Thunderball." Ken Adam's sci-fi production design (including a hollow volcano) seems almost perfectly calculated for the genre. Lewis Gilbert is a rather more humanistic director than his predecessors, and he's a reasonably efficient traffic manager; he doesn't let the actors loiter on the sets too long. And Sean Connery's James Bond isn't the sleek, greasy-lipped dummy of the earlier films; playing the superhero as a paunchy, rather bemused spectator, Connery gives him more character than he's ever had before. This casual, human Bond is rather tender in his sex relationships—one might almost call them love relationships this time. The Roald Dahl screenplay (out of Jules Verne and old movies) is clever enough, and Donald Pleasence, as Blofeld, pets his white cat ominously. With Alexander Knox as the American President. Released in 1967.—Pauline Kael (IFC Center; Sept. 2-3.)

Also Playing

HIT & RUN: In wide release. **LITTLE WHITE LIES:** In limited release. **PREMIUM RUSH:** In wide release. **ROBOT AND FRANK:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

BAM CINÉMATEK

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"The Story of Film: An Odyssey." Aug. 29 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30; Episodes 9 and 10 (2011, Mark Cousins). ♦ Sept. 4 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30; Episodes 11 and 12 (2011, Cousins). ♦ "American Gagsters: Great Comedy Teams." Aug. 30 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Artists and Models" (1955, Frank Tashlin). ♦ Aug. 30 at 6:50: "Hollywood or Bust" (1956, Tashlin). ♦ Aug. 31 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Bell, Book and Candle" (†). ♦ Sept. 1 at 2 and 6:50: "A Shot in the Dark" (1964, Blake Edwards). ♦ Sept. 1 at 4:30 and 9:15: "The Return of the Pink Panther" (1975, Edwards). ♦ Sept. 2 at 2 and 6:50: "The Producers" (1968, Mel Brooks). ♦ Sept. 2 at 4:30 and 9:15: "The Party" (1968, Edwards). ♦ Sept. 3 at 2 and 6:50: "Blazing Saddles" (1974, Brooks). ♦ Sept. 3 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Young Frankenstein" (1974, Brooks).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"The French Old Wave." Aug. 29 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:20 and Sept. 1 at 10:05: "Diabolique" (1955, Henri-Georges Clouzot). ♦ Aug. 29 at 3:40 and 7:35: "Eyes Without a Face" (1960, Georges Franju). ♦ Aug. 30 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, and 9:45: "Liliom" (1934, Fritz Lang). ♦ Aug. 30 at 7:25: "Le Bonheur" (1934, Marcel L'Herbier). ♦ Aug. 31 at 1, 4:55, and 7: "Forbidden Games" (1952, René Clément). ♦ Aug. 31 at 2:50 and 8:50: "The Earrings of Madame de ..." (1953, Max Ophüls). ♦ Sept. 1 at 1: "The Story of a Cheat" (†). ♦ Sept. 1 at 4:30: "Under the Roofs of Paris" (1930, René Clair). ♦ Sept. 1 at 6:25 and 8:15: "Riptide" (1949, Yves Allégret). ♦ Sept. 2 at 5:20: "Crime and Punishment" (1935, Pierre Chenal). ♦ Sept. 4 at 1:20 and 5:30: "The Grand Magneux" (1955, Clair).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—“Orientation: A New Arab Cinema.” Aug. 29 at 4:15: “Beirut Hotel” (2011, Danielle Arbid). ♦ Aug. 29 at 6:15: “The Rif Lover” (2011, Narjiss Nejjar). ♦ Aug. 29 at 8:15: “Zindeeq” (2009, Michel Khleifi). ♦ Aug. 30 at 2:15: “Zelal” (2010, Marianne Khoury and Mustapha Hasnaoui). ♦ Aug. 30 at 4:15: “Cairo Exit” (2010, Hesham Isawi). ♦ “50 Years of the New York Film Festival.” Aug. 31 at 2:30 and Sept. 2 at 8: “Dogville” (2003, Lars von Trier). ♦ Aug. 31 at 6 and Sept. 3 at 2: “The World” (†). ♦ Aug. 31 at 8:45 and Sept. 2 at 5: “The Death of Mr. Lazarescu” (2005, Cristi Puiu; in Romanian). ♦ Sept. 1 and Sept. 4 at 2: “Offside” (2006, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi). ♦ Sept. 1 at 4 and Sept. 3 at 8: “Silent Light” (2007, Carlos Reygadas). ♦ Sept. 1 at 7 and Sept. 3 at 5: “Gomorra” (2008, Matteo Garrone; in Italian). ♦ Sept. 2 at 2 and Sept. 4 at 4: “The White Ribbon” (2009, Michael Haneke; in German). ♦ Sept. 4 at 7: “Black Venus” (2010, Abdellatif Kechiche; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—“James Bond No. 1: Sean Connery’s 007.” Aug. 31 at 10:55 A.M., 5:30, and 12:05, Sept. 1 and Sept. 3-4 at 5:30, and Sept. 2 at 10:55 A.M.: “Dr. No” (1962, Terence Young) ♦ Aug. 31 at 1:05 and 7:40, Sept. 1 at 10:50 A.M., 3:15, and 12:15 A.M., Sept. 2 at 1:05, and Sept. 4 at 10:35 A.M. and 7:40: “From Russia with Love” (1963, Young). ♦ Aug. 31 at 3:20 and 9:55, Sept. 1 at 1:05 and 7:40, Sept. 2 at 3:15, and Sept. 4 at 12:45 and 10:05: “Goldfinger” (1965, Guy Hamilton). ♦ Sept. 1 at 9:50, Sept. 2 at 5:20, and Sept. 3 at 10:35 A.M. and 7:40: “Thunderball” (1965, Young). ♦ Sept. 2 at 7:45 and Sept. 3 at 12:55 and 10:10: “You Only Live Twice” (†). ♦ Sept. 2 at 10 and Sept. 3 at 3:10: “Diamonds Are Forever”

(1971, Hamilton). ♦ Sept. 2 at 12:15 A.M. and Sept. 4 at 2:55: “Never Say Never Again” (1983, Irvin Kershner). ♦ The films of Alfred Hitchcock. Aug. 31-Sept. 3 at 11 A.M.: “Rebecca” (1940).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—“An Auteurist History of Film.” Aug. 29-31 at 1:30: “On the Waterfront” (1954, Elia Kazan). ♦ “Gaumont Thrillers.” Except where noted, all films are in French. Aug. 29 at 4:30: “Death in a French Garden” (1984, Michel Deville). ♦ Aug. 29 at 7:30 and Aug. 30 at 4:30: “The Cousins” (1959, Claude Chabrol). ♦ Aug. 30 at 7:30 and Aug. 31 at 4:30: “La Femme Nikita” (1990, Luc Besson). ♦ Aug. 31 at 7:30 and Sept. 2 at 2:30: “The Professional” (1994, Besson; in English). ♦ Sept. 1 at 2: “Serie Noire” (1979, Alain Corneau). ♦ Sept. 4 at 7:30: “The Murderer Lives at 21” (1942, Henri-Georges Clouzot). **MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE** 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—“Looking for Love: The Films of Ira Sachs.” Sept. 1 at 5: “Forty Shades of Blue” (2005). ♦ Sept. 2 at 5: “Married Life” (2007). ♦ Sept. 4 at 7: “Keep the Lights On” (2012).

READINGS AND TALKS

MCNALLY JACKSON BOOKS

Ten years after John Reed first published the novel “Snowball’s Chance,” a controversial parody of George Orwell’s “Animal Farm,” the author sits down with Eric Banks, a former *Bookforum* editor and the president of the National Book Critics Circle, to talk about the work. (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. Aug. 29 at 7.)

BARNES & NOBLE

Jonathan Kozol discusses his latest book, “Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-five Years Among the Poor-

est Children in America.” (33 E. 17th St. 212-253-0810. Aug. 29 at 7.)

BOOKCOURT

Victor LaValle offers selections from his new novel, “The Devil in Silver.” (163 Court St., Brooklyn. 718-875-3677. Aug. 29 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

PARTY TIME

The annual West Indian carnival celebrations at the end of the summer fill the streets of Brooklyn with a vast array of colorful costumes and vibrant music. During the weeks leading up to the main event, a parade on Labor Day, a great deal of work goes into the preparations. This year, the festivities start on Aug. 30, with a showcase of the finery and a concert. On the following night, Aug. 31, there’s a brass festival featuring the soca star Machel Montano. A children’s carnival is scheduled for the morning of Sept. 1; eleven steel orchestras compete that night. On Sept. 2, the “Dimanche Gras” show brings the legendary Calypso Rose to the stage. The festivities come to a head on Sept. 3, with the main parade, which travels down Eastern Parkway; some three million people are expected to attend. (All events, other than the parade, take place on the grounds of the Brooklyn Museum. For more information, visit wiadacarnival.org.)

GOINGS ON DIGITAL

Download the Goings On app for Apple and Android, visit our blog (newyorker.com/go/goingson), and follow us on Twitter (@[tnygoingson](https://twitter.com/tnygoingson)).

ON THE HORIZON

ART CORPORATE CULTURE Sept. 9–Dec. 16

Since its founding, in 1994, the art collective Bernadette Corporation has been hard to pin down. It designed a fashion line that made the pages of *Harper’s Bazaar*, published a novel, and exhibited art worldwide. Artists Space surveys this wide-ranging output in the exhibition “Bernadette Corporation: 2000 Wasted Years.” (212-226-3970.)

NIGHT LIFE PERFECT TEN Sept. 13

Nublu, a petite East Village club with an eclectic

sensibility, celebrates its tenth anniversary in slightly larger digs, presenting a night at (Le) Poisson Rouge with four of its regular bands: Clark Gayton, Wax Poetic (featuring the club’s owner, Ilhan Ersahin), Hess Is More, and Love Trio. (lepoissonrouge.com.)

THE THEATRE POETIC LICENSE Sept. 14

Roundabout Theatre Company revives Edmond Rostand’s seventeenth-century love story “Cyrano de Bergerac” (it premiered on Broadway in 1898), starring Douglas Hodge (who won a Tony in

2010 for “La Cage aux Folles”), Patrick Page, and Clémence Poésy. Jamie Lloyd directs, at the American Airlines Theatre. (212-719-1300.)

MOVIES WHAT’S IN A NAME? Sept. 14–16

The cinephilic pedigree of the weekend-long La Di Da Film Festival is evident from its title, which borrows, of course, from “Annie Hall.” The festival showcases a diverse spectrum of performances, styles, and voices in new independent films, such as the Southern neo-noir “Sun Don’t Shine” and the Minnesota family

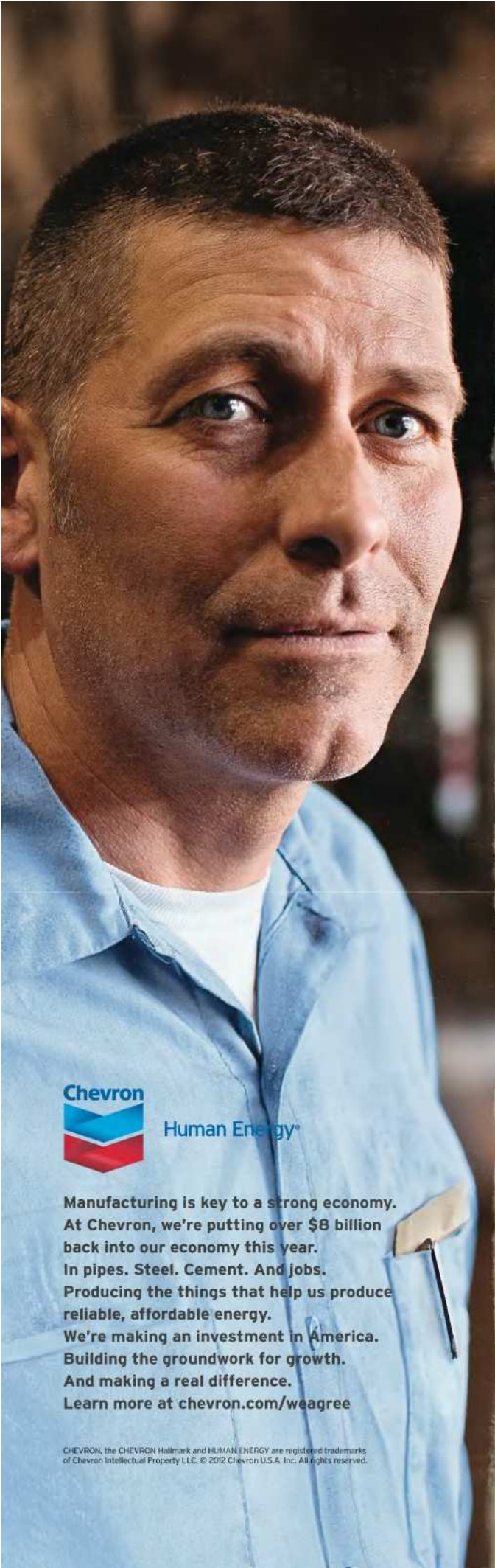
comedy “Marvin, Seth and Stanley.” (212-601-1000.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND ASTOR PLACE Sept. 24–25

With autumn comes the launch of the New York auction season. One of the first events is very much a Gotham affair: a two-day sale of property from the estate of the socialite and philanthropist Brooke Astor, who died in 2007. The sale includes a parade of impressive furniture, jewelry, and decorative objects. (sothebys.com.)

“Cyrano de Bergerac,” at the American Airlines Theatre.






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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT REPUBLICAN VS. REPUBLICAN



Twenty years ago this month, Republicans convened at the Astrodome, in Houston, to nominate George H. W. Bush for reelection to the Presidency. His acceptance speech was interrupted by spirited chants of “Viva Bush!” but few remember what he said. Bush, the last of his breed to head a Presidential ticket, was a patrician product of the pre-Reaganite Republican establishment: business-friendly, foreign-policy-minded, more secular than not, anti-Communist but otherwise minimally ideological. This was held against him by Party insurgents, such as the Louisiana state legislator and former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard David Duke and the pundit and former Nixon aide Patrick Buchanan, both of whom had challenged the incumbent in the primaries. Buchanan was granted a prime-time slot on the first night of the Houston Convention, and although he came with just eighteen delegates, he stole the show.

“Friends,” Buchanan said, “there is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America.” The fight, he explained, was over such issues as abortion, equal rights for homosexuals, and the inclusion of women in

combat units. Buchanan was against these things—“It’s not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call ‘God’s country.’” Of course, he said, he stood for unity and had come to rally the Buchanan Brigades to Bush’s cause, but nobody was fooled.

Today, solid majorities of Americans support gay rights, legal abortion, and women in combat. Yet the G.O.P. platform opposes them; the culture war that Buchanan trumpeted is no longer an insurgent cause but a permanent condition of the Republican Party, and, increasingly, it is being fought within the Party. Mitt Romney was reminded of this on the eve of this year’s Republican Convention, in Tampa, when Representative Todd Akin, of Missouri, who is running for the Sen-

ate, told a television interviewer that abortion should be criminalized, without allowing an exception for victims of rape; “legitimate rape,” he said, rarely results in pregnancy, since “the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.” Akin later explained that when he said “legitimate rape” he really meant “forcible rape,” which wasn’t exactly reassuring.

Akin’s woeful semantics posed an immediate problem for Romney, because his running mate, the Tea Party hero Paul Ryan, had worked with Akin in the House, co-sponsoring anti-abortion legislation that included several draft bills employing the term “forcible rape.” Now, however, Ryan was privately urging Akin to do the Party a favor and drop out of the Senate race, a call that Romney echoed on the stump, though neither demanded that Akin quit the House, where, after all, he is firmly in the Republican mainstream. Actually, Ryan, in sharing Akin’s hard line on abortion, is at odds with Romney, who has repudiated the pro-choice policy he espoused as governor of Massachusetts but would allow exceptions in cases of rape or incest, or if a pregnancy endangered the woman’s life. Still, Ryan subordinated his beliefs, saying, “Mitt Romney is going to be the President. The President sets policy.”

Maybe Ryan felt that he had visited enough headaches on his new boss for one week, but he hardly represented a new-found Party discipline. When word got out that the Republican platform called for the criminalization of abortion without reference to exceptions, the Republican



National Committee chairman, Reince Priebus, declined to bow to the candidate. “This is the platform of the Republican Party,” he told MSNBC. “It is not the platform of Mitt Romney.”

Akin, too, held his ground. Instead of abandoning his campaign, he boasted that he was raising lots of money for it, depicting himself as the scapegoat of an ideologically spineless Party establishment. “Why couldn’t he run his race and I run mine?” Akin said of Romney. No doubt Romney was asking the same question. He was plainly blindsided by the speed with which Akin came to dominate the Presidential campaign, and he seemed baffled that he couldn’t contain the damage. He shouldn’t have been surprised—not after the humiliations he endured in a long primary season, waiting out the Tea-Partying, God-galvanized, government-reviling voters, who seemed willing to line up behind anyone but him. In the end, to become their leader, he followed them; tacking ever rightward, he emerged victorious, though it was anybody’s guess what he really stood for.

Perhaps there is a scaffold of conviction undergirding Romney’s opportunism; perhaps he did believe that he could team up with a hard-right favorite like Ryan, then swing back to the center, at Tampa, and rally a broader popular desire to give President Obama the boot. But to get caught up in a mess like the Akin affair comes from thinking that you’re in control of forces that, in truth, control you.

Even before last week, Romney was lagging far behind Obama in polls of women voters. He also found little support among Latinos, blacks, and the young. Rather than competing for these voters, however, Republican culture war-

riors have been competing against them, by making it harder for them to vote. Before Akin got going on abortion in his interview, he spoke of the need to impose stricter voter-identification requirements, in the name of ferreting out voter fraud. Charles Jaco, the interviewer, pointed out that the only instance of fraud ever documented in Missouri had occurred in 1936. Akin didn’t care. Stricter requirements were “really common sense,” he said.

In fact, such requirements, which have become a priority among Republican legislators across the country, stand to effectively disenfranchise millions of eligible voters, the vast majority of them in demographic groups that tend to support Democrats. In the past year and a half, according to the Brennan Center for Justice, states have passed twenty-three laws limiting access to the polls. In the swing state of Pennsylvania—which Obama won in 2008, and where there has been no evidence of voter fraud—a new law could disenfranchise nine per cent of voters; in Philadelphia, the number could be twice as high. And in Ohio, another swing state that went for Obama, a top adviser to John Kasich, the Republican governor, defended a decree that curtailed early voting, telling the *Columbus Dispatch*, “We shouldn’t contort the voting process to accommodate the urban—read African-American—voter-turnout machine.”

After the 1992 Convention, the columnist Molly Ivins wrote that Pat Buchanan’s speech “probably sounded better in the original German.” And many observers later blamed Buchanan for scaring off centrist and swing voters, and contributing to Bush’s defeat. In Todd Akin, Romney clearly feared a similar risk. He had better get used to it. If he lets the Party’s culture war define him, and goes

down as its casualty, he will have nobody to blame but himself. He always says that he would rather be talking about how he would fix the beleaguered economy, but so far he has scarcely been more forthcoming on that subject than he has on his income taxes. If he knows what to do, he should tell us. Or is he waiting, betting that things will get worse? Bad news for America remains Romney’s best hope.

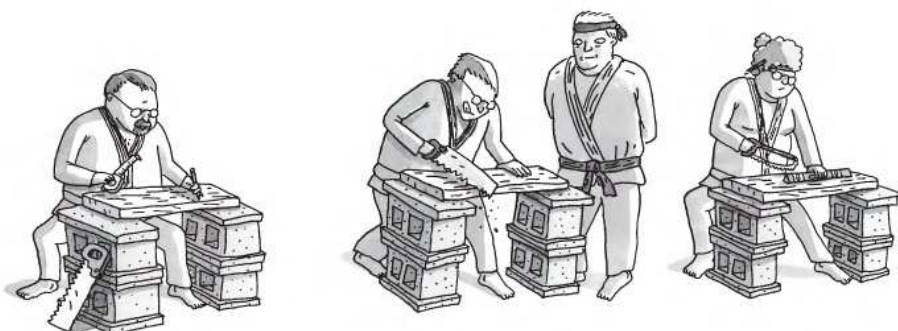
—Philip Gourevitch

ON THE GROUND SHOTS



The shooting last Friday morning on West Thirty-third Street at Fifth Avenue—with two dead and nine wounded—was, in the terrible calculus of American gun violence, not an especially significant event. The night before, no fewer than nineteen people had been shot in Chicago, thirteen of them in the span of just thirty minutes. That was preceded, of course, by twelve dead and fifty-eight wounded at a showing of “The Dark Knight Rises,” at the Century movie theatre in Aurora, Colorado; seven dead and three wounded at the hands of a white supremacist at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin; plus shootings at Alabama’s Auburn University, Texas A&M, and the Family Research Council, in Washington, D.C. Friday’s shooting—which was, one hopes, the last in this string of summer murders—was distinguished perhaps less by its bloodshed than by its iconic location: the Empire State Building, with its souvenir shops selling King Kong figurines and its tourists milling around.

By just after ten o’clock, about an hour after the shooting, the area around the Empire State Building had been blocked off, leaving Fifth Avenue eerily carless. Helicopters hovered overhead. While the Mayor and the Police Commissioner were inside a CUNY Graduate Center building going over police reports and figuring out how to explain an inexplicable event—a handbag-company employee who had lost his job murdered the man who reportedly fired him and then was gunned down by

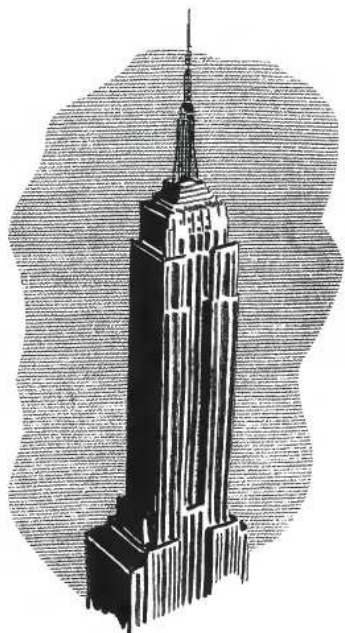


REMEDIAL KARATE

Kanin

police—stunned office workers and food vendors wandered about, giving their own press conferences.

Felipe, an employee of the food distributor Sysco, was unloading his truck in front of the Hotel Metro, on Thirty-fifth Street, when he heard gunshots. He saw people running, heard them screaming; “I hid behind my truck and stayed down there until it was over.” Diana, a dental assistant from Flushing, had just got a cara-



mel macchiato at the Starbucks on the ground floor of the Empire State Building when she heard five shots. She threw her coffee to the ground and crouched down until the shooting ended. “I knew what they were,” she said, of the sounds. “I’ve heard gunshots before.”

Troy Cobb, a burly deliveryman, had seen the shooter from above: he’d been moving equipment in the building when he heard the first shots. Initially, his view had been obscured by a tree. Then he saw the gunman in the street: gray suit, briefcase. “We could see the guy walking,” Cobb said. “He started walking up the block like he didn’t do anything.” People on the street started pointing at him. “Everybody’s like, ‘It’s the guy in the gray suit! The guy in the gray suit!’ As he turned the corner, I couldn’t see him no more.” Then came the second round of gunshots.

An older woman approached Cobb and told him, “You should tell the cops that!”

Cobb seemed hesitant. “The cops were there,” he said. “They killed the guy.” (As it turned out, it was probably their bullets that wounded most or all of the nine

bystanders, none of whom had life-threatening injuries.)

“Yeah, but still! You saw it happen!”

Finally, Mayor Bloomberg came out onto the street and stood behind a lectern. He was dressed like a man who had been about to leave town for the weekend. He was stern, informative, and reserved. Despite his long-standing advocacy of gun control, he seemed reluctant to score an obvious political point about the killing. Instead, he recapped the facts of the event, and said, “I ask everyone to keep the victims in their thoughts and in their prayers.”

Rush Limbaugh was not so reticent. “The *New York Daily News*, and a lot of the New York media,” he told his Friday radio audience, “is reporting that the Empire State Building shooter did indeed kill his boss.” Putting a mock reversal on liberal spin, he said, “He was fired. He went out there and he killed his boss. I wonder if Obama’s constant warfare on bosses and so forth might have led this guy to pull the trigger.

“The last time there was a shooting in New York, who’d the Mayor blame it on?” Limbaugh continued. “Tea Party people that didn’t like health care, right?”

In fact, after Aurora the Mayor had criticized both President Obama and Mitt Romney on the issue of gun control. In his weekly address on WOR radio, he’d said, “Maybe it’s time that the two people who want to be President of the United States stand up and tell us what they are going to do about it, because this is obviously a problem across the country.”

This time, the Mayor allowed himself just one pointed observation. Concluding his press conference, he said, “There’s an awful lot of guns out there.”

—Lizzie Widdicombe

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS ROLLING RHETORIC



Midway through his speech at the 1952 Republican National Convention, Herbert Hoover began speaking extremely slowly and then muttered, “This damned thing—I could do better without it!” As often in politics, small flubs carry big revelations: the speech was one of the

first instances of a politician using—and misusing—a teleprompter, or, as Hoover later called it, “that blasted contrivance.” Created by the electrical engineer Hubert Schlaflay, Jr., the actor Fred Barton, Jr., and the television executive Irving Berlin Kahn (Irving Berlin’s nephew), the teleprompter had debuted two years earlier, on the set of the soap opera “The First Hundred Years.” (The scripts were typed on paper scrolls.) Its role in political life has been vexed. Barack Obama’s teleprompter reliance was a recurring theme of Republican potshots during the 2008 campaign. This year, Rick Santorum dubbed him “reader-in-chief.”

“Most Presidents are dependent on the teleprompter,” Steve Carofalo said recently. As the general manager of QTV, which has prompted every R.N.C. since 1960, he should know. Carofalo was seated amid piles of road cases in QTV’s midtown offices, where packing was under way for this week’s Convention, in Tampa. Carofalo will oversee a staff of eleven and a sixty-box inventory of monitors, glass panels, and backup equipment. “If the microphone goes, they can just yell it out,” he said. “But if the prompter goes down you’re in the shit.”

Carofalo has prompted for everyone from Sting (who stopped him from “decking James Taylor” during a teleprompter-related squabble at a rain-forest benefit) to Ronald Reagan, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday (“He was just so down to earth”). He considers himself a “Bloomberg Republican,” but two decades of prompting Conventions has left him disillusioned. In 1992, when he was a registered Democrat, he prompted both parties’ Conventions back to back. “I realized it’s all rhetoric,” he said.

Still, he described the prompter-promptee relationship as an intimate one, like that of a conductor and a musician. The prompter turns a knob that scrolls the text on a monitor. Carofalo said that the best prompters “breathe along with the speaker.” If an orator accelerates, the prompter shouldn’t necessarily keep pace. “A good operator learns how to rein them in without them knowing.”

That wasn’t the case, however, with Sarah Palin, in 2008. Palin had bonded with a prompter hired by the McCain staff and asked that he prompt her Convention speech. (Carofalo makes this

exception only for top-of-the-ticket candidates.) As Palin spoke, the operator began speeding ahead during the applause breaks. “He was almost rolling the words off the screen before she even said them!” Carofalo recalled. The McCain campaign put out word that Palin’s teleprompter had malfunctioned. “My people hated that,” he said.

Carofalo explained that his staff, coming from the New York production scene, is “mostly liberal.” One of this year’s operators will be Michael Barringer, an actor who recently appeared in an Off Broadway Chekhov spoof called “The Three Seagulls, or MASHAMASHAMASHA!” Barringer, who called himself “to the left of most Democrats,” began prompting in 2007, because the hours were flexible. In Tampa, he will prompt for Mitt and Ann Romney and Paul Ryan. “Whenever I tell a friend I’m going to the R.N.C., their first reaction is ‘You gotta sabotage it!’” But he has no such plans. “Maybe there will be some terrible things that they’re going to say,” he continued, “but I still have to twiddle the knob, because it’s paying for me to do weird downtown theatre.”

Barringer found the QTV gig through Flux Factory, an artists’ collective in Queens. Its co-founder Morgan Meis has worked the last two R.N.C.s, and will prompt for Chris Christie, Newt Gingrich, and others in Tampa. Meis has a Ph.D. in philosophy (dissertation topic: Walter Benjamin) and considered himself a “Frankfurt-school Marxist” for many years. “There’s a cognitive dissonance there, no doubt about it,” he said. “It shook me a couple of times, where I thought, Wow, I see why he’s saying that. I see why he believes that. Then I’d snap out of it and say, ‘It’s wrong! It’s wrong!’”

At the 2004 R.N.C., in Madison Square Garden, Meis prompted for Rudolph Giuliani’s rehearsal. “I had found myself in political opposition to His May-orship, and the content of his speech I found more or less politically disgusting throughout,” he recalled. “But there was something charming and likable about him in person.” Meis told Giuliani that he was leaving the Convention early to get married. “He said, ‘You gotta stay to prompt my speech, because you know how it flows!’” Meis agreed to stay an extra day, and, as a gesture of thanks, Giu-

liani offered to officiate at his wedding. Meis declined, only because the ceremony was in the Catskills. “It would have been weird,” he said, “but I think I would have done it.”

—Michael Schulman

SENDOFF RIGHT-HAND MAN



Stu Loeser, who was, until last week, Mayor Bloomberg’s press secretary, has for several years been an indispensable part of this administration’s apparatus. It was Loeser who, back in 2005, when he was working on the Mayor’s reelection campaign, described Bloomberg’s courting of wealthy Democrats as part of an attempt to reach “New Yorkers of all stripes and backgrounds.” It was Loeser who covered for the Mayor after it came out that he spent Christmas, 2010, in Bermuda while a blizzard was barreling down on New York. (“I decline to comment on the Mayor’s private schedule, personal life, or personal property,” Loeser said.) And it was to Loeser that the Mayor deferred when at a loss for words. “I’d love to tell you that I’m *au courant* on the proposal to ban illegal tinted windows, but I’m not,” Bloomberg said a few years ago. “However, I can promise you Stu Loeser will get back to you with a short, pithy, insightful statement about that.”

Even so, when Loeser announced in July that he would be leaving to start his own consulting company, the Mayor was unsentimental. “Stu made a big difference in this city,” Bloomberg told reporters. “But, you know, the cemeteries are full of irreplaceable people.” Last week, a going-away party was held for Loeser at One Mile House, a bar on the Lower East Side. The guest of honor raised a beer to his lips and ruminated on his swift consignment to history. “My desk is being removed now, the day of the party,” he said. “That’s kind of cold.”

Loeser, who is thirty-eight, is bespectacled and baby-faced, and is given to wearing a fedora, as if he were appearing in a high-school production of “The Front Page.” There had been much to marvel at

in his years at Bloomberg’s side, he said. “I was born on Andrews Air Force Base and lived there until I was four, and so I remember the hospital I was born in,” he recalled. “You know how they say everything from your childhood looks smaller when you go back to it? Well, when you fly over the hospital you were born in, in your boss’s jet, every three weeks, it really is smaller than you remember.”

Friends, colleagues, and professional adversaries had filled the bar. “Every reporter loves him, though we’ve all been berated and gone home crying because of him,” Annie Karni, a reporter at the *Post*, said. Ray Kelly, the Police Commissioner, had dropped by. “He protects the principal,” Kelly said. “He does his job ex-



Stu Loeser

remely well.” Andrew Brent, a former deputy press secretary for Bloomberg, remembered how Loeser had responded when, during the swine-flu epidemic, Vice-President Biden told a television interviewer that he would advise members of his family against riding the subway. “I see this, and I’m cringing,” Brent said. “Meanwhile, Stu is calling every single television station and telling them the Mayor is going to take the subway to City Hall that morning.” (Less heroically, Loeser also handled the revelation that Bloomberg, who often rides the subway to work, is driven to the subway stop in his official S.U.V., unlike the average rider. “Who is the average Manhattan subway-goer? I don’t think it’s an answerable question,” Loeser said.)

The Mayor stopped by the gathering to pay brusque tribute to Loeser. “Stu

got the seven-year itch a little early," Bloomberg said. "I did try to spice things up for him. But he said, 'It's not you. It's me.'" The Mayor thanked Loeser for always giving his unvarnished opinion—"Sometimes a little varnish would have been O.K.," he added—and went on, "When Stu talked about leaving and starting his own company, I had two thoughts. One, I didn't want him to go, and, two, I didn't think that I'd have a year of dicking around to put up with, listening to him finally pull the plug." The Mayor read an official proclamation citing the dedication of Loeser, who "lived and breathed his job and worked tirelessly day and night, 24/6." (Loeser observes the Sabbath.) "As you know, I worked hard to write this proclamation," the Mayor said, adding, "Who wrote this shit?"

In his final farewell, Bloomberg reminisced about a moment of intimacy after a press conference. "I'm feeling good—I got the usual bullshit questions, I didn't screw up, I'm feeling no pain," the Mayor recalled. "I get into the car. Stu turns to me and starts screaming at me, 'You stupid—,' 'You no good—,' and you could see the two detectives up front look at each other. They had never seen anybody, particularly the Mayor, being treated this way. What did I do wrong? I didn't screw up. It was some stupid little thing he wanted me to say, and I forgot to say it."

Loeser, at the Mayor's side for the last time, interjected. "I wanted you to say that the graveyards are full of irreplaceable people," he said, animatedly. "The question was: Are we doomed to irrelevance after Dan Doctoroff left? And *now* you get it."

—Rebecca Mead

TRANSPORTATION DEPT. RUSH



Like many formerly dicey aspects of life in New York City, riding a bicycle has, in recent years, been undergoing a government-sponsored sanitization. In place of dashes through traffic, there are cruises down painted bike lanes and, coming next spring, a fleet of communal bikes,

sponsored by Citibank. But New York is not Paris yet. A new movie, called "Premium Rush," serves as a helpful reminder. The film, a chase movie directed by David Koepp, portrays the Manhattan streetscape as a battle zone—a jumble of taxis, pedestrians, venders, and delivery trucks, whose collisions and near-misses are punctuated by screaming confrontations ("Hey, watch it!" "Asshole!"). The film's hero, a bike messenger played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, visualizes crashes as he zooms along. Turn left: cause a pileup. Turn right: run over a baby carriage. "Premium Rush" shows it all, complete with bone-crunching sound effects.

Austin Horse, a bike messenger who did stunts for the film, said that its portrayal of the job is, for the most part, accurate. On a bike, he said, "you're really responsible for what's going to happen to you." The golden word is "anticipate." These tips were not theoretical. Horse, who has a wiry build and was wearing a Red Bull cap, had agreed to take a guest with him on his morning rounds. A little after 9:30 A.M., he got a call from his dispatcher, summoning him for a pickup. Triple rush.

The pickup was at 240 East Houston. Horse was at Time's Up, the Williamsburg bike collective, where he lives. He got on his bike and, apologizing for rudeness, sped over the Williamsburg Bridge, leaving his guest, on a borrowed bike, to huff along in his wake. Up Clinton Street—around double-parked cars and construction cones—she found him again, in the honking chaos of East Houston. He had his package: a manila envelope. The envelope's destination was near MOMA, but Horse wanted to see if there was more work in the area. "I'm only holding one"—package—he said, "and that's not very efficient." But when he stopped on Astor Place to check in with his dispatcher, an industry veteran named Bob, at Quick Trak Messenger Service, he was told, "Get rid of it."

Hopping back on his bike, he veered into Fourth Avenue, cutting off several taxis. They leaned on their horns, which was apparently a good sign: "If they honk at you, that means they know you're there." Turning left on Twenty-first Street, around an unloading UPS truck, he headed up toward Sixth Avenue, where restaurant deliverymen whizzed

past, ringing bike bells. At Forty-third Street, there was a near-crash. Some double-parked cars blocked a Volvo—an out-of-towner, Horse suspected—that was attempting to make a left. The Volvo hesitated, and a speeding FedEx truck behind it slammed on the brakes. There were shouts. Horse offered a safety lesson: "Legally, we're supposed to be on the far left or far right. But it's safer and makes more sense to ride in the middle of the avenue, at the same speed as the cars."

Horse dropped the envelope off at a law firm called Katz & Matz, at 1350 Sixth Avenue. He made a call: "I'm clear." The next stop was Joie, a fashion company on West Fortieth Street. Before fax machines and the Internet, people sent documents via bike messenger, and the trade was more robust. Now, Horse said, he spends most of his time ferrying swag between fashion companies and the press—"Samples, bribes. The whole world of journalism is kind of corrupt." On Fifth Avenue, an armored vehicle blocked the bus lane, and his guest found herself bellowing, "Coming through!" Pedestrians gawked. "You're picking it up," Horse said, and continued on to Saks Direct, on West Twenty-fourth Street, where he waited for an elevator, covered in sweat. Upstairs, women in cubicles typed amid racks of clothes. Horse acknowledged the upstairs-downstairs dynamic: "I'm, like, a young white guy, so it's not really a problem for me, but did you notice we're taking mostly freight elevators?" Worst part of the job? "Waiting for elevators. That and rain." Best part? "Making money, flowing through traffic."

After stops at Credit Suisse, at 11 Madison Avenue, and on West Twentieth Street, Horse had dropped off three packages. (A typical commission for a New York bike messenger is eight dollars per single-package run.) It had started raining, and his guest's enthusiasm waned. Down Nineteenth Street, around a delivery van, and across the traffic of Seventh Avenue, he arrived at the Quick Trak offices, on Seventeenth Street. The tall guy in a tank top, talking on a phone, was Bob. Bob nodded. "This is it," Horse said, but he couldn't stay. Hoisting his messenger bag onto his shoulder, he shouted, "See you guys!" and headed back out.

—Lizzie Widdicombe

LETTER FROM TEL AVIV

THE VEGETARIAN

A notorious spymaster becomes a dissident.

BY DAVID REMNICK



Earlier this month, a liberal Israeli novelist published a liberal polemic in a liberal newspaper. The article, by David Grossman, ran in the op-ed section of *Haaretz*, and decried Prime Minister Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu's fevered declarations that he might soon order a unilateral strike on the Islamic Republic of Iran and its nuclear facilities. Grossman warned of Netanyahu's "megalomaniacal" vision. He asked why Israelis, faced with what "could turn out to be the biggest mistake ever" by their government, were absorbing the news with such "fatalistic resignation": "How will we face ourselves and our children when we are asked why we kept silent?" he wrote. "Why didn't we set up a single symbolic protest tent in front of the Prime Minis-

ter's Residence to warn against the potential disaster heading our way?"

The article inspired no protests, no tents. A generation ago, Grossman's vivid reporting on the Palestinians for the weekly *Koteret Rashit* awakened many Israelis to the dehumanizing abuses of occupation. A fluent Arabic speaker, Grossman went into the refugee camps and villages of the West Bank, quoted the voiceless, and revealed to his Israeli readers the humiliations being inflicted in their name. But these days more than twice as many Israelis call themselves right-wing as call themselves left-wing; the symbol of the Israeli pioneer long ago shifted from the kibbutznik to the settler. Although there is still ideological complexity and debate in Israel, the heartfelt

polemics of liberal novelists no longer have much sway.

Since early last year, however, Israelis have witnessed a very different kind of dissidence, of a variety almost unknown since the founding of the state. As Netanyahu and his Defense Minister, Ehud Barak, routinely speak of an imminent "existential threat" from Tehran, comparable to that of the Nazis in 1939, and warn that the Iranian nuclear program is fast approaching a "zone of immunity," a growing number of leading intelligence and military officials, active and retired, have made plain their opposition to a unilateral Israeli strike. They include the Army Chief of Staff, the Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force, the heads of the two main intelligence agencies, the Mossad (Israel's C.I.A.) and Shin Bet (its F.B.I.), President Shimon Peres, and members of Netanyahu's cabinet, including the Intelligence Minister. Apart from Peres, these men are anything but liberals; most have impeccable hard-line credentials. The insiders are more muted in their language than the "exes," but there is no question that together they present Netanyahu and Barak with a formidable barrier to an attack. A poll this month in Israel showed that sixty-one per cent of Jewish Israelis opposed a unilateral strike and twenty-seven per cent were in favor.

The most outspoken of the high-level "dissidents," such as Yuval Diskin, who was the head of Shin Bet from 2005 to 2011, accuse Netanyahu and Barak of behaving with "messianic" fervor. "I have no trust in the current Israeli leadership," Diskin told a public gathering recently, warning that "one of the results of an Israeli attack on Iran could be a dramatic acceleration of the Iranian program." Earlier this month, Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, a former head of military intelligence, told the *Jerusalem Post* that an Israeli attack would lack legitimacy, unite a fractured Iranian leadership, and make it "clear that they need a bomb now so that we cannot attack them again."

These opponents believe that both Netanyahu and Barak, who repeatedly invoke the Holocaust and the eliminationist rhetoric of Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, are frightening the public and alienating the Obama Administration. "Barak's phrase 'the zone of immunity' is pure bullshit," a retired Israeli general told me. "I heard the same phrase

Meir Dagan has become the most outspoken critic of Netanyahu's position on Iran.

from him in 2010 and 2011," he went on. "Intelligence is something that is always debatable. Remember, we had a kidnapped Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who was held for five years just beyond our border and we didn't know where he was. Are we really sure we know everything about the Iranian nuclear program?" Lieutenant General Shaul Mofaz, an opposition leader and former Defense Minister, addressed Netanyahu directly in the Knesset, saying, "Over the past few months, Israel has waged an extensive and relentless p.r. campaign with the sole objective of preparing the ground for a premature military adventure. This p.r. campaign has deeply penetrated the 'zone of immunity' of our national security, threatens to weaken our deterrence, and our relations with our best friends. Mr. Prime Minister, you want a crude, rude, unprecedented, reckless, and risky intervention in the U.S. elections. Tell us whom you serve and for what?"

One morning recently, I took a cab to a sleek new residential tower on the eastern edge of Tel Aviv and asked at the reception desk for Meir Dagan. I was not entirely surprised that the security man gave me the once-over. From 2002 until January, 2011, Dagan was the director of the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations—the Mossad. The Mossad, which has its headquarters just north of Tel Aviv, is charged with a range of tasks, from counterterrorism to foreign espionage and covert operations, including assassinations. Only Isser Harel, who led the operation that, in 1960, discovered Adolf Eichmann living in Argentina, kidnapped him, and brought him to trial in Jerusalem, served longer as Israel's spy-master. Dagan is known as a ruthless agent; his career is said to have included operations of all kinds—car bombing, poisoning, cyberwar. He was also the earliest of the dissident security chiefs and is arguably the most authoritative.

A ludicrously young, unarmed security guard materialized and rode with me in the elevator. I rang the bell and Dagan opened the door. He was a startling sight. He is not much taller than five feet and nearly that wide around. He is sixty-seven and has bowed legs, stubby, muscular arms, and a bald, egg-like dome. He wore severe steel glasses, faded jeans, and a polo shirt the color of a Concord grape. His

grin is sly and sardonic, and not without a trace of menace. He clearly eats plenty, but he does not eat meat. ("It's because of a gruesome event in 1985. I cannot even smell meat or touch it.") He collects swords. Various military exploits have left what he calls "their memorials": a bullet in the chest, a bad leg and back, and "metal pieces in my body here and there." In general, he makes plain that his health is not good. He smokes a pipe, listens to classical music, and paints, like a dentist on weekends. The apartment is decorated with his canvases. They are naïve, sentimental, Orientalist—desert landscapes, a Bedouin, an old man in the Iranian town of Tabriz. "I get pleasure from this," he said. "It helps me relax." Since leaving the Mossad, Dagan has been living both in Tel Aviv and in the northern countryside, and, for the first time, he has been making private-sector money, in the energy business. "It's not bad," he said. "It seems that you can make quite a bit without working very much."

Dagan was born in 1945, on the floor of a train, as his family was being deported from the Soviet Union to a Nazi detention camp in Poland. His name then was Meir Huberman. Some members of the family died in the Holocaust, and Dagan kept in his office a photograph of his maternal grandfather on the day he was killed, in 1942, in the Polish town of Lukow. The picture shows a bearded, terrified man on his knees, draped in a prayer shawl, his arms up in supplication, as Nazi soldiers stand around with mocking expressions, truncheons and rifles at the ready. In 1950, the family sailed for Israel aboard a cattle boat that nearly capsized in a storm. They lived at first in a transit camp, in Lod, and then settled in the town of Bat Yam, south of Tel Aviv, where Dagan's parents ran a laundromat.

After graduating from high school, Dagan trained as a paratrooper. He used to go around throwing a knife into trees. While he was fighting in Gaza during the Six-Day War, in 1967, his jeep hit a mine. The explosion shattered his leg. As a soldier, Dagan won the attentions of Ariel Sharon, and, in 1970, Sharon, who was then the head of the Army's Southern Command, ordered him to create a special "elimination" unit, dedicated to hunting down suspected terrorists in Gaza. Dagan is wary of discussing the details of his life, especially his life in the military and

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intelligence, but accounts in the Israeli press, particularly *Haaretz* and *Yediot Ahronot*, are abundant. Dagan and his men often dressed as Palestinian taxi-drivers or farmers to infiltrate terror cells and, often, to kill. One of his decorations was for disarming and killing a Palestinian fighter who was wielding a live grenade. Sharon once said, "Dagan's specialty is separating an Arab from his head." Sometimes, one article claims, Dagan went on raids with a Doberman named Fanny. A soldier who served with him told *Yediot Ahronot* that Dagan would "wake up in the morning, leave his room, take a piss with one hand and shoot at soda cans with the other."

As an elder of the security establishment, however, Dagan knows well enough to dismiss any trace of a "colorful" biography. And, to be fair, there is every possibility that the stories of his career contain elements of myth. ("It's really bullshit. Life and people are much more complicated.") Above all, Dagan is eager to dispel the image of the mindless warrior. When Ilana Dayan, a reporter for Channel 2, asked him recently how he felt when he went on lethal missions, he said, "There is no joy in taking lives. Anyone who enjoys it is a psychopath."

Far from everything is known about Dagan's career. Two reporters for *Yediot Ahronot*, Yigal Sarna and Anat Tal-Shir, once investigated a story that, before Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which was aimed at rooting out Yasir Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Dagan led a secret unit across the border whose mission was to instigate terrorist events that would justify an incursion. Military censors killed the story, Sarna told me. Dagan acknowledges the censorship but denies the thrust of the story.

Dagan worked in various military and security jobs until 2002, when Sharon, then Prime Minister, grew frustrated with what he saw as a lack of initiative in the intelligence leadership and appointed Dagan the director of the Mossad. Dagan, a shrewd bureaucratic infighter, managed to increase the Mossad's budgets, expand aggressive (and sometimes violent) operations abroad, and develop the agency's technological capacities. Under his leadership, the Mossad was credited with a string of high-stakes operations. There was the discovery, in 2007, of what the Mossad determined was a Syrian nuclear installation built with North Korean help;

the Israelis bombed the plant the following year, though they have never admitted it publicly. In 2008, the Mossad engineered the car bombing, in Damascus, of Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's leading terror operative.

The singular focus of Dagan's work was Iran's nuclear program. Since the mid-nineties, Israeli intelligence had been convinced that Iran had embarked on a set of redundant projects that would take it through the steps of procurement, enrichment, and, possibly, weaponization. The work was methodical and unrushed, intended to evade the attention of inspectors and the sanctions of Iran's enemies. "Iran learned the lessons of North Korea, Pakistan, Libya, Syria, and Iraq," Amos Yadlin, a former chief of military intelligence, told me. "The Iranians are very sophisticated. This strategy, in a way, is to be appreciated. It is unusually sound. It is designed not to achieve nuclear weapons as soon as possible but to achieve them as *safely* as possible." Under Dagan's direction, and in cooperation with Western intelligence agencies, the Mossad is believed to have been involved in all the main efforts to sabotage Iran's progress: the cyberwar project called Stuxnet; the assassination of leading researchers and bureaucrats involved in the nuclear projects; the penetration of procurement networks and then the sale of defective equipment designed to derail installations. The Mossad has also encouraged defections and recruited agents in Iran. Dagan believes that the West and Israel, which has had nuclear weapons for decades, should do all they can to foment regime change by supporting the Iranian opposition.

For years, Dagan was an almost satanic figure in the Arab press, portrayed as a pitiless killer of Arabs. An article published in the official Egyptian press, in 2008, charged him with "atrocities." Yet Egypt, like Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states, is deeply apprehensive about a "Shia bomb," and in January, 2010, when a nuclear scientist named Massoud Ali Mohammadi was assassinated in Tehran, Egypt's largest-circulation newspaper, *Al-Abram*, published an article calling Dagan "Israel's superman" and "the brains" behind the killing. "Without Dagan, the Iranian nuclear program would have been complete years ago," Ashraf Abu al-Haul, the paper's analyst of Pales-

tinian affairs, wrote. Dagan, al-Haul went on admiringly, has been "able to accomplish feats no man can describe, from the Iranian issue and limiting the military force of the Syrian Army to facing Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad."

This ambivalence is evident, too, on the Israeli left. In 2008, the columnist Gideon Levy criticized Channel 2 when it declared Dagan Israel's "man of the year." ("Our man of the year is a declared killer," Levy wrote. "Whether by box-cutter or car bomb, his craft is killing. His killer instincts are our source of pride, the peak of our creativity.") Three years later, after Dagan went public with his criticism of Netanyahu, Levy celebrated Dagan for his "responsible and courageous act."

Dagan had close working relations with Sharon and with Ehud Olmert; he enjoyed no such rapport with Netanyahu, whom he came to think of as needlessly abandoning negotiations with the Palestinians and letting relations with Turkey decay. Netanyahu, for his part, was unhappy about a botched operation, in January, 2010, in which Israeli operatives carrying fake passports from other countries allegedly killed the Hamas chief of rocket procurement, Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, while he was a guest at a five-star hotel in Dubai. There were no arrests, but, thanks to surveillance cameras at the hotel, the faces of the twenty-six suspected operatives were plastered all over the media.

When Dagan stepped down as director of the Mossad, a thousand intelligence officers and members of the government gathered at Tel Aviv University to celebrate his tenure. Dagan denies that he was forced out. "The Prime Minister knows I wanted to leave my post," he said. "After eight and a half years, enough is enough." Certainly no superlative was spared at the retirement reception. Shimon Peres, who had a monthly dinner date with Dagan, said that if the heads of all the world's intelligence agencies were to gather they would nominate Dagan as the best of them. "Some people have a knife between their teeth," Netanyahu said, according to the Israeli press accounts. "Meir has a rocket-propelled grenade between his teeth." But Netanyahu's tribute masked an incipient clash with Dagan and other security chiefs, who, in November, 2010, had told the Prime Minister and Barak, in a secret meeting,

that a unilateral attack on Iran would not work and would lead to war. According to reports on Channel 10 and in *Yediot Ahronot* and to my own sources, the meeting took place at the Mossad in an atmosphere of whiskey, cigars, and acrimony. Barak was so angered by the opposition from Dagan, Yuval Diskin, and others that he said, "If this current command had been present in 1967, we wouldn't have had a war." (In 1967, the Israelis, fearing invasion, launched a preemptive assault on Egypt and Syria.)

Just days before stepping down, Dagan began what amounted to an extended public denunciation of Netanyahu's Iran policy. The first sally came when he told some reporters at a farewell background briefing that an Israeli attack would be too dangerous and would fail to achieve its objective. A military censor told the reporters that they could publish nothing of what had been said, but, inevitably, the story quickly got out. In the months that followed—at conferences, and in speeches and interviews—Dagan became increasingly frank in his opposition to an attack. This was astonishing. The Israelis are accustomed to holding hearings *after* the fact: among the most famous are the investigations following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which the military was caught off guard by a joint Egyptian-Syrian attack and suffered deep losses before recovering; and the inquiry after the 1982 massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, in Beirut. There were also commissions of inquiry following the second Lebanon war, in 2006, and the invasion of Gaza, in 2008. Dagan told me that the military disaster of the Yom Kippur War had always haunted him, and that it had led him to go public now.

"I was an Army captain in 1973 and I saw the discussions of our military and intelligence leaders," he said. "None of them were stupid. This was Israel's best team. Nevertheless, they made mistakes—mistakes that cost twenty-five hundred lives. I don't want to find myself in a situation where I look back and I haven't acted and spoken from my conscience.

"Don't be mistaken, I am not a liberal by point of view," he went on. "If I thought the use of brute force on Iran would stop the nuclear threat in the region and to Israel, that would be one thing. I am judging things from a practical point of view. . . . You have to take into consideration the

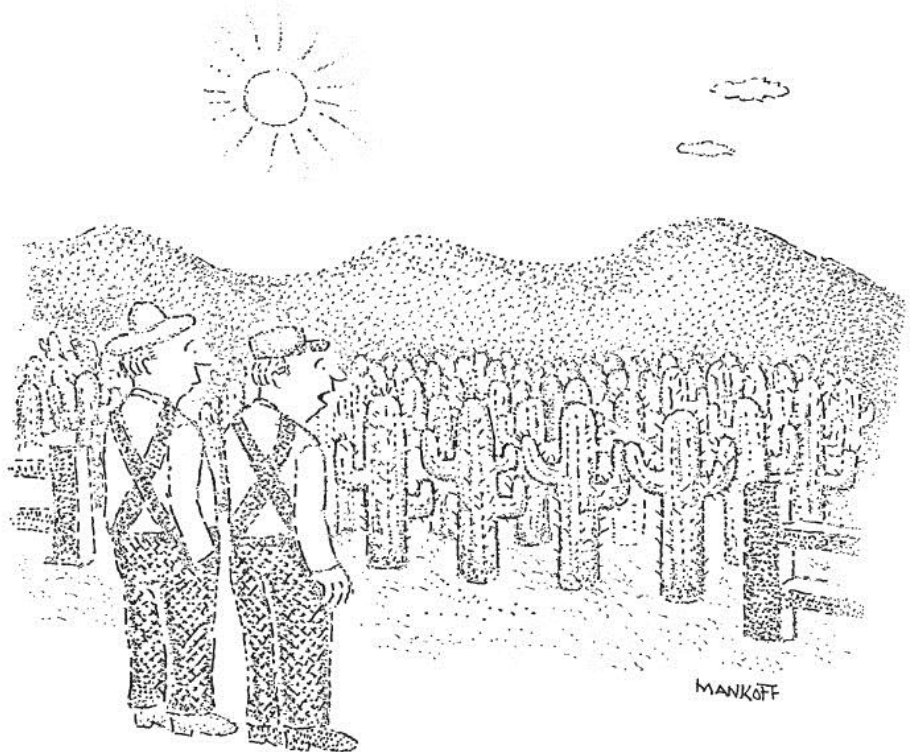
following questions about an Israeli attack: What would be achieved? What about five minutes after? And what are the consequences of such an attack?"

Dagan answers those questions simply: "An Israeli bombing would lead to a regional war and solve the internal problems of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It would galvanize Iranian society behind the leadership and create unity around the nuclear issue. And it would justify Iran in rebuilding its nuclear project and saying, 'Look, see, we were attacked by the Zionist enemy and we clearly need to have it.' A bombing would be considered an act of war, and there would be an unpredictable counterattack against us. And the Iranians can call on their proxy, Hezbollah, which, with its rockets, can hit practically any target in Israel."

Dagan's view that a unilateral Israeli strike would intensify, not diminish, the danger posed by Iran is now the general view of the dissident politicians and security chiefs. And, increasingly, Netanyahu and Barak have grown infuriated by the resistance. The statements of the national-security dissenters, Netanyahu has said, are "irresponsible and hurt the national security." Recently, Netanyahu held a closed meeting with a group of reporters for the Israel Defense Forces radio station. According to a leaked account that appeared in *Haaretz*, Netanyahu alter-

nately pounded his chest and the table in front of him as he declared, "If there is an investigative committee, I'll say that I—I—am responsible." He told the reporters that skeptics in the government have "been bringing me presentations prepared as if for an investigative committee. I tell them they should put away these slides, stop speaking for the historical record, and instead speak straight to the point."

Senior Obama Administration officials say that they can't discount Netanyahu and Barak's threats to attack Iran unilaterally in the next few months, but that a more likely reason for the rhetoric is Israel's desire to play "bad cop" in the international effort to pressure Iran. A kind of undeclared war has been raging between Iran and the West for many years, and the latest evidence is, on one side, the killing of Iranian nuclear scientists and, on the other, the killing of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria, allegedly by Iran's client Hezbollah. President Obama's assurance to Netanyahu that his policy, when it comes to the Iranian nuclear project, is prevention, not containment, is already an Israeli victory—that is, Obama has accepted the premise that a nuclear Iran is not to be contemplated. In March, Obama backed up his statement that an Iranian bomb was "unacceptable" by telling Jeffrey Goldberg,



"I've never seen the corn this bad."

of *The Atlantic*, “As President of the United States I don’t bluff.”

Despite these guarantees, and despite the fact that both sides say that military and intelligence cooperation between the U.S. and Israel has never been tighter, the relationship is fraught. Netanyahu, who is so close to conservative American politicians and businessmen that he is said by some Israelis to talk with “a Republican accent,” distrusts Obama. Obama, in turn, has little doubt that the Israeli leader would greatly prefer to see Mitt Romney in the White House. Sheldon Adelson, the Las Vegas casino magnate who is one of Romney’s biggest backers, owns an Israeli daily, *Israel Hayom*, that is so blatantly a Netanyahu mouthpiece that some Tel Aviv liberals call it *Tishreen*—the official newspaper of the Assad regime, in Syria. Clearly there is a political element to the drama. “Bibi looks at Obama and sees his ideological opposite,” Aluf Benn, the editor-in-chief of *Haaretz*, told me. “Obama looks at Bibi and sees Eric Cantor.”

Netanyahu distrusts Obama not only because of their initial clashes over settlements and the Palestinian question but also for reasons of personality. Obama finds Netanyahu pedantic and arrogant; Netanyahu finds Obama naïve about the realities of the Middle East and diffident about Israel. “Obama has no special feeling for us” is a familiar refrain. A senior official in Jerusalem told me, “Bibi, by nature, doesn’t trust people and Obama is not exactly Mr. Warmth.” (Another official in Netanyahu’s office, however, insisted that such sentiments do not “correctly represent the Prime Minister’s views.”)

Netanyahu also provides a historical dimension to his reluctance to rely on American promises. At a speech to AIPAC, in Washington, last March, he recounted how, in 1944, the U.S. War Department spurned a plea from the World Jewish Congress to bomb the death camps at Auschwitz. “Never again will we not be masters of the fate of our very survival,” he said. “We deeply appreciate the great alliance between our two countries. But when it comes to Israel’s survival we must always remain the masters of our fate.”

Benn and many others believe that Netanyahu has a heroic conception of himself that is hard for Obama to understand or countenance. “Bibi wants to be the prophet, the man who saw the trouble coming like no other,” Benn said. “In

HOUSE MASTER

Mr. Finley sat cross-legged
On top of a desk
Reciting from memory Sappho in Greek
In his galoshes, administering an I.V. drip of nectar
While hovering like a hummingbird.

That was Finley, magical, a bit fruity,
Warbling like a bird while the snow outside
Silenced the Yard.

We were in a Romanesque red brick
H. H. Richardson building, Sever Hall.

I was an auditor
In a Greek lyric poetry seminar
That was somewhere over the rainbow.
Certainly it was the only time
I heard a hummingbird sing.

I remember everything.
I remember nothing.
I remember ancient Greek sparkles like a diamond ring.
Professors were called mister.
To address someone as professor was deemed vulgar.

It was good sport to refer
To one’s inferiors as N.O.C.D. (not our class, dear).
Biddies still cleaned the student rooms.
I had a living room with a fireplace that worked.
Finley was the Master of Eliot House, my House.

Somewhere else, Senator Joseph McCarthy
Of Wisconsin was chasing American communists,
But despite that, he was evil.
The snow kept falling on the world,
Big white flakes like white gloves.

—Frederick Seidel

his mind, he is Theodor Herzl, who foresaw the trouble coming in anti-Semitic Europe. He even thinks that he foresaw 9/11, and he was the one who saw that if we left Gaza we would be hit by rockets in Ashkelon. He sees himself as the visionary, always in dialogue with the history books. It doesn’t matter to Bibi that most people are not for bombing. He argues, “Look at all the naïve Jews in Europe in the late thirties who didn’t go to Palestine as Zionists or to America as immigrants. They were deluded.”

Netanyahu’s psychology has been shaped by Israeli history, too. In 1981, Begin, against the advice of Peres and

other cabinet members, ordered his Air Force to bomb the Osirak nuclear reactor, in central Iraq. Thereafter, the policy that no country in the Middle East except Israel should get a nuclear weapon became known as “the Begin doctrine.” (Arguably, Iraq accelerated its program after the 1981 bombing and ended it only with the Gulf War, a decade later.) To be sure, such a mission in Iran would be more dangerous—there are many more installations, some of which are heavily reinforced and deep underground, and Iran’s capacity to counterattack is far stronger. Netanyahu and his aides readily acknowledge that America’s military, with its air-

craft carriers, foreign bases, and Tomahawk missiles, is vastly superior to Israel's and would have a much better chance of eliminating the Iranian nuclear installations if it ever comes to that. But Netanyahu shows little sign of trusting the President's assurances. As one senior official told me, "The way North Korea was allowed to go nuclear sure doesn't add to our confidence."

Netanyahu declined to speak to me. But Moshe Ya'alon, the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Strategic Affairs, echoed his boss's view, telling me that if Iran gets a nuclear weapon, or even the capacity to build one, "we will witness nuclear chaos." Iran would gain such a strategic advantage that its regional rivals—Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt—would build their own bombs. Iran, Ya'alon said, might hesitate to drop a bomb on Israel, but it would use a bomb "as a nuclear umbrella to intensify its rogue activities" through Hezbollah and Hamas.

Ya'alon is a tough but subtle operator, and he is known to be more reluctant than Netanyahu and Barak to launch a bombing campaign against Iran. "It is not our preference to do it ourselves," he told me. "This is achievable without the military option, which I consider a last, last resort. But so far I don't see that the Iranians are ready to give it up."

But isn't proliferation inevitable? We've even learned to live with a bomb in Pyongyang. "North Korea has no aspiration to impose its regime and ideology globally," Ya'alon replied. "It wanted a nuclear weapon to defend the regime and to exercise blackmail. Even Pakistan, which is complicated and dangerous enough, does not want to impose its regime globally. Iran is unique."

"We face a fanatical, messianic, apocalyptic regime with the aspiration to defeat Western civilization," Ya'alon said. "And in this picture Israel is the minor Satan and America is the great Satan."

People in Netanyahu's circle recognize that, thanks to sanctions, Iran is hurting economically, that there are serious splits among the political and religious leaderships, and that there is a complicated political and ethnic opposition there, but they believe that the acquisition of a nuclear weapon would prolong the life of the regime. Only the opposition to Netanyahu trusts the United States to con-

tinue to press effectively against an Iranian bomb. "Iran is not just a danger to Israel but a real danger to the entire world," Shimon Peres told me when we met, in Jerusalem. "People ask if Obama will meet a commitment, and no doubt he will." The retired general told me, "I trust Obama more than I trust Netanyahu. Obama is an honest man. He's made some stupid mistakes in the Middle East, but he's learned, and he's a serious man. Before Obama, the American military establishment had no plans, no preparations for Iran; now they do. And they have new weapons, too," including thirty-thousand-pound "bunker-buster" bombs. The Israelis have spent many millions of dollars preparing for a potential attack and have been training for months, but their Air Force is, as the security dissidents repeatedly point out, weak compared with America's.

For Netanyahu, reliance on the United States smacks of timidity and a repudiation of national purpose. As Moshe Halbertal, a professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University, put it to me one morning in Jerusalem, "If Netanyahu fails, in his terms the entire *raison d'être* of Israel falls apart—meaning, if we cannot face up to the new Hitler, who am I? Who are we? At this point, he would have to be courageous *not* to attack Iran."

In the meantime, Netanyahu has all but given up on making even marginal progress on the Palestinian question. Around his office there is a free-floating slogan: "Iran is the great stage. Everything else is management." His bellicose rhetoric tends to overshadow one political crisis after another, whether it is the increasing influence of the ultra-Orthodox or the power of a small number of families at the center of the economy or violence directed against Arabs in the West Bank or west Jerusalem. He faces minimal electoral pressure. The Labor Party is small and somnambulant. The left is quiet and diminished. "Netanyahu has numbed Israel," Halbertal said. "Israel is numb."

Many Israelis on the left argue that, while Iran and proliferation are undoubtedly dangerous, the occupation, which has lasted since 1967, is the country's true

existential threat. But, since the West Bank is relatively calm, and there are no negotiations between Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian leader, the issue all but disappears from public consciousness, as if behind a tall fence. "The Palestinian issue, for most people, is utterly *boring*," Avi Issacharoff, who covers Palestinian affairs for *Haaretz*, told me. "The trouble the Palestinians are facing is that, when things are quiet, no one cares. People care only when there is violence, when there is terror."

Beneath the illusory semblance of normality, people know that the settlements are steadily becoming irreversible. And the military itself is becoming more and more heavily populated by religious Zionists—soldiers and officers who would be, at best, reluctant to follow orders to dismantle Yitzhar or Givat Ze'ev or Beitar Illit. In 1990, only two per cent of the infantry's officer training corps was religious; now the figure is forty-two per cent. "People here fail to understand this profound change," Amos Harel, a journalist writing a book on the Army, said. "They still think of an army of kibbutzniks, the way it used to be."

In the cafés and apartments of Tel Aviv and even Jerusalem, it is easy to block out all that is going on nearby: the grinding civil war in Syria just beyond the Golan; the chaotic assembly of foreign jihadis in the Sinai; the contentious politics of Cairo; the geopolitical clash between Turkey and Iran; the accumulating rage of the Palestinians in Gaza and the

West Bank and the very real possibility of a third intifada.

"There is a good life here and, at the same time, the feeling of a party on the Titanic, a kind of deep melancholy running under it all," Avishai Margalit, a political philosopher at the Hebrew University, told me. "There is silence and yet this desire

to talk. It's like in a Pinter play: underneath all the clichés there is something deeply threatening to the fabric of things."

Netanyahu bolsters his argument for urgent action in Iran by describing the regime as irrational and determined to destroy Israel. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,



and President Ahmadinejad have made plenty of statements to warrant Israeli anxiety. Khamenei has referred to Israel as a “cancerous tumor.” Just last week, Ahmadinejad told a crowd at Tehran University, “The existence of the Zionist regime is an insult to all humanity.” He has called the Holocaust a “myth”; in 2005, he said that Israel ought to be “wiped off the map.”

Yet the dissidents in the national-security establishment have a somewhat cooler view of the Iranians. Dagan believes that the Iranian leadership, for all its religious fervor and anti-Semitic rhetoric, operates on a level of rational self-preservation. He told me that Iran’s nuclear project is indeed designed as a potential “umbrella” to protect Hezbollah and other client groups, but it is also “an insurance policy against any intervention in Iran.” The Iranian leadership sees certain markers in its history—the U.S.-backed coup in 1953 and U.S. support of the Shah; the development of an atom bomb in Israel; the eight-year war with Iraq, in which the U.S. backed Saddam Hussein—and acts according to its own “version of rational,” Dagan said.

“In 2003, as the United States invaded Iraq, Iran felt under siege,” he went on. “The great Satan was at their borders and threatening. . . . The Iranians learned from North Korea, Pakistan, and India that a state with a nuclear weapon will not suffer interference the way a state without one does.”

Dagan is no less anxious than Netanyahu about a nuclear Iran, but his language is less emotional, his analysis different. “It’s too serious to just casually tie it to the Holocaust,” he said. “There are thousands of Jews in Iran, and no one touches them. They don’t suffer there as Jews. I don’t think the Iranian regime is anti-Semitic in that sense.” Dagan agrees that the current regime’s rhetoric is hateful: “This started with Ayatollah Khomeini, comparing us to dogs and monkeys.” But, he said, “remember, when Ahmadinejad says these things he is not talking to the United States or to Europeans. He does it to please certain groups in Iran. Ahmadinejad is not stupid. Don’t be mistaken. He is a very capable bureaucrat. In university, he was an engineer and he was a capable manager. Does he take a radical-Islamist ap-

proach? Of course. And the Iranians see Israel as a state established through wrongdoing and they see it as a menace to the region. They see Israel as spreading a Western ideology and as a threat to groups under its umbrella.”

Dagan, after years of studying intelligence reports on Iran, believes that the regime is suffering not only from internal splits and economic pressure but also from the political changes in the region: the ascendance of Turkey, the destabilization of Syria’s Alawite regime, the reluctance of the Iraqi government to relinquish its ties to the West. Iran, he said, has failed in its ambition to lead the Muslim world. “The Iranians are receptive to pressure,” he said. “In 2003, when they felt the U.S. might turn on them, they stalled their nuclear project to an extent. They also discovered that they are not able to maintain any level of secrecy.”

Dagan believes that Iran had resumed its nuclear project by 2005, when it was clear that the U.S. had no interest in a fight, but, perhaps out of faith in his own tactics as Mossad director, he believes that covert, economic, and diplomatic pressure—particularly with American support—should allay the need for a unilateral strike. “I have no doubt in my mind that the Iranians are moving on their nuclear program, but I don’t share the point of view that they are speeding there,” he said. “The Iranian nuclear issue is not an Iran-Israel issue; it is more related to the entire region and to the international community.”

The morning I met with Dagan, *Haaretz* had published a long interview, by Ari Shavit, with an unnamed Israeli “decision-maker,” who warned yet again that the leadership could not wait much longer. One of the many giveaway details in the piece was that the decision-maker was a great military strategist who had a black grand piano in his living room. Few Israelis could miss the hint: this was Ehud Barak, talking gravely behind a flimsy scrim. (“A single atom bomb is enough to finish off the Zionist story.”)

Dagan smiled. Then he said, “As for the ‘man who knows how to play the piano,’ if you look back at his career, every major strategic approach when he was Prime Minister was a failure: his meetings with Arafat at Camp David, his attempt

to make peace with Assad of Syria, his retreat from Lebanon, which brought Hezbollah to our borders. And there are other examples. I’m not under the influence of such a renowned, clever man.”

Dagan is more at ease talking about the Americans than about his former bosses in the Israeli leadership. He warns the Israeli government “not to surprise” the United States and has confidence in Obama’s assurances. “I don’t think the U.S. will act because of Israeli interests,” he said. “The U.S. acts according to U.S. interests, and it has strong economic and political interests in the region, beyond, or regardless of, Israel. And when a President of the United States makes an open declaration about policy it is to protect, first of all, the interests not of Israel but of the United States.”

As we were talking, Dagan interrupted himself and motioned to the spread of dates, nuts, and candy that he had laid out on the coffee table in front of us. “Look!” he said, with a mock-wounded expression. “You haven’t touched a thing!”

It is not clear what the security dissidents will do next. One of them told me that he was organizing a group to decide: A petition? A public meeting? Dagan seemed not to care so long as he could continue speaking out. “Look, this is not a liberal environment, the neighborhood is very tough,” he said. “After thirty-three years in the military and intelligence, you discover not only the nice side of human nature. You discover it is possible to get dragged into something and then it is hard to explain why it all happened. It’s easy to go from being a victim to being an oppressor. You always have to pay attention to your internal moral compass and ask the right questions.

“I believe in the end that the Iranians are going to have to make a hard decision and choose between continuing their nuclear project or surviving as an Islamic regime. They have serious internal problems. Even though they are defying the international community and there are enough fanatics pursuing the nuclear program, in the end they are not stupid. Ayatollah Khomeini saw Saddam Hussein as the devil, but he finally signed a ceasefire with him. He ‘drank the cup of poison,’ as he put it. But he signed because the public demanded it. We have to think about how to influence the people making these decisions. And we cannot be hasty.” ♦

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HOW TO WIN AT CONVERSATION

BY PAUL SIMMS



Conversation! Everyone's doing it these days.

Have you ever had that thing where someone says something to you, then you say something back to them, then they say something, and so on? You probably just had a conversation and didn't even realize it.

But are you winning your conversations? Too many people use conversation to exchange information or simply to pass the time, completely unaware that every conversation has a winner and a loser. Which would you rather be?

Use the following strategies correctly and you'll be winning conversations so consistently that no one will dare engage you in one ever again.

1. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: I can't believe it! They finally gave you a five-hundred-thousand-dollar raise, didn't they?

OPPONENT: Er . . . no.

YOU: Oh. Sorry. So what's the good news?

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: Oh. That's good, too. Certainly nothing to sneeze at!

Strategy used: Intentional Overstatement of Expectations.

2. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: Do tell!

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: It's so great that you're forcing him to make life-altering decisions at such a young age. Builds character—that's the theory, right?

Strategy used: Seed of Doubt.

3. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: Go on!

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just—

YOU (to waiter): Are the scallops on the menu actual "divers" scallops, or is that a misprint?

WAITER: I'll check with the kitchen.

YOU (to opponent): Sometimes they fib. Anyway, Jimmy did what?

OPPONENT: I was saying that our little Jimmy just got into—

YOU: Does "divers scallops" mean they were caught by actual scuba divers? Or is it just some old-timey way of saying "diverse"? Always wondered about that.

Strategy used: Barrage of Interruptions.

4. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: This I have got to hear about!

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: I have cancer.

OPPONENT: What? When did you . . . I'm so sorry. Is there anything I can do?

YOU: I'll let you know. Just taking it day by day. I mean, right now it's only a freckle. Oddly shaped, of course—as these things always are. My dermatologist says to just keep an eye on it and come back for another look in twenty-four to twenty-six months. But enough about my dreary travails—you were telling me something great about little Johnny.

OPPONENT: Jimmy.

Strategy used: The C-Bomb.

5. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: Lay it on me already!

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: Holy shit! Is that Al Peterson over there? Don't look, don't look! Just be cool.

OPPONENT: Where?

YOU: He's gone now. Can't believe he would show his face here after what he put his wife through.

OPPONENT: What did he put his wife through?

YOU: You know what? It's probably just idle gossip, and I don't believe in idle gossip. So let's just leave it at that. Let's go back to "first-choice preschool" and pretend we never saw him.

Strategy used: Unfulfilled Intimations of Actual Gossip.

6. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: Don't leave me hanging here! Get to it!

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: That's so great! Tell me everything!

OPPONENT: Well, we were worried that he wasn't going to test well, because his verbal skills aren't—

YOU: Oh. Ha ha ha ha ha ha!

OPPONENT: What?

YOU: I'm sorry. What you said was "first-choice preschool." What I heard—and this one is on me—is "Hearst-choice free shoes."

OPPONENT: What does that even mean?

YOU: My blunder. I thought you were saying that you were finally able to fit your

big feet into a pair of free shoes that were endorsed by one of the Hearst publishing company's life-style magazines. Again, my goof-up. What can I say—I'm a shoe-a-holic! So forget that. Back to your kid story. And . . . four, three, two, one—continue!

Strategy used: Intentional Mishearing.

7. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: Tell me everything. Every little thing!

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU (*singing*): "Every little thing she does is magic! Everything she do just turn me on! Even though my—"

OPPONENT: Why are you singing?

YOU: "—life before was tragic, now I know my love for her goes on . . ."

OPPONENT: Why are you singing that song by the Police?

YOU: "I resolved to call her up, a thousand times a day. And ask her if she'll marry me, in some old-fashioned way—Pittsburgh Civic Arena, sing along!—But my silent fears have gripped me . . ."

OPPONENT: Why are you still singing?

YOU: Sorry. I was just listening to a very, very rare Police bootleg from the Pittsburgh Civic Arena 4/9/82 in the car on the way over. Such a killer song. Such a killer band.

Strategy used: Appreciator of the Arts.

8. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: I am listening to you.

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: That's great! That's so great! That's so, so, so great! How did all this go down?

OPPONENT: Well, we were worried that he wasn't going to test well, because his verbal skills aren't as strong as—

YOU: Hang on a sec. Preschool is the one right after kindergarten, right?

OPPONENT: No. It goes preschool, then kindergarten, then first grade and so on.

YOU: Oh, O.K. Go on.

OPPONENT: So we were worried that—

YOU: But that's where they do finger painting, right?

OPPONENT: What?

YOU: In preschool. That's where they learn finger painting?

OPPONENT: Yes. Anyway, so we were—

YOU: And do they still do finger painting in kindergarten? Or is finger painting considered kind of passé by then?

OPPONENT: What?

Strategy used: Detail-Oriented Sidetracking.

9. OPPONENT: We just got some pretty good news.

YOU: Bring it.

OPPONENT: Our little Jimmy just got into his first-choice preschool.

YOU: That's incredibly great. I mean, first-choice med school—that's one thing. After successfully pursuing a bachelor-of-arts and/or bachelor-of-science degree. But "first-choice preschool"! That's a whole different son of a bitch right there! Because, at that age, most kids can't even compellingly explain the difference between a square and a rectangle. So for your little J-man to not only *pick* a first choice re preschools but then to stack the goddam cherry of actually getting into it on top of all that is . . . well, let's put it this way: I know a stringer from *Newsday* who could really make hay out of this one, so—

OPPONENT: O.K., I'm done. I don't know why I even bother trying to have dinner with you once a year. I mean, yes, we were friends in college. But all you ever do is try to make me feel bad about myself in ways I can't even accurately describe later when I try to tell other people about it. So I'm leaving now.

(Opponent exits.)

YOU (*to waiter*): My friend's not feeling well. So it's just going to be one. How are the scallops prepared?

WAITER: They're pan-seared in a—

YOU: You like the Police?

WAITER: The first two albums, definitely. They lost me around "Zen-yattà," but—

YOU: You were in them, right? You're Sting. Don't lie.

WAITER: No, I'm not Sting. I'm just a waiter.

YOU: But you can sing as good as or better than Sting, right?

WAITER: Do you want the scallops or not?

YOU: Will they aggravate my medical condition?

Strategy used: The Kitchen Sink. ♦

PROMOTION



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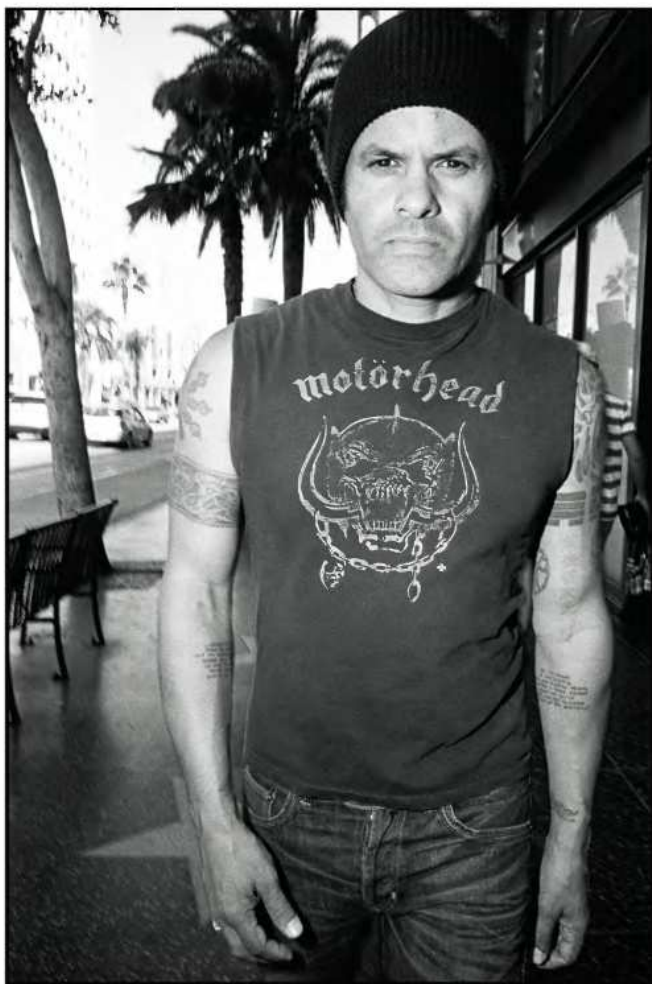


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LIMITED RELEASE

A former gang leader's new life in movies.

BY TAD FRIEND



As a boy, Elgin James would catch moths dazzled by the light and set them free. Mosquitoes need not fear him. And when eight F.B.I. agents descended on James one afternoon three years ago, as he was walking a pair of rescue pit bulls with menacing scars, he cried, “My dogs are friendly!” “We know,” an agent replied. “We’ve been watching you.”

James’s own appearance tells a similarly ambiguous tale. A smile creases his face at the slightest encouragement, and his button-brown eyes shine like Paddington Bear’s. At forty-two, he is trim and fit, a vegan who has long forsworn drugs and alcohol. His upper body is a

scrapbook of tattoos, many of which embody aspiration: a tree of life, a ringing line from Rimbaud, and a tribute to the passion St. Francis felt for St. Clara, which made “the surrounding wood appear to be on fire.”

Others are darker, the inky residue of James’s fifteen years leading a gang called F.S.U., for Fuck Shit Up. F.S.U. rose out of Boston’s hardcore-music scene to become a straight-edge militia whose members prided themselves on beating up drug dealers and neo-Nazis. Later on, when the mission got muddled by drugs and shakedowns and rampant testosterone, they’d coldcock anyone who gave

them lip. The violence grew baroque; James would sometimes club opponents with a DustBuster, and his friend Bruce used a human thighbone. “It was horrible, coming home and washing hair and scalp out of your collapsible baton and it being like nothing,” James says. “When you can see a halo of blood around someone, life just spilling out of them, and it’s no more tragic than a bug on a windshield . . .” The sun-radiating-daggers tattoo on his right shoulder indicates that he’s drawn blood in battle, and “Born to Die” spans his back in bold block letters.

In 2006, James renounced gang life and moved to Los Angeles, where he hoped to break into film, the medium that had sustained him since he was a child. He didn’t know a grip from a gaffer, but he was a quick study, and before long he had a berth at Sundance Labs, the prestigious indie-film boot camp. In L.A.—that cradle of reinvention—he discovered that he had the essential qualities of a writer-director: charisma, determination, and a deep well of sorrow. “Something is broken inside of me,” he says, “and it’s easier to try to fix it in other people.”

Robert Redford founded the Sundance Institute, in the mountains of Utah, in 1981, to help young filmmakers find their voice away from what he calls “the tentacles of the industry.” James—like such previous outlanders as Quentin Tarantino, Paul Thomas Anderson, and Allison Anders—was perfect for it, and Redford was immediately drawn to him. “When someone like Elgin, someone who was so raw and broken, uses film to get out of the violence, and uses it so beautifully—I was just very taken by that,” he told me.

After taking Sundance Labs classes in screenwriting and directing, James worked to develop his first film, “Little Birds.” But, just as his producer succeeded in raising the five hundred thousand dollars they needed to shoot it, James was arrested by the F.B.I. for attempted extortion. Four years earlier, F.S.U. members had twice beaten up a punk singer who’d previously been in a white-power band. James interceded, at the request of a mutual friend, and told the singer that if he gave five thousand dollars to an F.S.U.-supported charity the attacks would stop—which, after the payment was made, they did. As the government prepared its case, James raced to shoot and edit “Little Birds.”

MAGNUM

Elgin James raced to finish his film before going to prison. Photograph by Bruce Gilden.

After he finished editing, he waived a trial and pleaded guilty; he didn't mind paying for his past now that the film was done.

The news raced around Hollywood much faster than James's script had. But when "Little Birds" premiered, at the Sundance Film Festival in January, 2011, those in the audience who knew his history discovered a film that was nothing like the pageant of carnage they might have expected. "Little Birds" is an intimate, idiosyncratic portrait of two fifteen-year-old girls, Lily and Alison, who live on the shores of the Salton Sea, a briny lake in California's Imperial Valley. When Lily, a self-mutilating hellion, runs off to Los Angeles to meet up with some homeless boys, Alison reluctantly tags along. Once they go west, things go south. The crowd at Sundance was riveted: the film shone with scenes reminiscent of James's directing hero, John Ford, and Juno Temple's Lily was a volatile compound of teenage longing and contempt. Temple says, "Elgin kept encouraging me to keep it raw and messy and scary and real."

At the party following the screening, James found himself repulsed by "all the girls in bikinis and ski boots dancing on the bar, and all the lame industry dudes in Ed Hardy hats." He went out back with JR Bourne, who played a tweaker who tries to rape Lily. Bourne says, "The feeling as Elgin and I talked was satisfaction, a bit of fear about what was going to happen next, and, coming off him, some definite sadness." James recalls, "I was thinking, The only person who isn't here is my mom. I never ever got to call her with good news, and now I can't." He used to phone her on Father's Day, because she'd given him all the parental love he got, but she had died of cancer in 2003—soon after telling him, "It's never too late for a second chance."

After the premiere, James learned that he had been sentenced to a year in the Metropolitan Detention Center, a federal prison ten minutes from his home, in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles. Once inside, he said, "I lost my empathy very quickly. I began to hate listening to NPR, because I couldn't touch the feeling of being free anymore. Just hearing my cellmate breathe—within a month, I was filled with such rage, I was, like, 'I want to fucking stab you in the neck!'" To preserve a self-image that no longer encompassed stabbings, James wrote a lot in

his head and grimly ran out the clock.

When he was released, this March, he found himself baffled by restaurant menus, having forgotten what he liked to order. He was thirty pounds lighter, but glutted with ideas: "Prison filled me with all these thoughts I need to use in my writing, thoughts about not wanting anything to do with people because of how terrible we are, how selfish and greedy and rotten and beautiful." He finds that view reflected back at Hollywood parties, where, he says, "I sometimes get the vibe that I'm a weird animal, a poisonous animal." And yet, he adds, "I've also found people like Robert Redford. He's a truer friend than all the guys in Boston who said they'd take a bullet for me."

Many in Hollywood have warmed to the Elgin James story because it fits one of the town's stock narratives: the triumph of the human spirit. Terry Press, a longtime marketing consultant who recently became a co-president of CBS Films, says, "Elgin is the best of both worlds: he went to prison, so he's authentic—but for beating up Nazis and drug dealers. I mean, come on!" However, she cautions, "the farther outsiders come to get here, the faster they fall." The industry reckons success by the box-office: as you bring in more money, you get paid more; and as you get paid more it becomes harder to preserve the authentic voice that made you desirable. "In Hollywood, there are platters of fruit everywhere, and people asking if you want a blankie. But, if your voice is based on deprivation, then the thing that distinguished you, which is usually anger-based, can disappear."

Now that James has been released, "Little Birds" will follow; it débuts in New York this week. Yet James clings to his deprivation. He hasn't had "respectfully retired" added to his F.S.U. tattoos, as is the custom for ex-members, because he won't retire his guilt. It's a bittersweet way of staying connected to his mother, of keeping her admonitions alive. And, he says, "this is such a hard town that I'm not going to give up anything that can fuel me, any of my demons. I'm going to use them all."

When a talented outsider comes to Hollywood, he soon learns to temper his rough edges. Even an iconoclast such as Martin Scorsese, who arrives with a calling card like "Mean Streets"—

the vivid crime film that brought fame to Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel—may eventually find that, with a compromise here and a movie-star casting decision there, he's making bombastic crowd-pleasers like "Gangs of New York." The writer-director David Ayer says that after the success of his scripts for "U-571" and "Training Day" he was in demand as "the crazy ex-military street guy"—a reputation derived from his stint in the Navy after a knockabout interval in South Central. Yet the studios wanted just a tincture of Ayer. "They want 'flavor' and 'unique point of view'—the *sense* of authenticity," he told me. "They take your madness and make it pop-y and shiny by supplying it with arcs, stakes, and ticking clocks." The main character must have a transformational and improving arc; the catalyst for this change is the necessity of, say, saving his estranged wife; and the ticking clock is the bomb strapped to her chest. And so Ayer was swiftly assigned to work on "The Fast and the Furious," the five-film car-heist franchise that has grossed a billion and a half dollars by finding ever-fresh ways to demonstrate that if you strafe a street racer it will explode in a monstrous fireball that slightly singses the driver.

At twenty-four, John Singleton became the youngest director to be nominated for an Academy Award, for "Boyz n the Hood," his semi-autobiographical 1991 film about life in South Central. Beguiled by the industry's embrace, he took years to realize that he was expected to hug back, and found real commercial success again only a decade later, when he directed "2 Fast 2 Furious." "I didn't want to become the poseur I used to make fun of," he explains. "But I'm polite now, I'm not an asshole like when I was a kid. You know, I used to watch the boats go by on the beach in Inglewood." He gave a bark of laughter. "And now I have a yacht."

Troy Duffy, a tough kid from Boston who was bartending at a West Hollywood dive called J. Sloan's, sold his first script, "The Boondock Saints," in 1997. Miramax agreed to pay Duffy four hundred and fifty thousand dollars, let him direct, and even buy him J. Sloan's. But, as Duffy boasted that he would perform deeds "no one else in the history of this fucking world has ever done," the deal fell apart. "The Boondock Saints" was produced by another company, in 1999,

and Duffy had to pay for the film's release, so it was shown at only a handful of theatres. "When I wasn't chilling at the mansion with Hefner and the girls, I realized I'd made a lot of mistakes," he says. "It boils down to not burning bridges. People here are savagely polite—and then there's a knife in your back at the end of the day."

People skills are Hollywood's currency. Stacey Snider, the C.E.O. of DreamWorks Studios, explains, "To be a bad-boy Hemingway, you just need a computer, but film has real barriers to entry. You have to convince someone to put up millions, or even hundreds of millions, and then you need to get two hundred people to work together. So if you're antisocial you'll flame out."

James is highly social. As he explained in his Sundance admissions interview, "I've been the leader of four hundred alpha males—I know how to inspire people." His common touch has attracted a band of industry stalwarts who are eager to help. One of them is the producer Brian Grazer, who asked for a meeting after reading the script for "Little Birds." James was nervous about sitting down with someone of Grazer's eminence, but his friend J. W. Buckley, another former F.S.U. member, provided some Socratic reassurance: "Is Brian Grazer going to shoot you if something goes wrong? Is he going to hit you in the face with a glass pitcher?" Grazer and James got on well, and the producer hired him to rewrite a script called "Lowriders," about rival Latino car clubs. Grazer explains, "When I was making '8 Mile'—the 2002 hip-hop drama—"Dr. Dre told me, 'Don't clown out our world.' Elgin's going to prison raised the stakes for him—you can feel he's not going to clown out this lowrider world."

Most of James's devotees are women. The seventy-seven-year-old director Joan Darling likens him to a brother, as does the twenty-three-year-old Juno Temple; one female executive calls him "a Buddha." Around women, his raspy voice softens and the curses drop away. He encourages intimacy by listening attentively, sharing his vulnerabilities, and interjecting "Bad-ass!" and "That's awesome!" "Elgin wanted a female cinematographer for 'Little Birds,' so the actresses would feel more comfortable,"

Reed Morano, the woman who took the job, says. "But he actually has more estrogen than I do."

One afternoon, James showed me his childhood mementos: two dozen snapshots clumped in a manila envelope. He studied an early one in which he was beaming in the arms of his father, Chuck, a heavy man who sported black sunglasses and an unreadable grin. "I have so much joy. . . ." His voice trailed off.

Chuck and Carol Perroncel, hippies who cultivated sheep and marijuana in rural Morris, Connecticut, adopted Elgin James Herman when he was a toddler and changed his name to Nathan Lawrence Perroncel. James, who suddenly had two older sisters, grew up knowing only that his biological mother was a white teen-ager who'd run away to the South Bronx. From the evidence of his olive skin and wiry hair, he believed that his father was black; the schoolmates who called him "nigger" agreed.

His adoptive father, a pastoral counsellor in the Episcopal Church, espoused pacifism and had marched for civil rights. But he was also an alcoholic who battered his wife and son. Carol often sobbed in her room, and James, a sensitive boy who felt bad for the sock whose brother got lost in the dryer, developed a stammer and a tic that made his head shiver uncontrollably. His father forced him to wear a blue elastic headband fringed with sleigh bells, and he bellowed at the slightest jingle. James's ties subsided only when he immersed himself in books, and in movies like "Billy Jack" and "Planet of the Apes."

At thirteen, James, by now obsessed with Sid Vicious—the photographs show a Mohawk and a sullen smirk—tried to kill himself by slashing his left wrist with a razor blade. A few months later, he was sent to juvenile hall for ten months for breaking and entering and selling drugs. Juvie, he says, was where he developed "a higher capacity for cruelty," learning to hit fast and hard and longer than necessary. He also read "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" and became a straight edge. After he was released, he recalls, there came a day when "my dad shoved me down on the couch. I was half his size, but I got up and punched him in the face. When he fell back, in total surprise, I

started punching and kicking and punching and kicking. Afterward, I was convulsing and shaking the way dogs do after they get in a fight. I don't remember when my dad started hitting me, but I remember that that was when it stopped." In his early twenties, James renounced his patronym and—with the blessing of his mother, who would shortly leave his father—had his name legally changed to Elgin Nathaniel James.

In 1986, James entered Antioch College, with dreams of becoming a civil-rights lawyer. During his first winter break, four kids from a rival town jumped him—in retaliation for a beating he'd administered to one of their friends the previous year—and clubbed his skull in with bats. For months, the resulting brain damage made James lose hold of things, words and objects both; he still has foggy days, and he wears watch caps everywhere as psychic protection. Unable to concentrate, he dropped out and drifted to Boston, where he lived on the streets, scalping tickets and participating in medical trials. One night, he saw five kids from South Boston fighting a gang of neo-Nazis, and joined them. After pinning a skinhead, James taunted him, saying, "C'mon, man, I'm half a nigger—use your white power!" With that rumble, James threw in with Fuck Shit Up.

When James became "Nathan F.S.U.," he was reborn as an incendiary. "We were glorious, we were just Vikings," he recalls. "I felt the world had always been kicking me until I started to kick back hard." He became the strategist and the field surgeon, the guy who sewed up your wounds with dental floss (a technique he picked up from "Rambo: First Blood Part II"). And he had your back. J. W. Buckley recalls a scuffle in which his opponent, a Vietnamese-American, reached into his sock as if for a weapon: "Vietnamese gangers love to stab—they get stabby—and so everyone hung back. The only person who stepped forward to help me, instinctively, was Elgin." Mark Vieira, a former bouncer who was familiar with F.S.U., says that James "was a quiet leader, not yelly or bossy—but also the last guy anyone wanted to piss off."

When F.S.U. helped produce "Boston Beatdown II"—a DVD studded with grainy-looking assaults that was shot as a lark and became an underground

hit—James wrote and delivered the mission statement: “We are your children, raised on Ritalin and Prozac, biting the hand that’s reared us, pissing down our heroes’ throats.” He also fronted the hardcore bands Wrecking Crew and 454 Big Block, which Vieira describes as “very, very loud and very, very angry. Elgin would slam himself in the forehead with the mike and intimidate the audience.”

F.S.U. provided security for many of Boston’s night clubs, but its satrapy extended into the streets, where policy was often made ad hoc. When James and his friend Bruce received a consignment of pistols and a sawed-off shotgun to dispose of because they had “bodies attached,” they traded them to a Roxbury gang for its fighting dogs, so that they could foster them. “The dogs ripped up the squat we lived in, and the Roxbury gang later shot it up—probably with the guns we got them,” James told me, as we talked in his living room. “But, as ugly and clumsy as it all was, there was something beautiful about it, because the animals were pure.” He put a companionable hand on his pit bull Nell, asleep on the couch beside him. “Nelly wouldn’t steal your wallet.”

James was F.S.U.’s house intellectual, the one who wore Diesel jeans and sneaked off to watch French films. “When I would say a word like ‘symptomatic,’ my friends would think I was big-timing them,” he says. “I’d hide my books under my mattress as if they were porn, only I wasn’t embarrassed about porn.” As the gang expanded into ten cities, early in the past decade, James grew increasingly distant from the hand-to-hand fighting and hand-to-mouth existence of his foot soldiers. His music became more reflective, moving toward a Leonard Cohen-meets-the Eagles mellowness. And he began to notice that many of his companions had dropped away. There was the friend who died after swallowing a heroin balloon to hide evidence; the one abandoned in an ice-filled tub after O.D.’ing the more usual way; the one who played Russian roulette; the one beaten to death; the six suicides; the four murder victims; the three rape-and-murder victims—more than thirty in all.

In 2003, James started dating Liz Boettcher, a pretty blond Boston University student who played bass in his band Cherry Love Affair. One night, she saw

him in a brawl at a club where he worked security. “It was like seeing a stranger—it really freaked me out,” she recalls. To him, a head butt or two as prelude to slamming a guy into a stack of dish trays was just another Wednesday night. “But when I went to Liz afterward she wouldn’t let me touch her with those same hands,” he says. Boettcher adds, “That night, Elgin told me, ‘It’s what I know, and what I’ve done, but it’s not who I want to be.’” And, cinematically, that was the first time they said “I love you.” In January, 2006, two and a half years after James promised his dying mother that he would change his life, he and Boettcher finally drove their Dodge van to Los Angeles. She says, “Ever since Elgin was a kid, he’d wanted to live in L.A. and marry a blond girl, so this was his chance.”

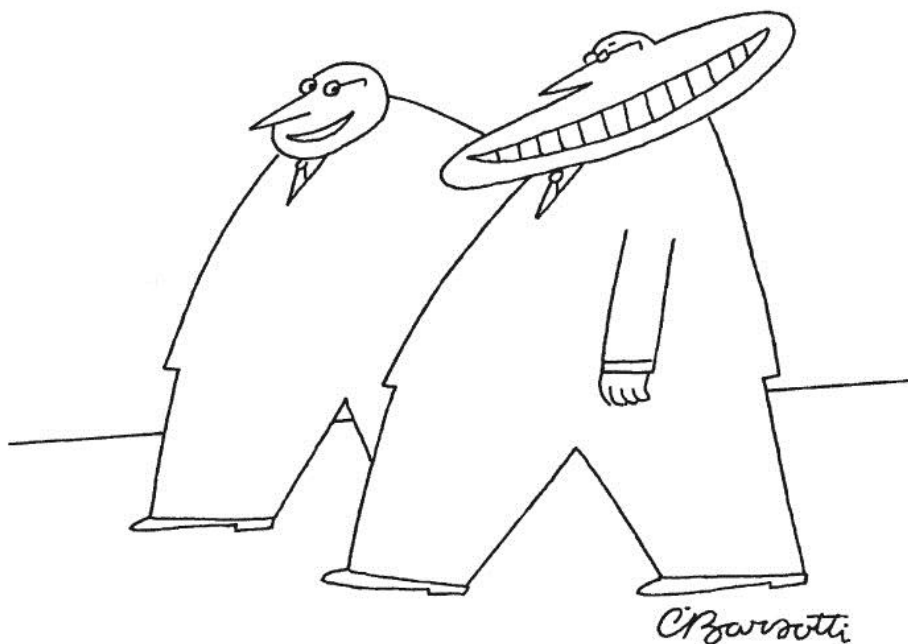
Within eighteen months, James had optioned his life story to two screenwriters. He’d accompany them to pitch meetings and sit quietly, until his cue came to interject, “And then I smashed him in the face with a brick.” Nick Cassavetes got attached to direct, and Justin Timberlake to star, and James went from producing the Untitled Elgin James Project to being an executive producer. When he discovered that this was a step down, he began to feel exploited,

and to realize that his life was becoming a bloodier “Good Will Hunting.” Then the producers wanted to soften the film’s rating to PG-13 and make James’s character white: “I was, like, ‘You’ve just taken away his entire motivation.’”

He took his story back to write it himself. But one day, while he and Boettcher were driving near the Salton Sea, he saw a girl looping aimlessly on the back of her boyfriend’s BMX bike, cigarettes rolled up in her sleeve. “And I just knew: That’s it! I’ll tell the story of me and Bruce”—the thighbone-wielding friend of his teenage years—“but as two girls, so I won’t be glorifying the violence.” As he wrote, he made Lily and Alison into complementary aspects of himself: the time bomb and the safety switch.

When Jamie Patricof, the producer of such indie gems as “Half Nelson” and “Blue Valentine,” approached him about making a twenty-million-dollar Elgin James bio-pic, James gave him his Salton Sea script instead. Patricof agreed to produce it if he could find the financing; to keep costs down, both men would work for free. (James and Boettcher, now married, were able to scrape by on her salary as an assistant at a record company.) To give his new partner the necessary tools, Patricof steered him to Sundance Labs. James flew to Utah in January, 2009, and,





"I love your gloat."

soon afterward, Robert Redford invited him to lunch. "Elgin was probably the most personally interesting voice in the bunch," Redford told me. "He certainly didn't look like everyone else. But, having grown up in a rough neighborhood in a Mexican area of L.A., I could relate to him a little bit."

James began the meal by detailing his lifelong admiration for his host, starting with when he'd watched "The Sting" on his mother's lap. Then he poured out his own story, down to his hatred of "pacifism," his father's passive-sounding lie. At last, Redford said, "O.K., first thing, Elgin, I would work on listening more." He went on to observe that by being so focussed on what his father hadn't given him James had totally missed what his mother had. "Why don't you just forget the word 'pacifism' and find your own way to non-violence as an active choice?"

James recalls, "No one had ever called me on being a tough guy but also having Rimbaud tattooed on my arm, on the amazing duality of me. I was thirty-nine, and here Robert Redford, of all people, was my first positive male role model. I went for a long walk afterward, in a total fog, and I finally decided, O.K., fuck it, I am never going to raise my hand or my voice to another person again."

That vow was tested during the

filming of "Little Birds," when a homeless crack addict, angry that the crew had displaced him from an abandoned motel, threatened the actresses; James was able to talk him down without taking his fists from his pockets. Still, it wasn't the calmest production. Kyle Gallner, who played the skateboarder Lily falls for, says that the eighteen-day shoot "was basically a whole set of tattooed-up misfits running around in controlled chaos." But James knew what he wanted, and he'd acquired the vocabulary to get it: he told his cinematographer to go for a "nostalgic, slow-motion sway" by shooting the girls riding their bikes at forty frames per second, and to hint that their relationship is splintering by racking focus between them. James later added mournful ballads that he wrote and sang, such as "I Will Die Young," to underscore the mood of shimmering fatalism.

When the last scene was in the can, he and his friend J. W. Buckley, whom he'd hired as an adviser, quietly shook hands. "Besides marrying my wife," James says, "that was the most satisfying moment of my life."

The directors of James's favorite indie films—"Manny & Lo," "All Over Me," and "Tully"—essentially disappeared after their initial offerings. So he knows that he needs to get another proj-

ect going fast, and that it has to pop. He's developing several passion projects about strong women: a treatment about the actress Jean Seberg; an Audrey Hepburn film remake; and a teen-hobos murder mystery that would star Juno Temple. But studios see such films as "man poison" at the box office, and the market is saturated with passion projects; six hundred and ten movies were released in the United States and Canada last year, three-quarters of them independent films. In any case, James can't simply pursue his inclinations; his father-in-law, a financier, paid his nearly three hundred thousand dollars in legal fees, and James is determined to swiftly expunge that debt.

The commercial projects he's been offered all summon up the ghosts of his past. His only real paycheck thus far has been eighty thousand dollars from Imagine Entertainment, Brian Grazer's company, to rewrite "Lowriders." James's draft, written longhand in prison, gave the hero a charismatic older brother, deepened the characters significantly, and added a Coppola-style montage of a *quinceañera*, an abortion, and a girl taking crystal meth and getting gang-raped.

Both Imagine and the studio, Universal, loved the character work—and wanted him to "elevate" his next draft so it felt like a twenty-million-dollar studio film. James, now fluent in the lingua franca, understands that elevating a picture means broadening its potential audience, or, if you're in a dour mood, dumbing it down. He told me wryly, "The first note was 'Lose the gang bang.'" The producers also asked him to look at the fights in "Rocky" and the rap battles in "8 Mile" and work in similarly triumphal performance scenes. "'Add stakes' is the worst note you can hear," he observes. "But when Brian Grazer says, 'You need a car contest, and maybe a Romeo and Juliet,' I'm, like, 'Of course we do!'—because all of a sudden you've got momentum and drive."

James also hopes to direct a ten-million-dollar shoot-'em-up called "Come Sundown." The hero is a doctor named Ben, whose marriage is foundering—and then the couple and their daughter are carjacked by Morse, a killer who needs them to drive him through Maine to Canada. When James got the screenplay, it was a schematic genre piece; his polish

brought nuance to the marriage, gave Ben a spine, and made Morse even more baffful.

In mid-June, he met the screenwriter, Justin Marks, for coffee in West Hollywood. They bro-hugged, then laid their weapons on the table: sunglasses up and iPhones face down. Marks, a younger man with a light beard, complimented James's revisions: "Ben was always the problem; he was born of every bad yuppie horror-film archetype. It's so *ridiculous* that you of all people made him work." He eyed James's tatted-up forearms. "Morse was the one I was interested in, I find it easier—"

"—to be a sociopathic murderer?"

Marks grinned. "I do think you're way too hard on Morse."

"The fucked-up way Morse thinks is the way I do," James said. "Ben is what I aspire to be." He told me, "No actor wanted to play Ben, because he was weak and flaccid, so I gave him the philosophical reasons I have for not fighting." In James's revision, Ben explains that he swore the physician's oath to "maintain the utmost respect for human life, even under threat."

James and Marks agreed that the film had to be shot this fall, when the New England foliage would establish a melancholy mood. In the effort to lock in a name actor to get financing, they faced the usual Venn diagram: actors who were interested, such as Taylor Kitsch, weren't immediately available, and actors who could attract foreign financing weren't necessarily right for the film. Marks observed, "You'll always have Travolta, Ray Liotta, Nic Cage brought up for a part like Morse, because they're big foreign, but then it gives it the smell of 'Are you just raising foreign money so you can shoot it?'" James nodded somberly. What he loved about making "Little Birds" was collaborating with kindred spirits, but he's come to understand that, above a certain budget, collaboration often means bowing to someone else's venal agenda.

Elevating yourself isn't easy. One morning, as he sat in an editing room, fine-tuning a Johnny Knoxville profile he'd directed for a Web series called "Becoming," Marshall Johnson, the series' supervising producer, stopped by. James remarked that he'd switched agents, to Sarah Self, of W.M.E., because she rep-

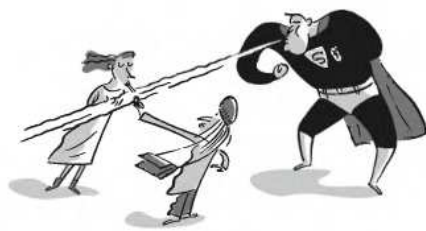
resented Diablo Cody, the screenwriter of "Juno." "In the beginning, it was 'Diablo Cody, Stripper,' and now it's 'Diablo Cody, Academy Award Winner,'" he said. "Right now, it's 'Elgin James, Gang Member,' and I want to get that out of the conversation."

Without looking up from his smartphone, Johnson said, "You'll always be 'Elgin James, Gang Member.'"

One Friday in June, James drove to Imagine's offices, in Beverly Hills, to work on a pitch for a musical about a young black tuba player in the projects. The story would be loosely based on the life of Pharrell Williams, the hip-hop producer, who'd brought the Untitled Pharrell Williams Project to Imagine—which hoped to get the script produced once it had been laced with teen yearning by James, their new go-to teen-yearning guy.

After Brian Grazer gave James an emphatic hug, James told him, "We've got our first scene already—he's on his back watching the Navy jets fly overhead from the nearby base—and our last scene, where he finally makes it and is getting on a jet going somewhere."

Kim Roth, Imagine's president of production, said, "We also talked about imposing a love story onto it. Remember we talked about the world of trailer parks?" Grazer likes to set his films in cozy subcultures with their own rules and lingo. "So we think it's a girl from the trailer park and a boy from the projects."



"Which is great," James said, "because the typical 'Romeo and Juliet' is kids from two different classes, but we won't do that stereotype. The main thing is going to be that Pharrell's character sees the world through music, and so people around him sing all the time. When he has the heartbreak at the end of the second act, all of a sudden the music is gone, and it's just the gritty world of the projects, dull and bleak—and then in the third act, when he builds

back up, the music returns and it goes all Technicolor."

"Wow!" Grazer said. "That's cool!"

Roth said, "But though we're thinking about an ethnic kid for the girl, it's not about racial conflict?"

James said, "No, what's beautiful is that we're beyond racial conflict." He glanced over at Roth. "Unless you think it should be?"

"No. No," she said, frowning. "But what is it that breaks them apart?"

After a silence, James reluctantly volunteered, "The more obvious one is that she's a summer girl who comes in for music camp. . . ."

Sarah Bowen, another executive, chimed in, "There *is* more the trope of the townie and the summer girl." Grazer nodded benevolently.

"And it puts a clock on it," Roth said. "Everyone is out of school, but for only a limited time."

James fidgeted, then smiled. "I hate musicals," he said. "In 'West Side Story,' I was, like, Man, aren't they going to really fight? But maybe we can really get into that teen-age-angst world, where the girl can shut you down totally, so ice cold, and the guy is all devastated."

"If anyone could write that, you could, Elgin," Bowen reassured him.

Afterward, James reflected, "Arcs and stakes—I see why they're useful. But I'm not sure they apply to my life. I feel that people don't really change hugely so much as their true nature comes to the surface. When I took a vow of nonviolence, I was just getting back to who I was—it wasn't like I came out of the birth canal and punched the doctor in the face." He smiled shyly. "But I do have a ticking clock. With all the shots to the head I took, I'm going to have Parkinson's, and probably Alzheimer's, within ten years."

So he spends his nights writing furiously in Silver Lake with all the blinds drawn, while Hollywood watches as the F.B.I. once did. "Right now, Elgin is on the come," Grazer said. "If he gets one more bump—if 'Lowriders' gets a green light, or the town gets one more piece of empirical evidence—then, if he stays the authentic, fearless guy he is, he'll really be in demand." Grazer smiled, satisfied with this first pass, and gave his notes for the story's continuing arc: "Having faced emotional death, the isolation of prison, here he is in Hollywood, freed!" ♦

THE THROWAWAYS

Police enlist young offenders as confidential informants. But the work is high-risk, largely unregulated, and sometimes fatal.

BY SARAH STILLMAN

On the evening of May 7, 2008, a twenty-three-year-old woman named Rachel Hoffman got into her silver Volvo sedan, put on calming jam-band music, and headed north to a public park in Tallahassee, Florida. A recent graduate of Florida State, she was dressed to blend into a crowd—bluejeans, green-and-white patterned T-shirt, black Reef flip-flops. On the passenger seat beside her was a handbag that contained thirteen thousand dollars in marked bills.

Before she reached the Georgia-peach stands and Tupelo-honey vendors on North Meridian Road, she texted her boyfriend. “I just got wired up,” she wrote at 6:34 P.M. “Wish me luck I’m on my way.”

“Good luck babe!” he replied. “Call me and let me know what’s up.”

“It’s about to go down,” she texted back.

Behind the park’s oaks and blooming crape myrtles, the sun was beginning to set. Young mothers were pushing strollers near the baseball diamonds; kids were running amok on the playground. As Hoffman spoke on her iPhone to the man she was on her way to meet, her voice was filtered through a wire that was hidden in her purse. “I’m pulling into the park with the tennis courts now,” she said, sounding casual.

Perhaps what put her at ease was the knowledge that nineteen law-enforcement agents were tracking her every move, and that a Drug Enforcement Administration surveillance plane was circling overhead. In any case, Rachel Hoffman, a tall, wide-eyed redhead, was by nature laid-back and trusting. She was not a trained narcotics operative. On her Facebook page you could see her dancing at music festivals with a big, goofy smile, and the faux profile she’d made for her cat (“Favorite music: cat stevens, straycat blues, pussycat dolls”).

A few weeks earlier, police officers had arrived at her apartment after someone

complained about the smell of marijuana and voiced suspicion that she was selling drugs. When they asked if she had any illegal substances inside, Hoffman said yes and allowed them in to search. The cops seized slightly more than five ounces of pot and several Ecstasy and Valium pills, tucked beneath the cushions of her couch. Hoffman could face serious prison time for felony charges, including “possession of cannabis with intent to sell” and “maintaining a drug house.” The officer in charge, a sandy-haired vice cop named Ryan Pender, told her that she might be able to help herself if she provided “substantial assistance” to the city’s narcotics team. She believed that any charges against her could be reduced, or even dropped.

Hoffman’s legal worries were augmented by the fact that this wasn’t her first drug offense. A year earlier, while she was a senior, police pulled her over for speeding and found almost an ounce of marijuana in her car. She was ordered into a substance-abuse program, which required regular drug testing. Later, after failing to report for a test, she spent three days in jail.

Hoffman chose to cooperate. She had never fired a gun or handled a significant stash of hard drugs. Now she was on her way to conduct a major undercover deal for the Tallahassee Police Department, meeting two convicted felons alone in her car to buy two and a half ounces of cocaine, fifteen hundred Ecstasy pills, and a semi-automatic handgun.

The operation did not go as intended. By the end of the hour, police lost track of her and her car. Late that night, they arrived at her boyfriend’s town house and asked him if Hoffman was inside. They wanted to know if she might have run off with the money. Her boyfriend didn’t know where she was.

“She was with us,” he recalled an officer saying. “Until shit got crazy.”

Two days after Hoffman disappeared,

her body was found in Perry, Florida, a small town some fifty miles southeast of Tallahassee, in a ravine overgrown with tangled vines. Draped in an improvised shroud made from her Grateful Dead sweatshirt and an orange-and-purple sleeping bag, Hoffman had been shot five times in the chest and head with the gun that the police had sent her to buy.

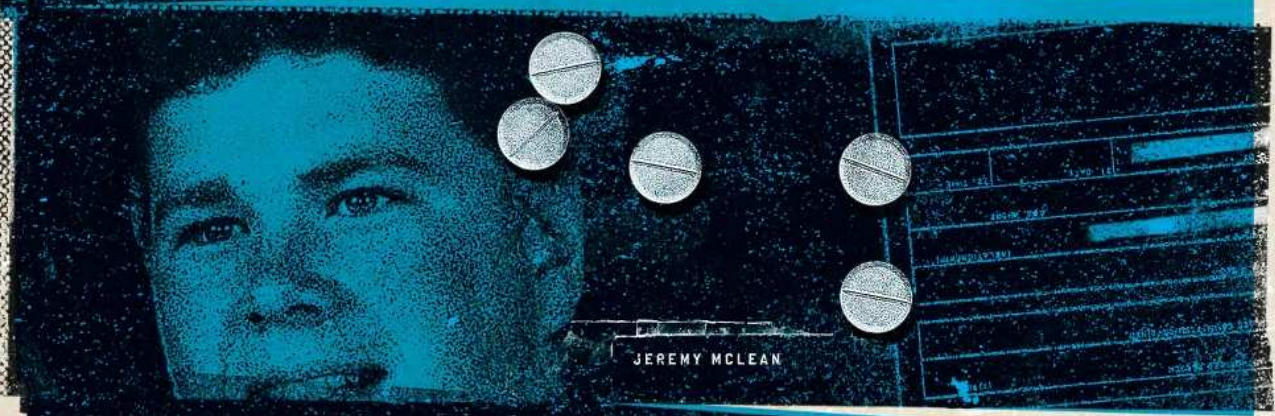
By the evening of her death, Rachel Hoffman had been working for the police department for almost three weeks. In bureaucratic terms, she was Confidential Informant No. 1129, or C.I. Hoffman. In legal parlance, she was a “coöperator,” one of thousands of people who, each year, help the police build cases against others, often in exchange for a promise of leniency in the criminal-justice system.

Informants are the foot soldiers in the government’s war on drugs. By some estimates, up to eighty per cent of all drug cases in America involve them, often in active roles like Hoffman’s. For police departments facing budget woes, untrained C.I.s provide an inexpensive way to outsource the work of undercover officers. “The system makes it cheap and easy to use informants, as opposed to other, less risky but more cumbersome approaches,” says Alexandra Natapoff, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and a leading expert on informants. “There are fewer procedures in place and fewer institutional checks on their use.” Often, deploying informants involves no paperwork and no institutional oversight, let alone lawyers, judges, or public scrutiny; their use is necessarily shrouded in secrecy.

“They can get us into the places we can’t go,” says Brian Sallee, a police officer who is the president of B.B.S. Narcotics Enforcement Training and Consulting, a firm that instructs officers around the country in drug-bust procedures. “Without them, narcotics



RACHEL HOFFMAN



JEREMY MCLEAN

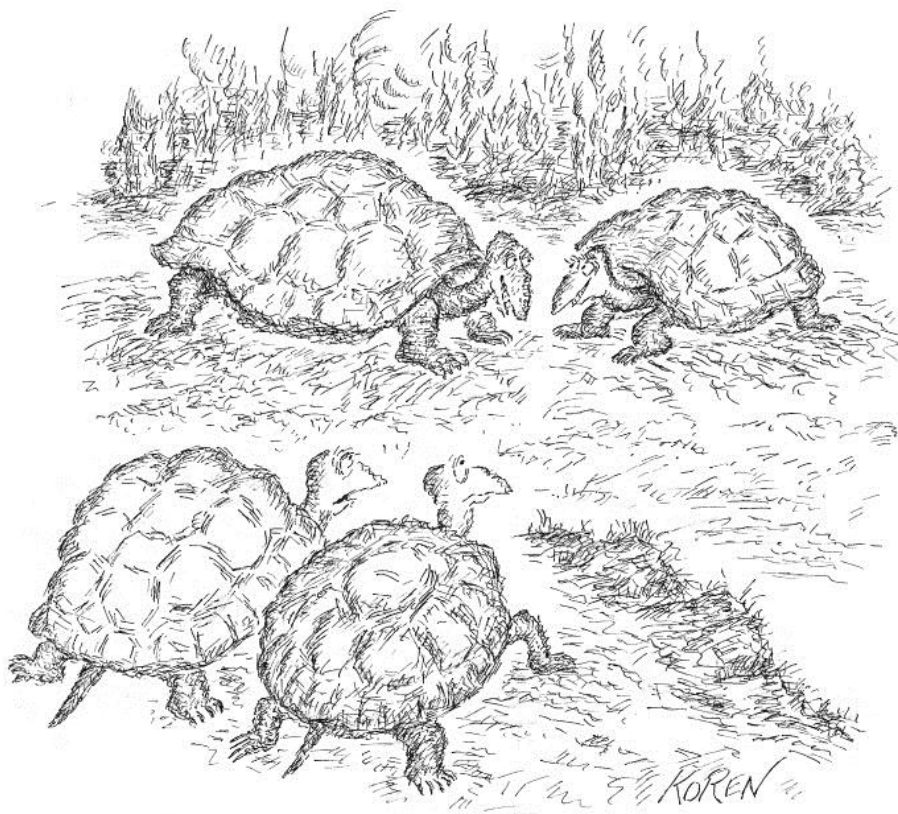


SHELLY HILLIARD



LEBRON GAITHER

In exchange for leniency, untrained informants are sent out to perform dangerous police operations with few legal protections.



"How appropriate is that—she's a hundred and twenty years his junior."

operations would practically cease to function."

Every day, offenders are sent out to perform high-risk police operations with few legal protections. Some are juveniles, occasionally as young as fourteen or fifteen. Some operate through the haze of addiction; others, like Hoffman, are enrolled in state-mandated treatment programs that prohibit their association with illegal drugs of any kind. Many have been given false assurances by the police, used without regard for their safety, and treated as disposable pawns of the criminal-justice system.

The recruitment of young informants often involves risks that are incommensurate with the charges that they are facing. And the costs of cooperating can be high. A case that has dragged on for years in the courts involved LeBron Gaither, a sixteen-year-old student at a public high school in Lebanon, Kentucky. One afternoon, Gaither, who, according to his family, was generally mild-mannered, had an outburst in which he punched the school's assistant principal in the jaw. He was taken into custody for

juvenile assault. An officer from the Kentucky State Police came to see him, and told him that he could face a prison term or he could agree to become a local drug informant.

"Our mom had a drug problem," his older brother Shawn, who subsequently became a corrections officer, recalled. "I think LeBron wanted Mom to be off drugs so bad that when they approached him he saw it as an opportunity to go after the guys who were selling her drugs." Gaither signed the paperwork, and soon found himself performing undercover drug stings in two counties.

After one of these stings, Gaither, by then eighteen, was called upon to testify before a grand jury against Jason Noel, a local drug dealer whom he'd set up. The next day, the police sent Gaither out with a wire and cash to buy still more drugs from Noel—a decision that one state attorney later called the most "reckless, stupid, and idiotic idea" he had seen in his nineteen years of legal work. The meeting was to take place in the parking lot of a local grocery store; Gaither was instructed to say, "This looks good," once he had the drugs in hand. At that

point, the police would move in for the arrest. If something went wrong, he was to say, "I wish my brother was here," and officers would hasten to his aid.

Shortly after the sting began, however, detectives lost track of Gaither when Noel, who had learned of the teen's testimony from a grand juror, drove off with him. Gaither was tortured, beaten with a bat, shot with a pistol and a shotgun, run over by a car, and dragged by a chain through the woods.

When his family learned what had happened, they sued. In 2009, after years of bureaucratic delay, they won a hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars in a wrongful-death case, but the award was vacated; this past May, the state court of appeals ruled that although Gaither's use as an informant was "tragically flawed," the police could not be held accountable, because the "execution of the undercover operation was left to the judgment and discretion of the detectives." The family hopes to take the case to the state supreme court.

"I've been waiting for someone to call!" the family's lawyer, Daniel Taylor III, exclaimed when I phoned him to ask about the lawsuit. During his career, Taylor has worked on a hundred and forty-six cases involving homicide, but he describes Gaither's, which he has worked on pro bono, as "the single most important one." He added, "I've been wondering when the hell the rest of the world was going to wake up to this."

I heard some version of Taylor's statement dozens of times in the course of more than seventy interviews with people whose lives have been shaped by America's growing reliance on young drug informants—narcotics officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and the friends and families of murdered C.I.s, as well as some former informants. Occasionally, concerns about the practice were prompted by law-enforcement agents who fear that pressures to rack up revenue-generating drug busts pose challenges with which their departments can't keep pace. (According to Shawn Gaither, the detective responsible for LeBron's recruitment told the family that it will haunt him for the rest of his life; the detective declined to comment.) More often, questions about why informant use remains so unregulated came from parents who have lost a child to the practice. Within their ranks,

the parents of Rachel Hoffman have become folk heroes of sorts. After Rachel's murder, more than four years ago, Irv Hoffman, a mental-health counsellor, and Margie Weiss, a registered nurse and massage therapist, joined together in order to reform the way young amateurs are used in the war on drugs—first in the state of Florida, and now, if they and parents like them have their way, across the country.

By the time Rachel was twelve, she had been a ballerina, a Brownie, an equestrian, and a Weeki Wachee Springs Little Mermaid contestant; by eighteen, she had learned to play the flute and the piano, gone skydiving, and hiked the Grand Canyon. By twenty-three, she had completed an undergraduate degree in psychology, interned at a mental-health institute, and travelled internationally. She loved to cook—she'd prepare elaborate multicourse meals for friends and deliver homemade matzo-ball soup to an ailing classmate. She was given to hatching big plans: She had initially dreamed of going into counselling, but decided to apply to culinary school. She would invent a new form of therapy, she told her dad; perhaps troubled kids who hated talking to a therapist from an overstuffed couch would open up as she taught them how to bake cakes and make spaghetti carbonara.

"Rachel was conceived on a Windjammer," Margie Weiss told me one night, sifting through photographs of her tropical honeymoon with Irv Hoffman on a sailboat in the Caribbean. In the photographs, the couple look sun-glazed and blissful, Margie's slender arm draped around her new husband's broad shoulders. Within a year and a half of Rachel's birth, they had separated. Margie was a hard worker, but also something of a stargazer, who wore long, flowing skirts and burned sage smudge sticks in the living room. Irv, the child of Hungarian-Czech Holocaust survivors, was more of a straight arrow, who placed a premium on stability and structure.

Margie worries that growing up between the two households took a toll on Rachel. By the end of high school, she had been voted "Party Animal of the Senior Class," a title that prompted some parental angst about her impending departure for Florida State. "If you're ever lonely or bored, or just miss my wonder-

ful self (haha), well the phone is just a few ft. away and so am I," she wrote in a five-page letter to Irv that she left for him on the kitchen counter before he drove her to college. She assured him that she would be "just fine."

Despite Hoffman's legal problems, in the months before her death she earned admission to a master's program in mental-health counselling, with an essay about how her grandparents, "who witnessed the murder of their family and who were severely and emotionally scarred," had taught her "the importance of family, hard work, and economic survival." She still made a habit of smoking pot, and she sold it in small quantities to friends.

The police were able to use Hoffman's stash as leverage. The day after her apartment was raided, she arrived at Police Headquarters to initiate her C.I. contract. Panicked and eager to cooperate, Hoffman first tried to set up a student at Florida State who was a small-time campus dealer. But guilt quickly set in, and soon afterward she contacted the student to confess what she'd done. He not only forgave her but agreed to help her out with the police. Together, they would come up with someone to bust. In return for the favor, Hoffman promised to pay his overdue utility bill.

According to a confidential deposition from a friend of Hoffman's, the police made it clear that run-of-the-mill pot busts wouldn't be sufficient to work off her charges. Instead, the friend said,



the cops were looking for large quantities of "heroin, cocaine, crack, Ecstasy, guns." The Florida State student told her about a young man he'd seen dealing drugs at a car-detailing shop near campus—the man, whom he knew only as Dre, might have access to Ecstasy and cocaine, and possibly more. Hoffman, it turned out, had just had her Volvo worked on by Dre at the same shop, and he had joked about the car's pungent marijuana smell.

Soon, she was wired up and dispatched to the shop, where, using her friend's connection, she put in a request to Dre's brother-in-law, Deneilo Bradshaw, to buy a stash of cocaine, fifteen hundred Ecstasy pills, and, as she described it, a "small and pretty" handgun. The order was large, by any standard. She wanted the drugs for friends who would be visiting from Miami, she explained. And the gun? "I'm a little Jewish girl," she told Bradshaw, as police listened via a surveillance device. "I need to be safe."

By early May, the deal had been arranged. She was to show up with thirteen thousand dollars, and they'd make the swap—at Bradshaw's parents' house, in a quiet green neighborhood on the outskirts of Tallahassee. Behind the scenes, the police worked up an Operational and Raid Plan, which involved more than a dozen local and federal agents.

On the afternoon of the drug bust, Hoffman drove to Police Headquarters. Officer Pender placed a surveillance wire and a recording device in her purse, along with stacks of money for the buy. Dre, who was later identified as Andrea Green, a twenty-five-year-old local man, had changed the site to a nearby park called Forestmeadows—one unfamiliar to Hoffman. Hoffman's boyfriend had sent off a good-luck text message: "I kinda like you so be safe!!" he joked. She took off for the park.

After some fifteen minutes on the road, Hoffman neared the entrance of Forestmeadows. But she turned too soon, into the wrong park. Over the phone, Pender redirected her to the venue slightly farther north.

After this, Pender lost track of her. Other officers later reported that they had all thought that he—or, at least, someone—"had eyes" on Hoffman. She began driving toward a plant nursery just a mile and a half north, evidently thinking that the police were still monitoring her. Within minutes, her audio surveillance equipment went dead. ("Uh, I lost her over the wire," Pender said to colleagues at 6:46 P.M.) She wasn't answering her cell phone. According to Pender, Hoffman managed to reach him a few minutes later, saying, "I followed them from the nursery. We're on Gardner. It looks like the deal is going to go here. It's a dead-end street." Pender later said that he told her, "Turn around!

Turn around! Do not follow them!” Then the phone cut off. “I had no response from her,” Pender told investigators, “which meant, you know, either she hung up on me or we lost the signal.”

Officers began frantically searching the area, trying to find Gardner Road. The D.E.A. plane circled haplessly overhead, its agents unable to see, owing to the dense tree cover. By the time a police team arrived at the narrow turnoff, Hoffman and her car were no longer there. Instead, they found a spent .25-calibre round, two live ammunition rounds, six cigarette butts, and a single black flip-flop.

The encounter had never really been a prospective drug deal. Green was apparently planning a con: he was going to hand Hoffman a bag full of aspirin in place of the Ecstasy, a relative of his told me, and take off with the money. When investigators spoke to Green’s wife in the days that followed, she acknowledged that her husband had called on the night of the botched operation. She described what had taken place: “They found a wire in her purse, and shot her.”

In the mid-nineteen-eighties, Congress enacted federal sentencing guidelines that imposed harsh mandatory minimums for drug offenses, even petty ones. The results of these and similar measures were striking. Over the course of that decade, the U.S. prison population doubled. In Florida, incarceration rates for drug crimes increased nearly twentyfold—with some sentences for marijuana sales surpassing those for murder. The new approach codified a long-standing escape hatch for the accused: to provide “substantial assistance” to authorities in exchange for the possibility of early release or dropped charges. The use of drug informants surged. Soon, legal experts say, the trend swept through state and local law-enforcement agencies across America. Rachel Hoffman was, in this respect, a typical conscript in this country’s numbers-driven war on drugs.

But Hoffman, with her middle-class background, was in some ways not a typical C.I. Generally, it is young people from lower-income communities—often black and Latino—who are under pressure to be informants. It is in their neighborhoods, too, that a serious backlash against the practice has occurred. For one

thing, the snitch-based system has proved notoriously unreliable, fuelling wrongful convictions. In 2000, more than twenty innocent African-American men in Hearne, Texas, were arrested on cocaine charges, based on the false accusations of an informant seeking to escape a burglary charge; the incident, and a number of others like it, prompted calls for national legislation to regulate informant use.

In many urban neighborhoods with heavy police presence, the anti-C.I. backlash has taken a more virulent turn: “Stop snitchin’” and “Snitches get stitches” are popular mottoes. Police departments have responded with counter-propaganda, which is meant to bolster both their own C.I.s and routine criminal witnesses. (In Baltimore, “Keep talkin’” is the official slogan of choice.) These campaigns have raised prickly questions. If the high stakes of snitching are so readily apparent, and so hard to mitigate—if, as the rapper Master P has it, “bitches talk shit and snitches get killed”—should the practice be encouraged among vulnerable populations, at least in the absence of clear rules about how informants are to be protected? In particular, should there be any conditions governing the enlistment of the young and inexperienced in high-risk sting operations?

One day last spring, Irv Hoffman spoke with me about the legal concept of *parens patriae*, and the broad notion that the state has an obligation, when dealing with those in need of special protections—the young, the mentally ill, and perhaps even the drug-addicted—to act as a parent would. “Have you heard about the girl in Detroit?” Irv Hoffman asked me.

He was referring to a nineteen-year-old informant who had been killed several months earlier. I had in fact just visited her mother at her squat brick house off Detroit’s Seven Mile Road. Together, we attended the pretrial murder hearing of James A. Matthews, a stocky man with a long blond ponytail. Matthews, clad in an orange jumpsuit, was in court to face felony charges that he “did mutilate, deface, remove, or carry away” the young woman’s body.

One night in the fall of 2011, Shelly Hilliard, an African-American teen-ager in Detroit—her family called her Treasure—went to her mother’s house for a plate of macaroni-and-

cheese. Hilliard, who was transgender (born male, with the legal name Henry Hilliard, Jr.), left the house and didn’t come back that night or the next. Before long, one of her older sisters, Mechelle, noticed a disturbing trend on Facebook. “Everybody started posting, ‘Rest in Peace, Shelly,’ and ‘She’s with God now,’ and this and that,” Mechelle recalled on a recent afternoon, as she sat with her mother, Lyniece Nelson, at a bright-red kitchen counter. “And we were like, ‘Hold on, we didn’t even get a call.’”

Nelson, a devout Christian who sometimes writes Bible verses along her doorframe in blue chalk, sighed. “I guess the streets talk,” she said.

Shelly was dance-obsessed (“She loved Beyoncé!”), with hazel eyes and long straightened hair that seemed to be a different color every time she came home. She spent much of her time singing, doing friends’ hair and makeup, and, like many teens, documenting her life with cell-phone snapshots.

On October 23rd, at around 4:30 A.M., a torso, later identified as Shelly’s, was found ablaze beneath an old mattress on an I-94 service road. In March, the rest of the body, except for her hands, was found. By this point, her family had long since begun to surmise what had happened.

At first, because the victim was transgender, local officials believed that the murder was a hate crime. But several weeks later it became clear that Shelly’s death was connected to work she had done as a police informant. Just days before she was killed, cops had spotted Shelly and a friend smoking a blunt on the balcony of a Motel 6 in a Detroit suburb. When they raided the room, they found a sandwich bag with half an ounce of marijuana in the toilet tank. One of the officers threatened Shelly with prison—a particularly terrifying prospect for a transgender woman, who would be sent to a male facility—and then offered her a way out: she could set up her dealer, Qasim Raqib, and walk free that same day. She agreed.

Raqib was arrested after Shelly arranged the sting. Several hours later, he was released. He then tracked her down and, with the help of James Matthews, strangled, mutilated, burned, and dismembered her. (Both men have since pleaded guilty to murder; in court, one

witness testified that the police had revealed Shelly's identity.)

"Now I lost my baby for an ounce of weed," Nelson said at her kitchen counter. "It's like they just threw her away."

When I asked Lieutenant Joseph Quisenberry, the commander of the local sheriff's Narcotics Enforcement Team, about the case, he said, "I don't have a written guideline that governs every sit-

miles away, in Palm Harbor, Irv also received a call, asking if he'd heard from Rachel or knew her whereabouts. The department called again later that morning, urging both parents to come to Tallahassee; Rachel still hadn't been found, they said, making no mention of the botched drug bust or of Rachel's recruitment as a C.I. Within the hour, Margie and Irv were driving north on U.S. 19,

them to go to their daughter's apartment and await further updates.

Margie and Irv opened the front door to Rachel's place (which she often kept unlocked) and sat down among scented candles and posters of John Lennon and Johnny Depp. Only then, when they turned on the television and scanned the news for updates, did they discover that Rachel had "provided assistance during a



The family of Shelly Hilliard, an informant killed in 2011, learned about her death on Facebook. Photograph by Peter van Agtmael.

uation." He continued, "I have heard that this was someone living in a more dangerous context." He declined to discuss the specifics of the case.

"More than anything," Nelson says of the police treatment of her daughter, "I want to know, Why would you all not protect her?"

Like Lyniece Nelson, Rachel Hoffman's parents were concerned that authorities weren't telling them the full story behind their daughter's disappearance. At around two-thirty on the morning after the bungled sting, Margie received a call from the police at her home in suburban Safety Harbor. "Your daughter's missing," she was told. A few

in separate cars. Their rabbi, Gary Klein, followed close behind.

When Rachel's parents arrived at the headquarters of the Tallahassee Police Department, they immediately grew suspicious. "I remember noticing that they weren't taking us to the missing-persons unit," Margie recalled. "Instead it was like, 'Come over here to Narcotics.'"

There Police Chief Dennis Jones, a middle-aged man with a thick mustache, repeated what they already knew: "Rachel's missing." (A victims advocate had already alerted them to the possibility that she might not be found alive.) Jones then assured them that an aggressive search was under way, and instructed

police operation" the previous day, and that officials suspected "foul play" in her disappearance. Police were looking for two suspects, Andrea Green and Deneilo Bradshaw, according to a departmental press release.

The news shows relayed that Rachel's Volvo had been found in Perry. The car was empty, parked beneath a tree outside a welding shop. Her phone was discovered by a roadside, which gave Irv a "dark, ugly feeling." "She loved that iPhone," he told me. "I gave it to her as a gift, and someone would have had to pry it away from her to get it."

Just after dawn the next day, Margie and her husband, Mike Weiss (who had arrived to join her), drove down the road

to get some coffee and bagels. Margie was standing alone in the parking lot of Publix Food & Pharmacy when she got a call from Irv. "You need to come back to the apartment," he said. She ran back into the grocery store, searching the aisles for Mike, screaming to the cashier, to random shoppers, "Where's my husband? My daughter was just murdered!" Back at the apartment, Rabbi Klein confirmed her fears: Rachel's body had been found. It was lying in a dry creek bed near Cabbage Grove Road, in Perry.

Later that morning, journalists descended on a forest clearing where Tallahassee Police Department officials were holding a press conference, not far from where Hoffman's body still lay. (The two suspects had been apprehended, and, at around 6:30 A.M., they had led police to the site.) "We had established protocols in place to insure her safety," Officer David McCranie told the crowd. "At some point during the investigation, she chose not to follow the instructions. She met Green and Bradshaw on her own. That meeting ultimately resulted in her murder."

Rachel's parents watched the coverage on the television in her apartment. It marked, for Irv Hoffman, the beginning of what he sometimes refers to as "the

smearing"—the period following Rachel's murder during which their daughter was portrayed in police statements and front-page news stories as, in his words, "this horrible drug-dealing monster."

Rachel's friends started coming by her apartment, and they, too, were almost as shocked by the initial coverage of the murder as by the death itself. "That was devastating for so many of us," one of Hoffman's childhood friends recalled. "The first stories tried to paint Rachel as a low-life druggie drug dealer." Two months later, in a TV segment on Hoffman's death, the ABC News correspondent Brian Ross interviewed Police Chief Jones. "I'm calling her a criminal," Jones told him. "That's my job as a police chief—to find these criminals in our community and take them off the street, to make the proper arrests." Ross asked about the department's accountability. "Do we feel responsible?" Jones said. "We're responsible for the safety of this community."

On the advice of a mutual friend, Irv Hoffman arranged a meeting with Michael Schiavo, a neighbor who had a great deal of experience with hostile media attention. He was the husband of the late Terri Schiavo, the brain-damaged woman who spent fifteen years in a vegetative state, and whose parents insti-

gated a lengthy and highly public court battle with Michael when he wished to discontinue Terri's life support. Michael became the target of a steady stream of media attacks, and even death threats.

At the meeting, which took place in their friend's living room, Hoffman asked Schiavo what lessons he'd learned from his experience with the press. "You need to understand that if you speak out you're opening Pandora's box," Hoffman recalled being told. "You're going to be out of your comfort zone real quick, and some people are going to support you and other people are going to come out against you. And you just need to decide: 'Am I ready to step through that door?'" Hoffman knew that he was. So he and his ex-wife hired a lawyer and wrote up a plan.

Across the country in Vancouver, Washington, another set of parents, Shelly and Mitchell McLean, have tried to take on the C.I. system. Shelly works as a manager at a Fred Meyer grocery store just across the Oregon border; Mitchell works in construction. On the morning that we met, at a restaurant in Longview, Shelly wore a thick gray sweater, pink lipstick, and gold eyeshadow. Mitchell, a rugged, genial man, arrived soon afterward from his construction job "out in the boonies," wearing a mud-flecked leather jacket.

The couple hauled in wicker baskets and bright-colored plastic containers from their car and carried them to the table. They had brought along all these relics—photo albums, golf trophies, wrinkled report cards, Hot Wheels cars, baby teeth, baseballs, and short stories written in cursive with titles like "The Adventures of the Wild West"—in order to offer a glimpse of their son, Jeremy. Waggish and affable, he was the kind of guy who, if you dared him, wouldn't hesitate to eat more than twenty Big Macs in a sitting. But he also loved going antiquing with his mom, who called him Bubbers as a kid. Growing up, Jeremy and his younger sister Jenny attended a local Christian school, and Mitchell insists that they never rode the bus. "That's how protective we were," he said. "I was the bus," Shelly added.

Jeremy was an avid weight lifter and wrestler in high school, and, after he graduated, his father got him a construc-



"A vow of poverty and sponsorship aren't necessarily exclusive."

tion job. He liked the heavy lifting, but eventually he hurt his back and started taking pain pills. "That's what did it," Mitchell recalled; Jeremy began using painkillers for which he had no prescription. In his mid-twenties, he was struggling to figure out what he should do with his life—perhaps go into law enforcement, or the military—when, one day in 2006, he agreed to sell eight methadone pills to a friend.

The friend, it turned out, was wearing a wire; he had drug charges of his own that he was trying to work off as a C.I. Jeremy faced a possible prison sentence—and feared that he would bring shame to his family, since nothing stayed quiet in their small community. According to Mitchell McLean, an agent from a federally funded narcotics task force laid out Jeremy's options, saying, "You can sit down with us and make a deal. Or you can go upstairs, get a lawyer, and get ready to be ass-rammed in prison." Jeremy signed a contract to "make purchases of controlled substances from four individuals," in return for which his charges would be reduced, "with a recommendation of no jail time."

Before long, using a camera hidden in his baseball cap, Jeremy had set up at least five local drug suspects. But, according to his parents, he was told that he would need to keep going, because the cases had led to plea bargains rather than to convictions. (No such stipulation appeared in his contract.)

Seeing no other choice, Jeremy proceeded to conduct, in all, more than a dozen operations for the regional task force, which placed him in increasingly dangerous situations. "In their mind, the police just had an open-ended contract," said Mitchell, who at the time knew nothing of the arrangement.

Jeremy's fourteenth undercover sting led to the arrest of a heroin trafficker, William Vance Reagan, Jr. After a day in jail, though, Reagan was out on bail.

A week later, Reagan, a burly, balding fifty-one-year-old with a dense gray beard flecked with red, phoned Shelly McLean. "Tell your son I'm out of jail and that he better watch his back," she recalls him saying. Jeremy immediately told his police handler, but the officer, according to Mitchell, seemed unconcerned, saying, "Don't worry about it—the guy's harmless." (The handler de-

clined to discuss these events, citing a pending lawsuit.)

Friends began to call with warnings. "Vance is hunting for you," they'd say. "He's offering good money to lure you to the woods to polish you off." One friend saw Reagan holding a pistol, saying, "I'm going to use this gun on Jeremy." According to Jeremy's parents, he reported all this to his handler, and the handler responded, "It's just hearsay."

By then, Jeremy had told his parents about his undercover activities and was trying to lie low at his mother's house. He hung a towel over the half-moon window above the door, and made sure that no one could see inside the house from other vantage points. He spent several months this way, under virtual house arrest. "We'd make dinner together at night, stir-fry," his mother recalled. "We'd watch movies. He loved 'It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia.'" She added, "But when you have to hang things over your window?"—that, she explained, is when you know you're in trouble.

After several months, Mitchell went to the police station to issue an ultimatum: "If anything happens to my son, it will be on your hands." He said that he was told not to worry; the guys Jeremy had busted were "small fries," not the murdering type, just low-life drug runners. "But any bonehead can get a gun and shoot someone!" Mitchell recalled telling them. "It doesn't take Pablo Escobar—it can be a guy who's got the I.Q. of a head of lettuce."

On December 29, 2008, Jeremy left the house after a snowstorm to buy some milk. He didn't return. Reagan had paid an accomplice to bait or kidnap Jeremy and bring him to a nearby motor home, where he was waiting with a .22-calibre pistol. He shot Jeremy three times in the back of the head, then once, at close range, in the face.

At the trial, Reagan boasted to the judge that he had done the world a favor, by eliminating a snitch. According to a news account, he told the court, "Anybody that Jeremy knew or came into contact with would have been suffering for it," and declared, "The good of the many outweighs the good of the few."

He was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Mitchell McLean has come to see his son's death as the result of an equally cynical and utilitarian calculation. "The cops, they get federal funding by the number of arrests they make—to get the money, you need the numbers," he explained, alluding to, among other things, asset-forfeiture laws that allow police de-



partments to keep a hefty portion of cash and other resources seized during drug busts. "It's a commercial enterprise," he went on, citing a view shared by many legal scholars and policy critics. "That's how they pay for their vans, for their prosecutors—they get money from the war on drugs. They put zero dent

in the supply. They just focus on small-town, small-time arrests." He continued, "I understand using C.I.s to get information on who is a mid-level dealer, or to go after the big guys. That's the information that I, as a taxpayer, would love to see them do—cases that have some significance. I still remember the big busts from the eighties and nineties, where they'd nail a heroin kingpin."

Now, he said, the threshold for putting an informant's life at risk is dramatically lower, and small cases to rack up arrest rates are the order of the day. It's little fish chasing other little fish, like Jeremy and his eight methadone pills. This argument is at the heart of a lawsuit that Jeremy's parents decided to file last December. They allege that the regional drug task force and the agents handling their son's case showed "deliberate indifference" to an "obvious danger." They also charged the cities of Longview and Kelso, whose police departments were involved, with failure to create "appropriate procedures and regulations concerning the recruitment, training, retention and protection of confidential informants." The opposing lawyers deny most of the McLeans' account and assert that Jeremy failed "to exercise reasonable care for his own safety." The suit is ongoing.

At around 2 A.M. one morning a few weeks after Rachel Hoffman's death, her father, Irv, began jotting notes. Almost daily since his daughter's murder, he had woken up in the early

hours, turning over the details of the botched drug bust in his mind. He began typing out a list: Why was Rachel used in such a high-risk police sting when she had no training, when she couldn't even find her own socks in the morning? Why was she sent to buy a semi-automatic pistol when she had never even fired a weapon? Why was she pressured into taking part in the operation before she consulted a lawyer?

Hoffman set about turning his questions into a wish list of policy reforms. "I'd write something, throw it away, write something more, throw it away," he told me. Margie Weiss had also been thinking about policy reforms. They began working on what they called Rachel's Law. Weiss proposed that the two of them appeal to the father of one of Rachel's friends, a Florida attorney named Lance Block, to guide them through the process.

Block, a trim, tanned man with thick brown hair, was intimately familiar with the state's legislative process. A former president of the Academy of Florida Trial Lawyers, he had helped advise Al Gore's legal team during the 2000 Presidential recount, and seemed to be on first-name terms with half of Tallahassee, from smoothie-store clerks to state-capital legislators. He agreed to lead the push for Rachel's Law pro bono, and to represent the family in a civil suit against the city.

Block immersed himself in a study of the informant system, both in Florida and around the country, searching for model legislation, some sort of template that he could use to give shape to Weiss and Hoffman's late-night brainstormings. "I began talking to legal experts, but almost all of them had focussed exclusively on how to impeach C.I.s, not protect them," he recalled, referring to efforts by civil-liberties groups to combat jailhouse informants' false accusations. California, he later learned, was one of the few states that had rules governing the use of teenage informants, and prohibiting recruits younger than thirteen. Those rules had been devised after a seventeen-year-old named Chad MacDonald was brutally murdered and his fifteen-year-old girlfriend raped and shot in retaliation for Chad's work as a low-level drug C.I., in 1998. Yet when it came to putting together a comprehensive, realistic version

of Rachel's Law, he said, "we were in totally uncharted territory."

Block, Hoffman, and Weiss would be starting from scratch, but they swiftly worked out the particulars. First, all C.I.s should be given the right to counsel; Miranda and Sixth Amendment rights often don't apply to informants, since they may never be formally arrested or charged with a crime. Second, there should be a provision banning the use of juveniles altogether. Third, there should be "offense parity"—nonviolent, low-level drug offenders should not be used in apprehending traffickers with histories of violence. Fourth, people who are in drug-treatment programs, as Rachel Hoffman was, shouldn't be used at all. A range of other provisions were also suggested.

In August, soon after they'd begun putting the bill together, they got a dramatic boost. A grand jury charged with reviewing the facts of the Hoffman case not only indicted the two murder suspects, Green and Bradshaw, but also took the highly unusual step of issuing a scathing condemnation of the police department's conduct. (Green and Bradshaw are now serving life sentences for the Hoffman murder; Bradshaw recently appealed.) "Letting a young, immature woman get into a car by herself with \$13,000.00, to go off and meet two convicted felons that they knew were bringing at least one firearm with them, was an unconscionable decision that cost Ms. Hoffman her life," the grand jury de-



clared. "Less than fifteen minutes after she drove away from the offices of [the Tallahassee Police Department], she drove out of the sight of the officers who assured her they would be right on top of her watching and listening the whole time. She cried out for help as she was shot and killed and nobody was there to hear her."

After this, the police department began to acknowledge that it had made mistakes. An internal-affairs investiga-

tion revealed that police officers had committed at least twenty-one violations of nine separate policies in Hoffman's case. "I didn't think it would be so many policies not being followed," Chief Dennis Jones told the Tallahassee *Democrat*, which covered the case extensively. He admitted that it had been wrong to blame the victim, and expressed regret.

This was an ideal moment for Hoffman's parents to make a bold proposal. Two Republican politicians, State Senator Mike Fasano and Representative Peter Nehr, agreed to sponsor Rachel's Law, and committee meetings were held. Yet the reforms proved to have formidable opponents. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Florida Sheriffs Association, and other groups lobbied against the law, and more than a hundred law-enforcement agents packed the meetings.

Many vice cops, in particular, argued that forbidding the use of juveniles as C.I.s would force them to turn a blind eye to young people committing adult crimes. More record keeping would only increase the risk of C.I.s' identities being disclosed. The right-to-an-attorney clause, they contended, would make it far too cumbersome to catch and "flip" a drug suspect on the spot, effectively nullifying a valuable, real-time tactic for fighting crime. Sheriff Larry Campbell, of Leon County, declared that the bill, if passed in its original form, would be "the end of law enforcement."

Behind many of these arguments was the belief that C.I. use shouldn't be subject to uniform regulation, since the practice is inherently unsystematic and improvisatory. "There's no such thing as training an informant," Brian Sallee, of B.B.S. Narcotics Enforcement Training and Consulting, told me. "You direct them what to do, and if they follow those directions that will make it safer for them. There's always going to be a risk, but when things go bad it's usually because they didn't do as they were told to. *They* get themselves hurt, not the officers. The informants cause their own dilemma."

Eventually, a compromise bill was put forward, stripped of several of the earlier provisions, including the informant's unequivocal right to legal counsel and the measure to exclude juveniles. But even the revised version promised groundbreaking rights and regulations

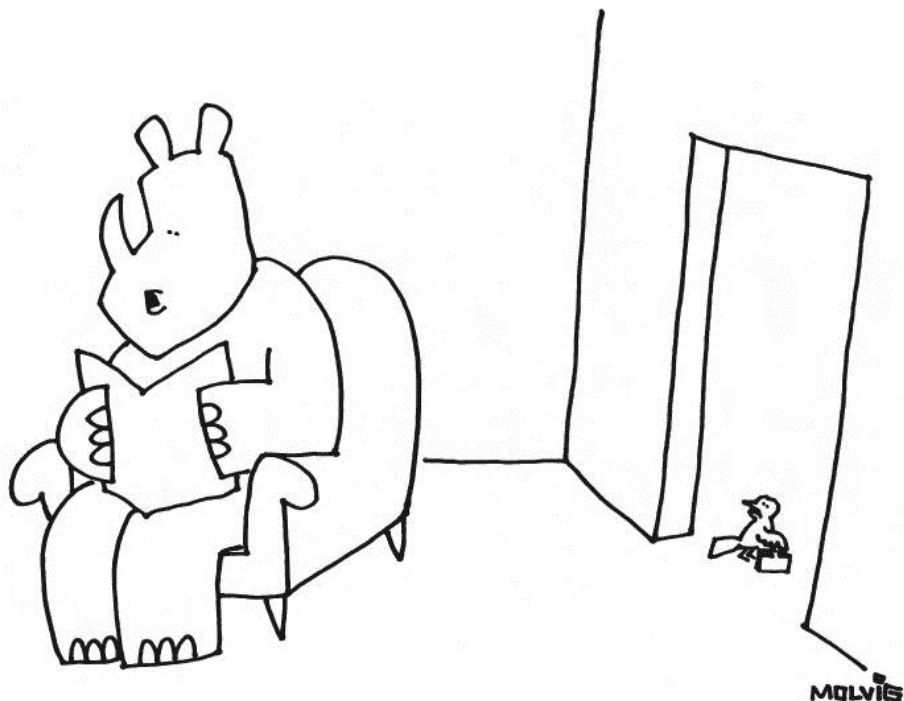
for informants; officers were now required to undergo special training, and to take into account a new recruit's age and emotional state and the level of risk involved in a given operation. And, in all operations involving C.I.s, safety had to be the first priority.

The revised bill passed both chambers of the Florida legislature unanimously. On May 7, 2009, the anniversary of Hoffman's murder, Governor Charlie Crist signed Rachel's Law. It became the first comprehensive legislation of its kind in the nation. Even so, Hoffman's parents have vowed to continue working to strengthen it. This summer, they spoke out about the case of a twenty-seven-year-old mother of two who was murdered after working as an informant in Citrus County.

Earlier this year, Weiss and Hoffman won another major victory: a \$2.6-million settlement from the City of Tallahassee in a wrongful-death lawsuit—along with a formal apology. Now they hope to take their campaign beyond Florida and broaden their push for regulations of the kind that might have saved their daughter. In the meantime, their public example and the media coverage surrounding it—including accounts by Jennifer Portman in the *Tallahassee Democrat*, segments on ABC News, and a substantive report by Vince Beiser for the *Huffington Post*—have inspired other family members of victimized C.I.s across the country to seek redress.

"Why is it that we only seem to regulate in the wake of tragedies?" Lance Block asked recently from the porch of the Black Dog Cafe, a coffee shop near Tallahassee Police Headquarters. "We took on all of the major forces in Florida, and we won. But it's going to take a lot more than the three of us to carry this issue beyond state boundaries—to say, 'Untrained civilians should not be performing the duties of law enforcement.'" He added, "They should not be treated as throwaway people."

Margie Weiss did not expect the settlement or the resolution of the murder trials, or even the passage of Rachel's Law, to bring her peace. Nothing has. "Some days, I can't shampoo my hair, I can't drive my car," she says. "I'm proud if I can just get up and do what I have to do. I mopped the floor today.



"Symbiosis isn't enough for me anymore, Carl."

That was good." On other days, though, she stays up late making plans for the Rachel Morningstar Foundation, an organization she is launching to advocate for C.I. reform. (Irv, for his part, has started a scholarship in Rachel's name.) On those days, she says, between contacting politicians and corresponding with parents across the country who have lost their children to untrained-informant work, "I feel confident that we are going to go on a crusade to take the law national, that we're going to save other kids."

Margie has built a small memorial garden outside her office window. There she has planted flowers of persecution—crown of thorns, bleeding heart—alongside what she considers to be foliage of resilience: purple passionflowers, an angel-trumpet shrub that bloomed, she says, on the afternoon that the legislature passed Rachel's Law. She counts the monarch butterflies around the milkweed. Their color reminds her of Rachel's hair.

Irv Hoffman, too, has his rituals. Every morning, he drives to Rachel's grave, carrying his supplies in the trunk: a bottle of water for Rachel's flowers, a pair of scissors to freshen their stems, a beach chair to sit in and read beside his

daughter's memorial bench. At home, some nights he revisits an injury, replaying the ABC News interview with Police Chief Dennis Jones on YouTube, watching as Jones says, "Yes, I'm calling her a criminal." At other times, he reads from the letter that Rachel wrote him on the evening before she left for college. On a recent afternoon, he showed me the letter, which he had laminated and placed on his coffee table. He picked it up and began to read: "To my hero, Dad, where do I even begin?"

Irv paused to collect himself. The house was quiet, except for the sound of Rachel's tabby cat, Bentley, snoring on a nearby chair. It's this letter, more than almost anything else, that makes Irv feel the weight of the years ahead, when he expected to be an active father and grandfather but instead finds himself endlessly turning over the details of a botched C.I. operation. "Dad, please don't worry about me," he continued to read aloud. "I'm a *very* smart, independent girl and I do have morals and ethics you've taught me, which will not be left at home. Have Faith, Old Man, I'll be just fine." ♦

TEEN TITAN

The man who made Justin Bieber.

BY LIZZIE WIDDICOMBE

When Scooter Braun, the manager of Justin Bieber and a stable of other pop stars, was growing up, his favorite comic-book hero was Superman. “I liked everything he stood for,” Braun, who is thirty-one, told me recently. He liked that Superman had been created by two Jewish men, which made him “the Jewish superhero.” Braun played basketball, and he dreamed of one day joining the supermen of the N.B.A.—the Magic Johnsons and the Michael Jordans. When it became clear that he didn’t have the talent to play professionally, he began to think about the entertainment industry. But there, too, not all lanes were open to him.

“Justin Bieber was born with the Superman powers,” Braun said. “He could sing, he could dance, he could play instruments. I wasn’t born with those gifts, so I had to become a different kind of superhero.” Braun studied the careers of influential behind-the-scenes guys, especially David Geffen, who moved from the William Morris mailroom to the music business and eventually co-founded DreamWorks. “David Geffen was a Bruce Wayne to me,” Braun said. “He was extraordinary, but at the same time his talents were something that I could dream of and could fathom. I’m a normal Joe. But, with a lot of effort, I’ve got a shot at being Bruce Wayne.”

Braun, a former Atlanta party promoter, has become the central figure in the current teen-pop explosion. Teenage girls, and even some parents, recognize him as the college dropout who discovered Bieber on YouTube and then shepherded him to worldwide stardom. For the past three years, Bieber, with his soulful voice, silky hair, and hip-hop vocabulary (“swag, swag, swag”), has occupied the spot once held by Justin Timberlake and Elvis Presley, singing blue-eyed soul to

the screaming tween masses. Infatuation with him is often described as Bieber Fever.

Bieber is the only superstar to have emerged from YouTube so far, and, as he pushes his new album, “Believe,” his online power and off-line marketability are seamlessly intertwined. His YouTube channel is approaching three billion views, and on Twitter, where he acquires a new follower every other second, a single tweet from him can mobilize his supporters to perform stunning feats: sell out Madison Square Garden in seconds, conjure a horde of three hundred thousand tweens in Mexico City, induce fans to buy a hundred and twenty million dollars’ worth of perfume (Bieber’s fragrance, *Somebody*), or influence the conversation about world events—in March, Bieber’s tweets brought attention to the campaign to apprehend the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony.

The speed and the scale of Bieber’s success have tended to make Braun seem like a lottery winner: a lucky schmoo who hit it big. This perception bothers Braun. “I look to the shit talkers to find out what I have to do next,” he told me. After hearing that someone had called him a one-hit wonder, he said, “I decided, I’m not just gonna break one new act, I’m going to break *two* more.” He took on the management of a British boy band called the Wanted, and he signed Carly Rae Jepsen, a Canadian singer, to his label, Schoolboy Records. Bieber had brought Jepsen to Braun’s attention after he heard her song “Call Me Maybe” on Canadian radio. This summer, with Braun’s encouragement, Bieber made a video of himself and some teen celebrity pals prancing around to the song, which was leaked to YouTube; the song shot to No. 1 on the U.S. singles charts, and has spawned hundreds of other YouTube tributes.



Scooter Braun's job includes developing revenue

(There is a clip of Colin Powell singing it.) During the summer, three of Braun’s acts—Jepsen, Bieber, and the Wanted—reached the top three slots in the *Billboard* Hot 100. It has become impossible to walk into a drugstore, a dentist’s office, or a slumber party without hearing some emanation from the Bieber-Braun empire.

Bieber came to fame as a musical prodigy—his first “hits” were unadorned YouTube clips of him singing and playing instruments—but, these days, his power as a global brand overshadows his reputation as an artist. (One executive pointed out to me



streams that record labels wouldn't think of. "This isn't a dying business, this is a changing business," he says. Photograph by Jeff Minton.

recently, "I don't think Adele is selling perfume.") Braun is satisfied with having it both ways: he likes to compare Bieber's career with those of Michael Jackson and the Beatles. "I don't think you're selling out by allowing the masses to love your art," he told me. "The only curse is that, when you get so big, sometimes people forget to look at the music."

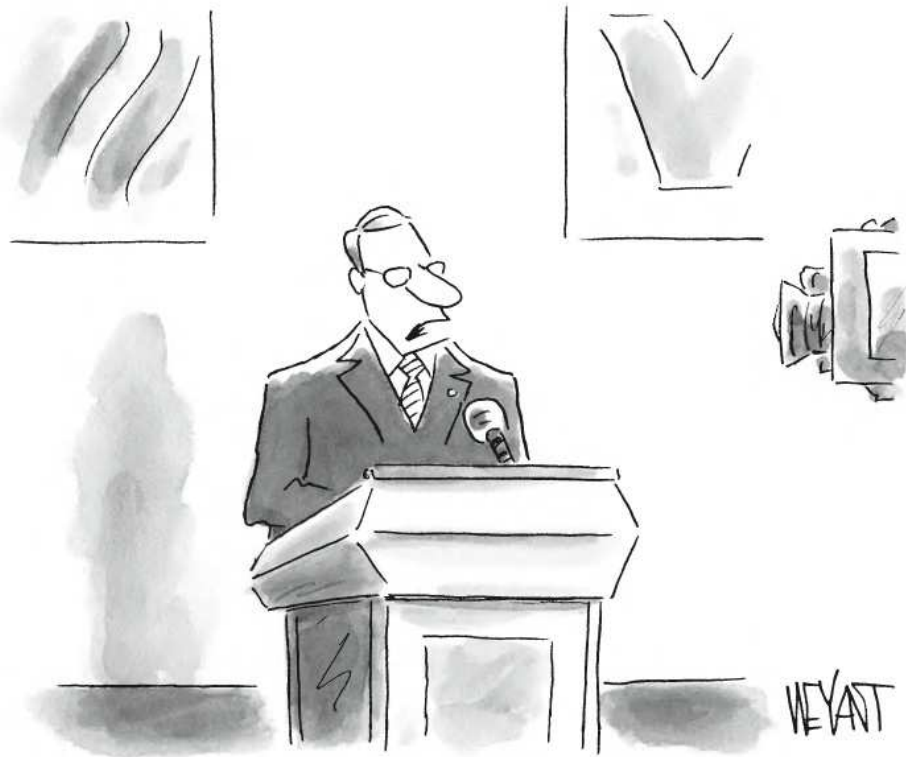
In the beleaguered music industry, few managers can afford to focus on just selling music anymore. When Braun met David Geffen, at a party a couple of years ago, he said that Geffen had one bit of advice for him: "Get out

of the music business." So Braun has been converting his twelve-person company, SB Projects, into a many-faceted organization: it now has film and TV arms (Braun recently sold a scripted show, and has reality shows in development), a publishing division, and a technology-investment unit, in addition to a label and a management company.

Universal Music Group, one of the "big four" record companies, recently signed a distribution deal with Braun's label and named him its first technology "entrepreneur in residence." Lucian Grainge, Universal's C.E.O., told

me, "He understands the entertainment business, he understands rights, he understands intellectual property, products, social networking, tech—that's what I'm betting on." Also, he added, "the company likes hits, the fans like hits, and that's what he's there to do—make hits. We're not in the art business."

"You know what it is?" Braun asked me one day this summer. "My friend put it best. I'm a camp counselor for pop stars." Braun was in Los Angeles, where he lives, looking after his growing talent roster. His manner is



"I regret that my poor choice of words caused some people to understand what I was saying."

amiable but volatile—half frat boy, half impresario—and he cuts the burly profile of an athlete during the off-season: he has large lips and a toothy mouth, and he has lately been wearing a close-trimmed beard. He had on his usual uniform, of a Yankees cap, jeans, and a Mickey Mouse T-shirt purchased at Disneyland, where he gets many of his T-shirts. "It's a nonthreatening thing," he said. "The whole world loves Mickey."

At 10 A.M., he got into the passenger seat of a black BMW that belonged to his assistant, a twenty-four-year-old named Teddy Riley, and reviewed his schedule. As often happens, he was supposed to be several places at once: a rehearsal with the Wanted for the NBC show "The Voice"; an interview that Spike Lee was conducting with Bieber for a documentary about Michael Jackson; and a video shoot with Cody Simpson, a fifteen-year-old Australian singer. Braun said that he wanted to go to all three events. Riley stepped on the gas: "It's gonna be tough, but we can make it happen."

Staffing at record companies has de-

creased almost sixty per cent in the past decade, and managers now perform many of the functions traditionally handled by label executives—suggesting a producer, scheduling release dates and media appearances, and devising marketing strategies. Braun sees part of his job as developing revenue streams that labels wouldn't think of. "This isn't a dying business, this is a changing business," he told me. "CD sales have declined drastically, but the overall business has grown: licensing, merchandising, digital sales. Ten years ago, a pop star might not have a fragrance that does a hundred and twenty million dollars in business in a year." He went on, "My job is to make sure a client doesn't have any 'what if's—to make sure, when you look back, you don't say, 'What if I had done this? What if I had done that?'" Among Bieber's other revenue streams: "Never Say Never," a 2011 movie that Braun produced about Bieber's life, which was the highest-grossing concert film in U.S. history; a line of watches, backpacks, and singing dolls; a "home" collection that includes comforter sets and

shower curtains; and an endorsement deal with Proactiv, a purveyor of acne remedies. All this has made Bieber rich—his annual income is estimated to exceed fifty million dollars—and has given Braun a unique economic power. A big part of a manager's job, one industry veteran told me, is "getting an artist to say yes to things."

Braun arrived at the set of "The Voice." Two of the five members of the Wanted, Thomas Parker and Max George, were outside, sharing a cigarette. Both are twenty-three and from Manchester. (For a reason that Braun can't explain, most of his acts are from the British Commonwealth.) They had been issued yellow nametags, which they'd applied to their crotches. To set the Wanted apart from other boy bands, Braun has encouraged them to embrace a bad-boy image, and to flaunt the fact that they like to party. George said that he was glad to be of drinking age: "There's nuffin' worse than coming to America and bein' under twenty-one!"

Inside, the group did a run-through of their song "Chasing the Sun"—an Ibiza-inflected club number with a thumping bass. Braun watched intently on a small monitor. Afterward, he approached the band and said, "You guys, that was great," but told them that they needed to show more enthusiasm. "During the breakdown, I want to hear one of your voices saying, 'America, let's go!'" He added, "And smile." The five young men nodded blankly.

After the rehearsal, Braun and the Wanted climbed into golf carts and were driven to a red-carpeted area that housed the talent trailers. There was a buzz in the air—a pack of assistants and security staff stood around tensely—that indicated the presence of Justin Bieber, who was slated to make a short appearance on "The Voice," to promote his new album. Bieber, who had just turned eighteen, wore a white T-shirt, tight black jeans sagging low, and unlaced Timberland boots. His hair was swept up into a James Dean pompadour, and a black bandanna with skulls on it dangled from his back pocket. He was much smaller than the young men in the Wanted, and he looked frail and skittish. (At one point,

Braun reminded me, "That skinny kid you just met is the most Googled person on the planet by like two hundred million hits.")

Bieber greeted the members of the Wanted familiarly. (Braun's policy, among his acts, is that "everyone's family, everyone has to get along.")

"It's your birthday, bro?" Bieber said to Nathan Sykes, one of the band's singers. He had been prepped by Braun, who was throwing Sykes a party that night, at the Playboy Mansion. The young men immediately began comparing tattoos. George lifted up his shirt to reveal some song lyrics: "We try / we fall / we live another day."

"Dope," Bieber said, and pulled up his pant leg to show, on his calf, a large tattoo of Jesus with hands clasped in prayer. (Bieber and his mother are devout Christians.) The Wanted members looked a little stunned.

Braun mentioned that Bieber was interested in English soccer.

"Have you got a team?"

"Not really," Bieber said. "I like Chelsea."

Carson Daly, the host of "The Voice," walked by. Braun called out, "Hey, Carson!" Daly and Braun began to review a script detailing stage patter.

Bored, Bieber started a game, playfully jabbing everyone in the crotch with his fist. First, he jabbed at Braun, who, without looking up from the script, dropped his hands to block. Daly did the same. When Bieber jabbed at Siva Kaneswaran, a member of the Wanted, he connected. He called out, "Got you, bro." Kaneswaran balled his fist but seemed unsure how to respond. "I don't want to hurt his pretty face," he said.

Braun said, "Just get him in the pretty balls. It's fair game."

"No, it's not," Bieber said.

Braun took a firm tone. "Justin, it is—fair game," he said. "You hit him in the balls, fair game."

Bieber was peeved. "Where're we going?" he asked. "Where's my dressing room?"

Wherever there's talent, there's a talent manager. When Mozart was a child piano prodigy, his father, Leopold, travelled around with him, booking tours and stoking

his son's reputation in the Salzburg court. Danny Goldberg, who managed Nirvana before going on to run various record labels, told me that there are two ongoing stories about what a music manager is. One is the underappreciated visionary: "the manager who gives everything to the artist, sacrifices for them, and then, once the artist becomes successful, is cast aside" (Andrew Oldham and the Rolling Stones, for instance). The other is the manager as Svengali: a scheming puppeteer who exploits a star to satisfy his own greed or ambition (Lou Pearlman, the impresario behind the Backstreet Boys and 'NSync, whom Justin Timberlake later accused of "financial rape," and who went to prison for conspiracy and money laundering).

Braun is sometimes compared to Colonel Tom Parker, the onetime carnival barker who masterminded the transformation of Elvis Presley, from country bumpkin to rock-and-roll icon. Parker, a Svengali type, embodied the concept of the manager as cap-

italist, constantly pushing for more lucrative deals for his client, turning him into a movie franchise and a merchandising industry worth millions. But he took a fifty-per-cent cut of Presley's earnings, and kept Presley psychologically isolated and dependent, denying access to anyone who could threaten his all-controlling power over the star he called "my boy."

Braun is similar to Parker in that he is a businessman and not a music coach, and he plays a major role in his young client's life. Like Parker, who signed his letters "Elvis and the Colonel," Braun likes to cultivate his own celebrity. He constantly updates his Twitter account, which has 1.8 million followers. And he can frequently be seen on TV, acting as Bieber's mouthpiece. Prepubescent Bieber fans often mob Braun in public, screaming "Scooter! Scooter!" When he turned thirty, he threw a star-studded birthday bash for himself; at the party, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, Bieber roasted Braun by doing an impression of him pitching a "Never Say Never"



"I got tired of 'Moby-Dick' taunting me from my bookshelf, so I put it on my Kindle and haven't thought of it since."

sequel, insisting, "My name has to be on the poster!"

Braun cops to the Colonel Parker comparison, but he says that the similarities go only so far. His public profile, he says, is part of an over-all ethos of transparency. "What you see is what you get with me," he said. "It's not a manipulation thing." Braun emphasizes that he takes a standard management fee, "between fifteen and twenty per cent," and, unlike some managers, he doesn't "double-dip"—that is, collect both royalties and a management fee from an artist who is signed to his label. "If you've got to gouge someone, then that's very short-term thinking," he said.

Colonel Parker treated Elvis as his private property. Braun, who has "Family" tattooed on his wrist, treats Bieber more like a ward. His name for Bieber, around the office, is "the kid." Braun is very close to Bieber's mother, Pattie Mallette, who gave birth to Justin when she was seventeen—"We're like brother and sister," she told me of Braun—and Braun often assumes a quasi-parental role with Justin. "Justin's and my relationship is not a manager-artist relationship," Braun said. "When he was thirteen, I said, 'If you stop singing, if you never dance again, if you never play again, I'm going to be in your life.'" Before every concert, Bieber prays to Jesus and recites the Shema, a Jewish prayer, with Braun and the rest of his team. Braun's Twitter feed is filled with cheerleading ("He killed it!!! #Proud"), but he takes a tough-love approach when he needs to. "I'll curse his ass out if I think it's necessary," he said.

Before one performance, I was whisked into Bieber's dressing room, where the teen star was leaning back on a couch, strumming a guitar. Braun had prepped Bieber before my arrival and had asked him to think of three qualities that his manager possessed. Bieber strummed his guitar and began to sing his response, plinking a string with every phrase. "Three things that describe Scooter," he said. (Plink.) "He is persistent." (Plink.) "Intelligent." (Plink.) "And good-aggressive." He stopped playing, and said, in a more earnest voice, "Like, when he wants something, he's aggressive to get it

done. He's not, like, going to beat around the bush." I asked what role Braun played in his life, and he said, "He's like a close uncle."

Soon, Bieber's attention drifted. He held down the strings on the neck of the guitar and began strumming it fast, making an irritating, buzzing noise.

Braun ignored him. "He's just too much like me," he said. "It's really annoying. He has the same temper I had at that age, but he doesn't have the years of wisdom, so he makes my temper come back out." He turned to Bieber. "O.K., now my favorite. What's my biggest fault?"

Bieber looked at me with a pleading expression, and said, in a way that seemed sincere, "He's too hard to impress." He went on, his voice cracking, "He's too hard on me. In life. Like, he wants me to be . . ."

High standards?
"Yeah."

The template from which Braun takes his ideas about work, character, and management is basketball. He grew up in Greenwich, Connecticut, the grandson of Holocaust survivors. Braun's father, Ervin, a dentist, met his mother, Susan, an orthodontist, at the University of Pennsylvania. Ervin worried that raising his children—Scott (Scooter), Adam, and Liza—in affluent Greenwich would make them soft. Scott and Adam played the sports that Ervin had played at Bronx Science—basketball, football, and swimming. Lacrosse and hockey were out, because, Scooter says, Ervin thought of them as "rich-people sports."

Basketball took primacy, and Ervin Braun founded a local A.A.U. team, the Connecticut Flame. "The game made me professional," Scooter told me. It delivered lessons in fearlessness: "That I shouldn't be afraid of a full-court press." In the selflessness required of a coach: "It's my fault when we lose; it's their victory when we win." It also dissolved racial and class barriers. For years, the Brauns were among the few white players on their team. "By the time I was eighteen, those were my brothers," Scooter said.

The summer before Scott left for college, Ervin needed some extra players for an All-Star tournament. He found

Sam Manhanga, fifteen, and Cornelio Gouibunda, fourteen, former members of the Mozambique national team, who were well over six feet tall. The two had been lured to the U.S. by a recruiter who promised to get them American educations, but the program turned out to be a scam. After hearing their tale, Ervin invited the boys to stay with his family in Greenwich.

The Brauns ended up serving as legal guardians for Sam and Cornelio, who became stars of the Greenwich High basketball team. The team went to the league finals, but the sudden presence of two Mozambican ringers did not go over well. Opposing teams would sometimes throw things on the court, or chant "U-S-A" and "Go back to Africa." The experience "forced me to grow up really fast," Adam Braun, who drove Sam and Cornelio to school each day, said. He eventually founded a charity, Pencils of Promise, which builds schools in developing nations. Sam and Cornelio attended prestigious colleges on basketball scholarships, and are now married and living in the U.S., the former working as a commodities analyst, and the latter at the State Department.

Scooter Braun likes to point out that he has "two black brothers." By the time Sam and Cornelio moved in, though, he was in his freshman year at Emory University, in Atlanta, where he played on a Division 3 basketball team.

At Emory, Braun didn't like telling people that he was from Greenwich. "So I told everyone I was from Queens," he said. To earn spending money, he got involved in a lucrative fake-I.D. business, and then started organizing parties at night clubs. "I got eight hundred kids at my first party," Braun said. Within weeks, he was the biggest party promoter on campus. Within months, he had quit basketball.

As he began drawing larger crowds, he realized that he could extract more money from club owners if he moved his parties around, so that the parties became associated with his name, not with any one club. "My leverage was being able to move the parties from club to club each week," he said. His events catered mostly to white students, but, in Atlanta's divided club scene, they also had an unusual racial mix. Local music

celebrities—Chingy, Cee-Lo—started showing up. Braun never drank. “I don’t like losing control,” he said. “I was never the guy at the table with the bottles. Or, if I was at the table with the bottles, I was doing it strategically. I developed relationships.” Chaka Zulu, the manager of the rapper Ludacris, said that Braun held his own as a white kid among black musicians. “I don’t think he posed,” Zulu said. “It wasn’t like he was trying to be black. He was just himself.”

In the early two-thousands, Atlanta’s hip-hop scene was churning out a wave of superstars—Outkast, Lil Jon, Ludacris. Braun was ubiquitous. The singer Ciara referred to him as her “big brother.” Lil Jon called him “the white Puff Daddy.” Braun became an all-purpose celebrity fixer, arranging parties for NSync, Britney Spears and Kevin Federline, Ludacris, and Shaquille O’Neal. One day, the producer and rapper Jermaine Dupri came to a party with his then girlfriend, Janet Jackson. As Braun recalls, “He’s like, ‘You’re never going to get to living in mansions by throwing parties.’” After Dupri asked him to become the head of marketing at his label, So So Def, Braun dropped out of college.

A few years later, the glow was wearing off. Braun had found a couple of rap groups to manage, the Bama Boyz and O.D., but neither had panned out. Then Braun was fired from So So Def, after a dispute over the direction of the label. He agonized over his next move. “I was a college dropout,” he said, “and I was scared of failing.”

He knew that, whatever he did next, he wanted equity. “I wanted a stake in whatever business I was working on,” he said. He did some freelance consulting. Pretending to be a writer for a college

newspaper, he called up Pontiac and said that he was doing a story on the company’s marketing strategy. The next day, armed with the names of some Pontiac executives, he cold-called them and lined up a multimillion-dollar endorsement deal for Ludacris. Then he set up a management company, signing the white rapper Asher Roth, whom he’d found on MySpace: “I flew Asher and his boys down to Atlanta, got them a place, and

singing a Ne-Yo song at a talent show in Stratford, Ontario. At the time, the Jonas Brothers, a teen group who appeared on the Disney Channel, were huge, and Braun was looking for an act in a similar vein. He remembers telling Chaka Zulu, “I’ve got to find a kid who can do what Michael”—Jackson—“did. I said, ‘There’s a place in the market for a kid who can sing with an angelic, soulful voice.’”

When Braun saw the Bieber clip, he told me, “I was like, ‘This is the kid I’ve been looking for.’” Braun became obsessed with signing Bieber, and called all over—to the theatre where the talent show had been held, to the Stratford school board—until, finally, he tracked down Bieber’s mother, Pattie Mallette. They talked on the phone for two hours, and, Mallette said, “we really connected.” She agreed to bring Bieber to Atlanta for a no-strings-attached trial period. Eventually, Braun said, “I flew him and his mom down, got them a town house, bought all the furniture for their place, and started paying their bills.”

Instead of hawking his new talent to record companies, Braun set about building a bigger following for Bieber on YouTube, where his videos had already attracted tens of thousands of views. In Atlanta, he and Mallette made and posted low-fi videos of Bieber belting out R. & B. covers.

Braun made sure to show Bieber playing instruments—drums, a guitar that looked too big for him—to emphasize that he had musical chops. Bieber was urged to get rid of the “cheap church suit” he’d brought from Canada, and told to be just a kid in a baggy T-shirt.

Braun calls this kind of grassroots approach “authentic marketing”—a phrase, like “amicable divorce,” or



A nod from Bieber often propels the careers of Braun's other clients.

started paying their bills.” He had money in the bank but no income. “I figured I had about fourteen months where I could live my life style until I went broke.”

Braun’s first encounter with Bieber, via YouTube, has become a pop legend. While doing consulting work for the singer Akon, Braun stumbled across a clip of a twelve-year-old Bieber

“peacekeeper missile,” that sounds like an oxymoron. Explaining the idea, he cited “Mark Zuckerberg’s philosophy that the whole world should be open and everything should be shared,” and said that today’s young people think that “there should be nothing hidden, you can’t lie to us. Authentic marketing is respecting the consumer: make a viable product, and just concentrate on getting eyeballs on it and telling its story.”

When Bieber’s videos had attracted around fifty-four million eyeballs, Braun arranged meetings with fifteen music executives in New York and L.A. “I’m not someone who likes to go in and say, ‘Hey, we *could* do this,’” he said. “I’d rather create leverage by providing a model of something that is already working.” None of the executives bit. They said that Bieber, being a teen act, needed a platform—a show on the Disney Channel, say, or a slot on “American Idol.”

After the first round of rejections, Braun realized that a YouTube following wasn’t enough. He pitched Bieber to two R. & B. stars, Usher and Justin Timberlake, who had his own imprint, at Interscope. When both expressed interest, he pitted the stars against each other, turning the ensuing bidding war into good press. Usher recalls, “Instantly I knew this kid had something different.” Island Def Jam, led by Usher’s mentor, the music executive L. A. Reid, prevailed, signing Bieber to a “360 deal,” in which the label takes a cut of all revenues, including ticket sales and merchandising. There was also a fifty-fifty profit split between the label and a new production company that Braun and Usher had formed. Braun says that Island Def Jam, in addition to covering recording costs, agreed to pay for a private tutor for Bieber, and for housing and moving expenses.

Once Bieber had a label and Usher as a spokesperson, traditional marketing mechanisms fell into place. Bieber appeared on MTV. Ludacris and Usher performed in his videos. Ellen DeGeneres devoted an hour of her talk show to Bieber and Usher; there was pandemonium in the audience. Two years later, Bieber was performing at the White House, where he greeted

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more lofty than Lament or Whine.
Complaint for Absolute Divorce:

so well phrased, who could feel remorse?
That “Absolute” was rather fine.
A little something to endorse

the universe as-is: for worse,
for better. Nothing by design.
Complaint for Absolute Divorce,

let me salute you, sole recourse!
I put my birth name on the line
(a little something) and endorse
the final word, then, in “Divorce.”

—Mary Jo Salter

the President, in a receiving line, by saying, “What up, my dude?”

Barry Weiss, the chairman of Island Def Jam, said, “Between YouTube and Usher, Scooter created a platform that basically hadn’t existed.” The involvement of African-American stars also helped to burnish the credibility of Bieber, a white R. & B. singer. Usher told me, “We gave him swag. We gave him a cool button that the other kids just didn’t have.”

Braun recently bought a house in the Hollywood Hills. It is a large, modern bachelor pad with double-height ceilings and a wall of windows overlooking the city. To get to the front door, you walk on slate stepping stones through a koi pond. In the foyer are shelves displaying meaningful tokens: a signed copy of the basketball coach John Wooden’s “Pyramid to Success”; a sketch of Braun’s sports car, a hundred-thousand-dollar electric vehicle called the Fisker Karma (“I got one for me and one for Justin,” he said. “It makes

you help the environment, but you also don’t have to feel like a pussy”); a poster commemorating Bieber’s performance at the White House, signed by President Obama. Braun told me that he was buying the house next door, to tear it down: “I’m putting in a basketball court.”

The home is the center of operations for Braun’s blossoming mini-moguldom—you could say that he’s halfway up the Geffen scale. In addition to tending his music projects, Braun is part of a cadre of entertainment types—others include Ashton Kutcher, Bono, and Will.i.am—who make regular trips to Silicon Valley to schmooze, attend conferences, and invest. (Will.i.am, who is an adviser to Intel, told me, “It’s our generation that understands the freakin’ code to the matrix.”) Braun has put money into ten start-ups, including the car company Uber, the social-networking service Stamped, and the music-sharing program Spotify. He said, “I’ve got an investment in a gold mine that does very well.”

He has been buying art, too. He

has paintings of Mickey Mouse and Superman, by Warhol, and, one afternoon in L.A., he stopped by a gallery to look at some work by Takashi Murakami.

It was a few minutes before closing time. Braun strolled into the gallery wearing jeans, flip-flops, a red "Star Wars" T-shirt, and a green Army cap. He pondered a few small Murakami prints, then moved on to a larger painting, a glittery black-and-white silk screen of Marlon Brando, done in a Warhol style, by the British-born artist Russell Young. "How much is that?" Braun asked a gallery assistant.

The assistant, a thin woman in glasses whose spike heels echoed on the gallery floor, seemed impatient. "Twenty-seven thousand dollars," she said.

"I love that one," Braun said.

The gallery assistant raised her eyebrows. "Is that piece realistic for you?"

Braun had told me that he doesn't like to announce his job to people he's just met. Nevertheless, he was offended. "Uh, yeah," he said.

"So do you want to secure the piece now?"

"No," Braun said, and added, in a pushier voice, like the one he uses for business calls, "I want to see everything else you have by him."

The gallery assistant gave him a brittle smile and walked over to a computer. "What's your name?"

"Scooter."

"Scooter? Pleasure."

Just then, he noticed a sculpture by the door: a three-foot-tall Mickey Mouse toy. It was fifteen hundred dollars, but it wasn't for sale. "Can you get me another one?" Braun asked.

"I can check," the gallery assistant said. "But only if you confirm that you definitely want it."

Braun had grown steely. "Yes," he said. "I want it."

"And you'll take it now?"

"Yes," he said. A few minutes later, he walked out of the gallery with the Mickey Mouse under his arm.

When David Geffen was launching a group like the Eagles, he took them to the Troubadour, in L.A., or put them on tour with a bigger act. When Lou Pearlman and Johnny Wright were launching the Backstreet

Boys, they had them perform in middle schools and produced an expensive video for MTV. Braun does such things, but he combines them with the power of Bieber's social-media following. Barry Lowenthal, the president of Media Kitchen, an ad agency that is promoting Bieber's new fragrance, *Girlfriend*, told the *Times* that the reach of a Bieber dispatch across networks like Facebook and Twitter would cost ten million dollars to replicate through conventional advertising methods.

I saw Braun take numerous meetings with people who wanted to get a piece of Bieber and Braun's marketing power, including one with TV executives proposing an online tween channel and one with a Web company, called China Branding Group, that would serve as an endorsement agent for Bieber in China. Braun was optimistic about all of them.

Braun uses Bieber's fame as a P.R. platform for his other clients as well. He makes it worth Bieber's while: when Braun signed Carly Rae Jepsen, he gave Bieber a fifty-percent cut. Braun told him, "We'll be partners. But you're going to do your part, being a loudspeaker: put her on your tour, sing a song with her." And Bieber obeyed. The homemade video of him horsing around to Jepsen's "Call Me

Maybe" got forty-eight million views and made the song catch fire. Last month, he tweeted to introduce the world to Braun's newest client, Madison Beer, a thirteen-year-old singer who resembles a baby Megan Fox. Within minutes, her name was trending worldwide.

Cross-promotion is all part of the interdependent business culture that Braun has created. For instance, he cuts Bieber in on many of his tech investments. Sometimes he has Bieber put money into a start-up company directly; sometimes he offers to have him promote a product in return for equity. "If it makes sense for Justin's brand, I show it to him," Braun said. (He has a similar relationship with his other artists, and with Ellen DeGeneres, with whom he has shared tech-investing tips: "She put me onto something, and I put her onto something.")

Braun has one requirement for any investment: "Every deal has to have a charitable component." A portion of Bieber's perfume sales, and the proceeds from last year's Christmas album, went to twenty charities, including the Make a Wish Foundation and Pencils of Promise, his brother Adam's charity. Braun's reasons: "One, karma—it's everything I stand for. Two, it is the right thing to do. And,



"Now, should we add something at the end about how wise we are and therefore nothing in here should ever be changed?"

three, it is proven that a for-profit business makes more money in the long run if it has a not-for-profit component.”

Bieber’s fans, who call themselves Beliebers, are often drafted into these charity drives. When the Christmas album came out, the Beliebers banded together to hold “buyouts”: after coördinating on Twitter, they swarmed big-box stores and bought all the Bieber CDs in stock, to boost sales. The fans now stage buyouts for any new release, though the profits go primarily to Bieber and Braun.

Occasionally, Braun’s deal-making has created awkwardness for Bieber’s squeaky-clean image. Last year, Bieber made a series of public-service announcements discouraging texting while driving, in which he urged fans to buy an app called PhoneGuard, which prevents a user from typing on a phone in a moving car. Bieber had been given warrants to buy sixteen per cent of the stock of PhoneGuard’s parent company, a struggling Boca Raton firm called Options Media. (The company’s president, Anthony Sasso, resigned after it emerged that he was a convicted felon; Braun’s father, Ervin, later served on the board.) Options Media’s stock, which had been trading for around a penny before Bieber got involved, spiked briefly

following his endorsement. It has since fallen to as low as a tenth of a cent a share.

The biggest hurdle for teen idols is making the transition into adult stardom. Braun wants to see Bieber become a lifelong icon, in the vein of Michael Jackson (without the tragic ending). But Bieber’s continued success depends on his ability to come up with radio hits, which means appealing to a broader audience. The release of “Believe,” Bieber’s new album, represents a gentle attempt to point him toward older audiences: the songs are not as sickly-sweet as his early hit single “Baby.” In his new videos, Bieber is cast as a brooding sex symbol, though the role doesn’t always fit: a video for the recent single “Boyfriend” shows a bunch of sultry older women pawing at a skinny, baby-faced boy. (The song was ultimately a success on the radio; the album’s second single, “As Long As You Love Me,” is working its way up the charts.)

Another wild card is Bieber himself. It’s possible to foresee a time when he won’t want to coöperate with the plans that his manager lays out for him; at the moment, a delicate give-and-take prevails. On a Wednesday in June, Bieber was scheduled to perform on the “Tonight Show” with Jay Leno. Braun

arrived early, wearing a “Star Trek” T-shirt and his Army cap, and sat watching backup dancers run through “Boyfriend.” Bieber, who now lives with a friend, in a ninety-four-hundred-square-foot house, was supposed to get himself to the rehearsal, but he was already an hour late. “Where is my client?” Braun said, sounding testy. He called Bieber’s cell phone and yelled, “Where are you?” When he hung up, he said, cheerfully, “I said, ‘O.K., you asked to be trusted and you blew it.’ Now he goes on what I call probation. He has to have somebody come to his house every workday.”

The star eventually arrived, and Braun watched the “Boyfriend” taping from the wings. Afterward, he passed Bieber in the hall. “You went the wrong way,” Braun said.

“What?”

“When you first did this thing”—Braun executed a dance step—“on the breakdown? You went the opposite of everyone else for the first step.”

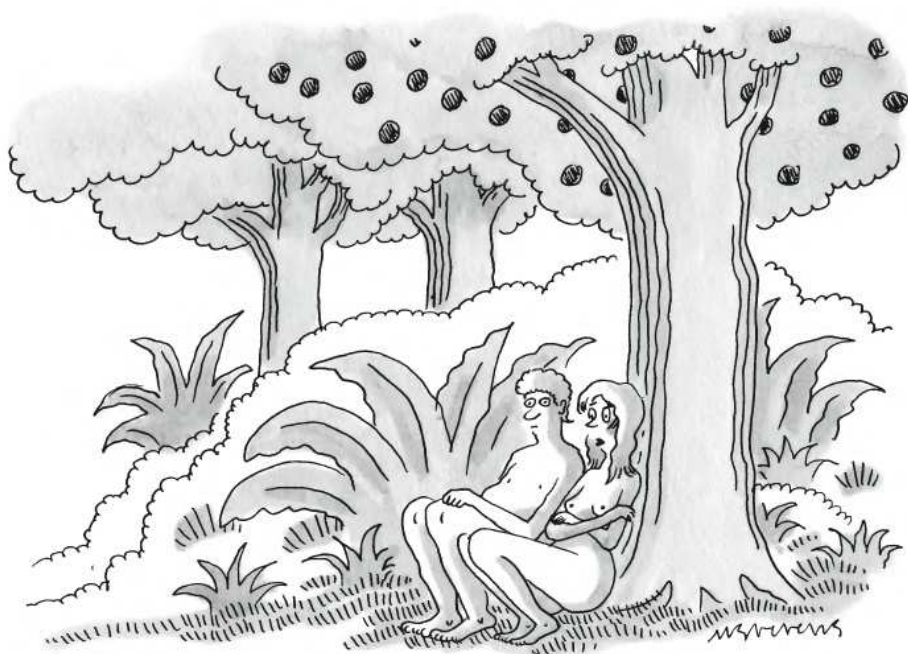
Bieber seemed to find the criticism nitpicky. He asked softly, “Who cares, though?”

Braun had been consulting with the film editors. “I’m just gonna take it out,” he said. “It was a great performance. I’m just going to take that one thing out.”

“That’s fine,” Bieber said, sounding aloof.

Braun smiled. “He wants me to take it out,” he told me. “He just doesn’t want to have to think about it.” He strode away to meet with the editors.

These days, it’s rare to walk into the grocery store and hear songs by the Jonas Brothers and Miley Cyrus, who were superstars only a few years ago. In the fast-moving world of teen pop, the best-laid plans for the future have a way of falling apart. A music executive who has worked with several successful teen-age acts told me, “Teen things happen so fast. If you’re really good at it, you figure out how to harness every possible dollar as long as it lasts.” Braun understands this, and his efforts on behalf of his clients can sometimes seem like a race against the clock. One day, I heard him scream at a label executive on the phone, accusing the company of not hustling enough on behalf of one of his clients,



“Well, it was original.”

who, he pointed out, was not getting any younger: "The one thing he has going for him is he's younger than everyone else!"

In addition to Bieber and his other stars, Braun is trying to keep the pipeline full, and he has five or six new acts in development. When it comes to identifying new talent, he has few hard-and-fast rules. "My trick is trusting my gut," he told me, "and when people say I'm crazy it usually means I'm on track."

One afternoon, I sat in on a meeting Braun had in his living room with a potential client, a nineteen-year-old singer named Tori Kelly, and her parents. At eleven, Kelly had appeared on the TV series "America's Most Talented Kid," and she'd had a deal with the Geffen label. But her career had stalled.

Braun leaned back on the couch, his hands crossed behind his head. "So what do you guys want to do?" he asked in an antsy tone. "I think you're a real artist with a real voice. I want to understand what you want so I can help you out."

Kelly's mom, wearing pink Capri pants, explained that Kelly had just self-released an album, which was charting on iTunes. Kelly named a few pop acts that she'd like to open for: Beyoncé, Alicia Keys, Justin Timberlake. "Justin"—meaning Bieber—"would be great." She said that she'd like to perform with a band and with choreography, "if it fits."

Braun interrupted: "You've been doing this for a while now. What do you think the holdup has been?"

Kelly said, in a small voice, "I think the people we have worked with, they don't see the full picture. They don't know what to do with me."

After a minute, Kelly picked up one of Braun's guitars and performed a song—the chorus went, "Lavish me with your love." It sounded a bit like acoustic Lauryn Hill. Braun listened attentively. It was nothing like the R. & B. and dance-oriented pop on his roster.

When Kelly finished, Braun asked, "Are you a fan of Jewel?"

She said, politely, "I'm not super-familiar..."

Braun jumped in. "Let me give you the background," he said. "Jewel tried to get signed, it didn't work out.



"My client pleads high jinks, Your Honor."

She drove to California, and she lived in her car. She was homeless, she played coffee shops. She wrote really amazing songs. Then she sold millions of records." He explained that in the late nineties, during the height of Jewel's fame, the charts were dominated by elaborate pop acts like the Backstreet Boys and 'NSync. "But the biggest female star on the planet was someone who came in with a guitar, real quiet, and people would sit there and just be blown away by these singer-songwriter songs." He went on, "That is the lane for you. There is a time for that again."

Kelly was wary. Her father said,

"So, like, a Jewel-meets-Fiona Apple-meets-Beyoncé?"

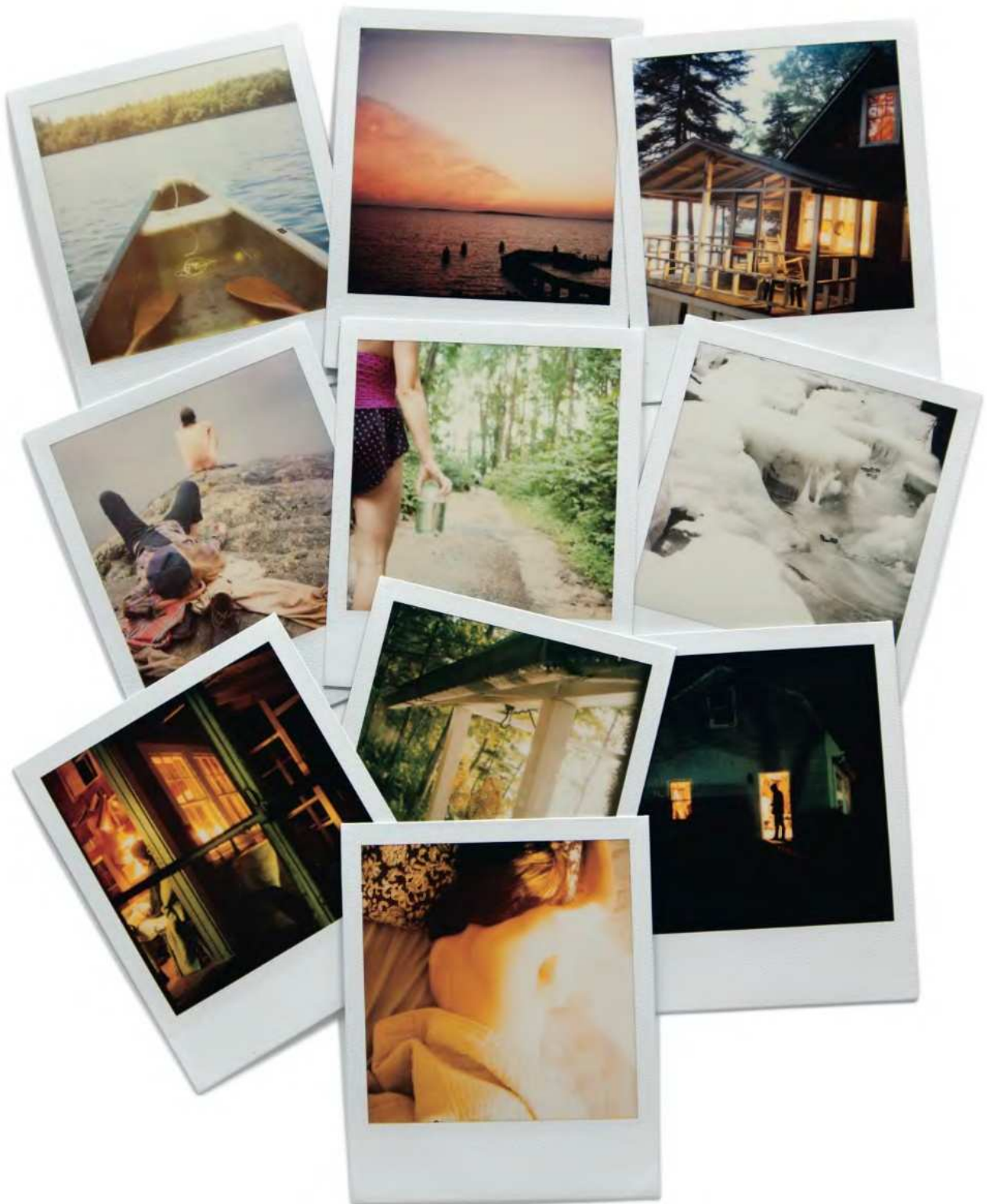
Braun said, "Jewel-meets-Tori Kelly. The Beyoncé thing comes later." He said that the strategy was a marketing approach, not a musical one. "People compartmentalize things. Kobe needs to be like Jordan. Justin Bieber needs to be like Justin Timberlake. You want to dictate to the public who you want them to compare you to. If I was to market you, I'd want them to call you the next Jewel. Because if another Jewel came out, in today's music market, people would go crazy. That's what they're missing."

Kelly asked, meekly, "How about just the next Tori Kelly?" ♦

FICTION

BIRNAM WOOD

BY T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE



It rained all that September, a grim, cold, bleached-out rain that found the holes in the roof and painted the corners with a black creeping mold that felt greasy to the touch. Heat would have dried it up, or at least curtailed it, but there was no heat—or insulation, either—because this was a summer rental, the price fixed for the season, Memorial Day to Labor Day, and the season was over. Long over. Back in May, when Nora was at school out West and I sent her a steady stream of wheedling letters begging her to come back to me, I'd described the place as a cottage. But it wasn't a cottage. It was a shack, a converted chicken coop from a time long gone, and the landlord collected his rent in summer, then drained the pipes and shut the place down over the winter, so that everything in it froze to the point where the mold died back and the mice, disillusioned, moved on to warmer precincts.

In the summer, we'd been outside most of the time, reading and lazing in the hammock till it got dark, after which we'd either listened to records or gone out to a club or somebody's house. We had a lot of friends—my friends, that is, people I'd grown up with—and we could just show up anytime, day or night, and get a party going. On weekends, I'd unfold the geological-survey maps of Fahnstock or Harriman Park and we'd pick out a lake in the middle of nowhere and hike in to see what it looked like in the shimmering world of color and movement. Almost always we'd have it to ourselves, and we'd swim, sunbathe, pass a joint and a bota bag of sweet red wine, and make love under the sun, while the trees swayed in the breeze and the only sound was the sound of the birds. Nora didn't have a tan line all summer. Neither did I.

But then it was September and it was raining and I had to go back to work. I was substitute-teaching at the time, a grinding, chaotic, thankless job, but I didn't really have a choice—we needed money to stay alive, same as anybody else. Nora could have worked—she had her degree now and she could have substituted, could have done anything—but the idea didn't appeal to her, and so, on the three or four days a week that I was summoned to one school or another, she was at home, listening to the rain drool from the eaves and trickle into the pots we'd set out under the worst of the leaks. I sprang

for a cheap TV to keep her company, and then an electric heater the size of a six-pack of beer that nonetheless managed to make the meter spin like a 45. But we weren't paying utilities—the landlord was. I'd given him a lump sum at the end of May, and now we were getting our own back. One morning, when I was at work, he used his key to let himself in and found Nora in bed, the blankets pulled up to her neck and the TV rattling away, and he backed out the door, embarrassed, without saying a word. The next day, we got the eviction notice. The day after that, he cut off the electricity.

I was cooking by candlelight over the gas stove a few nights later (Chef Boyardee cheese ravioli, out of the can, with a side of iceberg lettuce cut in wedges), when Nora edged up beside me. We'd been drinking Burgundy out of the gallon jug we kept under the sink as a way of distracting ourselves from the obvious. The house crepitated around us. It wasn't raining, at least not right then, but there was a whole lot of *dripping* going on, dripping that had emerged as the defining soundtrack of our lives in the absence of music.

Her hair shone greasily in the candlelight. She'd twisted it into pigtails for convenience, because the water heater was defunct now, definitely defunct, and there was no way to take a shower unless we went over to a friend's house—and that involved the hassle of actually getting in the car and going someplace, when it was so much easier just to pile up the blankets on the bed, get stoned, and watch the shadows creep over the beams that did such an admirable job of holding up the slanted portion of the roof. Nora gazed into the pot on the stove. "I can't live like this," she said.

"No," I said, and I was in full agreement here. "Neither can I."

The first place we looked at was also a seasonal rental, though for a different season. It was another crumbling outbuilding, in the same summer colony, but it had been tricked up with heat and insulation because the landlady—eighty, ninety, maybe, with eyes like crushed glass and hair raked back so tightly you could make out the purple-splotched ruin of her scalp beneath—saw the advantage of renting through the winter and spring to whoever was left behind when the

summer people went back to the city. I didn't begrudge her that. I didn't begrudge her anything. I didn't even know her. Nora had circled an ad in *The Pennysaver*, dialled the number, and now here she was, the old lady, waiting for us on the porch, out of the rain, and the minute we pulled into the driveway she began waving impatiently for us to jump out of the car, hurry up the steps, and get the business over with.

There were two problems with the house, the first apparent to all three of us, the second only to Nora and me. That problem, hovering over us before we even walked in the door, was that we were looking for a deal, because we didn't have the kind of money to put down for a deposit or first and last months' rent, just enough for now, for the current month—enough, we hoped, to get us out of the converted chicken coop and into someplace with heat and electricity till we could think what to do next. The old lady—Mrs. Fried—didn't look as if she would let things slide. Just the opposite. She gazed up at us out of her fractured eyes with the expectation of one thing only: money.

But then there was the first problem, which obviated the need to dwell on the second. The place was too small, smaller even than the shack we were living in, and we saw that the minute we stepped through the door. There were two rooms, bedroom and living room/kitchen, and to the right of the door, in a little recess, a bathroom the size of the sweatbox in "The Bridge on the River Kwai." We never got that far. We just stood there, the three of us, and gazed into the bedroom, which was off the narrow hall. The bedroom was too cramped for anything but the single bed that was squeezed into it. A second single, made up with an Army blanket and sheets gone gray with use, was pushed up against the wall in the hallway so that you had no more than a foot's leeway to get around it and into the front room. The old lady read our faces, read our minds—or thought she did—and gestured first at the bed in the hallway and then at the one in the bedroom. "Ven you vant," she said, shrugging, her delicate wheeze of a voice clinging to the hard consonants of her youth, "you come."

If Nora found it funny, laughing so hard that she couldn't seem to catch her breath as we ducked back into the car, I

didn't. I was the one put in the awkward position here, I was the provider, and what was she? It was the sort of question you didn't ask, because it stirred resentment, and resentment was what had brought us down the first time around. I put the car in gear and drove along the dark tree-choked tunnel of the street, turned right, then right again, and swung into the muddy drive where the shack stood awaiting us. Inside, it smelled like a tomb. I could see my breath, even after I'd flicked on all four burners of the stove. Not sixty seconds went by before Nora said something that set me off, and I came right back at her—"We wouldn't be in this fucking mess if you'd get up off your ass and find a job"—and when we went to bed, early, to save on candles, it was for the warmth and nothing else.

There was no call the next morning, and I had mixed feelings about that. I dreaded the calls, but they meant money—and money was the beginning and end of everything there was, at least right then. When the phone did finally ring, it was half past twelve, and it went off like a flash bomb in the dream I was having, a dream that made me so much happier than the life I jolted awake to that I wanted it to go on forever. My eyes opened on the slanted ceiling, and my first thought was that even the chickens must have hated staring up at it, the sameness of it, day after day, until you lost your head and your feathers and somebody dropped you into a frying pan. Nora was propped up beside me, reading. Rain rapped insistently at the roof. "Well," she said. "Aren't you going to answer it?"

The cold pricked me everywhere, like acupuncture, and I clutched my jeans to my groin, fumbled with a sweatshirt, and hobbled across the room to snatch up the phone. It was my best friend, Artie, whom I'd known since elementary school. He didn't bother with a greeting. "You find a place yet?"

"Uh-uh, no."

"Well, I might've found something for you—"

I glanced at Nora. She'd put down her book and she was watching me now, her eyes squinted to slits in the fierceness of her concentration. "Who is it?" she mouthed, but I ignored her.

"I'm listening," I said.

"I didn't know if you'd be interested, because it's not a real rental—it's more like

housesitting—and it's only temporary, like from next week through the end of April. It's a friend of my father's. An old guy and his wife. They go to Florida every winter and they want somebody in the house—or the apartment, there's an apartment in the basement, above ground, with windows and all—just so they don't get anybody breaking in. I was there once when I was a kid. It's nice. On a private lake. A place called Birnam Wood. You ever hear of it?"

"No," I said.

"Would you be interested at all?"

"You got a phone number?"

I told Nora not to get too excited, because chances were it wouldn't work out. Either we wouldn't want the place—there had to be something wrong with it, right?—or they, the old couple, wouldn't want us, once they got a look at us. Still, I phoned right away and the old man answered on the first ring. I introduced myself, talking fast, too fast maybe, because it wasn't till I dropped the name of Artie's father that the voice on the other end came to life. "Yes, we are expecting your call," the old man said, and he had some sort of accent, too, hesitating over the "w" in "we," as if afraid it would congeal on him, and in a sudden jolt of paranoia I wondered if he and Mrs. Fried were somehow in league—or, worse, if he *was* Mrs. Fried, throwing her voice to catch me unawares. But no, the place was miles away, buried in the woods in the hind end of Croton, well beyond the old lady's reach. He gave the address, then directions, but they were so elaborate I stopped listening midway through, thinking instead of what Artie had said: the place was on a lake. A private lake. I'd find it, no problem. How many private lakes could there be? I told the old man that we'd like to come have a look—at his earliest convenience, that is.

"When"—the hesitation again—"would you like to come?"

"I don't know—how about now? Now O.K.?"

There was a long pause, during which Nora flapped both hands at me as if to say, "Don't sound too eager," and then the old man, in his slow, deliberate way, said, "Yes, that will suit us."

We were late getting there, very late, actually, one snaking blacktop road looking much like the next, the rain hammer-

ing down, and Nora digging into me along the lines of "You're a real idiot, you know that?" and "Why in God's name didn't you write down the directions?" For a while, it looked like a lost cause, trees crowding the road, nobody and nothing around except for the odd mailbox and the watery flash of a picture window glimpsed through the vegetation, but finally, after backing in and out of driveways and retracing our path half a dozen times, we came to a long low stone wall with a gated entrance flanked by two stone pillars. The gate—wrought iron coated in black enamel so slick it glowed—stood open. A brass plaque affixed to the pillar on the right read "Birnam Wood." I didn't want to bicker, but I couldn't help pointing out that we'd passed by the place at least three times already and Nora should have kept her eyes open, because I was the one driving and she was the one doing all the bitching, but she just ignored me, because the gravel of the private lane was crunching under our tires now and there were lawns and tennis courts opening up around us. Then the first house rose up out of the trees on our left, a huge towering thing of stone and glass with a glistening black slate roof and too many gables to count, even as the lake began to emerge from the mist on the other side of the road.

"Wow, you think that's it?" Nora's voice was pitched so low she might have been talking to herself. "Artie did say it was a mansion, right?" I could feel her eyes on me. "Well, didn't he?"

I didn't answer. A moment ago, I'd been worked up, hating her, hating the broken-down car with its bald tires and rusted-out panels that was the only thing we could afford, hating the trees and the rain, hating nature and rich people and the private lakes you couldn't find unless you were rich yourself, unless you had a helicopter, or a whole fleet of them, and now suddenly a different mix of emotions was surging through me—surprise, yes, awe even, but a kind of desperation, too. Even as the next house came into view on the right—ivy-covered brick with three wings, half a dozen chimneys, and a whole fairway of lawn sweeping down to the lake and the two red rowboats pulled up on a perfect little crescent of beach—I knew that I had to live here or die, and that I'd do anything it took, right down to licking the old man's shoes, to make that happen.

"What's the number?" I said. "You see a number on that house?"

She didn't. She'd lost her glasses—she was always losing her glasses—and in our rush to get out the door she hadn't bothered with her contacts, either. No matter. The road took us over a stone bridge and swept us directly into the driveway of the house we were looking for—No. 14. We got out of the car, the rain slackening now, and just stared up at the place, a big rearing brown-timbered Tudor that sat right on the lake itself. Around the corner I could make out a gazebo and a little dock with a rowboat tethered to it, this one painted green. And swans. Swans on the lake.

Everything seemed to brighten suddenly, as if the sun were about to break through. "All right," I said. "Here goes." And I took Nora by the hand and led her up the flagstone steps to the front door.

I introduced Nora as my wife, though that was a lie. Old people, that's what they wanted to hear. If you were married, you were mature, reliable, exactly like them, because in their day men and women didn't just live together—they made a commitment, they had children and went on cruises and built big houses on lakes and filled them with all the precious trinkets and manufactured artifacts they collected along the way. Mr. and Mrs. Kuenzli—Anton and Eva—were just like that. They met us at the door, two dwarfish old people who were almost identical, except that she was wearing a dress and had dyed her hair and he wasn't and hadn't. They gave us tea in a big room overlooking the lake and then escorted us around the house to show off their various collections—Mexican pottery, jade figurines, seascapes painted by a one-armed man they'd encountered in Manila. Every object had a story connected to it. They took turns filling in the details, no hurry at all. I knew what they were doing: checking us out, trying to get a read on us. I shrugged it off. If they were alarmed at the sight of us (this was in a time when people our age wore beads and serapes and cowboy boots and grew their hair long for the express purpose of sticking it to the bourgeoisie), they didn't show it. Still, it was a good hour before we went downstairs to the basement, which was where we were going to live, after all. That is, if things worked out.

They did. I made sure they did. The minute we walked down the stairs I was hooked—and I could see that Nora was, too. Here was a huge room—low-ceilinged, but the size of a basketball court—with a kitchen off to the left and next to it a bedroom with curtains, framed pictures on the walls, and twin beds separated by matching night tables fitted out with ashtrays and reading lamps, just like the room that every TV couple slept in, chastely and separately, so as not to confront the American family with the disturbing notion that people actually engaged in sexual relations. Nora gave me a furtive glance. "Ven you vant, you come," she said under her breath, and we both broke up.

Then it was back out into the main room and the real kicker, the deal-sealer, the sine qua non—a regulation-size slate-topped pool table. A pool table! All this—leather armchairs, Persian carpets, gleaming linoleum, heat, twin beds, the lake, the rowboat, swans—and a pool table, too? It was too much. Whatever the old man was asking for rent, because this wasn't strictly housesitting and we were willing to make a token monthly payment, I was ready to double. Triple. Anything he wanted. I squeezed Nora's hand. She beamed up at me as the old couple looked on, smiling, moved now by the sight of us there in the depths of

that house that had no doubt harbored children at one time, grandchildren even.

I felt a vast calm settle over me. "We'll take it," I said.

At the end of the first week, after checking on us six or seven times a day (or spying on us, as Nora insisted), Mrs. Kuenzli fretting over how we were getting along—*Fine, thanks*—and even creaking down the stairs one night with a pot of homemade chicken-spaetzle soup, the old couple climbed into a limousine and went off to the airport, leaving us in possession. The main house was sealed off, of course, but I didn't care about that. What I cared about was getting out of the shack. What I cared about was Nora. Making her happy. Making myself happy—and everybody else, too. Within days of the Kuenzlis' departure, my friends began showing up unannounced for the purpose of shooting eight ball and cranking up the volume on the Bang & Olufsen sound system the Kuenzlis had at some point so fortuitously installed, then maybe getting wrecked and taking the rowboat out on the glittering surface of the lake while the trees flamed and the swans bobbed in our wake. Even the weather cooperated. If September had been a loss, one of the coldest and rainiest on record, October tiptoed in on a streak of pure sunshine and tempera-



"Forward and backward, not up and down!"

tures that climbed into the seventies.

I was shooting pool one Saturday afternoon with Artie and another friend, Richard, all three of us wired on black beauties and chain-drinking cheap beer, when Nora came in the door, looking flushed. She had news. While we'd been frittering our time away—that was how she put it, "frittering," but she was smiling now, hardly able to contain herself—she'd gone out on her own to interview for a job.

I loved her in that moment, loved the way the color came into her face because she was addressing all three of us now, not just me, and that made her self-conscious no matter the news, which was good, very good, I could see that in an instant. "Well," I said, "you got it?"

The smile stalled, came back again. She nodded. "It's not much," she said, already retreating. She looked from me to Artie and Richard. "Minimum wage—but it's six nights a week."

I'd set down my pool cue and was coming across the room to her, that big room with its buffed floors and the carpets thick enough for anything, when I noticed she was all dressed up, and not in business clothes but in the fringed boots and gauzy top she wore when we were going barhopping. "What is it," I said, "that hostessing thing?"

She nodded.

"At Brennan's?"

Her smile was gone now. Her eyes—she was wearing her false lashes and pale-blue eyeshadow—sank into mine. I was the one who'd told her about the job, which Richard had heard about from the bartender there. "All you have to do is smile," I'd told her. "All you have to do is say 'Party of four?' and let them follow you to the table. You can do that, can't you?" I hadn't meant to be demeaning. Or maybe I had. She was strong-willed, but I wanted to break her down, make her dependent, make her mine, but at the same time I wanted her to hold up her end, because we were a couple and that was what couples did. They worked. Both of them.

I took her by the hand, tried to peck a kiss to her cheek, but she pulled away.

"It means I'll be gone nights."

I shrugged. I could feel Artie and

Richard watching me. There was a record on the stereo—I remember this clearly—something drum-based, with a churning polyrhythmic beat that seemed to fester under my words. "At least it's something," I said.

Artie lined up a shot. The balls clacked. Nothing dropped. "Hey, it's great news," he said, straightening up. "Congrats."

Nora gave him a look. "It's only temporary," she said.



We settled into a routine. The phone rang in the dark and I got up, answered it, and found out what school I was going to because somebody who just couldn't stand another day of it had called in sick—either

that or hanged himself—and I was back home by three-thirty or four, at which point she'd be drinking coffee and making herself scrambled eggs and toast. Then I'd drive her to work and either sit there at the bar for a couple (depending on how I was feeling about our financial situation), or go back home and shoot pool by myself, pitting Player A against Player B and trying not to play favorites, until she got off, at ten, and I went to pick her up. Sometimes we'd linger at the bar, but most nights—weeknights, anyway—we'd go back home, because I needed the sleep. We climbed into our separate beds, snug enough, warm and dry and feeling pampered—or, if not pampered, at least secure—and when I switched off my lamp and turned to the wall the last image fading in my brain was of the steady bright nimbus of Nora's light and her face shining there above her book.

The weather held all that month, even as the leaves persisted and the lake rippled under the color of them. Whenever we could, we went out in the rowboat, and though we never acknowledged it, I suppose we were both thinking the same thing—that we'd better take advantage of it while we could, because each day of sun might be the last. I'd row and Nora would lie back against the seat in the stern, her eyes closed and her bare legs stretched out before her. What did I feel? Relaxed. As relaxed as I've ever felt in my life, before or since. There was something more to it, too. I felt powerful, the muscles of my arms flexing and releasing,

while Nora dozed at my feet and the rest of the world went as still as held breath.

It was a feeling that couldn't last. And it didn't. Less than a week into November, there was frost on the windshield when I got up for school, and the sun seemed to have vanished, replaced by a low cloud cover and winds out of the north. Finally, reluctantly, I pulled the rowboat ashore and turned it over for the winter. Two days later, there was a rim of ice around the lake and the temperature went down into the teens overnight. But, as I said, the house was warm and well-insulated, with a furnace that could have heated six houses, and when we went to bed at night we couldn't resist joking about the shack, what we'd be suffering if we were still there. "My feet," Nora would say, "they'd freeze to the floor like when you touch the tip of your tongue to the ice-cube tray." "Yeah," I'd say, "yeah, but you wouldn't even notice because by then we'd be dried up and frozen like those mummies they found in the Andes." And she'd laugh, we'd both laugh, and listen to the whisper of the furnace as it clicked on and drove warm air through the bedroom and into the big room beyond, where the pool table stood draped in darkness.

And then came the night when I dropped her off at Brennan's and had my first drink and then another and didn't feel like going home. It was as if some gauge inside me had been turned up high, all the way, top of the dial. I felt like that a lot back then—and maybe it was just an overload of testosterone, maybe that was all it was—but on this night I sat at the bar and kept on drinking. I knew the regulars, an older crowd who came in for dinner and gradually gave way to people like Nora and me, the music shifting from a soft whisper of jazz to the rock and roll we wanted to hear, as the late diners gathered up their coats and gloves and doggie bags and headed out into the night. I'd been talking a lot of nothing to a guy in a sports coat who must have been in his thirties, a Martini drinker, and when he got up and left, a guy my own age slid onto the stool beside me. He asked me what was happening at the same time that I asked him, then he ordered a drink—tequila-and-tonic, very West Coast, or *hip*, that is—and we started talking. His name was Steve. He had rust-red hair, kinked out to his shoulders, and he wore a thin headband of braided leather.

What did we talk about? The usual—bands, drugs, what concerts we'd been to—but then we started in on books, and I was pleased and surprised, because most of the people I ran into in that time and place didn't extend themselves much beyond the Sunday comics. We were debating some fine point of "Slaughterhouse-Five," testing each other's bona fides—he could quote passages from memory, a talent I've never had—when Nora leaned in between us to brush a kiss to my lips, then straightened up and shook out her hair with a quick neat flip of her head. "My heels are killing me," she said. "And this top—Jesus, I'm freezing." She stole a look around, gave Steve a vacant smile, picked up my drink, and downed it in a single gulp. Then she was gone, back to her post at the station by the door.

Steve gave a low whistle. "Wow," he said. "That your old lady?"

I just shrugged, nonchalant, elevated in that instant above everybody in the place. I wouldn't have admitted it, but something stirred in me whenever I looked up and saw the way the men watched her as she tapped across the floor in her heels, trailing husbands and wives and sometimes even kids behind her, but it wasn't something good or admirable.

"Man, I'd love to—" he began, and then caught himself. "You are one lucky dude."

Another shrug. My feelings were complicated. I'd been drinking. And what I said next was inexcusable, I know that, and I didn't mean it, not in any literal sense, not in the real world of twin beds and Persian carpets and all the rest, but what I was trying to convey here was that I wasn't tied down—*old lady*—wasn't a husband, not yet, anyway, and that all my potentialities were intact. "I don't know," I said. "She can be a real pain in the ass." I took a sip of my drink, let out a long, withering sigh. "Sometimes I think she's more trouble than she's worth, know what I mean?"

That was all I said, or some variant of it, and then there was another drink and the conversation went deeper, and I guess somehow Steve must have got the impression that we weren't really all that committed, that living together was an experiment gone sour, that we were both—she and I—on the brink of something else. There was an exchange of phone numbers and addresses (*Birnam Wood? Cool. I used to swim in the lake*

there when I was a kid), and then he was gone and the crowd at the bar began to thin. The minute he left I forgot him. Next thing I knew, Nora was there, dressed in her long coat and her knit hat and gloves, perched high on the platform of her heels.

"You've been drinking," she said.

"Yeah," I admitted.

She gave me a tired smile. "Have fun?"

"Yeah," I smiled back.

"Did you know it's snowing out?"

"Really?"

"Really." And then a beat. "You want me to drive?"

It was a long way home, twenty, twenty-five minutes in the best of conditions, but, with the snow and the worn tires and the fact that Nora didn't see too well at night, it must have taken us twice as long as that. We were the only ones on the road. The snow swept at the headlights and erased everything in front of us. I tried not to be critical, but every time we went around a curve the car sailed out of control and I suppose I got vocal about it, because at one point she pulled over, her lips drawn tight and her eyes furious in the sick yellow glare of the dashboard. "You want to drive?" she said. "Go ahead, be my guest."

When we got home (finally, miraculously), the phone was ringing. I could hear it from outside the door, making its demands. It took me a minute, pinning a glove under one arm and struggling to work the key in the lock as the snow sifted down and Nora stamped impatiently. "Hurry up, I have to pee," she said between clenched teeth. Then we were in, the phone ringing still—it must have been the sixth or seventh ring—and I flicked on the lights while Nora made a dash for the bathroom and I crossed the room to pick up the phone.

"Hello?" I gasped, out of breath and thinking it must be Artie, because who else would be calling at that hour?

"Hey, what's happening," the voice on the other end of the line said. "This Keith?"

"Yeah," I said. "Who's this?"

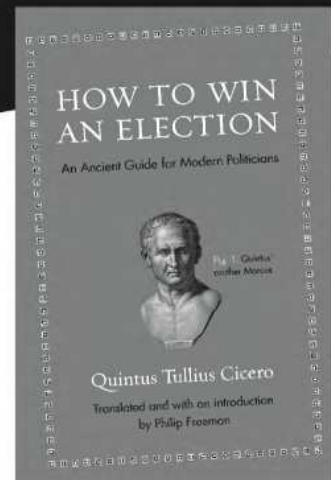
"Steve."

"Steve?"

"From the bar, you know. Like earlier? Brennan's?" I heard Nora flush the toilet. The cover was off the pool table because I'd left in the middle of a climactic match between Player A and Player B, all the

**"I just hope my opponent
in the next campaign
doesn't get a copy."**

—James Carville, *Foreign Affairs*



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angles still in play. I listened to the water rattle in the pipes. And then Steve's voice, low, confidential: "Hey, I was just wondering. Is Nora there?"

The bathroom door clicked open. There was a buzzing in my skull. Everything was wrong. "No," I said, shaking my head for emphasis, though there was no one there to see it. "She's not in."

"When'll she be back?"

I said nothing. I watched her swing open the bathroom door, saw her face there, the pristine towels on the rack, and the copper-and-gold wallpaper that Mrs. Kuenzli must have gone to some special

store to pick out because she wanted the best, only the best. The voice on the other end of the line was saying something else, insinuating, whispering in my ear like a disease, and so I bent down to where the phone was plugged into the wall and pulled it out of the socket.

"Who was that?" Nora asked.

"Nobody," I said. "Wrong number."

She gave me a doubtful look. "You were on the line long enough."

I wanted to do something right for a change, wanted to take hold of her and press her to me, confess, tell her that I loved her, but I didn't. I just said,

"You feel like a game of pool? I'll spot you two balls—"

"You play," she said. "I'm beat. I think I'll get ready for bed and read for a while." She paused at the bedroom door to give me a sweet, tired smile. "You've got to admit, Player B's a lot better than I am, anyway."

No argument there. I turned on the light over the table, cued up a record and took up the game where I'd left off. I was deep into my third game, on a real roll on behalf of Player A, the balls dropping as if I didn't even have to use the stick, as if I were willing them in, when suddenly there was a knock at the door. Two thumps. A pause. And then two thumps more.

I was just laying down the stick, any number of scenarios going through my head—it was a stranded motorist, the guy who drove the snowplow come to complain about the tail end of the car sticking out into the street, Artie braving the elements for a nightcap—when Nora came out of the bedroom, looking puzzled. She was in her pajamas, the kind kids wear, with a drawstring around the waist and a fold-down collar. Pink, with a flight of bluebirds running up and down her limbs and flapping across her chest. Her feet were bare. "Who's that?" she asked. "Artie?"

I didn't know what was coming, couldn't have guessed. I was in my own house, shooting pool and listening to music while the snow fell outside and the furnace hummed and my girlfriend stood there in her pajamas. "Must be," I said, even as the knock came again and a voice, muffled by the door, called out, "Keith? Nora? Knock-knock. Anybody home?"

I opened the door on Steve, his hair matted now and wet with snow. He was holding a bottle of tequila by the neck and he raised it in offering as he stamped in through the door. "Hey," he said, handing me the bottle, "cool place." He shrugged out of his jacket, dropping it right there on the floor. "Anybody down for a little action? Nora, how about you? A shot? Want to do a shot?"

She looked at him, bewildered—or maybe it was that she wasn't wearing her glasses and had to squint to take him in. I just stood there, the bottle like a brick in my hand—or no, a cement block, a weight, avoirdupois, dragging me down.

Steve never hesitated. He crossed the

room to her, digging in his pocket for something, grinning and glassy-eyed. "Here," he said, producing an envelope. "After I saw you tonight? You're so beautiful. I don't even know if you know how beautiful—and sexy. You're really sexy." He handed her the envelope, but she wasn't looking at the envelope, she was looking at me. "I wrote you a poem," he said. "Go ahead. Read it."

"Steve," I was saying, "look, Steve, I think—" but I couldn't go on because of the way Nora was staring at me, her lips parted and her eyes come violently to life.

"Read it," he repeated. "I wrote it for you, just for you—"

"Look," I said, "it's late," and I moved toward him and actually took hold of his arm in an attempt to steer him away and out the door, back into the snow and out of our lives. "Nora's tired," I said.

He never turned, never even acknowledged me. "Let her say it. You're not tired, are you?"

For the first time, she shifted her eyes to him. "No," she said finally. "No, I'm not tired at all."

Before I knew what I was doing, I'd set the bottle down on the desk and I was pulling on my coat, furious suddenly, and then I was out the door and into the night, the snow swirling overhead and Steve's voice—"So you want a hit of tequila?"—trailing off behind me with a soft, hopeful, rising inflection.

Outside, the snow made a noise, a kind of hiss, as if the night had come alive. I walked twice around the house, cursing myself—but I wouldn't go back in, I wouldn't, not till whatever was going to happen had happened and he was gone—and then I found myself huddling under the gazebo. I turned my collar up, pulled on my gloves. There was a wind now and a taste of cold northern forest on the air. I walked out on the dock and stood there for I don't know how long, the lake locked up like a vault below me. That was when I noticed the light in the house directly across the lake from ours, the one with all the chimneys and the two red rowboats that were turned over now, twin humps like moguls in the snow. It was the only light visible anywhere, a single lamp burning in a window on the ground floor of the wing nearest the lake. What came over me I can't say—what the impulse was, I

mean—but I lowered myself down off the edge of the dock and started across the lake. The wind was in my face. There were no stars. And the footing was bad, drifting powder over ice as clear as if it had come out of a machine. I went down twice, hard, but picked myself up and kept on.

When I got close, when I came up the crescent of beach past the rowboats and on up the slope of the whitening lawn, I saw that the curtains were open, which explained the resiliency of the light. The people there—and I didn't know them, not at all, not even by sight—must have left the curtains open purposely, I realized, because of the snow, the romance of it, the first snow of the season. It came to me that I was trespassing. Peeping. That, once the sun came up, anybody would be able to see my tracks. But, as soon as the thought entered my head, I dismissed it, because I didn't care about any of that—I'd gone out of myself, fixated on that light. Still, I kept to the shadows. I might even have crouched down in the bushes; I don't know.

What I saw was an ordinary room, a bedroom, lit like a stage. I saw a bed, an armoire, pictures on the wall. A shadow flickered across the room, then another, but for the longest time I didn't see anything. And then the man came into view, padding back and forth, undressing, getting ready for bed. How old was he? I couldn't tell, not really. Older than me, but not old. He settled into the bed—a double bed, queen-size, maybe—flicked on the lamp there and picked up a magazine and began reading. At some point, he set it down and seemed to be saying something to the other person in the room—the wife, I guessed—but of course it was just a murmur to me. And then, as if she'd heard her cue and stepped out of the wings, there she was, in a nightgown, fussing around her side of the bed before finally settling in and turning on her own light.

I felt guilty. I felt sick. And I didn't see anything revealing—or sexual, that is—no snuggling or stroking or even a kiss. They were night owls, those people. That light burned a long time. I know. Because I stayed there till it went out. ♦

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T. Coraghessan Boyle on "Birnarn Wood."

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB

One Direction takes over pop rock.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

One Direction, five amiable young men under the age of twenty-one who came together in England, on the set of “The X Factor,” has taken over America. The band’s record, “Up All Night,” which was released in March, became the first debut album by a British group to enter the American charts at No. 1. “Up All Night” has sold more than a million copies, and more than five million digital tracks. In December, the band will headline at Madison Square Garden. It is the newest standard-bearer of an old form: the boy band.

During “The X Factor”’s 2010 season, all five members were competing in the solo category, when the show’s producers urged them instead to form a band. They took this advice but finished third. In a convincing simulation of surprise, Simon Cowell, the series’ creator, said he was “guttured” about the band’s failure to win. No worries, boys—Cowell promptly signed One Direction to his Syco label and set about producing the various commodities that would bear the name One Direction, including, as of now, three books.

After its reality-show appearance, the band built up a large online presence, with nearly six million Twitter followers to date. The group’s TV performances circulated widely on YouTube before there was a single recording credited to the group.

Does this success herald another boy-band gold rush, like the one in the nineties? In the U.S., the main rivals were ’NSync and the Backstreet Boys (who are

set to release a new album); across the Atlantic, the alpha teens were Take That and Westlife. Those groups spawned individual careers: after ’NSync dissolved, Justin Timberlake became a deft recording artist and a passable actor. The gifted Robbie Williams left Take That to become a devilish pop star; in 2010, the band reunited with Williams, recording a remarkably successful album called “Progress.”

Like its predecessors, One Direction has been compared to the Beatles, mostly owing to its remarkable chart success. But the comparison is misleading. In a way that was not possible even fifteen years ago, let alone fifty, American tweens had access, via the Internet, to the fresh faces of Harry Styles, Louis Tomlinson, Niall Horan, Zayn Malik, and Liam Payne for months before their band’s album release. “We have to laugh it off because the Beatles were iconic,” Payne demurred once, slightly too accurately, when asked by Australia’s *Sunday Telegraph* about the resemblance.

The Internet isn’t the only change. The nineties cohort of boy bands performed music that was rooted in American R. & B. “Girlfriend,” ’NSync’s final single, was remixed as a collaboration with the R. & B. visionaries the Neptunes. In contrast, One Direction and other chart-topping bands are evenly split between guitar-heavy pop rock and generic club beats for drunk people to flop around to. This makes for a dramatic stylistic shift. “We’re five lads in a band,” Payne said. “Boy bands aren’t all

about dancing and being structured and wearing the same clothes.”

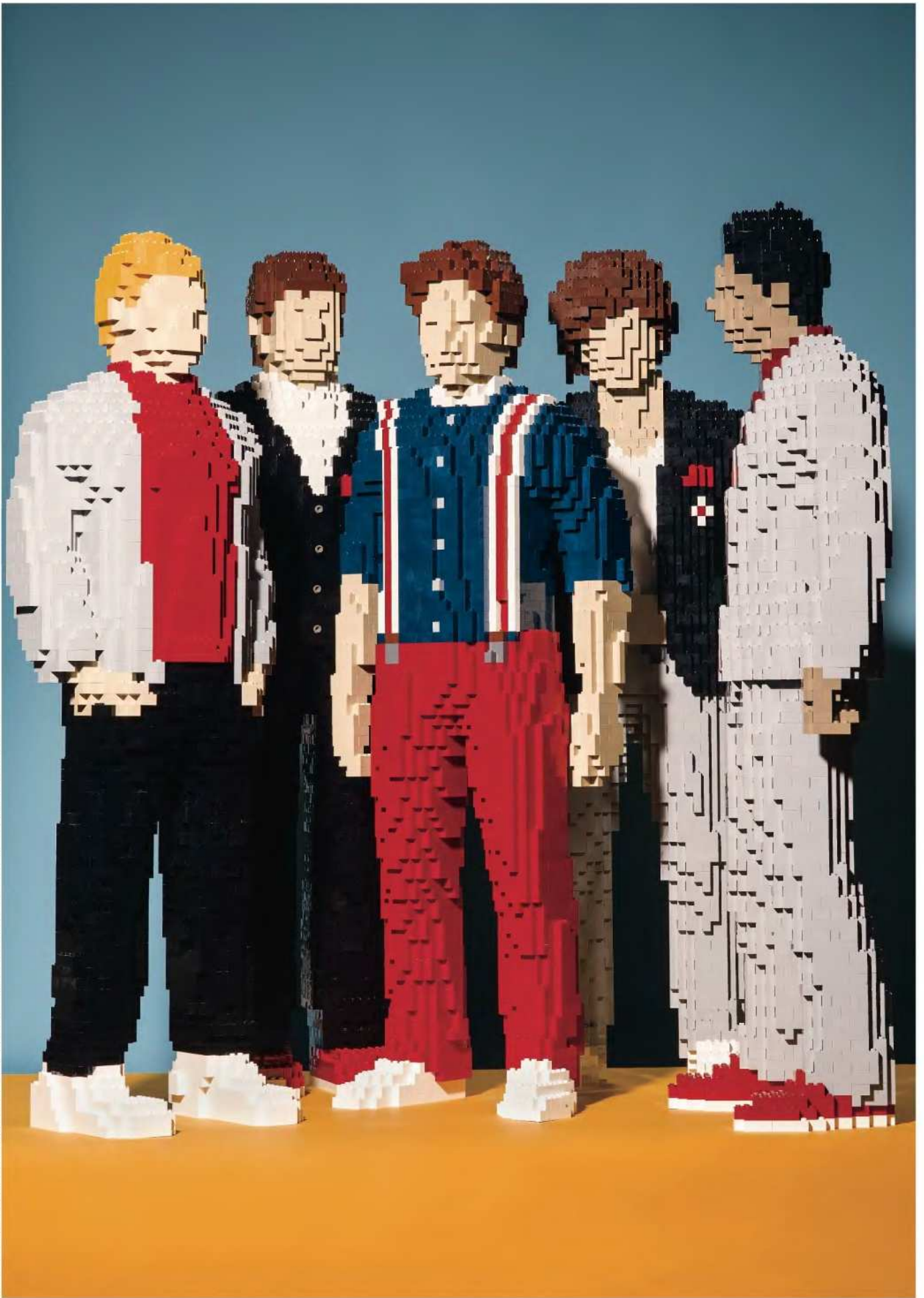
Not only is this statement a dismissal of twenty years of unison dance routines and syncopated beats; it also signals One Direction’s desire to take its place in Britain’s lad culture, which has historically rejected boy bands, preferring rowdy acts like Oasis. Lads are now in boy bands, and they need not dance.

What One Direction really sounds like, though, is a bunch of girls. The band plays a form of pop rock made popular, in the past ten years, by women. In it, details are either eliminated or enlarged to barn size: there are big hand claps, huge dropouts that spotlight a single word, even sirens. Syncopation is replaced with a big, thumping global four-four beat. This sound was popularized by P!nk’s “Don’t Let Me Get Me,” from 2001, and reached its height in Kelly Clarkson’s magnificent single “Since U Been Gone,” from 2004, which was written by Lukasz (Dr. Luke) Gottwald and Max Martin, a Swede who is the most important teen-pop songwriter of the past twenty years. The current trendsetter is Katy Perry, whose album “Teenage Dream” has spawned a series of hits—several involving Gottwald, Martin, or both—that may eventually eclipse Michael Jackson’s “Bad” for the number of No. 1 songs from a single record. Perry’s influence on One Direction extends to “Up All Night”’s title song, in which Styles sings, “Katy Perry’s on replay, she’s on replay.” Then the guitars lurch in for the chorus, following Perry’s formula of club-plus-rock, for those who missed the message. That chorus has all five band members singing, “I wanna stay up all night and jump around until we see the sun,” a perfect tween line that allows for the younger set to score their sleepover and talk the night away; older fans can interpret it differently, if they like.

Teen-pop royalty appears elsewhere on the album. Rami Yacoub, a protégé of Martin’s who also worked on ’NSync singles, is credited as a writer on several tracks. And Kelly Clarkson is one of three writers on “Tell Me a Lie,” a less rosy song, which nods to the slice of the demographic nursing its first broken heart.

Cowell has positioned the band bril-

One Direction, which plays a form of pop rock heavy on guitars and club beats, will soon have its own action figures.

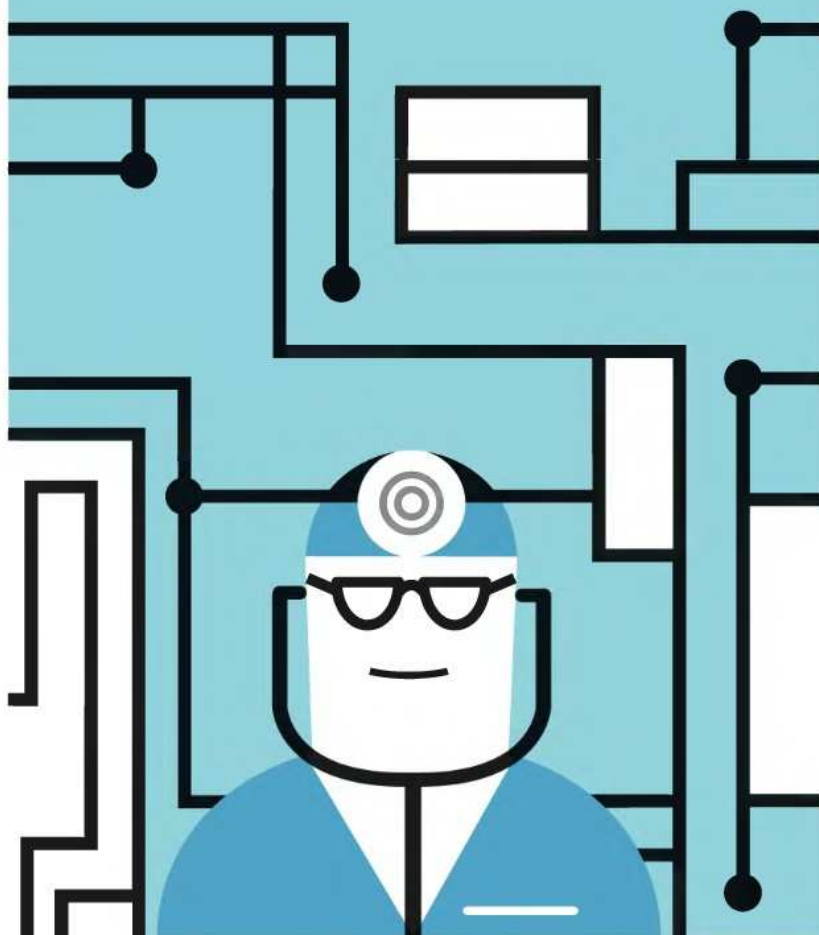


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liantly. Well aware that “prepackaged” is a pejorative label, and that audible Auto-Tune has become a commercial liability, Cowell has used shows like “The X Factor” and its progenitors, “Pop Idol” and “American Idol,” to valorize actual singing ability. The five boys in One Direction can sing quite ably, which lends them a crutch of authenticity to lean on. In interviews, Styles has said that the band members have been writing songs in hotels and airports, because they don’t want to sound like they’re performing work for hire, produced by some “forty-year-old man.” Indeed, the long list of professionals credited on “Up All Night” are mostly younger than forty, though they also aren’t in One Direction. The three songs written by the band have outside co-writers, and none have been released as singles. The group’s Twitter and Facebook audience has been praised by industry participants as some kind of D.I.Y. phenomenon, as if the social-media accounts weren’t being promoted with the resources of corporations like Hasbro, which will soon release a group of One Direction action figures.

Cowell has come up with an ingenious way of turning A. & R. into a sort of self-sustaining economy. He has created a system in which one party (advertisers) pays for ingredients, another party (fans) buys the resulting pizza, and various third parties argue about whether or not the pizza is organic—a debate that further promotes the pizza. The problem with the formula is that this band is not distinct enough to spawn secondary brands. Malik has genuine swagger, and Styles has a shaggy amiability. The other three are of various heights, and that’s about all I can tell you.

What the group needs is better forty-year-olds. The album and the band are like a dull gray sphere, with few flaws and fewer distinguishing marks. The marketing plan seems to have been “Make no mistakes.” The honking club track “Stole My Heart” sounds remarkably like Taio Cruz’s sugary and elegant “Dynamite,” written in part by Gottwald and Martin. That doesn’t fill a hole for somebody who already knows “Dynamite.” One Direction has no commercial need to change course, or to rough up its cuteness ahead of schedule. But the band needs one demonically well-built track, the kind of thing that Martin could provide. In the end, nobody really cares if the pizza is organic, as long as it tastes like pizza. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Light Between Oceans, by M. L. Stedman (Scribner). Told with the authoritative simplicity of a fable, this debut novel by an Australian lawyer living in London considers the question of what the right thing to do is when the pursuit of one's own happiness becomes a zero-sum game. Set in the years after the First World War in a lighthouse in the far west of Australia, the story begins with the familiar trope of the stranger who arrives in a storm. Here the stranger is a newborn baby, whom the lighthouse keeper and his wife, desperate for a family, take in as their own. Stedman's intricate descriptions of the craggy Australian coastline and her easy mastery of an old-time provincial vernacular are engrossing. As the couple at the lighthouse are drawn into an increasingly tragic set of consequences, these remote, strange lives are rendered immediate and familiar.

Jack 1939, by Francine Mathews (Riverhead). In one of the most deliciously high-concept thrillers imaginable, J.F.K. is given the "Shakespeare in Love" treatment. En route to Europe to research his Harvard senior thesis, twenty-one-year-old Jack Kennedy is enlisted by President Roosevelt to gather intelligence on the increasingly aggressive Nazis. Following the trail of German attempts to tip the 1940 U.S. elections toward isolationist candidates who won't oppose Hitler, Jack proves courageous—tussling with Reinhard Heydrich, helping to hijack an Enigma encryption device, and ultimately facing down his father, Ambassador Joseph P., who supports Chamberlain's appeasement policy. Family mythology and intimations of Jack's destiny are deftly and amusingly woven into page-turning adventures in London, Rome, Paris, Ber-

lin, Danzig, and Warsaw. Equally crucial in Jack's passage to manhood is a heartbreaking romance with an aloof society woman. He may wonder if she's a double agent, but her elegance and cool style leave a lasting mark.

The Good Life, by Cheryl Mendelson (Bloomsbury). This treatise on "the moral mentality" has provocative points to make about the long-term effects of day care, the police use of Tasers, and the treatment of morality as an academic subject, among other things. However, these come amid a steady supply of assertions likely to annoy all but those who happen to agree with the author. Mendelson's understandable aversion to moral relativism causes her to err in the other direction, narrowing her definition of morality to a specific, yet vaguely explained "cultural product of the West," and thereby shrinking her sympathetic readership to those few who happen to share her idiosyncratic terms. Intended largely as a condemnation of the "politicization" of morality by American conservatives, the book presents a cartoon version of their perspective, and, with its odd indifference to argument, loses many opportunities to persuade.

Winter Journal, by Paul Auster (Holt). Near the end of this charming and unusual memoir, Auster recalls an anecdote about a woman who approached James Joyce at a party and asked to "shake the hand that wrote 'Ulysses.'" Joyce is said to have replied, "Let me remind you, madam, that this hand has done many other things as well." In a similar spirit, Auster's book—composed of loosely organized fragments and written, coquettishly, in the second person—scarcely mentions his other writing. Instead, it catalogues pratfalls, childhood fistfights, sexual misadventures, anxiety attacks, and other humiliations that have scarred and defined him. While at times the book languishes in long, if poetically rendered, lists of addresses and favorite foods, Auster's ruminations on death, family, memory, and marriage are both poignant and delightful.



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Jason Patterson, Published September 4, 2006

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OUT OF THE FRAME

A new portrait of Henry James's "The Portrait of a Lady."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Readers of *The Atlantic Monthly*, browsing the edition of November, 1880, and already looking forward to articles on "The Silk Industry in America" and "The Future of Weather Foretelling," were greeted, on the opening page, by the first installment of a new story. It began, "Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea." This is hardly the most American of starts, and certainly not the most American of sentiments; those readers, if canvassed, could have nominated a host of more agreeable experiences. The whole setup sounds suspiciously English; was it for this that Emerson, Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and others had founded the magazine, twenty-three years before? Suspicions are confirmed, as the tale unfurls; the setting is indeed an English lawn, rug-soft, on a waning summer's day, and one of the tea-takers, to make matters worse, is an English lord.

He and two other men are soon joined by a female character. As a newcomer, she is entranced by the spectacle, and we are invited to join the trance:

She had been looking all round her again,—at the lawn, the great trees, the reedy, silvery Thames, the beautiful old house; and, while engaged in this survey, she had also narrowly scrutinized her companions; a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited. She had seated herself, and had put away the little dog; her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself lightly this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions. Her impressions were numerous, and they were all reflected in a clear, still smile. "I have never seen anything so beautiful as this," she declared.

And I have never read anything as beautiful as that. Decades after I first encountered the passage, it has lost none of its thrill and lustre. The beauty of the telling should not be confused with the loveliness of the scene, whatever the entice-

ment of the greensward; hundreds of writers have tried their hand at Old World pastoral and got stuck in a sentimental mud. The beauty, rather, is in the excitement—in the motions of the "flexible figure," and in all that is presaged by the quickness of her response. "It's just like a novel!" she exclaims, unaware that she is trapped inside one. Already, however, we find ourselves wanting to ask, of those turnings of hers: are they feline and purposeful, or more akin to the flutters of a flag in a breeze? Will this impressionable young woman, apparently so open to experience, end up in its pitiless thrall?

So begins "The Portrait of a Lady," and its opening chords, quiet as they are, have almost no match in English-speaking literature. You have to go to "Great Expectations"—to the raw, shivering sea light and the talk of slit throats, all so vastly distant in tone, though not on the map, from this teatime in the warm sun—to find the same trembling sense of a plot in waiting and a book in bud. What Pip sees, hears, and does in a few paragraphs will determine the entire span of Dickens's novel, though Pip will take almost as long to understand why, and no less an impact is made upon Isabel Archer, the woman on the grass; from here, she will be launched on an adventure, both by the men she meets at tea—two of whom will fall in love with her, and one of whom will bequeath her a fortune—and by the delectable deluge of her senses.

The serialization that started in late 1880 bore no author's name at the head. Instead, his identity was revealed at the end of each excerpt, in minuscule type: "Henry James, Jr." The appellation was a telling one; James still resided, to a degree, in the shadow of his father, and would remain there until Henry James, Sr., a theologian with a pronounced weakness for Swedenborg, joined the shades himself, at the end of 1882. Not that his son was a stranger to the magazine. Countless items of nonfiction, with titles such as "A Roman

Holiday" and "Recent Florence," had appeared there, as had the novels "Roderick Hudson" (1875) and "The American" (1877), whose title, so promisingly patriotic, had proved deceptive; the story opened in the Louvre and seemed all but incapable of tearing itself away from France. Where, one was forced to ask, did this young James fellow belong? To what, or to whom, did his loyalties cling? He had caused a small storm, in 1878, with the appearance of "Daisy Miller," whose sales were of a breeziness that would hardly be repeated; he had also published "The Europeans" (1878) and "Washington Square" (1880). Now, at last, he was girding himself for a more substantial project ("settling down to the daily evolution of my 'big' novel," he wrote in a letter of March, 1880), although subscribers to *The Atlantic Monthly* had, as yet, no inkling of what they were in for—no clue that James was passing from apprenticeship to mastery, or that the scene by the silvery Thames would flow into an enterprise of great pith and moment, shifting the deep tides of what we seek, and listen out for, when we read.

That flow is charted by Michael Gorra in "Portrait of a Novel: Henry James and the Making of an American Masterpiece" (Liveright), which takes the rare but wise decision to approach James through the channel of a single work. This is, in short, a book about a book, joining a select band of the equally fixated. We have "James Joyce's Ulysses," an early explication by Stuart Gilbert, and Francis Steegmuller's "Flaubert and Madame Bovary," although more questing Flaubertians may prefer "The Perpetual Orgy," a plunge into the same novel by Mario Vargas Llosa. Samuel Beckett's "Proust" was written after he spent a summer reading "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" twice, a valorous act, although any discussion of Proust must, by definition, pay homage to the one engulfing work. Note that all the authors honored in this list are themselves obsessives: men prepared to devote any amount of time and intellectual industry, and to renounce almost everything, in the exhausting bid to wrestle the world into words, leaving us to revere the result and to inquire how much was entailed in the sacrifice. In each case, the equilibrium of their readers was shaken, and it remains so today; part of Gorra's task, in admitting James to that distinguished company, is to measure the aftershocks touched off by

"The Portrait of a Lady." A book that begins in tranquil decorum will become, like "Ulysses" and "Madame Bovary," a disturbance of the peace.

What happens in "The Portrait of a Lady"? A plain chronology seems manageable. Isabel Archer, of Albany, aged twenty-one, and conveniently parentless, is brought by her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, to England. There she meets her uncle, the aging Mr. Touchett, who is sufficiently charmed to alter his will in her favor, although it is her cousin Ralph, weak of lung but strong in his affection for her, who suggests the change; to observe how Isabel fares, and what she may fashion from her independence, has swiftly become his "finest entertainment." She receives but rejects offers of marriage from Lord Warburton, a manly neighbor, and Caspar Goodwood, who has pursued her from Boston to pitch his woo. She spends time in London, largely with her friend Henrietta Stackpole, an American reporter, who nourishes fewer illusions about European allure. Mr. Touchett dies. Isabel makes the acquaintance of Madame Merle, a handsome, baffling friend of Mrs. Touchett's, who, in

turn, once Isabel has crossed to the Continent, and descended from France to Italy, introduces her to Gilbert Osmond, a widowed gentleman with perfect manners. To his imperfections, which are grave and irredeemable, Isabel alone seems blind, and she consents to marry him. She becomes stepmother to the teenage Pansy, who is later courted by a young American named Rosier and, for good measure, by Warburton, who will lose no opportunity to draw near to Isabel once more. Pansy, we learn, is in fact the product of an adulterous liaison between Osmond and Madame Merle. On hearing that Ralph is close to death, Isabel, against the orders of her disobliging husband, returns to the English house where we first

observed her, and where she stays until Ralph passes away. Goodwood, undaunted, arrives and pledges to rescue her from the quicksand of Osmond—"you must save what you can of your life." Isabel, nonetheless, leaves for Rome. What happens next we do not know.

Put like that, the novel sounds not uneventful, and it is surprising to read the re-

tent, the battle over James has never really shifted from that ground; Jamesians continue to swoon over his fine discernment, while detractors still smirk at his willingness to grind near-nothings into powder. Yet "The Portrait of a Lady"—and the same holds true for masterpieces early and late, like "The Europeans" and "The Ambassadors" (1903)—is enough to

stop the fight, and to prove both parties wrong. Plenty occurs to Isabel, in body and mind, with a frequency that suggests both comic and tragic modes; her pursuers pop up with the unexpected flourish of farceurs (Warburton is suddenly there, before her, in the Roman Forum), while a stalking mortality is never far behind. Her final exchange with Ralph would surely gratify the most demanding connoisseur of the Victorian deathbed, as Jamesian prolixity is halted and hushed by the patient's last gasps: "Love remains. I don't know why we should suffer so much. Perhaps I shall find out. There are many things in life; you are very young."

Yet the reviewers, in their bewilderment, were onto something. However carefully you lay out the structure of the plot, you will always be left with a rustling sense of truths unappre-

hended—smaller, darker sagas unfolding backstage or in the wings. Some of these, naturally, are prompted by the sexual reticence of the author and the period alike. When Henrietta heads off to see the Paris sights with a jovial bachelor named Bantling, and we hear that "they had breakfasted together, dined together, gone to the theatre together, supped together, really in a manner quite lived together," it is precisely in *not* knowing what they did together by night—whether they proceeded to feast in foodless ways upon each other—that one finds, as so often with James, a pleasurable ache of dissatisfaction. Far creepier is his description of Osmond's rapport with his daughter: "If he wished to make himself felt, there was soft



Our foremost explorer of the private life: Henry James, circa 1890.

views that "The Portrait of a Lady" attracted when it first appeared as a book, in both England and America, in 1881. "Nothing but a laborious riddle," *The Spectator* said, while *The Nation* remarked on its "elaborate placidity"; even William Dean Howells—not just James's friend and adviser but the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, who had received it, chunk by chunk, for serial publication—was moved to ask, in an essay on James the following year, "Will the reader be content to accept a novel which is an analytic study rather than a story?" A furious but anonymous critic, in *The Quarterly Review*, cited Howells's words and added, "The answer to this question, from nine readers out of ten, will be emphatically No." To an ex-

and supple little Pansy, who would evidently respond to the slightest pressure.” James omitted the line, and its surrounding passage, when he thoroughly revised the novel, in 1906, for the New York edition of his works (and thereby hangs another tale), yet the jolt of that earlier, unrefined image feels dreadfully suited to Osmond, for whom Humbertism, actual or threatened, would make a pleasing addition to his secret stash of sins.

This hint of links either missing or deliberately dropped, however, reaches beyond the carnal. James was the nonpareil of the hiatus: “the *whole* of anything is never told,” he confided to his Notebooks, when sketching out the novel. Only he would pause, after his heroine has been favored with yet another declaration of love, and then spring forward a year, obliging us to hang around, like fidgety suitors, for her reply. The year, we learn, has been “an interval sufficiently replete with incident,” though not replete enough to warrant more than a short chapter; the author tells us that Isabel gazed at the Pyramids, but makes it clear that her mind was elsewhere. And only James, too, would then vault over the wedding itself, and the first years of marriage, before landing squarely once more in the presence of “Mrs. Osmond”—for a second, we have to stop and remind ourselves who on earth this is. What change has been wrought by her new status, and her new name? “She had lost something of that quick eagerness to which her husband had privately taken exception—she had more the air of being able to wait. Now, at all events, framed in the gilded doorway, she struck our young man as the picture of a gracious lady.” Tucked inside that last sentence is not simply the near-title of the novel but a perplexing memory of her first appearance, hundreds of pages ago—“a tall girl in a black dress,” who “lingered in the doorway, slim and charming,” observed by Ralph as he wandered on the lawn. Over the years, she has traded one doorway for another—stepped from frame to frame, as if sitting for two different artists, first as a girl, and then as a lady. In between, the picture has become a prison.

How does one hope to pay homage to such complications: to all those hops and holes in the text, those worrisome velleities? What Michael Gorra has done—and I can’t decide whether it’s

modest or brazen—is to make his book almost as tricky to negotiate, let alone to summarize, as James’s. You shouldn’t tackle “Portrait of a Novel” without getting “The Portrait of a Lady” under your belt, and into your head, either afresh or for the first time; submit yourself to the dazzling vertigo of James’s third and fourth chapters, when he drops away from the tea ceremony and slips backward into Isabel’s meeting with her aunt, in a rainy Albany, and thence, with frictionless grace, into incidents from her childhood, and you will be nicely primed for Gorra’s own exercise in time travel. He thinks nothing of leaping from a scene in Osmond’s villa to the Italian journeys of Goethe, in 1786, or from a chapter that ends with James getting down to his novel, in Italy, to a chapter that opens, “With nine months of work on the ‘Portrait’ behind him, James left London.” Some people will find this confounding; a more charitable verdict would be that, in deference to James’s brilliance, Gorra has assumed the role of a professional prismatist. He peers at the book from multiple angles—those of biography, geography, publishing, textual variation, and mild erotic sleuthing, among others—as if hoping to catch it at an unfamiliar slant. No facet must go uninspected.

That may be inevitable. How can a critic embrace James and stay uninfected by his chronic restlessness? This had been initiated by a trip to Europe in 1843: a first chance to take the temperature of an older civilization, although even Henry was not quite up to the job, being only six months old. By the time Gorra catches up with him, in 1869, the wayfaring is well under way. “He hiked through Switzerland and traveled down into Italy, to Venice and Florence and then Rome,” Gorra writes, and anyone schooled in the later, fastidious James will be bewitched by this youthful vision of him with groaning rucksack and outstretched thumb. But Gorra is right to map such movement, because vagabondage was as crucial to the formation of the novel as it is to people’s actions within it; it is scarcely a coincidence that a heroine who lands in Europe with a dangerously boundless curiosity, as Isabel does, and who marries an expatriate so torn from his roots that he now secretes himself in Florence like a neglected prince, or a spider, should have been conjured into being in that same place. It was

in yet another city, on the Venetian waterfront, that the threads of the book were eventually pulled together; James’s incomparable preface to “The Portrait of a Lady,” composed to accompany the New York edition, recalls a vain struggle to create fiction while the “ceaseless human chatter” outside, teeming with unfictitious life, poured in through his high window.

If chatter is your preference—if you would readily swap James the international voyager for the more contained prowling of James the social animal—then Gorra will meet your needs, with a roll call of the supporting players from whom “The Portrait of a Lady” drew its dramatic strength. Most of them are female, as befits a novel about “a certain young woman affronting her destiny,” in James’s phrase—not merely “confronting” but squaring up to what was expected of her and, if the mood stirred her, doing the opposite. Gorra gives us a chapter on George Eliot, for instance, whose account of a frustrated, half-frozen marriage, in “Middlemarch,” can be felt behind Isabel’s no less calamitous match with Osmond, and to whom James’s anxious debt was such that—for *The Atlantic Monthly*, again, in 1876—he couched his response to “Daniel Deronda” not as a straight review but as a three-voiced “Conversation.” We get a similar excursus into the short but zestful existence of Minny Temple, James’s adored cousin, who is commonly identified with the ailing Milly Theale, in “The Wings of the Dove” (1902). But that connection is a sickly one; in Minny’s “taste for life as life,” as lauded by James in his autobiography, in “the play of her own light spontaneity and curiosity,” she is no less surely reborn in the shape of Isabel Archer. (“Poor Minny was essentially *incomplete* and I have attempted to make my young woman more rounded, more finished,” Isabel’s creator wrote in a letter of 1880.) A third presence whom Gorra summons to the stage is Constance Fenimore Woolson, with whom James once shared a villa, and who threw herself from a window in Venice, after—we should not say because—he failed to make a promised pilgrimage to see her. Mind you, their intimacy belongs to the late eighteenth-eighties and the early nineties, some years after “The Portrait of a Lady,” and that gap forces Gorra to read backward, rather than forward, into the novel and tempts him into a flight of wayward fancy:

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“Let us walk with Fenimore onto her terrace and look down at Henry James as he sits with his morning coffee.”

That is untypical of Gorra’s book. For the most part, it is wary of elastic speculation while being every bit as nimble, alert, and far-ranging as it ought to be if justice is to be done to Henry James. I could have used more vivisection—the laying bare of individual sentences, and the probing of syntactical tissue—but no one could deny how densely the author is steeped in his theme. When, on the first page, he writes of James, “He had lived in Europe for thirty years—he had taken possession of it, inhaled it, appropriated it,” he is himself appropriating a line from a letter that James wrote to his family from London, in November, 1875, the day after docking in Liverpool: “I take possession of the old world—I inhale it—I appropriate it!” Gorra does not own up to that borrowing in the endnotes, which is a little remiss, and, as a rule, it seems risky to replay as reported fact, long after the event, what a young man once announced and prophesied on his own behalf. Nonetheless, the accent of devotion is unmistakable, and, if anything, one is driven to ask: Is this book mad enough? Does it have a touch of “that tonic wildness” which Isabel finds wanting in the oversophisticated Madame Merle? If you love a book so much that the sole outlet for your infatuation is to write your own book about it, should you leave rough traces of that love, or should scholarship smooth them over?

In the acknowledgments, at the back of “Portrait of a Novel,” Gorra writes, “I first read ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ during

the fall of 1977, in a class at Amherst College.” If I find myself wishing that he had broken cover, perhaps in an afterword, and sought to track his changing apprehension of the novel, over thirty-five years, that is not out of prurience but because such transformation is an abiding theme in James. His books are drenched in time: the times at which they were written, and the times and ways in which they were rewritten or left alone; the times in which they are set; the times that elapse in the careers of the characters, as they thrive or sour; the time it takes for a man to split into two, like the hero of “The Jolly Corner,” and to see what he might have become; and, last, the times at which we read them, and, if we happen to be incurable Jamesians, at which they leave us other than we were. I know of no more enviable diary entry than the one made by Evelyn Waugh on Sunday, November 17, 1946: “Patrick left on Saturday afternoon. What an enormous, uncovenanted blessing to have kept Henry James for middle age and to turn, as the door shuts behind the departing guest, to a first reading of ‘Portrait of a Lady.’”

On the other hand, what does middle age bring to the inhabitants of the book? Disappointments, refusals, and shut-downs; chances for the enactment of low cunning, if you are Osmond or Madame Merle; and, for Ralph, what Philip Larkin called “the only end of age.” “The Portrait of a Lady” that I read in my late teens bears the scantest relation to “The Portrait of a Lady” that I read today. That may be because, taking things the wrong way around, I began with the New York edition, whose style bears the more velvety nap, whereas

these days, if possible, I pick the earlier version, which is marked by abrasive edges; but textual difference alone does not account for the chasm between the two. What I browsed, back then, seemed a serene, rather aristocratic affair, strewn with bright, overtalkative folk who could switch countries at will; one bad marriage didn’t make it any the less romantic. What I discover now feels funnier, still sharp with the Jane Austen-like tartness of its predecessor, “Washington Square,” but it’s more than that. It’s a horror story.

The first critic to notice this, and to lend it adequate stress, was, of all people, Ezra Pound. In a brief essay from 1918, he wrote, “What I have not heard is any word of the major James, of the hater of tyranny; book after early book against oppression, against all the sordid petty personal crushing oppression, the domination of modern life.” In a footnote, he added, of James, “What he fights is ‘influence,’ the impinging of family pressure, the impinging of one personality upon another.” We think of Osmond, the supreme impinger, all the more cruel in his confinement of Isabel’s spirit because she gave herself to him, rather than to his rivals, in a defining flourish of her liberation. That, it turns out, is precisely what rouses his contempt. “One ought to make one’s life a work of art,” he tells Isabel, sounding like a warmup act for Oscar Wilde; any hint of aesthetic levity, however, vanishes after the marriage, once she realizes that he is an anti-Pygmalion, quenching her vital fire and nailing her into place like a statue. Osmond did not fall in love with our heroine; what he loved was “the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects.” That is what monsters do, especially the polite and patient ones: they harvest souls. Hand them a human in full bloom, and what they give back to you, after a few seasons, is a pressed flower.

Is there a blush of self-accusation here? When James calls Osmond “a student of the exquisite,” whose “ideal was a conception of high prosperity and propriety,” was he glancing in the mirror at his own ambitions, fearful of what harm they might, if brandished too freely, inflict on other selves? It goes without saying that James, who chose never to marry, was infinitely kinder than his villain; but I agree with Gorra when, having recounted



“I thought Burning Man would be more interesting.”

Dd

the closeness of James and Minny Temple, he frowns over “the speed with which he reconciled himself to Minny’s loss.” In short, the elbow of the creator—someone, as Gorra says, “whose job is to turn life into narrative”—is forever nudged by opportunism. If Osmond is uniquely menacing, it is because he resembles a writer who writes nothing, preferring to take a woman as his text.

Yet he is not alone. Listen to all the other schemers in the book. “I don’t pretend to know what people are meant for,” Madame Merle says, adding, “I only know what I can do with them.” She would say that, of course, being Osmond’s co-conspirator, but consider Henrietta, the journalist in search of a topic, who admits to Isabel that “I should have delighted to do your uncle,” or Ralph, musing on the newly arrived Miss Archer with his mother:

“All this time,” he said, “you have not told me what you intend to do with her.”

“Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico.”

Ralph, hands in pockets, with not much time to live, is the most benevolent character in the book; yet if even he displays “the crooked timber of self-interest in the most altruistic of intentions,” as Gorra proposes, what hope is there for the rest of us? Are we all so mercenary, cutting and trimming people, whether unwittingly or by design, to fit the pattern of our own desires? Such are the politics of personhood. There is always the option to remain alone: “A woman ought to be able to make up her life in singleness,” Isabel reflects, and that assurance stares ahead to what we, though not James, would hail as the feminist cause, requiring no male prop. At the same time, any retreat into the solo self, for either sex, must be shaded with a special dread: “the isolation and loneliness of pride had for her mind the horror of a desert place,” we learn of Isabel, in words that seem to herald the parched cries of “The Waste Land,” and the truest hell is to wind up like Osmond, immured in the plush safety of his own home and the

fortress of his own brain. And so the book traffics back and forth, with sublime indecision, between the need to stand firm, in Emersonian majesty, and the yearning to break one’s pose and join the more crowded landscape of mankind. “That account of the limits of self-sufficiency is what, above all, makes ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ stand as a great American novel,” Michael Gorra declares, and the case that he mounts for the defense is unlikely to be put with more conviction. “It is the business of the artist to make humanity aware of itself,” Pound wrote in his tribute to James, adding, in triumph, “Here the thing was done.” We are left, in Ralph-like idleness, to wonder what Henry James would make of our current state. To him, one imagines, it would rise up like a bad dream; he would see an archipelago of solitudes, feverishly interlinked, with bridges collapsing as fast as we can build them. He is our foremost explorer of the private life, and of what it costs to preserve. We need him more than ever. ♦

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THINGS FALL APART

A Spanish master's quizzical unravellings.

BY JOANNA KAVENNA

At the start of “Dublinesque,” the latest novel by Enrique Vila-Matas (translated from the Spanish by Anne McLean and Rosalind Harvey; New Directions), Riba, an aging publisher who has recently battled alcoholism and closed down his publishing house, is invited to a literary festival in Lyon to speak on “the grave state of literary publishing in Europe.” Riba “has a somewhat romantic image of himself and spends his life thinking that it’s the end of an era, the end of the world, doubtless influenced by the sudden cessation of his activities.” Arriving in Lyon, he avoids the festival entirely and holes up in his hotel room, working feverishly on “one of the dreams he’d had when he was in publishing and didn’t have time for anything: to write a general theory of the novel.” As soon as he finishes, he has a realization—“If one has the theory, why write the novel?”—and consigns his work to the wastebasket: “He held a secret, private funeral for his theory and for all the theories that had ever existed, and then left the city of Lyon without once having contacted the people who had invited him to speak.”

The novels of Vila-Matas, a Catalan writer who has established himself over four decades as arguably Spain’s most significant contemporary literary figure, are full of comically self-defeating projects like this. His narrators make urgent attempts to prove a theory—to throw labels at the immensity of experience, to define the indefinable—but their efforts invariably collapse. And the novels enact a similar kind of self-defeat. In “Bartleby and Co.” (2001), Vila-Matas’s breakthrough novel, a virtuoso parody of critical taxonomy and listmaking, the narrator discourses on the “attraction towards nothingness that means that certain creators . . . never manage to write”—a phenomenon epitomized by Bartleby, Melville’s archetypically unproductive scrivener. Vila-Matas’s narrator pains-

takingly crafts lists of “writers of the No”—de Quincey, Rimbaud, Kafka, Gide, Musil. Visiting New York, he becomes convinced that J. D. Salinger is sitting opposite him on a Fifth Avenue bus. Salinger, who “has spent thirty-six years in strict silence,” is naturally a major literary hero to a man transfixed by aesthetic self-annihilation, and the narrator



Enrique Vila-Matas

starts to imagine what he would say, if he could only pluck up the courage to speak:

It occurred to me to approach Salinger and say to him,

“Gosh, how I love you, Salinger. Would you mind telling me why you have not published anything in so many years?” . . .

“Mr Salinger, I am an admirer of yours, but I haven’t come to ask you why you have not published in over thirty years, what interests me is your opinion regarding the day Lord Chandos perceived that the endless cosmic whole of which we are part could not be described in words. I wondered if you’d had the same notion and that’s why you stopped writing.” . . .

“Mr Salinger, would you be so kind as to imprint your legendary signature on this scrap of paper? Gosh, how I admire you.”

“I’m not Salinger,” he would have answered.

The narrator fails to approach Salinger, or even to establish whether it really

is Salinger, and soon Salinger gets off the bus. The whole non-encounter has been an exercise in futility—one more example of the “art of the No” that so absorbs the narrator. Reading a Vila-Matas novel is like watching someone weave a beautiful tapestry with one hand while unravelling it just as expertly with the other.

Until eight years ago, none of Vila-Matas’s writing was available in English, though he was widely acclaimed throughout the Spanish-speaking world and in France. (In all, he has been translated into some thirty languages.) Since 2004, however, New Directions has been releasing his major novels here in fine, sympathetic English translations: “Bartleby & Co.,” “Montano’s Malady,” “Never Any End to Paris,” and now “Dublinesque.” These works supply a useful introduction to an oeuvre that includes journalism, novels that read like essays, essays that read like novels, mock-heroic odysseys through Europe, the United States, and Latin America, and imaginary travelogues about places the author has never visited.

Vila-Matas was born in 1948 in Barcelona, and began his career during Franco’s nationalist and ultra-Catholic dictatorship. Franco suppressed opposition, stringently discouraged the use of any language other than Castilian Spanish, and made it a criminal offense for a woman to leave even a violent husband. Against this backdrop, Vila-Matas studied law and journalism and, by the late nineteen-sixties, was working at a film magazine, *Fotogramas*. While there, he wrote a series of mischievous and sometimes fictional essays, including an invented interview with Marlon Brando. So began a career-long obsession with obliterating the line between reality and invention—a destabilizing tactic that one is tempted to associate with the experience of life under an oppressive regime. Like other Catalan authors who write in Castilian Spanish, such as the poet Jaime Gil de Biedma, Vila-Matas toys constantly with themes of identity and self-effacement. One of his core enterprises has been a kind of hiding in plain sight—the creation of a series of personal myths and teasing pseudo-auto-

biographies. As one narrator explains, "Life is too short to live a sufficient number of experiences, so you have to steal them." One after another, Vila-Matas's first-person narrators spill out their stories, but the reader is never any closer to knowing where Vila-Matas ends and a narrator begins. In an interview with *Le Monde* in 2011, Vila-Matas helpfully told the interviewer to "feel free to reinvent the whole thing entirely."

In 1973, Vila-Matas published his first novel, "Woman in the Mirror Contemplating the Landscape." The novel consisted of a single, uninterrupted sentence, and, the author claims, was read by only one person, who called it, perhaps euphemistically, "an exercise in style." The following year, Vila-Matas left Spain and went to Paris, where he rented a room from the French author Marguerite Duras. This interlude forms the basis of his novel "Never Any End to Paris" (2003), in which an aspirant bohemian goes to Paris and writes a novel, "The Lettered Assassin"—the actual title of Vila-Matas's second novel, from 1977—which, he posits, will kill anyone unfortunate enough to read it.

The narrator sees his Parisian apprenticeship as "an ironic revision" of Ernest Hemingway's account of his time in the city in "A Moveable Feast": "Unlike Hemingway who was 'very poor and very happy' there, I was very poor and very unhappy." The novel's possibly autobiographical reminiscences lead the narrator to wonder with disarming candor why he wants to remember his former self anyway:

The poor, young man, handsome and stupid, who fooled himself on a daily basis and believed he'd been very lucky to be able to live in that filthy garret that Marguerite Duras rented him for the symbolic sum of a hundred francs a month, and I say symbolic because that's how I understood it or how I wanted to understand it, since I never paid any rent despite the logical, though luckily only sporadic, protests of my strange landlady.

This "poor, young man" should, of course, have passed his time sitting at the feet of Duras, taking in her grand theories of art. Yet his French was so bad that "not always, but often, when Marguerite spoke to me . . . I didn't understand a word, not a single word she said to me, not even her demands for the rent."

Duras, her remarks lost or garbled in bad translation, becomes a fictional character, a compensatory fantasy. The present-day narrator regards his former self less with dewy-eyed indulgence than with red-faced horror: "a pretentious writer hiding his beginner's fragility . . . a walking nightmare." He adds, "There were people in my neighborhood who, quite rightly, crossed the street when they saw me coming." "Never Any End to Paris" offers an extended meditation on the shifting self, the "deep and insurmountable gap" between youth and adulthood, and how the past cannot be regained but how this is probably a very good thing, because when the past is not elusive it is horribly embarrassing. In the end, the narrator realizes, there is nothing more absurd than striving portentously after the "reality" of oneself.

Asked about "Dublinesque," Vila-Matas has said that it is about someone who "wants to hold a funeral for the world and discovers that, paradoxically, this is what allows you to have a future in life." The book, which overtly commemorates James Joyce, also more obliquely commemorates Vila-Matas's own temporary salvation. He has described being in the hospital while recovering from major surgery and dreaming that he was in Dublin, "a city I'd never been to before . . . and I was on the floor in the doorway of a pub, crying." Allied with this dream was "an idea of rebirth." In the novel, Riba, the publisher protagonist, has an almost identical dream, which precipitates a Joycean pilgrimage to Dublin. As usual, Vila-Matas's use of his own biography isn't quite as straightforward as it seems. The book's title is an allusion to Philip Larkin's poem "Dublinesque," which is likewise an homage to the world of Joyce, and which, like Vila-Matas's book, came from a dream. "I just woke up and described it," Larkin claimed. What seems like confession may be literary myth, and the only thing we can be sure of is that Vila-Matas wants us to be unsure which is which.

At one point in the novel, Riba hears a theory:

Joyce's traditional, classic, Oedipal, conservative journey . . . was replaced halfway through the twentieth century by a rectilin-

ear journey: a sort of pilgrimage, a journey always moving forward, towards an impossible point in infinity, like a straight line advancing hesitantly into nothingness.

For the rest of the novel, he aims at some kind of narrative coherence, but Vila-Matas keeps steering him back toward nothingness. Riba meanders, wastes hours on the Internet, feels his way from one disorienting encounter to another, teeters on the brink of plain disaster. Yet there is a consolation in the eddying freedom of his thoughts. For Riba, "each small incident, if one knows how to read it . . . has a wondrous quality." He tries,

wherever possible, to look for those hidden wonders in his daily life that, deep down, if he wants to, he's perfectly capable of finding. . . . At least all those years are worth something, all those years of understanding reading not just as a practice inseparable from his occupation as a publisher, but also as a way of being in the world: an instrument for interpreting, sequence after sequence, his day-to-day life.

So "Dublinesque" becomes—in the best Joycean tradition—the expression of one man's unique "day-to-day life," his personal interpretation of reality, his quotidian oscillations between despair and elation. Vila-Matas, as in all his novels, grapples with the freedom of the individual, a freedom inevitably compromised by tragedy and failure but also graced by moments of alleviation, even happiness. "I do think irony is a powerful device for de-activating reality," one of Vila-Matas's narrators says. "Human kind," as T. S. Eliot put it, "cannot bear very much reality." But for Vila-Matas there are two types of reality—the hard-nosed general kind, which is "an unbearable burden," "fragmentary and without meaning," and an "internal realism," composed of our own fragile, fluttering inventions, which can be both beautiful and truly affecting. Perhaps this is why the experience of reading Vila-Matas is, for all his apparent pessimism, curiously uplifting. He has written that, for him, there are two sorts of books—straightforwardly realistic ones, which he associates with "a sort of disagreeable noise," and those which, without his quite knowing why, "transmit happiness." By lifting the heavy weight of the past, by setting irony against dogmatism and rigidity, Vila-Matas allows his characters, and us, to contemplate the future. ♦

TOUGH GUYS

"Lawless" and "The Expendables 2."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Tom Hardy and Jessica Chastain in a Prohibition-era film by John Hillcoat.

When will John Hillcoat make a war film? It is in that genre, I suspect, that his fearsome skills will find their natural home. His reputation rests on "Ghosts . . . of the Civil Dead" (1988), which was about a maximum-security jail in his native Australia; "The Proposition" (2005), which stayed in that country but harked back to the eighteen-eighties, for a violent family feud; and his first American feature, "The Road" (2009), adapted from Cormac McCarthy's cheerful survey of a world reduced to its last whimper. Now we have "Lawless," which demonstrates that Hillcoat's narrative habits are locked into place. We get long, dun patches of inaction, interspersed with startling shows of force, in which men—and it is almost always men—belch forth uncontrollable furies. That mixture of tedium and spasm is invariably found in accounts of mass combat, and I can think of nobody better than Hillcoat to dramatize, say, the ferocious slog of Australian troops during their battle for New Guinea, in 1942.

For the moment, however, we must be content with rural Virginia, in 1931—

in Franklin County, which did as much as any patch of America to defy the dry season of Prohibition. The screenplay, by Nick Cave, is adapted from "The Wettest County in the World," a novel by Matt Bondurant, which he concocted from tales of his grandfather and great-uncles, and here they are onscreen: Forrest Bondurant (Tom Hardy) and his brothers, Howard (Jason Clarke) and young Jack (Shia LaBeouf). The Bondurants have a nice little business going, cooking up moonshine and selling it by the jar, like honey, to satisfied—or oblivious—local customers. Some of the movie's strongest images, at once fiery and funny, are provoked by the details of this brief industrial history. I loved the inventive guy who rigs up a household boiler as a makeshift still, so that, when he turns on the kitchen faucet, out comes neat hooch—a touch on the cloudy side, for a purist, what with all the rust in the pipes, but enough to get the party under way. Or, better still, the dreamy spectacle of an entire hillside dotted with flames, like the flank of a volcano, where scores of distillers brew their rival poisons.

In a way, this is an idyll: a black market where supply is eager and demand unending, and where the cops take their own sweet cut of the liquor. Into every paradise, of course, cometh the serpent, and the demon of "Lawless" is a singular creature called Special Deputy Charlie Rakes (Guy Pearce), newly arrived from Chicago. He parts his hair in the middle and tints it black; he wears bow ties and wash-leather gloves, which he hates to spoil with anything as messy as blood, but needs must, because Rakes is a psychopath. He throws Jack out the back door like a bag of trash; he gently escorts another lad to a haven beneath a tree and throttles him. You can't blame Pearce for making the most of this succulent role, yet it feels badly overcooked. The notion of the dandified killer is scarcely new—think of Dennis Price in "Kind Hearts and Coronets," or Chaplin in "Monsieur Verdoux"—but there we were gulled by a light comic wickedness, whereas at no point did I believe, faced with Rakes, that I was watching much more than a screenwriter's conceit.

Still, the tonal contrast works, for Rakes is a peacock in a farmyard. The backdrop against which he preens is a muted array of wood, asphalt, dirt, and woven tweed. Forrest, for his part, plunges his hands into the pockets of a long gray cardigan, which he accessorizes with a hat pulled low, a cigar jammed into his mouth, and brass knuckle-dusters. With these he reconfigures the face of anyone who crosses him, and Hillcoat is not someone to leave such deeds to our imagination. Hardy rounds off his portrait of Forrest with an extraordinary bass grunt, meant to indicate satisfaction, scorn, and pretty much everything in between; he sounds like Lee Marvin waking up in a pigsty. Even when a naked redhead glides into his room, after dark, and stands at the foot of the bed, all he can manage is the same noise, which she interprets, for some reason, as a prelude to intercourse rather than a request for Alka-Seltzer—the hot new product of that year, which shows that Prohibition was a bust. "You just goin' to watch me forever?" she asks. It's an idea.

The redhead is Maggie (Jessica Chastain), a hooper who has fled the big city in search of the quiet life, and has

found it, as one does, in the company of homicidal bootleggers. Chastain, as usual, manages to seem both paper-frail and tough enough to protect her own hide, a combination that would have had the noir directors of the nineteen-forties kneeling like pilgrims outside her door, and, as Maggie, she makes a couple of wondrous entrances, first in pale blue-green, and then in a velvet number of claret red. One problem with "Lawless," though, is that it feels chock-full of entrances that never quite lead anywhere. Maggie's importance flickers as the story proceeds, and more disappointing still is the fate of Gary Oldman, who arrives in spectacular style, playing a gangster named Floyd Banner, armed with a chattering tommy gun, only to fade in and out of the action like a ghost.

"Lawless" is the twin of "The Proposition." Both films concern themselves, as if updating a Biblical theme, with a trio of sparring brothers, and both answer the call of the elemental—bloodlust, envy, pride, and other basics. But "The Proposition" boiled over at its natural climax, whereas the shoot-out that concludes the new film could, you sense, have happened anytime. Since Rakes knows where to find the Bondurants, who live in the family homestead, why not crack down on them at the earliest opportunity? And where is the gravitational core of the tale? Our attention keeps swinging from Forrest to Rakes, and from Rakes to Jack, the only character who gets a chance to shift and grow. I have struggled, through fifty-seven varieties of "Transformers," to feel the magic of Shia LaBeouf, who

has the expression of a panicking puppy and a name like an Islamic steak house. To his credit, however, he gives Hillcoat's film a pulse and a purpose that it sorely needs. Jack is the runt of the litter who longs to be top dog, and the sheen of desperation on LaBeouf's face, as he hares off in a truck with a cargo of alcohol or poses for a photograph like a proper outlaw, tells us everything about the cravings of small-time crooks. The crime of "Lawless" itself is to collude in that mythologizing: we get an objectionable coda in which the Bondurants are reborn as a festive clan of decent citizens. Yet these are the men we saw, in the old days, carving up and even castrating their enemies, all in the name of booze. Some legend.

Anyone who soldiered through "The Expendables," two years ago, will be touched, and a little surprised, to learn that there is more to expend. How much extra juice, I wondered, can be squeezed from the exploits of Sylvester Stallone, Dolph Lundgren, Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Randy Couture, and other senior citizens, some of them close to desiccation? Oh, me of little faith. Here is "The Expendables 2," directed by Simon West, and, while the cast may have lost Mickey Rourke, it has gained Jean-Claude Van Damme and Chuck Norris, who is described as a "lone wolf," though to me he always seems more of a lone marmoset. Never was there a more unlikely action star: soft of voice and unfreakish of stature, with a genial grin that broadens in direct proportion to the number of villains

he happens to be wasting at the time.

The waste levels in the new film are beyond reckoning, with scores of opponents being dispatched according to a simple but troubling principle: if it's facing you and it's foreign, kill it. Our heroes—superannuated mercenaries—start in Nepal and then move to Albania, to deal with a case of nuclear theft. This is excellent news, because it allows Maggie (Nan Yu), the only woman on the team, to exclaim, "We're too late, the plutonium's gone!"—a line without which no self-respecting film is complete. There is also a heap of in-jokes, most of them cranked out by Schwarzenegger, although you mustn't laugh when Lundgren's character claims to have been a Fulbright scholar; Lundgren, who these days resembles a ruined cliff face, really was awarded a Fulbright, to study at M.I.T., and only failed to go because he met Grace Jones. In the haunting words of his Web site, "Somehow the academic world could not make him fully satisfied." Meanwhile, the key to understanding "The Expendables 2" lies in the closing credits, which list a stunt double for most of the stars, although the need for an acting double is often more acute; an astonishing roster of welders and carpenters, all of whom were presumably needed to assemble Van Damme; and, strangest of all, four "cleaning ladies." Only four! For all that blood? They must have spent a fortune on mops. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Liam Francis Walsh, must be received by Sunday, September 2nd. The finalists in the August 13th & 20th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 17th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You can tell the judge why you were doing CX in an XXV."
Brian Magaña, Bainbridge Island, Wash.



THE FINALISTS

"Any stiffness?"
Ryan Scott Misener, Tampa, Fla.

"Sorry about the wait."
Bob Howard, Eugene, Ore.

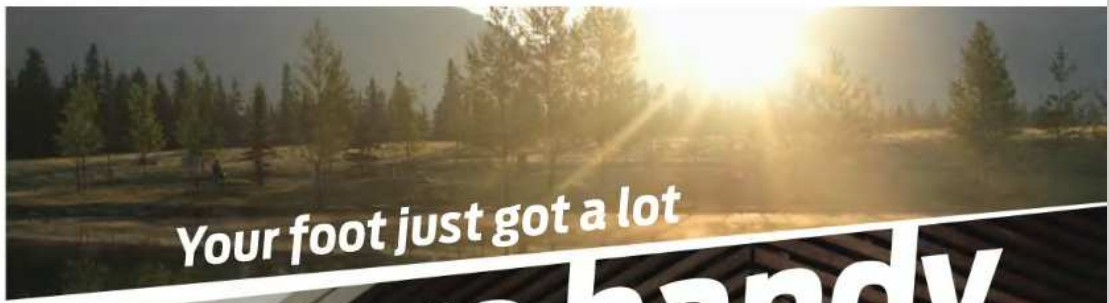
"Any family history with death?"
Stephanie Nilva, New York City

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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