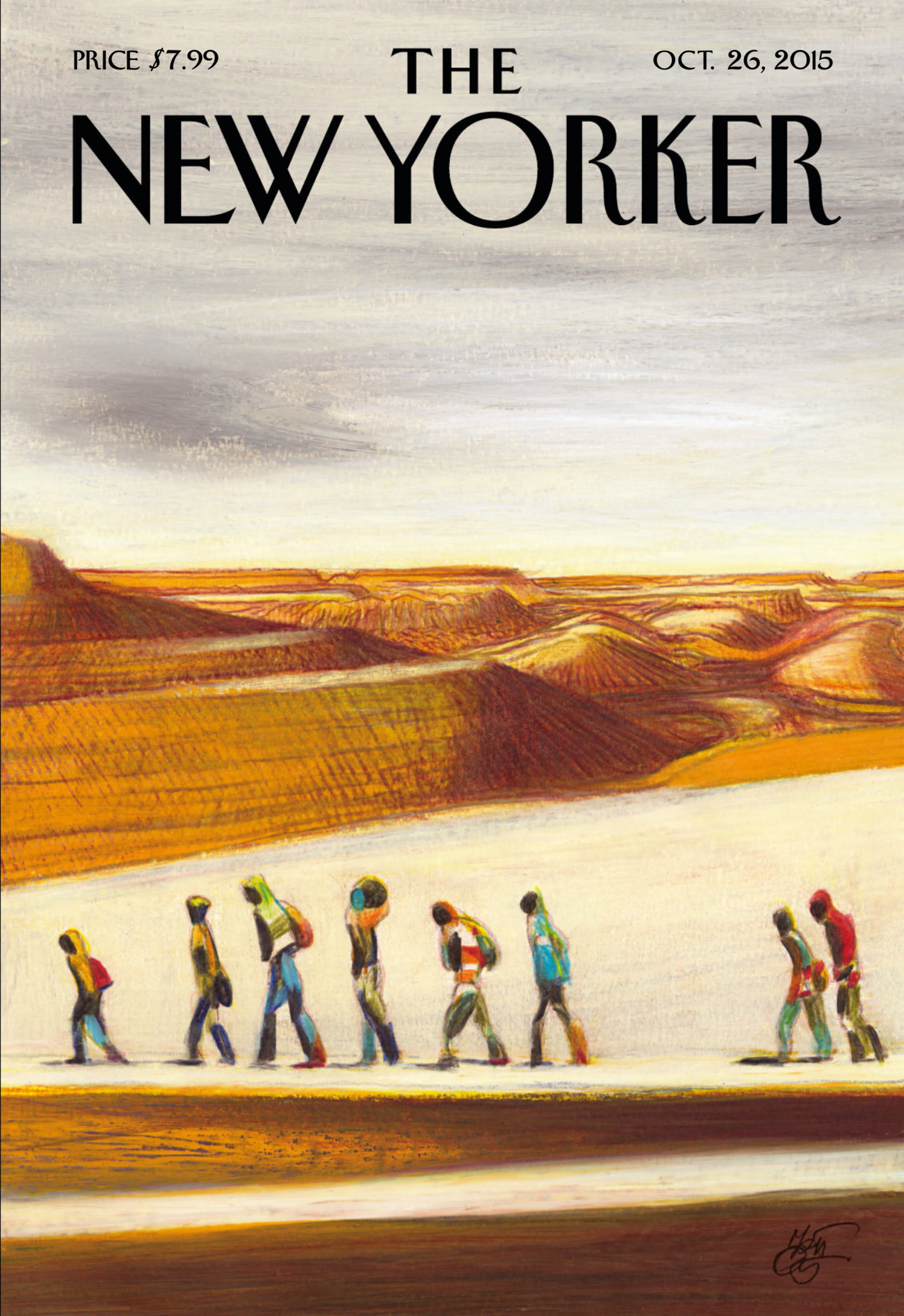
PRICE $7.99

THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 26, 2015




©2015 Cartier
www.cartier.us - 1-800-cartier

Cartier

Diamond Collection

THE NEW YORKER

OCTOBER 26, 2015

At one point, 40 percent of streetlights in Detroit didn't work.
This made life even more difficult for a city that was already struggling.

The Public Lighting Authority of Detroit devised a plan to reilluminate the city. But finding a bank to finance the project during Detroit's bankruptcy was challenging. Citi stepped up and committed its own capital, which encouraged other investors. So far, thousands of new LED lights have been installed, lighting the way as a model for similar projects around the world.

For over 200 years, Citi's job has been to believe in people and help make their ideas a reality.

citi.com/progress

citi®
The World's Citi℠

© 2015 Citibank, N.A. Citi and Citi with Arc Design are registered service marks of Citigroup Inc. The World's Citi is a service mark of Citigroup Inc.

"A GORGEOUS ANTHEM TO OPTIMISM."
VARIETY

BRIGHT STAR

A NEW MUSICAL

MUSIC AND BOOK BY
STEVE MARTIN

MUSIC AND LYRICS BY
EDIE BRICKELL

DIRECTED BY
WALTER BOBBIE

LIMITED PRE-BROADWAY ENGAGEMENT
DEC. 2, 2015 - JAN. 10, 2016

TICKETS ON SALE NOW!
BRIGHTSTARMUSICAL.COM

KENNEDY CENTER EISENHOWER THEATER
(202) 467-4600 · KENNEDY-CENTER.ORG · GROUPS (202) 416-8400

MUSICAL THEATER AT THE KENNEDY CENTER IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROSITY OF THE ADRIENNE ARSHT MUSICAL THEATER FUND.

Kennedy Center Theater Season Sponsor

Altria

ILLUSTRATION BY MICK WIGGINS

The Kennedy Center

CONTRIBUTORS

NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE ("TEN BORDERS," P. 42), the author of "To Live or to Perish Forever: Two Tumultuous Years in Pakistan," has been writing for the magazine since 2011.

RYAN LIZZA ("WHAT WOULD JEB DO?," P. 28) is a Washington correspondent for *The New Yorker* and a political commentator for CNN.

LAUREN COLLINS (THE TALK OF THE TOWN, P. 26) became a staff writer in 2008.

MASHA GESSEN ("THE MEMORY KEEPER," P. 36) has published several books, including "The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin" and "The Brothers: The Road to an American Tragedy," which came out in April.

REBECCA MEAD ("THEATRE LAID BARE," P. 54) is a staff writer. "My Life in Middlemarch" is her most recent book.

LESLEY NNEKA ARIMAH (FICTION, P. 64), a Nigerian writer, is the Africa Regional Winner of the 2015 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. She is at work on a story collection and a novel.

ELIZABETH KOLBERT (BOOKS, P. 80) won this year's Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction for her book "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History."

MICHAEL DICKMAN (POEM, P. 60) has written three books of poems, including "Green Migraine," which will be published in December.

LEO ROBSON (BOOKS, P. 83) is the fiction critic for the *New Statesman*. This is his first piece for the magazine.

LORENZO MATTOTTI (COVER) drew the illustrations for a new version of "Hansel and Gretel" that came out last year. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker* since 1993.

NEWYORKER.COM
EVERYTHING IN THE MAGAZINE, AND MORE THAN FIFTEEN ORIGINAL STORIES A DAY.

ALSO:

DAILY COMMENT / CULTURAL COMMENT: Opinions and reflections by *Hua Hsu*, *Jeffrey Frank*, and others.

PAGE-TURNER: Criticism, contention, and conversation about books and the writing life.

PODCASTS: On the Political Scene, *Jelani Cobb* talks with *Dorothy Wickenden* about what has changed in the United States during the Obama Administration.

POETRY: *Meghan O'Rourke* and *Michael Dickman* read their poems.

HUMOR: A Daily Cartoon on the news, by *Kaamran Hafeez*.

VIDEO: On the latest episode of "Comma Queen," *Mary Norris*, a copy editor at the magazine, talks about what the number of spaces a person puts after a period says about his or her age. Plus, on the Screening Room, "Review," a comedic short film.

SUBSCRIBERS: *Get access to our magazine app for tablets and smartphones at the App Store, Amazon.com, or Google Play. (Access varies by location and device.)*

THE MAIL

THE FATE OF IRAQ'S WOMEN

Rania Abouzeid's piece about a former prostitute in Baghdad who is now working to monitor sex trafficking gives a sobering picture of the situation of women in Iraq ("Out of Sight," October 5th). Abouzeid discusses what happened to a country that, as of the nineteen-seventies, was in the forefront of women's rights in the Middle East. She argues that successive conflicts—in the eighties, with Iran; in 1990, with the Gulf War; and then thirteen years of international economic sanctions—reversed the momentum. The United States' contribution to this setback was the "chaos that ensued after the U.S.-led invasion," she writes, at which point crimes against women increased. It is important to remember that the U.S. also provided aid in the war with Iran, led the Gulf War, and initiated the campaign to impose sanctions. Later came the rather significant matter of an occupation. I cannot help but wonder what the situation for women in Iraq would be like today if the U.S. had left the country alone during the past thirty-five years.

Marshall Carter-Tripp
El Paso, Texas

PRIMO LEVI'S HUMANITY

I enjoyed James Wood's article about the life and work of Primo Levi ("The Art of Witness," September 28th). However, I was disappointed that Wood indulges that old canard that Levi committed suicide. The Italian police and others immediately concluded that he had taken his own life, but that doesn't mean we should ignore evidence to the contrary. Diego Gambetta's 1999 essay, "Primo Levi's Last Moments," from the *Boston Review*, offers a scrupulous handling of the facts surrounding Levi's death. When one is writing about the Holocaust, it is tempting to engage in operatic tragic narratives. Levi never gave in to that temptation. I believe that Levi the scientist, the careful thinker, the man who dug deep for answers, the man who consistently eschewed the dramatic gesture, would have scorned the assumption that he'd created such a messy, grandiose, and poetic ending for himself. Levi did the hard work necessary to survive the Holocaust with his humanity intact, and because he did so his writings will inspire readers forever. He proved to us, beautifully, that humanity can endure and that individual identity can survive the greatest of degradations. We need that legacy, untarnished, as much now as we ever did.

Angela Allyn
Renton, Wash.

Wood apparently shares my appreciation for "The Periodic Table." I picked up a copy during a stint in Europe as a business manager for a specialty chemical company, and I recommended the "Uranium" chapter to my sales force. Someone who knew Levi mentioned this to him, and he wrote to me, "Time and again I happened to enjoy the strong salty taste of the act of persuading people." (His note is tucked into my copy of the book.) After that, I read what translations I could find of Levi's other work. In those books, I discovered a much different part of him. No less open and genuine, he dealt with his past with amazing clarity. He wrote about a horrific experience sparely, and this heightened the impact of his words. I think he was less judgmental about events and people so that his readers would have to bear this onus themselves.

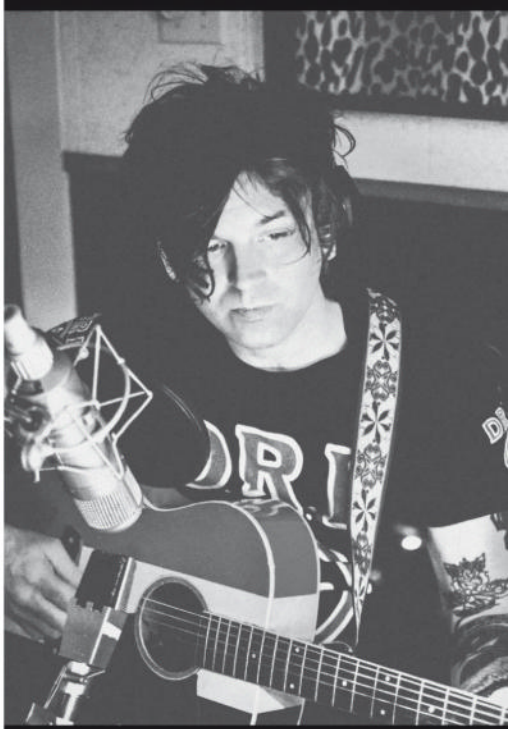
Frank Robertson
Philadelphia, Pa.

CORRECTION: "Drawing Blood" (October 19th) incorrectly included Renald Luzier in a list of people killed in the attack at the offices of *Charlie Hebdo*. He continued to work at the paper until last month.

•

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

RYAN ADAMS
1989



"...a melancholy masterpiece"
–AV CLUB

"Beyond a mere meme...an actually great record...fits thematically with his best work."
–GRANTLAND

"music that is both personal and generous"
–THE NEW YORKER

"Adams elevates these songs to a transcendent realm"
–THE CURRENT

DIGITAL ALBUM OUT NOW

CD AVAILABLE OCTOBER 30TH
VINYL AVAILABLE DECEMBER 11TH

amazonmusic

AMAZON, AMAZON MUSIC, AMAZON.COM AND THE AMAZON LOGO ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF AMAZON.COM, INC. OR ITS AFFILIATES.

BLUE NOTE PARAMOUNT

"A big, stunning first novel [of] heart-stopping power"

—Michiko Kakutani, THE NEW YORK TIMES*

"A magisterial epic [of] the human condition that is both ambitious and sublime"

—VANITY FAIR

"An extraordinary performance"

—Ron Charles, THE WASHINGTON POST

"Its storytelling ardor will remind many readers of *The Goldfinch*"

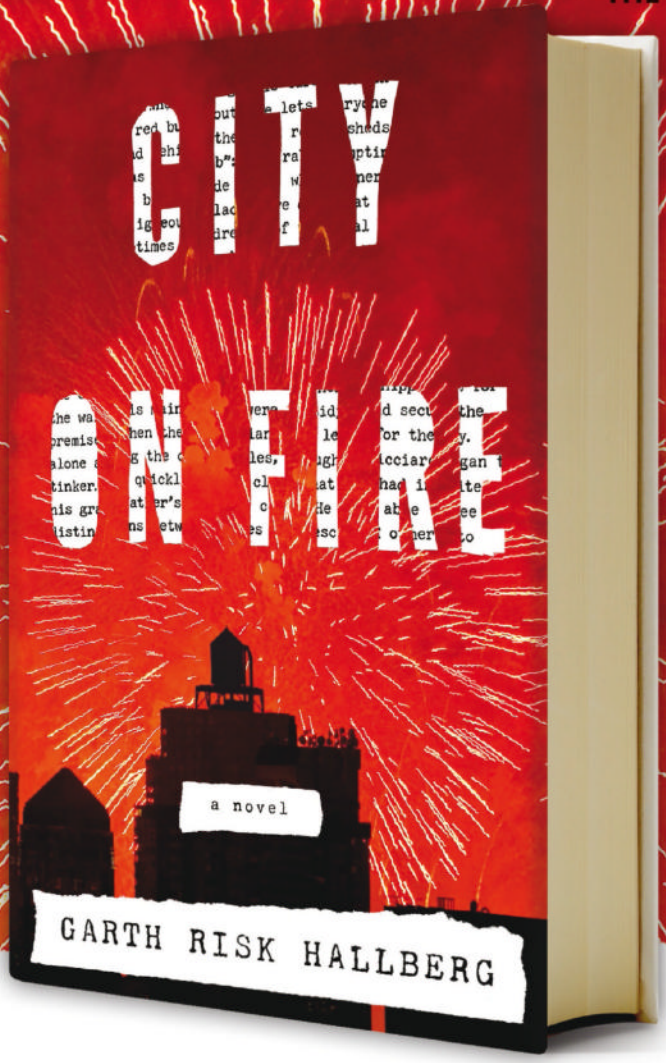
—THE NEW YORK TIMES*

"Thrilling... A kind of punk *Bleak House*, brimming with power brokers and anarchists, cops and journalists, rockers and wannabes"

—Megan O'Grady, VOGUE

"A tour de force"

—Frank Rich, on the front cover of THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW



"A singular achievement"

—ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"Hallberg's powers of evocation are uncanny"

—Louis Menand, THE NEW YORKER

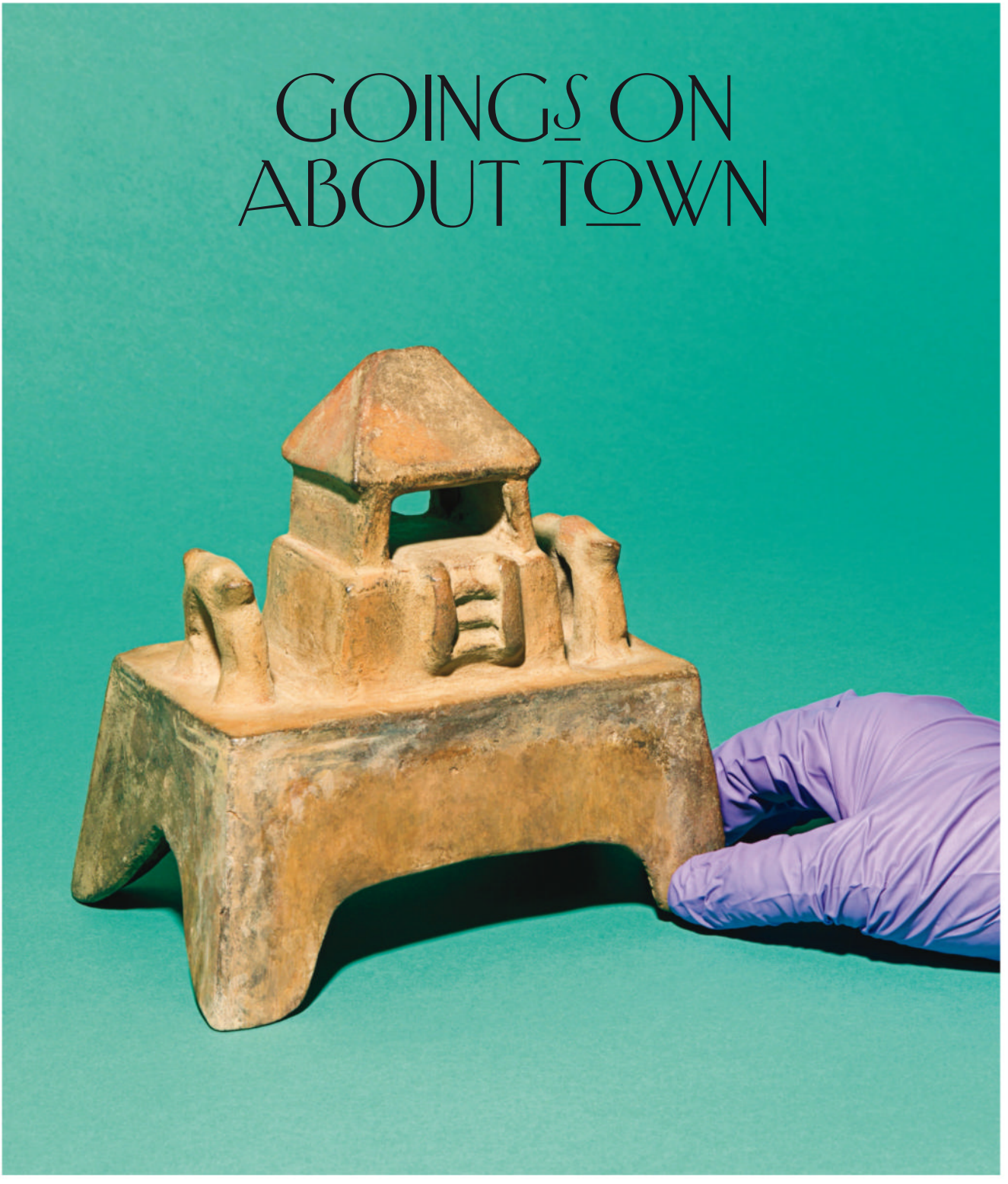
"He writes with style and sophistication about everything"

— Kevin Canfield, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

"The kind of debut novel that comes around only once every 20 years" —ELLE

PUBLISHED BY KNOPF READ AN EXCERPT AT GARTHRISKHALLBERG.COM

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



OCTOBER 2015 | WEDNESDAY 21ST · THURSDAY 22ND · FRIDAY 23RD · SATURDAY 24TH · SUNDAY 25TH · MONDAY 26TH · TUESDAY 27TH

TWO MILLENNIA BEFORE Luis Barragán and Oscar Niemeyer became modernist icons, pre-Columbian craftsmen were fashioning scaled-down versions of their cities' buildings in stone, wood, clay, and silver. From as early as the second century B.C. until the Spanish arrived, eighteen hundred years later, wealthy Incans, Aztecs, and their forebears were laid to rest with miniature palaces, ball courts, houses, and temples (including the ceramic example above, made in Colima, Mexico). The first show on the subject in the United States, "Design for Eternity: Architectural Models for the Ancient Americas," opens at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Oct. 26. One high point, excavated in Peru just two decades ago, offers a glimpse of good times at the pre-Incan palace at Chan Chan, complete with figurines serving beer.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIC HELGAS

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Brooklyn Museum

"Impressionism and the Caribbean: Francisco Oller and His Transatlantic World"

Aside from the flurry of daubs that coalesce into a few modest if lush green landscapes from the late nineteenth century, there's little that's identifiably Impressionist, or even modern, in the provincial academic realism of the Puerto Rican painter Francisco Oller. Despite Oller's lengthy sojourns in France in the company of such innovators as Courbet, Pisarro, Cézanne, and Monet, his portraits, topographical views, and genre scenes are reliably stolid. The exception is a series of closely cropped still-lifes of tropical fruit, which play with Old Master conventions, resulting in visions of prickly and exotic abundance. The museum generously lards the show with examples of coeval European paintings (usually to Oller's detriment); there's also an introductory section of broadly defined Caribbean art, from a Mexican *casta* painting depicting colonial miscegenation to a Winslow Homer watercolor of a Key West beach. Wall labels detailing the region's history betray some curatorial ax-grinding, as when Frederic Church's lovely 1871 painting of a tranquil Jamaican cove is taken to task for its failure to depict social unrest. Through Jan. 3.

Japan Society

"For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968-1979"

This insightful two-part exhibition, which continues downtown at N.Y.U., situates the roots of Japanese conceptual art in the anxiety and growing radicalization of a country chafing under its ties to the United States. In both locations, it opens with dark, chaotic images of protests and demonstrations, interspersed with glimpses of ferocious erotic abandon. (The most influential photographic journal of the underground scene was *Provoke*, copies of which are installed in vitrines amid other printed matter.) Pictures by established artists—Daido Moriyama, Shomei Tomatsu, Nobuyoshi Araki, Keizo Kitajima—prepare viewers for more challenging work, much of it bracingly conceptual, by less familiar names, including Tatsuo Kawaguchi, Akihide Tamura, and Keiji Uematsu, who grounded their avant-garde vision in the grit, drift, and chaos of their postwar reality. "For the Damaged Right Eye," a 1968 film by Toshio Matsumoto, serves as a keystone: a delirious mash-up of footage from political demonstrations and riots, dance clubs and strip joints. Through Dec. 10. (Through Dec. 5 at the Grey Art Gallery at N.Y.U.)

Neue Galerie

"Berlin Metropolis: 1918-1933"

Painting, photography, fashion, and architecture all had their place in the Weimar capital, but it's through the cinema, above all, that the curator Olaf Peters evokes a city recovering from one war and tumbling into another. There are posters, costume sketches, film stills, photomontages (notably of airplanes and monkeys in Walter Ruttmann's "Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis"), and looped scenes from Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" and "M." Those films would have screened in swanky theatres like the Roxy-Palast, designed by the Jewish architect Martin Punitzer, whose unobtrusive lighting and low, sinuous balustrades survive only in photographs. (The building now houses an organic supermarket.) Also on view are some familiar masterpieces, including Mies van der Rohe's charcoal sketches for his unbuilt Friedrichstrasse tower and John Heartfield's biting anti-Hitler photomontages. Less expected are four wild paintings by Hannah Höch, one of which depicts a freakish child bride encircled by a flying eye and breast. Through Jan. 4.

New Museum

"Jim Shaw: The End Is Here"

Perhaps the strangest of many strange things about this jam-packed retrospective of the Los Angeles-based artist is its equanimity. Chipper dispassion plays like dappled sunlight across Shaw's determinedly freaky works—hundreds of drawings, paintings, collages, doctored photographs, videos—which are accompanied by pieces from the artist's collections of amateur paintings and crackpot Christian and conspiracy-mongering tracts, books, banners, and other printed materials. Longtime followers of Shaw's torrential lumpen-Surrealist output may have fancied that it must flow from a heart of hysteria, if not of darkness. But he turns out to be an even-tempered connoisseur of eccentricities—including his own, which he mines in comic-strip-like illustrations of his dreams—and is an epoch-defining aficionado of the very best in American bad taste. (Religion is a recurring target, and Shaw went as far as to invent a sect, supposedly contemporaneous with the rise of Mormonism: O-ism, the worship of a goddess who must not be named.) Throughout the show, elements in Shaw's agglomeration of symbols may excite amused if not queasy recognitions. But their meanings are opaque, secreting things that the artist knows and that we, short of a born-again revelation, will never find out. Through Jan. 10.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Cosima von Bonin

Think of this tight, decade-spanning survey as a greatest-hits introduction to this compelling but slippery German artist. Like Rosemarie Trockel, who is also based in Cologne, von Bonin ranges across media but has a soft spot for textiles. Plaid-patterned wool, checkered cotton, and florally decorated silk are stretched like canvas and exhibited as paintings, while stitched details of superhero hands compound the imbrication of high and low. Poised in the center of the gallery is a striking soft-sculpture octopus, which in its vividness and variegation could double as a portrait of the unpredictable artist herself. Through Oct. 31. (Petzel, 35 E. 67th St. 212-680-9467.)

"Lee Friedlander & Pierre Bonnard: Photographs & Drawings"

What links the American photographer's pictures, taken deep inside tangled woods, with the French painter's sketches of country fields, rolling hills, and the occasional seaport? Consummate skill and pleasure. Because every branch in Friedlander's works can easily be read as the mark of a pencil, the show is weighted in his favor. Bonnard's drawings are small and improvisational—deft but slight. The photographs, by contrast, are compelling—claustrophobic, even when we glimpse a clearing in the distance. Through Oct. 24. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Yola Monakhov Stockton

The photographer (a contributor to this magazine) eschews straight-ahead documentary in favor of a more inventive, even empathetic approach in her most visually arresting show yet. Color portraits of birds—cardinals, warblers, falcons—flutter with energy, whether capturing stasis or motion. For another, more conceptual series, Stockton made pinhole cameras from boxes of photographic paper, which she mailed to herself. The cameras' journey is recorded in mysterious, layered abstractions—new-millennium descendants of Moholy-Nagy. Through Oct. 24. (Wester, 526 W. 26th St. 212-255-5560.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Zak Prekop

Strong new works by the young Chicago-born painter merge geometric shapes—a diamond grid, a nonet of white circles—with inscrutable flowing forms, some made with a palette knife, others by using a stencil. In two cases, Prekop paints both sides of the artwork, and woozy circuits of black or red appear faintly through thin muslin. The fraying contours and subtle underpainting reward sustained attention, and, gratifyingly, would be lost in translation to JPEG. These are paintings made to be seen, rather than circulated. Through Oct. 25. (Essex Street, 114 Eldridge St. 917-263-1001.)

Emily Mae Smith

Like other high-calibre young realist painters at work in New York (Chason Matthams, Greg Parma Smith, Jamian Juliano-Villani), Smith flattens hierarchies between high and low. She's as likely to ransack the studio of Walt Disney (the Sorcerer's Apprentice's broom is a recurring muse) as she is to lift from the patriarchy of Pop (a Lichtenstein Benday-dot mirror has a cameo). A tartly feminist current ripples through Smith's paintings, whose deceptively modest scale and sinister, erotic imagery recalls (and also celebrates) the underappreciated Chicago Imagist Christina Ramburg. Through Oct. 25. (Gitlen, 122 Norfolk St. 212-274-0761.)

OF NOTE Martine Syms

In the video at the heart of this nuanced exhibition by the promising young L.A.-based artist, a performer pairs hand gestures with spoken words. Clasped hands mean "real talk"; a raised finger, extended out from the chest, conveys "check yourself." Syms has edited the segments down to staccato fragments, repeated up to a dozen times each. In its looped, stuttering format, the piece recalls Vines or Snapchat videos, as if to underscore that expressions of identity and race (both Syms and her actor are black) are now the domain of social media. Still, like many young artists, Syms, a self-described "conceptual entrepreneur," is also devoted to printed matter, and she's set up a bookshop in the gallery's back room where you can browse through selections from her publishing project, Domenica. Through Nov. 1. (Donahue, 99 Bowery. 646-896-1368.)

KONGO POWER & MAJESTY

"Dazzling blockbuster"
—Wall Street Journal

ONE MET. MANY WORLDS.

metmuseum.org

#KongoPower

Through January 3

The exhibition is made possible by the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund and the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund.

Power Figure (Nkisi N'Kondi: Mangaaka), detail, Kongo peoples, 19th century, Manchester Museum, University of Manchester. Photo: Peter Zeray, The Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art © 2015.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Otto Schenk's 1977 production of Wagner's **"Tannhäuser"** is a medieval-style pageant: the singers, done up as thirteenth-century German minstrels, sweep about in robes and capes while carrying small harps. Stephen Pickover does what he can to bring new life to the staging; otherwise, it's left to the orchestra and James Levine—who, even with his physical limitations, conducts this music with unmatched authority—to drive the opera's story forward in magnificent, voluptuous sound, as the tormented hero (an indefatigable Johan Botha) struggles to choose between the sensual Venus (the dusky-voiced Michelle DeYoung) and the chaste Elisabeth (fulsomely sung by Eva-Maria Westbroek). Peter Mattei, an undervalued resource at the house, makes the most of Wolfram's tender lyricism. (Oct. 24 at 7:30 and Oct. 27 at 7.) • **Also playing:** Luc Bondy's controversial production of **"Tosca,"** which plays up the sleazier aspects of Puccini's melodrama about sexual blackmail, was a flop when it opened, in 2009, but has proved easy to revive. Paolo Carignani steps up to the conductor's podium, leading a cast that includes Oksana Dyka, Roberto Aronica, and Roberto Frontali. (In the first of many revolving-door cast changes for this production, Željko Lučić replaces Frontali in the second performance.) (Oct. 21 at 7:30 and Oct. 24 at 12:30.) • The American dramatic soprano Lise Lindstrom, who made her house début in Zeffirelli's extravagant production in 2009, returns to the formidable title role in Puccini's Chinese fairy tale, **"Turandot,"** leading a cast that also includes Marcelo Álvarez and Leah Crocetto; Carignani conducts. (Oct. 22 and Oct. 26 at 7:30.) • Michael Mayer's flashy but effective Las Vegas-style staging of **"Rigoletto"** features Stephen Costello as the profligate Duke (a Rat Pack-era Sinatra type in a white dinner jacket) along with the steadfast George Gagnidze as Rigoletto and the sparkling Olga Peretyatko as Gilda; Pablo Heras-Casado. (Oct. 23 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

"Heretical Angels"

This program at Lincoln Center's White Light Festival brings together the vocal ensembles Dialogos, which has made its name in fluently delivered plainchant and early polyphony, and Kantaduri, a group specializing in traditional Dalmatian music, in a music-theatre work (assembled by Katarina Livljanić) inspired by ancient pagan and Christian rites. Texts include prayers, tombstone inscriptions, and even exorcisms, sung in Old Church Slavonic and medieval Bosnian and Croatian dialects. (Union Theological Seminary, Broadway at 121st St. whitelightfestival.org. Oct. 20-21 at 7:30.)

"Refuse the Hour"

In town to direct a new production of "Lulu" at the Met, William Kentridge makes a diversion to Brooklyn to perform in a chamber opera on the subject of time which he's devised with the composer Philip Miller—a multimedia extravaganza that includes dancers, singers, instrumentalists, and, as in many a Kentridge project, a feast of projected animations. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. bam.org. Oct. 22-24 at 7:30 and Oct. 25 at 3.)

Beth Morrison Projects: "Persona"

The music of Keeril Makan, a professor at M.I.T., is empowered by modern technology but haunted by a spirit of immemorial darkness. He teams up with the bold young director Jay Scheib to mount a world-première opera based on Ingmar Bergman's cinematic epic of psychological unease, a major presentation of National Sawdust, the adventurous new Brooklyn music center. (80 N. 6th St. nationalsawdust.org. Oct. 23-24 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Semyon Bychkov's latest program with the Philharmonic is all-Brahms, but with a twist. "Brahms-Fantasie," a new piece by the leading German composer Detlev Glanert, is a prelude for two works by the Romantic titan, the rarely heard Double Concerto (with two persuasive soloists, the violinist Lisa Batiashvili and the cellist Gautier Capuçon) and the majestic Symphony No. 1 in C Minor. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 21-22 at 7:30, Oct. 23 at 11 A.M., and Oct. 24 at 8.)

Boston Symphony Orchestra

Andris Nelsons, only in his thirties, recently accepted a second major music directorship (that of the storied Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra) in addition to his still-fresh commitment to the B.S.O., an orchestra that, after a decade of tumult, could seriously use a grand and unifying vision. He brings the group to Carnegie Hall this week for three concerts. The first offers the New York première of Sebastian Currier's short work "Divisions" as well as Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto (with Lars Vogt) and Brahms's Second Symphony. The second is a concert performance of Strauss's **"Elektra,"** with Christine Goerke, one of the Met's favorite sopranos, in the title role. The series wraps up with a big Russian evening featuring Prokofiev's cantata "Alexander Nevsky" and Rachmaninoff's Symphonic Dances. (212-247-7800. Oct. 20-22 at 8.)

American Composers Orchestra

The orchestra closes this year's SONiC festival of young composers with an evening dedicated exclusively to world premières. The works, culled from a series of readings, are by Hannah Lash (who will double as soloist in her own Concerto for Harp and Chamber Orchestra), Judah Adashi, Michael Thomas-Foumai, Melody Eötvös, and Conrad Winslow ("Joint Account," a love letter, with video, to the Baroque era). The invaluable George Manahan conducts. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 23 at 7:30.)

London Symphony Orchestra

The peripatetic Russian maestro Valery Gergiev, rounding out his term as the L.S.O.'s principal conductor, brings the group to David Geffen Hall for the first big blowout of the Great Performers season. Each concert is rich in works by Bartók, a welcome focus on a composer who sometimes gets shortchanged. The first program offers the slashing "Miraculous Mandarin" Suite and the limpid Third Piano Concerto, as well as Stravinsky's complete "Firebird" ballet; the second features the "Dance Suite," the more percussive Second Piano Concerto, and the beloved Concerto for Orchestra. The soloist in each is the kingly Yefim Bronfman. (212-721-6500. Oct. 23 at 8 and Oct. 25 at 3.)

RECITALS

Matt Haimovitz

The maverick cellist—who made his name by playing the complete Bach Solo Suites at CBGB before the "classical in clubs" trend became a gimmick—brings his exquisite performances back to New York. He is still a pioneer, commissioning six composers—Philip Glass, Vijay Iyer, and Du Yun, among others—to write overtures for each individual Bach suite. Two of his concerts will be performed at Miller Theatre, and two others will be played "spontaneously," with times and locations announced on Miller's social-media platforms on the days they are to occur. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. millertheatre.com. Oct. 22 and Oct. 24 at 8.)

Michael Gordon's Rushes Ensemble

The postminimalist master (and Bang on a Can co-founder) has amassed a strange and unique ensemble—seven bassoons—to perform his new composition "Rushes," a constantly pulsing fabric of gnarly double-reed sonority. The Park Avenue Armory's elegant Board of Officers Room hosts the New York première. (Park Ave. at 66th St. armoryonpark.org. Oct. 23 at 8.)

Carnegie Hall Recitals

Two superstar pianists and one of the violin world's most enduring talents take the stage this week. Oct. 23 at 8:30: Lang Lang, rarely out of the news, returns to Gotham to offer a solo recital in moods reflective (Tchaikovsky's "The Seasons"), probing (Bach's "Italian Concerto"), and tempestuous (the four Chopin scherzos). (Stern Auditorium.) • Oct. 25 at 3: A more august figure, Maurizio Pollini, is next, displaying his career-long love for the Romantic repertory (three sonatas by Beethoven, including the "Tempest" and the "Appassionata") and modernist classics (Schoenberg's seminal Three Piano Pieces, Op. 11, and Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19). (Stern Auditorium.) • Oct. 25 at 7: Gil Shaham has had Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas under his belt for decades now, but the upcoming traversal of the complete set has an exciting extra element: a sequence of new films by David Michalek, which will be projected during the performance. (Zankel Hall.) (carnegiehall.org.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

The acclaimed French pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet joins several top-notch wind players, including the hornist Radovan Vlatković and the clarinettist Romie de Guise-Langlois, for an eclectic program of chamber music for piano and winds, featuring Albéric Magnard's exquisite Quintet in D Minor, the Six Bagatelles by the Hungarian master György Ligeti, Rimsky-Korsakov's Quintet in B-Flat Major, and Poulenc's riotous Sextet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, and Piano. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Oct. 25 at 5.)

"I WANT AN INVESTMENT PLAN FOCUSED ON MY NEEDS, NOT ON FEES."

iShares Funds can help you keep more of what you earn.

STRENGTHEN YOUR PORTFOLIO WITH iSHARES CORE FUNDS.

Low cost. 1/10th the cost of a typical mutual fund.[1]

Tax efficient. 95% of iShares Funds did not pay capital gains taxes in 2014.[2]

Diversified. Access a range of investments in a single fund.

So what do I do with my money?®

Visit iShares.com and speak with your financial advisor.

IVV	iShares Core S&P 500 Fund
IJH	iShares Core S&P Mid-Cap Fund
IJR	iShares Core S&P Small-Cap Fund

iShares®
by BLACKROCK®

BlackRock is trusted to manage more money than any other investment firm in the world.[3]

1. Morningstar, as of 12/31/14. Comparison is between the Prospectus Net Expense Ratio for the average iShares Core Series ETFs (0.12%) and the average Open-End Mutual Fund (1.27%) available in the U.S. 2. BlackRock, as of 12/31/14. 3. Based on $4.774T in AUM as of 3/31/15. **Visit www.iShares.com or www.BlackRock.com to view a prospectus, which includes investment objectives, risks, fees, expenses and other information that you should read and consider carefully before investing. Risk includes principal loss.** Small-cap companies are more volatile and less liquid than larger capitalization companies. Transactions in shares of ETFs will result in brokerage commissions and will generate tax consequences. All regulated investment companies are obliged to distribute portfolio gains to shareholders. Past distributions not indicative of future distributions. Diversification may not protect against market risk or principal loss. Funds distributed by BlackRock Investments, LLC (BRIL). The iShares Funds are not sponsored, endorsed, issued, sold or promoted by S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC (S&P), nor does this company make any representation regarding the advisability of investing in the Funds. BRIL is not affiliated with S&P. ©2015 BlackRock, Inc. All rights reserved. **iSHARES**, **BLACKROCK** and **SO WHAT DO I DO WITH MY MONEY** are registered trademarks of BlackRock, Inc., or its subsidiaries. iS-14049-0415

DANCE

DANCE OF DEATH

"The Green Table," in American Ballet Theatre's fall season.

THE GERMAN CHOREOGRAPHER KURT JOOSS had the sad honor of being a one-masterpiece master. He made scores of ballets, founded schools and companies, and was instrumental in developing a whole German style, Ausdruckstanz, which is still with us, above all in the work of the late Pina Bausch. "Ausdruckstanz" means "expressive dance," and the matters expressed are often grim—which brings us to Jooss's masterpiece, "The Green Table" (1932), being revived by American Ballet Theatre during its fall season (Oct. 21-Nov. 1, at the Koch Theatre). It is the world's most famous antiwar ballet.

The early thirties were bad years in Germany. Hitler was elected Chancellor in 1933. Jooss was convinced that all the vaunted shows of diplomacy were just a sham and that Europe, having barely recovered from the First World War, would soon be enmeshed in a second one. "The Green Table" opens with a group of grotesquely masked diplomats making a show of negotiating around a baize-covered table (the green table). Finally, they give up, pull out their guns, and shoot. Blackout. Then a dim light goes up, and on an otherwise empty stage we see a huge figure, wearing a Roman helmet and made up like a skeleton, doing a terrible, ineluctable stamping dance. This is Death, who now begins his march. Boys muster, whipping their flags, eager to show their courage. Mothers weep, knowing what will happen. Abandoned wives find their way into brothels. Each scene ends with Death seizing a new victim. The clarity of the action is like something from a church fresco or, to name its true source, like the Dance of Death etchings that proliferated in Germany from the late Middle Ages onward, as plague, famine, and war scoured the Continent.

Jooss made the role of Death for himself—actually, he said he made the ballet so that he could dance this role—and he was perfect for it: a big guy with a head like a dinosaur egg. Later, too, the part was usually given to large men, notably Christian Holder, in the beloved Joffrey Ballet production of 1967. The role not only glorified the dancers; it liberated them, via the mask-like makeup. As actors know, masks free you. The audience isn't really seeing you, you think, so you can cast off your inhibitions. In 2005, when A.B.T. acquired "The Green Table," David Hallberg was a reticent, if lovely, dancer. The company gave him the role of Death, and he became a giant—terrifying, fabulous. On Oct. 22, Marcelo Gomes will take the role for the first time. Gomes is a large man but not a natural for Death, because he has such beautiful manners. He has spent a lot of time as the Prince. In "The Green Table," I expect him to turn into a nightmare from Hell, and I can't wait.

—Joan Acocella

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY ALAN LOVE

American Ballet Theatre
The company's seventy-fifth-anniversary year continues with a two-week season at the Koch. Opening night is a gala performance, featuring the première of a new ballet by Mark Morris, "After You," set to a septet by the early romantic composer Johann Nepomuk Hummel. (The season's second première is "AfterEffect," by Marcelo Gomes, a member of the company, opening Oct. 28.) The rest of the gala program is no less enticing: a revival of Twyla Tharp's richly layered, post-Balanchinean "Brahms-Haydn Variations," from 2000, and a company première of two pellucid works by Frederick Ashton, "Monotones I" and "Monotones II," from 1965-66. Returning after several years out of rep, "The Green Table" is a searing antiwar parable from 1932, by the German modernist Kurt Jooss. Its central character, Death, will be danced on alternating nights by Gomes and Roman Zhurbin. • Oct. 21 at 6:30: "Monotones I and II," "After You," and "The Brahms-Haydn Variations." • Oct. 22 at 7:30: "The Brahms-Haydn Variations," "Monotones I and II," and "The Green Table." • Oct. 23 at 7:30: "Le Spectre de la Rose," "Valse-Fantaisie," "After You," and "The Green Table." • Oct. 24 at 2: "Le Spectre de la Rose," "Valse-Fantaisie," "After You," and "Company B." • Oct. 24 at 8: "Company B," "Le Spectre de la Rose," "Valse-Fantaisie," and "The Brahms-Haydn Variations." • Oct. 25 at 2: "Monotones I and II," "Company B," and "The Green Table." • Oct. 27 at 7:30: "After You," "Monotones I and II," and "The Green Table." (Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through Nov. 1.)

Okwui Okpokwasili / "Bronx Gothic"
The Bronx-born Okpokwasili—a frequent collaborator of Ralph Lemon's—is a woman of many talents: she is an actor, a dancer, a storyteller, and a singer. Her "Bronx Gothic" is a semi-autobiographical one-woman show that explores intimate themes from an urban childhood: sex, fear, identity, bullying, and, most keenly, friendship. Okpokwasili re-creates bruising conversations; she sings; and, all the while, she moves with exhausting precision and stamina. No matter what she does, she is riveting. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 21-24.)

Silas Riener
At once daring and hyper articulate, Riener was a standout dancer in the final Merce Cunningham troupe and has since become a standout dancer in works by Rashaun Mitchell, Kota Yamazaki, and Tere O'Connor. His own choreography, so far, has made less of his great gifts. His new work, "Blue Name," is a solo with an electronic score, by Jesse Stiles, that responds to Riener's bold and subtle movements. (The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111. Oct. 21-24 and Oct. 26-27. Through Oct. 28.)

Jon Kinzel
Kinzel is a subtle choreographer—sometimes too subtle. His works can feel like preparatory studies, made of gestures toward humor or meaning that never arrive. But his gentle manner seems to attract excellent dancers, and the cast of his new "COWHAND CON MAN," a study of physical endurance and mental disquiet, includes Omagbitse Omagbemi, whose performances are never less than dramatic. (Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, 280 Broadway. 646-837-6809. Oct. 21-24. Through Oct. 31.)

Monica Bill Barnes & Company
On the heels of a successful touring show with the public-radio host Ira Glass, Barnes and her trusty sidekick, Anna Bass, try out another unconventional format for their comic dancing. "Happy Hour" is a weekly after-work office party in a dance studio, hosted by the company's creative producing director, Robert Saenz de Viteri. Barnes and Bass dress in men's suits and play two average guys who wish they were the wild and crazy ones. (Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, 280 Broadway. 646-837-6809. Oct. 21. Through Dec. 16.)

Aakash Odedra Company
Odedra, a British dancer, is highly adept in *kathak*, a classical Indian form, but like his mentor, Akram Khan, he uses that traditional language to tell modern stories. For this program, part of Lincoln Center's White Light Festival, he combines his terpsichorean skills with video and props in two solo pieces. In "Murmur," choreographed by Lewis Major, Odedra expresses his struggles with dyslexia. In "Inked," choreographed by Damien Jalet, he transforms himself with paint. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-721-6500. Oct. 22-24.)

Trajal Harrell
For the latest phase of his project "In One Step Are a Thousand Animals," an investigation into Japanese dance history, Harrell turns to the influential choreographer Kazuo Ohno. Ohno, in his late solo piece "Admiring La Argentina," did not attempt to reproduce the style of the eponymous Spanish dancer, and Harrell, in his new piece "The Return of La Argentina," does not attempt to reproduce Ohno's work, exactly, but rather to create a "fictional archiving" of it. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400. Oct. 24-25.)

"Works & Process" / "Hagoromo"
"Hagoromo" is a popular Noh play about an encounter between an angel and a fisherman. In David Michalek's hands, it becomes something rather more elaborate: an opera-ballet-marionette hybrid. At the Guggenheim, the various collaborators who are bringing it to life—including the dancer Wendy Whelan, the tenor Peter Tantsits, and the flutist Claire Chase—will discuss the process and show a few brief, tantalizing excerpts. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Oct. 26.)

OF NOTE Chris Schlichting
There are stripes in the décor of "Stripe Tease"—streamers and fluorescent tigers, courtesy of the artist Jennifer Davis—and also in the diagrammatic choreography. Schlichting, who teaches at the University of Minnesota's School of Architecture, has a sophisticated way of shaping space. With moving bodies, he can suggest invisible rooms within rooms. Over this firm geometry he drapes wishy-washy gesticulations, generating tension between rigor and lassitude. Some drive comes from the score, played live by its composer, Jeremy Ylvisaker, and his eccentric three-piece rock band, Alpha Consumer. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Oct. 22-24.)

SWANN
AUCTION GALLERIES

Martin Lewis, *Wet Night, Route 6*, drypoint, 1933. Estimate $20,000 to $30,000. At auction November 3.

American Prints from a Private Collection & Old Master Through Modern Prints
NOVEMBER 3 & 4
Specialist: Todd Weyman • tweyman@swanngalleries.com
Preview: October 29 & 30, 10-6; October 31, 12-5; November 2, 10-6; November 3, 10-12
104 East 25th St, New York, NY 10010 • tel 212 254 4710
SWANNGALLERIES.COM

MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

Beasts of No Nation

In a nameless African war zone, the family life of the young Agu (Abraham Attah) comes to a curt end when his father and brother are slain by invading troops and his mother and sister are forced to leave their home. The aftermath of these events has the dark shock of a fairy tale; wandering in the forest, our hero is trapped and taken up by military rebels clad in ragtag uniforms and led by the Commandant (Idris Elba). Agu is trained not merely to serve but to kill, at which point the movie enters the territory of the almost unwatchable. We march through pillage and rape, and the Commandant tightens his power through abuse of his youthful charges; meanwhile, the film itself, supped full of horrors, begins to sicken and dwindle. The director Cary Joji Fukunaga's style relies on flourishes of gruesome intensity, although some viewers may feel that the events on show—such as Agu performing his first murder—are so dire that they beg to be filmed with a steadier eye.—*Anthony Lane* (In wide release.)

Jason and Shirley

The director Stephen Winter revisits a classic independent film—Shirley Clarke's "Portrait of Jason"—in this ingenious docudrama about the night, in 1966, when Clarke filmed Jason Holliday, a gay black hustler and aspiring cabaret artist, in her room in the Chelsea Hotel. The artist Jack Waters and the novelist Sarah Schulman play Holliday and Clarke, respectively, and they co-wrote the script with Winter. The result is a meticulous imagining of the shoot, especially in Waters's electrifying impersonation of Holliday. It's also an anguished view of the power relations, societal conflicts, and cruel sacrifices from which Clarke's film arose. The movie feels like a series of spontaneous variations on Clarke's and Holliday's themes, but in many details it departs from the historical record. Here, Clarke struggles to control the shoot and recruits her lover, Carl Lee (Orran Farmer), to take over. The scene suggests Clarke's transformation of directing into an art of life—the creation of the unique circumstances that made her film possible. Winter and his collaborators offer a distinctive homage to that spirit.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA.)

The Martian

In Ridley Scott's new film, Mark Watney (Matt Damon), an astronaut on a mission to Mars, is abandoned on the planet, presumed dead, when the rest of his crew, menaced by a wild storm, has to skedaddle and head back home. Declining to despair, Watney, a botanist by trade, sets about growing food and sitting out his years of solitude. Scott's movie, boosted by a chipper performance from Damon, feels anything but cramped; it revels not just in the finicky joys of ingenuity but, against the odds, in a kind of comic expansiveness. The script, by Drew Goddard, is adapted from the book of the same name by Andy Weir, and there is fine support from two quarters: first, from Jeff Daniels, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and Kristen Wiig, as some of the surprised and worried honchos back at NASA; and, second, from Jessica Chastain as the captain of the mission, who has to decide whether to swing round to the red planet and pick up her lost friend.—*A.L.* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/12/15.) (In wide release.)

Pan

The auguries were not kind for this latest spin on the myth of Peter Pan, yet, somehow, thanks in large part to a zestful script by Jason Fuchs, Joe Wright's film gets by on inventiveness and zip. Its attitude to history is a casual shrug, which marks a change from the slavishness of so much period drama. Peter (Levi Miller), an orphan boy, is spirited out of a London orphanage during the Second World War (a conflict that J. M. Barrie, the author of "Peter Pan," did not live to see), and flown by pirate ship to Neverland. There he meets James Hook (Garrett Hedlund), who becomes a friend and comrade in arms. Their enmity lies far in the future, though the film is not short of villainy, for Hugh Jackman has a blast as Blackbeard. His delivery ranges from fortissimo to sotto voce, and his mournful rage for immortality—which is boosted by a magic mineral, mined by captive children—is a counterpart to the eternal youth that will, as we know, be sprinkled like fairy dust on Peter. The movie sags in the middle stretch, but no matter; there are mermaids, crocodiles, and crystal mountains still to come. With Rooney Mara, as a dauntless Tiger Lily.—*A.L.* (10/19/15) (In wide release.)

Room

A boy named Jack (Jacob Tremblay) celebrates his fifth birthday. He and his mother, Joy (Brie Larson), make a cake, but they cannot go out to buy candles. Other things, too, seem awry. Jack looks like a girl, with long hair, and he sometimes sleeps in a wardrobe, which he calls "wardrobe." Slowly, we piece together their story: Joy has been kidnapped off the street and imprisoned for years in a soundproof shed by a man they know only as Old Nick (Sean Bridgers). Jack is his child, by Joy, whom he rapes at regular intervals. The first half of Lenny Abrahamson's movie, adapted by Emma Donoghue from her own novel, is extremely painful to watch, and sullen with routine; the second half, in which the captives plan a break for freedom, displays more spirit, and it also provides a welcome role for Joan Allen, as Joy's mother. But there is something pat about the movie's main conceit; Tremblay is startling, but you sense that the film is using a horrific plight (reminiscent of several real-life cases) to offer up a meditative study of childhood, and of just how much a child's view of things—first blinkered, then opening wide—can teach us. Does that lesson not come at far too great a cost?—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

Steve Jobs

With an entire busy life to choose from, Danny Boyle's new film about Steve Jobs, scripted by Aaron Sorkin, cuts to the core of Apple. Of Jobs's life as an adopted child, and then as an unwashed hippie, we see nothing; nor do we receive a hint of his decline and death, from cancer, in 2011. A few cursory flashbacks point to his hard labor with Steve Wozniak (Seth Rogen) as they toil over their earliest products in a garage. What we get, mainly, is three launches: of the Macintosh, in 1984; of the NeXT cube, in 1988; and of the iMac, ten years later. Within those events, a pattern of exasperation is set. Jobs (Michael Fassbender) rants at his employees over technical details, argues vehemently with John Sculley (Jeff Daniels) about Apple commercials and board meetings, and finds himself confronted by his former girlfriend (Katherine Waterston) about their daughter, Lisa. The result is a draining experience, as relentless and as caged-in as a wrestling match. Nonetheless, the movie meshes with the popular legend of Jobs as something more than a guru, the implication being that, if he made life hell for other people, it was worth it. The Jiminy Cricket role goes to Kate Winslet, who performs wonders as Joanna Hoffman—a marketing colleague at Apple, and a rare voice of conscience in Jobs's ear.—*A.L.* (10/19/15) (In wide release.)

Under the Sun of Satan

Gérard Depardieu's majestic talent has rarely been showcased as fiercely as in the director Maurice Pialat's tormented 1987 adaptation of Georges Bernanos's 1926 novel. The film, their third collaboration, is a religious drama endowed with carnal fury. Depardieu plays Donissan, a country priest with a literally self-flagellating faith and an obsession with ambient evil. Donissan's relentless quest for Christian suffering alienates his parishioners; he senses the presence of the Devil more clearly than that of God, yet claims miraculous powers for his dark devotion. Depardieu's colossal physical strength makes Donissan's self-punishment all the more harrowing, even as his blunt verbal fluency gives the priest's visionary agony a strong literary voice. Casting himself in the role of Donissan's superior, Pialat fixes his admiring gaze on Depardieu from both inside and outside the frame. The director locates spiritual power in a cosmic struggle that takes the earthly form of physical and emotional violence—that of the character and the actor alike.—*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; Oct. 25.)

The Walk

In this new bio-pic, the director Robert Zemeckis dramatizes Philippe Petit's 1974 high-wire jaunt between the Twin Towers. Petit's caper-like planning is the film's chronological and dramatic center. The movie opens blandly, however, as the young Petit perfects his craft under the tutelage of the circus veteran Papa Rudy (Ben Kingsley). In scenes of a saccharine goofiness, the grown Petit (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) goes to Paris and meets Annie (Charlotte Le Bon), another street performer, who accompanies him to New York and helps him realize his dream. As Petit assembles his team and works out the daring details of his plot, the movie comes alive, leading to the magic moment when Petit steps into the void. Here, Zemeckis hits his limit. The movie's overarching theme is Petit's self-asserted artistic ambitions and his quest for beauty, but Zemeckis's 3-D jumble of angles and swoops reduces the great walk to a mere stunt.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

NEW TRICKS

Annaleigh Ashford plays the title canine in "Sylvia."

THE ACTRESS ANNALEIGH ASHFORD moved to New York City from Denver when she was seventeen, and her bright, bubbly charisma has since stolen scenes in Broadway productions of "Legally Blonde," "Kinky Boots," and last year's "You Can't Take It with You," for which she won a Tony Award. Her newest project seems likely to boost her rising star: A. R. Gurney's crowd-pleasing 1995 comedy, "Sylvia" (in previews, opening Oct. 27, at the Cort), about a New York couple, played by Matthew Broderick and Julie White, who adopt a stray dog. Ashford plays the dog.

"The biggest difference is that dogs see with their noses and walk on fours," the thirty-year-old actress said in her dressing room recently, discussing the gulf between human and canine roles. "I definitely sniff right at the top of the play." Her research process was multi-pronged. This past summer, in Los Angeles, she observed her toy Australian shepherd, Gracie, at classes for obedience, agility, and sheep herding. (Gracie had a knack for it.) "She looks back at her butt a lot," Ashford said. "I really don't know why, it's just her own thing. But I noticed I did it at a preview on Saturday night." To tap into her primal instincts, Ashford did "chakra work," because "animals are completely grounded in their root chakra." And she read nine books dealing with dog psychology, including Temple Grandin's "Animals in Translation," Patricia B. McConnell's "The Other End of the Leash," and the novels "A Dog's Purpose" and "The Art of Racing in the Rain."

Still, "Sylvia" (which starred Broderick's wife, Sarah Jessica Parker, in its Off Broadway première) is less about how dogs actually think than about the desires their owners project onto them, and as the play progresses the title character becomes increasingly human-like. The hardest part of playing Sylvia, Ashford said, is knowing when to shed her canine behavior and morph into "a New York chick." But there is at least one occasion for which she plans to go full dog: "If a cell phone goes off, I can bark at it."

—Michael Schulman

ILLUSTRATION BY KYLE T. WEBSTER

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Before Your Very Eyes
The European collective Gob Squad stages a play based on observations of young New Yorkers, in which seven characters fast-forward from adolescence to old age as the audience watches from behind one-way mirrors. In previews. Opens Oct. 26. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

China Doll
Al Pacino stars in a new play by David Mamet, directed by Pam MacKinnon, as a man with a large fortune and a young fiancée. In previews. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Dada Woof Papa Hot
Scott Ellis directs a play by Peter Parnell ("QED"), in which two gay couples with kids navigate the pitfalls of urban parenting. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

Dames at Sea
An homage to nineteen-thirties musical comedy, first produced Off Broadway in 1968, with a book and lyrics by George Haimsohn and Robin Miller and music by Jim Wise. Randy Skinner directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 22. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Dear Elizabeth
Women's Project Theatre stages Sarah Ruhl's play, drawn from the correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell and performed by a rotating cast, including Cherry Jones and John Douglas Thompson. Previews begin Oct. 26. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

First Daughter Suite
Michael John LaChiusa's new musical imagines the inner lives of Julie Nixon Eisenhower, Patti Davis, Amy Carter, and other Presidential daughters. With Rachel Bay Jones, Mary Testa, and Barbara Walsh. Opens Oct. 21. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Hasan Minhaj: Homecoming King
Minhaj, the comedian and "Daily Show" correspondent, performs a solo show about being a first-generation Indian-American. In previews. Opens Oct. 23. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

Hir
In a new comedy by the performance artist Taylor Mac, directed by Niegel Smith, a young man returns home from the military to his transgender brother and his mother (Kristine Nielsen), who has

ALSO NOTABLE

ALLEGIANCE
Longacre

AMAZING GRACE
Nederlander.
Through Oct. 25.

AN AMERICAN IN PARIS
Palace

BARBECUE
Public. (Reviewed in this issue.)

THE CHRISTIANS
Playwrights Horizons.
Through Oct. 25.

CLOUD NINE
Atlantic Theatre Company

COLIN QUINN: THE NEW YORK STORY
Cherry Lane

THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME
Ethel Barrymore

DADDY LONG LEGS
Davenport

THE FLICK
Barrow Street Theatre

FONDLY, COLLETTE RICHLAND
New York Theatre Workshop. Through Oct. 24.

FUN HOME
Circle in the Square

FUTURITY
Connelly

HAMILTON
Richard Rodgers

HAMLET IN BED
Rattlestick.
Through Oct. 25.

HAND TO GOD
Booth

KILL FLOOR
Claire Tow

THE KING AND I
Vivian Beaumont

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
Pearl

THE NEW MORALITY
Mint. Through Oct. 25.

OLD TIMES
American Airlines Theatre

ON YOUR FEET!
Marquis

PLEASE EXCUSE MY DEAR AUNT SALLY
59E59. Through Oct. 24.

THE QUARE LAND
DR2

RIPCORD
City Center Stage I

ROTHSCHILD & SONS
York Theatre at St. Peter's

SISTERS' FOLLIES: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS
Abrons Arts Center

SOMETHING ROTTEN!
St. James

SPRING AWAKENING
Brooks Atkinson

SYLVIA
Cort

decided to take down the patriarchy. In previews. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

The Humans

Joe Mantello directs a drama by Stephen Karam ("Sons of the Prophet"), about a man who brings his family to celebrate Thanksgiving at his daughter's dilapidated apartment. In previews. Opens Oct. 25. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

Incident at Vichy

Signature Theatre revives the 1964 Arthur Miller drama, about a group of men taken prisoner in France during the Second World War. Michael Wilson directs. Previews begin Oct. 27. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

King Charles III

Tim Pigott-Smith stars in Mike Bartlett's speculative play in blank verse, directed by Rupert Goold, which imagines Prince Charles's ascent to the British throne. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Lost Girls

MCC presents a play by John Pollono, directed by Jo Bonney, about divorced high-school sweethearts (Piper Perabo and Ebon Moss-Bachrach) whose daughter goes missing during a blizzard. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

Misery

Bruce Willis and Laurie Metcalf star in a play by William Goldman, based on the Stephen King novel and Goldman's screenplay for the 1990 film, about a novelist with an obsessive fan. Will Frears directs. Previews begin Oct. 22. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Romance Language

Carl Andress directs Joe Godfrey's play, in which a well-to-do Manhattan widow strikes up an affair with her Italian instructor. In previews. Opens Oct. 22. (Theatre 511 at Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 866-811-4111.)

Songbird

Based on Chekhov's "The Seagull," Lauren Pritchard and Michael Kimmel's new musical follows a fading country star (Kate Baldwin) who returns home to Nashville. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Thérèse Raquin

Keira Knightley stars in Helen Edmundson's adaptation of the Émile Zola novel, in which a woman in a loveless marriage enters a torrid and murderous affair with her husband's friend. Evan Cabnet directs the Roundabout production. In previews. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

A View from the Bridge

Ivo van Hove's Olivier Award-winning production of the Arthur Miller drama, set on the Brooklyn waterfront, transfers from its run at London's Young Vic. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

The Alcoholic Movie Musical!

Cynthia Hopkins's performance works are autobiographical without being especially factual. They adulterate the events of her life with song, dance, imagery, and oddball costumes. This latest piece has three narrative modes, all of them at least a little untrustworthy: the story of her blackout alcoholism, her recent attempts to write a screenplay about that story, and scenes from that screenplay shown on video. Hopkins, on a mostly bare stage and assisted by the video artist Jeff Sugg, is a distinctive presence, ethereal and solid, anxious and assured. Her voice—a little bit country, a little bit Weimar—is warm and rich, raw when she wants to be. But this piece, with its conversational songs, confessional monologues, and burnt-bridges lampooning of past collaborators, can seem bleary and solipsistic, as much an apology for past work as the enactment of a new one. (The Bushwick Starr, 207 Starr St., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.)

Clever Little Lies

Audiences may be drawn to Joe DiPietro's new play, directed by David Saint, for the pleasure of seeing Marlo Thomas—and she doesn't disappoint, her raspy delivery and impeccable timing in full flower—but they're likely to walk out with a special appreciation for the comedic gifts of Greg Mullavey. As a successful businessman who's noticeably less in control when negotiating with his wife, Mullavey (probably best known as the husband on "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman") scores big with every line reading, vocal inflection, and facial expression. The play, which involves revelations of marital infidelity, wobbles a bit in tone, a strange hybrid of "Three's Company" and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" But Mullavey and Thomas, joined by George Merrick and Kate Wetherhead, are all talented farceurs, and the evening mostly floats. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

Eclipsed

Although Danai Gurira's harrowing play—about the brutalization of women during the moral vacuum of Liberia's second civil war—has its own stark rewards, the main draw of Liesl Tommy's production is the high-intensity wattage radiated by its star, Lupita Nyong'o, who is making her New York theatre début after winning an Oscar, last year, for "12 Years a Slave." Before she was a Hollywood darling, Nyong'o was a classically trained stage actor, and she renders a haunting turn as the Girl, a victim of serial horrors who, amid the spiralling chaos of the conflict, picks up a gun and becomes a victimizer herself, rounding up other young women for the rebels' rape camps. Furiously committed, Nyong'o pays the material the ultimate compliment a celebrity actor can bestow on a playwright—by submerging her iconicity, and disappearing into her role. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Fool for Love

Sam Shepard's 1983 play, conscientiously directed by Daniel Aukin, is about the deep impulses that keep people together even when they're apart. Eddie (Sam Rockwell) loves May (Nina Arianda), but he's no good when it comes to love's realities, which include staying put until passion either deepens or withers into something else. To escape Eddie's ambivalence, his need for attention, and his endless bullshit, May has moved to a dingy motel room on the edge of the Mojave Desert. She has just settled into a job as a restaurant cook when Eddie shows up. The dance of love and anger they perform is choreographed; the furious partners know its steps. The only way to nail the doomed couple is to play them the way a jazz master plays a tune, and Arianda and Rockwell enact Shepard's story with lionhearted fearlessness. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/19/15.) (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Gin Game

D. L. Coburn's 1976 play, about the fitful friendship that evolves between two cantankerous retirees over successive games of gin rummy, is a fusty, minor-key work. The reason to see Leonard Foglia's revival is to watch a peerless pair of American stage legends give a master class in comic timing. As Weller, a fiend for cards but a congenital loser, James Earl Jones delivers scads of curmudgeonly drollery, exploiting his booming basso to deliver unexpected line readings that ambush you into laughter. (Audiences *love* to hear Jones cuss; it must be all those authority figures he's played over the years.) As Fonsia, a gin-rummy savant with a painful past, Cicely Tyson parries Jones's bluster with sly understatement and faultless rhythm. Older even than the elderly characters they depict, these two actors, evidently delighted by each other, sparkle with time-denying verve. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Perfect Arrangement

"Millie, why is Normie in the closet?" a D.C. society wife inquires, in Topher Payne's delightful McCarthy-era

farce. It's a tricky question: the play follows two gay couples who avoid social scrutiny by pairing off into hetero husbands and wives, inhabiting adjoining apartments and ducking through a literal closet to join their real loves at night. But there's trouble brewing. Two of the four work for the State Department, which is widening its anti-Communist witch-hunt to include suspected "deviants," and a solitary rumor can ruin lives. As hiding gets harder, pitch-perfect comedy ensues: slamming doors, strange disguises, preposterous excuses (all crisply orchestrated by Michael Barakiva). Eventually, the four must decide whether face-saving domestic lies are worth it, or whether ostracism beats living in fear. In our own era of surveillance and paranoia, their mid-century problems don't feel so far away. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

Ugly Lies the Bone
Pain is personal in Lindsey Ferrentino's thoughtful meditation on trauma, directed by Patricia McGregor for the Roundabout. Jess (Mamie Gummer) has returned from Afghanistan, where she was badly burned in an I.E.D. attack, to live with her sister in their Florida home town. But everything's different. Her ex is married, her sister's schlubby boyfriend is everywhere, and then there are her burns. Jess finds solace in a new high-tech therapy: using virtual-reality goggles, she explores a personalized wonderland (which turns out to be snowy and alpine). Beginning to recover, she learns she's not the only one in pain. In the play's best moments, the V.R. apparatus becomes a symbol of subjectivity: as goggle-clad characters in a bare room gape at projected natural beauty only they can see, Ferrentino reminds us that our internal landscape, like our pain, is ours alone. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Autre Ne Veut
In 2011, the music writer Eric Harvey made a joke on Twitter, coining a fake genre called "PBR&B"—rhythm and blues made for, and by, Williamsburg hipsters. The joke is funny, but at some point the genre became real, with its own Wikipedia page. Whatever that story bodes for the culture of music journalism, this solo project, the creation of the scraggy musician Arthur Ashin, fits the bill. The music is loose and soulful, with Ashin's fragile falsetto perched atop moody synths and clatter-trap electronic percussion. (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Oct. 26.)

Chance the Rapper
Two summers ago, when this quirky young Chicago m.c. (né Chancelor Bennett) played a small venue in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, his energy was infectious, and as he robo-danced like the second coming of Ian Curtis and spat offbeat lyrics in a charmingly nasal register the room, packed to the gills, responded by, in Chance's parlance, "turning up." The performance introduced local audiences to his remarkable mixtape, "Acid Rap," made up of thirteen thoughtful, eclectic tracks that question whether Chicago rap needs to reflect the endless violence that plagues the Windy City. Since then, Chance's reputation has been cemented; "Surf," his album with Donnie Trumpet & the Social Experiment, was released earlier this year, and features superstars like Busta Rhymes, Erykah Badu, and Janelle Monáe. When he sold out this spacious venue, a second show was added to accommodate his hungry fans. (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Oct. 23 and Oct. 25.)

Kinky Friedman
Richard Friedman's family moved from Chicago to central Texas when he was still a toddler, and he has embraced a squinty outsider status ever since. Dubbed Kinky as a freshman at the University of Texas, Austin, Friedman formed his first band, King Arthur & the Carrots, in the sixties, but he made his mark as the leader of the Texas Jewboys, purveyors of country swing and political satire. Also a novelist, columnist, and candidate (he ran for governor in 2006), Friedman has just released his first album of all-new recordings in forty years, "The Loneliest Man I Ever Met," and it's a sincere, introspective effort, with covers of songs by Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan, among others. (B. B. King Blues Club, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Oct. 27.)

Jerry Lee Lewis
Given the actuarial statistics of rock stars, it's heartening, and beyond astounding, that the three colossi on whose shoulders the temple of rock and roll unquestionably rests—Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Jerry Lee Lewis—are all still standing. Well, in Lewis's case, he's seated at a piano, and whether the eighty-year-old bad boy will lift his right leg up to the keyboard to play percussive clusters with his boot heel remains to be seen. It's been nearly sixty years since "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," "Great Balls of Fire," and "Breathless" had their game-changing impact—followed by a nearly constant stream of rhythm, country, and gospel—and this is your chance to see the legend who made them. (B. B. King Blues Club, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Oct. 23.)

Losers Lounge Tribute to James Bond and John Barry
Ever since "Dr. No" premièred, in 1962, James Bond films have had a major influence on popular culture, both cinematically and musically. John Barry performed and arranged the world-famous theme, and composed the scores to eleven subsequent Bond pictures. The title songs have been

WHY ART?

Because you will never have to change batteries or remember passwords or read directions or fear obsolescence.

Contact us to request our catalogue

Important American Paintings Volume XVI: *Essential*

www.questroyalfineart.com

Reginald Marsh (1898–1954)
Off to the Movies, Love Affair is Playing!, 1939

QUESTROYAL FINE ART, LLC
Important American Paintings
(212) 744-3586 New York, NY gallery@questroyalfineart.com questroyalfineart.com

recorded by the biggest names in pop, including Tina Turner, Paul McCartney, Duran Duran, Tom Jones, and Adele, providing the gifted roster of Losers Lounge singers with a wonderful, dramatic catalogue to draw from. Some of these tunes have turned up in other Losers shows, like Carly Simon's "Nobody Does It Better" and an electrifying version of Shirley Bassey's "Goldfinger" (in the original key!), performed by the Losers regular Mike Fornatale. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8500. Oct. 22-24.)

The Sun Ra Arkestra
A singular entry in the annals of American music, the Alabaman Afro-futurist bandleader Sun Ra was a prime mover in the development of free-jazz composition, live performance, and twentieth-century black thought, until his death in 1993. He lives on in the form of this collective, which has gone by various names over the years (Sun Ra and His Intergalactic Research Arkestra, the Solar Myth Arkestra). They still perform their way-out music clad in elaborate costumes—flowing gowns, headdresses—and the live show, even without their namesake, is well worth seeing. (Brooklyn Bowl, 61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg. 718-963-3369. Oct. 22.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Joel Forrester Quartet
The pianist and composer Forrester may be indelibly associated with the Microscopic Septet, the beloved ensemble that he rose to fame with, but his own subsequent small groups have been delightfully ingenious as well. **Vito Dieterle,** Forrester's tenor-saxophone foil in this sparkling outfit, is an overlooked talent worth checking out. (Barbès, 276 9th St., Brooklyn. 347-422-0248. Oct. 20.)

Fred Hersch
Fred Hersch, celebrating his sixtieth birthday, wears many artistic hats—a dazzling solo pianist, a composer of concert music, and a creator of ambitious multimedia projects—but his trio remains an integral element of his musical identity. The latest iteration of the band, now in its fifth year, features the bassist **John Hebert** and the drummer **Eric McPherson,** with whom the leader communicates on a second-sight level. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Oct. 20-25.)

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis Plays Monk
The 1959 album "Thelonious Monk Orchestra at Town Hall," featuring the iconoclastic pianist and an extended ensemble playing Hall Overton's arrangements of some of Monk's signature tunes, is one of the great recordings of the era. Although the venue remains the same, reverence will play a small part in this tribute concert; chiefly, new arrangements of Monk material will be provided by members of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. **Brad Mehldau** and the eleven-year-old piano prodigy **Joey Alexander** will be the featured piano soloists. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. Oct. 23-24.)

Charles McPherson
With the recent death of Phil Woods, even fewer of the classic alto saxophonists who followed directly in the path of Charlie Parker are still with us. The seventy-six-year-old McPherson has retained the bite, vigor, and invention that first got him noticed when he was a member of Charles Mingus's bands, in the early sixties. His quintet includes the trumpeter **Brian Lynch** and the pianist **Jeb Patton.** (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Oct. 23-25.)

Mary Stallings and Bruce Barth
The veteran singer Stallings never attained the popular acclaim of some of her illustrious peers (a decade-long semi-retirement in the seventies couldn't have helped), but that's little reflection of her artistry. Essaying standards and the blues, this assured stylist will be accompanied by the gifted pianist Barth. (Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Oct. 22-25.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"Thrill the World"
In this annual global tribute to seasonal ghoulishness and to the memory of Michael Jackson, zombie-painted hoards gather in cities around the world to perform the dance from Jackson's "Thriller" video. In the past, the event has set world records for "Largest Thriller Dance" (last year, almost sixty-five hundred dancers participated, in a hundred and thirty-four events in twenty-two countries), and this year organizers will attempt to break the record for "Largest Simultaneous Dance Ever." Dance classes are available to get a head start on learning the moves. Part of the proceeds from tickets and (optional) professional zombie makeup goes to charity. (21 A Clinton St. thrilltheworldnyc.com. Oct. 24 at 2.)

Big Apple Circus
New York's own Big Apple Circus returns to Lincoln Center for its thirty-eighth season with "The Grand Tour," a Roaring Twenties-themed show featuring the ringmaster John Kennedy Kane and a host of acts from around the world. To name just a few: the pan-African troupe Zuma Zuma, which demonstrates an array of acrobatic and juggling skills; the Russian Dosov Troupe, whose members perform soaring aerial stunts off a teeterboard; the Chinese hand-balancing act the Energy Trio; the third-generation animal trainer Jenny Vidbel, who returns with her dog-and-pony show (and a few other animals); and Chiara Anastasini, from a nine-generation circus family, who astounds with hula hoops. (Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center. bigapplecircus.org. Oct. 21-Jan. 10.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

On Oct. 22, **Sotheby's** will sell off a trove of memorabilia from the collection of Sam Simon, the co-creator of "The Simpsons" (and a producer and writer on many other shows), who died earlier this year. As one might expect, there will be plenty of Simpsoniana in the sale, including a pinball machine that goads players with such bratty Bart-like comments as "You blew it, man." Items connected to Simon's other passion, boxing, include an X-ray of Muhammad Ali's cracked jaw, signed by the heavyweight champion himself. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • **Christie's** holds a series of sales of furnishings and decorative items, including a selection of English pieces from the Metropolitan Museum (Oct. 27). The items, which include silver, countless chairs, and a pagoda-shaped display case, are being sold off in advance of a planned refurbishment of the museum's British decorative-arts galleries. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Meanwhile, over at **Phillips** (Oct. 26), editions and multiples go under the gavel in a sale that includes a felt suit by Joseph Beuys, a small balloon figure by Jeff Koons, and various works on paper. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Symphony Space
Lorrie Moore will introduce a celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the annual anthology "The Best American Short Stories." Highlights from the series—including works by Nathan Englander, Junot Díaz, and Sherwood Anderson—will be read by the actors Jane Kaczmarek, Liev Schreiber, and others. (2537 Broadway. symphonyspace.org. Oct. 21 at 7:30.)

Brooklyn Historical Society
Ron Chernow, the author of the biography that inspired the smash Broadway hit "Hamilton," will appear with Oskar Eustis, the artistic director of the Public Theatre, where the musical premièred, to discuss the challenges of bringing historical figures, such as Alexander Hamilton, to the stage. The discussion will be moderated by Rebecca Mead, a staff writer for this magazine. (128 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn. brooklynhistory.org. Oct. 26 at 6:30.)

WORD Brooklyn
Carrie Brownstein, of Sleater-Kinney and "Portlandia," talks about her new memoir, "Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl," which she has called "the anti-'Behind the Music.'" She will appear in conversation with Questlove, of the Roots, in an event presented by WORD Brooklyn at Saint Vitus Bar. (1120 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. wordbookstores.com. Oct. 27 at 7.)

TABLES FOR TWO

TIMNA

109 St. Mark's Pl. (646-964-5181)

ST. MARK'S PLACE has long been home to satisfying, cheap Middle Eastern food, but those days may be numbered. Last year, the beloved neighborhood mainstay Yaffa Café was abruptly shut down when the Department of Buildings ruled that its back yard, which had been in operation for three decades, was illegal. Earlier this year, Hummus Place, a starkly casual falafel joint, closed its East Village outpost for renovations, only to reappear this summer as Timna, a modern Israeli-inflected Mediterranean restaurant named after ancient cities in Yemen and Israel. This ambitious venture, with cooking by the ex-chef of Williamsburg's Zizi Limona, Nir Mesika, is more upscale and Pinterest-ready than its predecessor, with exposed-brick walls and air plants dotting each tiny table. A few weeks ago, the somewhat ceremonious dinner service began with an amuse-bouche of creamy, garlicky sunchoke soup—"Butter soup," one gentleman remarked—a warming salve after the first cold rain of fall.

Mesika's food is all over the map, from a gingery "Chinatown" salad of arugula and glass noodles to a more Continental gnocchi and goat ricotta. His executions are, too. The gnocchi are pan-fried to a deep brown, evoking tater tots—at twenty dollars, you're better off going next door to Crif Dogs for the real thing, at a fifth of the price. But Timna redeems itself by serving some of the most outrageously delicious bread in the city right now. Kubaneh is a Yemenite-Jewish yeast loaf traditionally eaten on the morning of the sabbath, after it has baked overnight at a low temperature. Mesika's version is served steaming hot in a clay flowerpot, freckled with sesame seeds. Its texture falls somewhere between brioche, challah, and croissant, and it pulls apart like cotton candy. It's impossible not to finish it in ninety seconds, and the accompanying crushed tomatoes and labneh with za'atar routinely go neglected.

The dishes are all visually dazzling, and many come dressed with pea tendrils and microgreens, including an appetizer of bright-red cured tuna, quinoa tabouli, beet leather, and light-green tzatziki—mint, parsley, and citrus make the combination taste as bright and acidic as it is colorful. Nutty farro with a trio of vibrant orange root vegetables (sweet potato, butternut squash, and carrot) is offset by light and dark swirls of tahini and date molasses, pleasingly thick, like nut butter. Black-eggplant purée, hummus, grilled pickled cabbage, and salsa were two condiments too many for an octopus tentacle prostrated across a wide plate. Lamb saddle arrived juicy and tender, modestly accompanied by green-pea purée and lentils, but a contrarian dessert of porcini brulée felt like a booby prize—even the marshmallow was spiked with tonka bean, an unusual South American spice. Timna could learn from the old adage: always remove one accessory before leaving the house.

—Silvia Killingsworth

Open Tuesdays through Fridays for dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $20-$28.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL KRALL

PHOTOGRAPH BY DINA LITOVSKY

FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB TROPICAL 128

128 Elizabeth St. (212-925-8219)

"I can't recalled how many buttcheeks and fronts I rubbed," a "FAN" of Tropical 128 wrote on Yelp, about a January evening at the establishment. Some of those cheeks belonged to "hot chicks which was okay I guess." Other cheeks impressed him less. For fourteen years, the place has been a haven for low-key drinkers and near-dawn gyrators; a few months ago, Dave Delzio (knuckle tattoos: "HARD," "LOOK"), who owned the late music venue Tammany Hall, took it over, with a partner. When it's not jumping, the bar evokes a Rainforest Café post-zombie apocalypse (cloudy fish tank, drooping plants, crooked dolphin painting). Delzio explained via e-mail that they'd given the place a "cosmetic facelift"; a downstairs lounge with "a private feel" is nearly complete. But the facial rejuvenation is of the Mickey Rourke variety: the mirrored walls of the billiards room reflect pool tables so stained it appears that appendectomies might have been performed on them. The response to a recent inquiry about cocktails was "We have a full bar." Delzio says that they'll soon be serving frozen drinks and "sharable, lit bowls." The other night, men watched football and chatted in Chinese, as stylish young folks argued about Cy Twombly ("He's more than just scribbles"). Delzio noted that his clientele is "a healthy mix of downtown cool influencers, pretty people, skaters, models." He clarified, "But unpretentious in every way."

—Emma Allen

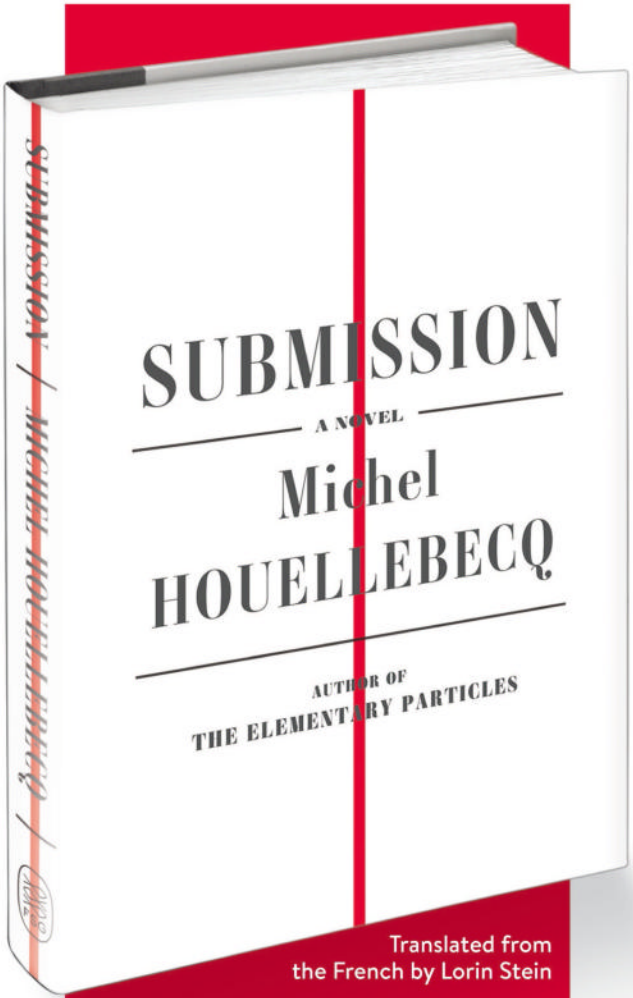
"ELECTRIFYING."*

A SENSATION IN EUROPE— JUST PUBLISHED IN AMERICA

"*Submission* marks one of those exceptional instances when politics and art arrive simultaneously. The issues that Houellebecq addresses will define the country in the coming years."
—CHRISTOPHER DE BELLAIGUE, *The Guardian*

"Far too intelligent to ignore."
—GABY WOOD, *The Telegraph*

"[A] darkly clever and funny book."
—STEVEN POOLE, *The Guardian*



Translated from the French by Lorin Stein

"Michel Houellebecq shares with **Aldous Huxley** a fascination with religious phenomena, and with **George Orwell** a horror of political correctness and an acute sense . . . of common decency . . .

He is an even more powerful novelist."
—EMMANUEL CARRÈRE, *Le Monde des Livres*

"A classic novel of European cultural pessimism . . . Strange and surprising."
—MARK LILLA, *The New York Review of Books*

"Houellebecq is not merely a satirist but—more unusually—a *sincere* satirist, genuinely saddened by the absurdities of history and the madnesses of mankind."
—ADAM GOPNIK, *The New Yorker*

"*Submission* is a fine, deeply literary work . . . It's electrifying; no recent English-language novel compares."
—*DAVID SEXTON, *The Spectator*

FSG
www.fsgbooks.com

Wherever books are sold

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
STRANGER THAN FICTION

Fifteen years ago, as Philip Roth was reading the galleys of a memoir by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., he came to a passage about the political fevers of 1939-40, when reactionaries like Father Charles Coughlin, Henry Ford, and Charles Lindbergh brandished the twin banners of nativism and isolation. Moderate Republicans, including Wendell Willkie, a corporate lawyer who eventually won the Party's Presidential nomination, were never likely to topple F.D.R., and some Party grandees wanted Lindbergh to run. Lindbergh was known by then not only as the daring aviator who crossed the Atlantic in the Spirit of St. Louis but also as a bigot so vile that F.D.R., upon reading one of his speeches, remarked that "it could not have been better put if it had been written by Goebbels himself."

Next to a passage where Schlesinger raised the question of whether Republicans would put Lindbergh forward at the head of a new Know-Nothing Party, Roth wrote, "What if they had?" That marginal note became the germ for "The Plot Against America," a counter-factual novel in which Lindbergh is elected President. "Fear presides over these memories," Roth's novel begins, "perpetual fear." Anyone who dares to look past the comedy of Donald Trump's surreal tweets and Ben Carson's end-times ruminations will notice that the politics of perpetual fear is, in our times, the stuff of nonfiction.

Last week, the Democrats held their first debate, a five-candidate affair in Las Vegas—an unlikely place to hear denunciations of "the casino-capitalist process." Still, it was a relatively civil and sober discussion compared with the Republican rodeos. After a year of floundering, Hillary Clinton, cool, well-schooled, forensically skilled, had her best hours as a candidate. Her performance provided relief for her supporters and a potential lure for the undecided. She was, contrary to previous reports, conspicuously human-seeming—funny, passionate, even, at times, rueful of past mistakes—a development that might have robbed her potential rival, Vice-President Joe Biden, of the rationale he needed to make a run. Bernie Sanders, the seventy-four-year-old junior senator from Vermont and unapologetic democratic socialist, spoke in a voice that suggested Larry David, on "Seinfeld," imitating George Steinbrenner. And yet although Clinton handily won the debate, Sanders largely set the terms, pushing her toward a more full-throated progressive view of income inequality and other issues. (From offstage, the Black Lives Matter movement had an equally serious influence on the discussion of race.)

Sanders also paused for an act of clever generosity, declaring, "The American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn e-mails!" Beaming and extending her hand, Clinton thanked him but did not reciprocate the kindness, swatting him on his weak record on gun control, citing his multiple votes against the Brady bill. And while Clinton totted up her own list of Scandinavian-style domestic goals, such as paid parental leave, she raised a brow at Sanders when he talked of "revolution" and the systemic rot of late capitalism. In case we hadn't figured it out, Hillary Clinton wants to win.

History may look back on the Las Vegas debate as the event that elevated Clinton the way that Barack Obama's eloquent victory speech after the Iowa caucuses elevated him, nearly eight years ago. It might even be regarded as the moment when she boxed out Biden, raked away the underbrush of Mssrs. Chafee, Webb, and O'Malley, and made Sanders look less like a plausible contender than like a protest candidate who forced his opponent to grapple with a political system poisoned by the outsized influence of an American oligarchy comprising, as the *Times* has reported, a hundred and fifty-eight families.

One debate will not erase all of what many voters see as Clinton's complications: the lingering perception of her

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

sense of moneyed entitlement, her lawyerly slipperiness under questioning, the walled garden of her political circle, her interventionist reflexes, her belatedness on gay marriage, comprehensive immigration, and Wall Street reforms. But if Clinton was not flawless she and her debating partners managed one distinct achievement: they accentuated the chaos, the intellectual barrenness, and the general collapse of their rivals in the Republican Party.

Consider the political spectacle on Capitol Hill, in which Speaker John Boehner, hardly a Rockefeller Republican, could no longer deal with his caucus and, with little more than a chorus of "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah," announced his early retirement. Members of the caucus stepped forward to admit that the hearings on Benghazi were aimed less at uncovering the truth than at burying Hillary Clinton. An ambitious Party loyalist, Paul Ryan, is reluctant to run for Boehner's chair because the House Republicans are the new Wild Bunch and, as a friend of Ryan's put it to Politico, "he's not a f---ing moron."

Consider, too, the G.O.P. candidates for the White House. Donald Trump and Ben Carson, the only Republicans polling in double digits, daily clear their throats with that ritual preface of modern self-satisfaction—"I am not politically correct"—and then unleash statements, positions, and postures so willfully detached from fact that they embarrass the political culture that harbors them. Trump is willing to say anything—anything racist, anything false, anything "funny"—to terrify voters, or rile them, or amuse them, depending on the moment. The worst of his demagogic arousals are reminiscent of Lindbergh's speeches at America First rallies and his fear, as he wrote in *Reader's Digest*, of a "pressing sea of Yellow, Black and Brown." Carson, who seems as historically confused as he is surgically skilled, has said that Obamacare is worse than 9/11, "because 9/11 is an isolated incident." What's more, the two men's rivals either fall into line or lack the persuasive powers and the courage to marginalize candidates they know to be dangerous.

In electoral terms, Democrats had to view the week's events with confidence. But there is pathos and foreboding here for the republic. In the debate, Clinton was clear who her enemies were: "the Republicans." Reports of the death of the radical right are premature. In 2016, the G.O.P. is likely, at a minimum, to hold its majority in the House. If there is a campaign promise in 2016 that is almost sure to be fulfilled, it is that obstructionism and political war will continue, for within the G.O.P. the politics of perpetual fear goes on corroding not just a party but a nation.

—David Remnick

WHAT PAPER D'YA READ?
IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Peter Barbey, the Pennsylvania-based heir to a retail fortune (The North Face, Timberland, Lee jeans), has a new professional home: he's just become the owner of the *Village Voice*, the alternative weekly that, in its heyday, channelled the feisty, countercultural spirit of Greenwich Village.

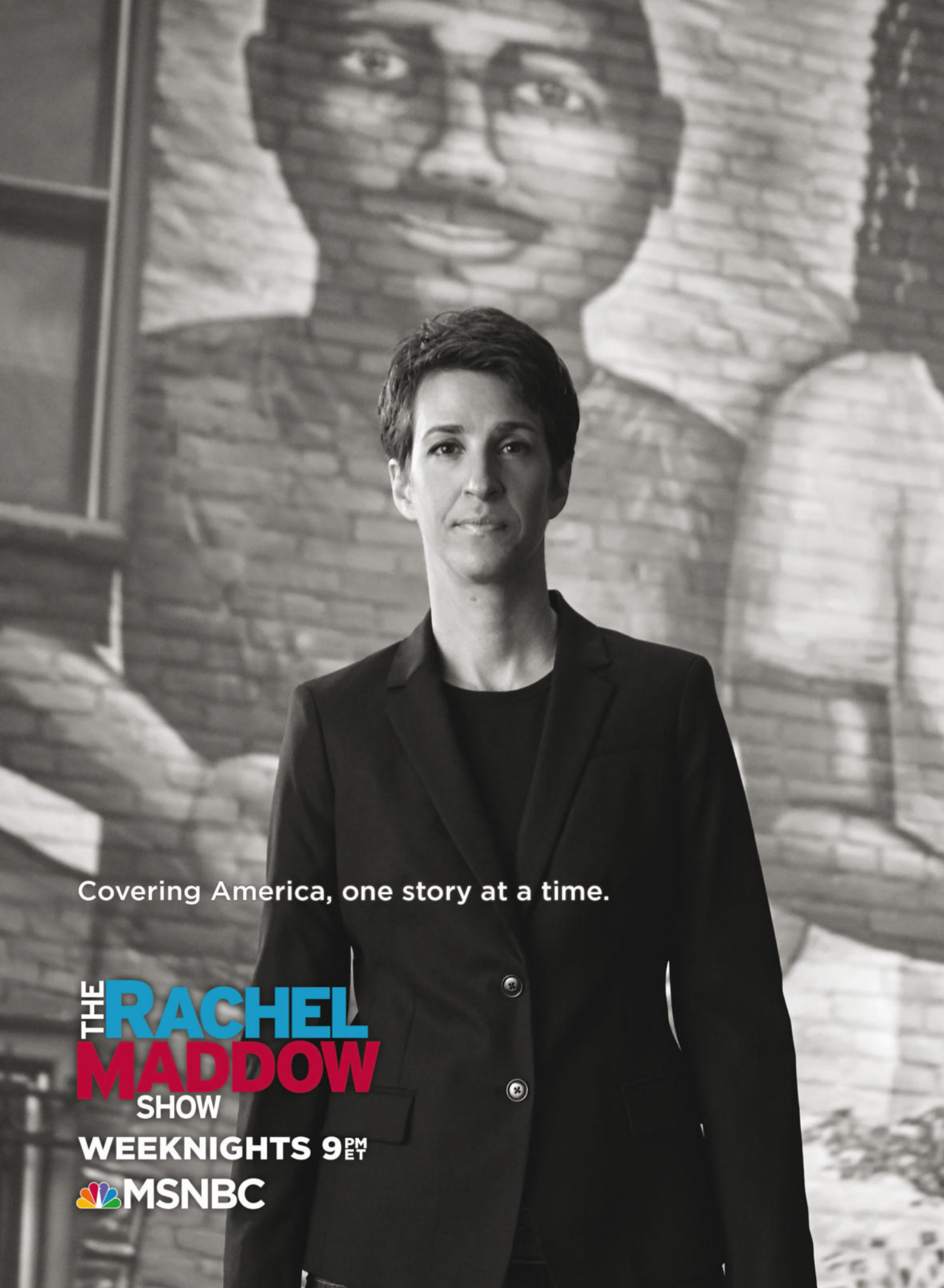
Now he needs an actual home. So last week, in town to meet with the *Voice*'s editorial staff, he went apartment shopping. Between stops, he and his wife, Pam, took a break at a bistro on First Avenue. Barbey is fifty-eight and diminutive. He had a lawyerish look: tweed jacket, glasses, thin white beard. Pam, who sat across from him, has platinum-blond hair. "I love Greenwich Village, but she's an uptown girl," Barbey said. They'd just visited a three-bedroom at River House, the Art Deco co-op on East Fifty-second Street where Henry Kissinger lives. (Asking price: nine million.) Barbey deemed the interiors too stuffy. "It's kind of like my dad's place in Phoenix."

Pam, explaining her uptown sympathies, said, "I love Central Park." She makes an annual trip to the city with girlfriends from Arizona. "We'll walk in the Park every morning, in any weather. We'll show up at restaurants like Daniel Boulud's and we'll still be in our sweats." She'd been floored, that morning, by the views from a two-bedroom at 15 Central Park West, the Robert A. M. Stern building where Sting has a place. "Oh, my gosh, who could not love that?" (Two bedrooms go for up to twenty million.)

Barbey first encountered the *Voice* in the nineteen-seventies, as a long-haired student at Northfield Mount Hermon, a boarding school in Massachusetts. His suitemate, a Lou Reed fanatic from Long Island, got the paper, and it provided Barbey with the epiphany that it offered suburban teen-agers everywhere. "It kind of opened up New York for me," Barbey said. "I was a kid from Boston, and the *Voice* was my New York." A fan of the Grateful Dead, the Allman Brothers, and Clapton, he was introduced to cool new music: "Lou Reed, Bowie, Roxy Music . . . I guess you would call it pre-punk." Barbey was also a film nerd, and he devoured reviews by Andrew Sarris. His experience of the Village scene was mostly vicarious—"I spent a lot of time in boarding school, so it was very hard to be in *any* scene"—but one weekend he and his roommate took the train into the city: hot dogs, graffiti-covered subway cars. "We got a bottle of Jack Daniel's and sneaked it into an all-night showing of Marx Brothers movies," Barbey recalled. "I remember Bodi"—the roommate—"falling asleep in the seat next to me." He went on, "We were both so into film at that time, and I felt like I was in with the hard core."

Then came college, at the University of Arizona, and business school, where he met Pam, and the city fell out of view. The Barbeys moved to Phoenix, where Peter bought Houle Books. "I hung out with a lot of writers," he said. (Many of them worked for *New Times*, the *Voice*'s future owners.) In 2011, he and Pam moved to Reading, Pennsylvania, so that Barbey could take charge of the Reading *Eagle*, which had been in his family for eight generations.

When the *New Times* people bought the *Voice,* in 2005, from an investor group, which had bought it from the pet-food mogul Leonard Stern, they


Covering America, one story at a time.
THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW
WEEKNIGHTS 9PM ET
MSNBC

made it part of their national chain. Most of its famously opinionated writers—Robert Christgau, Nat Hentoff, Wayne Barrett, Michael Musto—were fired or quit, and without them the paper became a shadow of its former self: depoliticized, bland, incurious.

Christgau, the paper's former rock critic, now writes for the Web site Noisey and is cautiously optimistic about Barbey. "It's a promising profile," he said. "Rich guy, likes the *Voice*, likes newspapers. That's a good start."

Barbey hopes to restore the paper's local focus: "You've got to find the Zeitgeist of New York right now, and write from a New York point of view. Because that's what the *Voice* offers to the world. That's why a young guy like me, in western Massachusetts, was reading it."

On Friday, he checked out an apartment in the West Village: a duplex penthouse. (Asking price: 26.5 million.) "Oh, wow," he said, stepping onto a vast terrace with views of downtown—town houses and, behind them, the Woolworth Building, 1 World Trade, and the Hudson River. "This is by far the most light of anything I've seen."

The Village had changed, Marc Jacobs stores and cupcake boutiques having taken the place of head shops, but he liked it: "It's truly an international location. It's so incredibly nice. It used to be like Cambridge, or Haight-Ashbury—very cool but a little rough around the edges. At my age, you're not looking for that. You're looking for the comforts."

As for the Old Guard *Voice* writers who are still around—Christgau, Hentoff, et al.—Barbey said, "Tell them to call me."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

UP LIFE'S LADDER
SUPPER CLUB

In 2010, the Newton South High School newspaper asked, "Is Jonah Reider the next Martha Stewart?" He was sixteen; it didn't seem likely. Last month, in his final year at Columbia University, Reider started a "restaurant" called Pith in his dorm room. He'd cook a multi-course meal for as many as four friends, who'd chip in for groceries. After the college paper and the *Post* wrote about him ("The hottest table in town is in a Columbia University dorm"), calls poured in from talent agents, TV producers, and BuzzFeed. "There's a thousand people who have hit me up, trying to get a reservation, who are lawyers and magazine editors," Reider said last week, in Hogan Hall.

The door of suite 4-B features roommates' names paired with photos of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. "Jonah" appears next to pumpkin cheesecake. Reider scoffed—"disgusting"—and led a volunteer sous chef through the common room (leather couches, beanbags, charcoal drawings of nudes) to a kitchen the size of a large closet. He started bouncing around: "I, like, need to cook!"

Reider, who is gaunt, with long lashes, hunched over the counter and said, "So this is today's menu, which I've scribbled on my thesis-seminar notes." He described his thesis as "a statistical look at all worker-owned co-operatives in the United States." He has a part-time job with Joseph Stiglitz.

"Oh, fuck," he said, and ran to flip a red pepper that was blackening on a gas burner. He popped some Brussels-sprout leaves into a toaster oven and explained his business model. "Fifteen dollars to cook yourself dinner is not enough money," he said. "But fifteen times four is totally enough—the economy of scale is just really good for cooking." He sang along to Amy Winehouse as he toasted almonds.

Reider pointed a large knife toward a copy of Julia Child's "Mastering the Art of French Cooking." "I never use recipes, but I love reading recipes," he said. He's studied jazz piano. "I'm trying to do food the way I do music."

Following the media blitz, Columbia was contacted by the Department of Health. "I was called into a very punitively toned meeting," Reider said. "They've chilled out, but at the moment I'm not allowing people who aren't my homies or Columbia people in." He hopes to host pop-ups during winter break. "I've been talking to this dude who has this big space in Grand Central, so we're going to do this huge music party with oysters."

He headed down a hallway to pick herbs in his suite mate Jordan's room—"He has the most light." "Oh, fuck!" he yelled again. Jordan's door was locked. Back in the kitchen, Reider pulled crispy turnips out of the oven and stashed them on top of the cabinets. His phone vibrated. His father, who designs exhibits for the Boston Children's Museum, had texted him a photograph of a celery root. Reider's mother, an administrator at Tufts, also cooks, but it's "mom food, like, everything in one pot," he said.

Around eight, another senior, named Caitlin, arrived from her receptionist job

Jonah Reider

at a "health goth" cycling studio. She noted that Reider's kitchen was nicer than the one in her sorority house. When her boyfriend, John, showed up, Reider poured rosé. "These are a bunch of dope cheeses," he said, setting a board on a coffee table. He identified vegetables he'd pickled—red-kale stalks with caraway seed, golden beets with sumac.

"I cook a lot. I have a C.S.A. that I share with people," Caitlin said.

"I cook—" John began.

"He doesn't cook," Caitlin interrupted. "But we did go to Trader Joe's two weeks ago."

John said, "It was the first time I went grocery shopping to cook for myself. My meal last night was a sandwich I grilled on the stove with turkey, egg, falafel"—everyone laughed—"and cheese," he added, sheepishly.

"You're outta the game," Reider chided.

Dinner was served on a pine table, with paper towels for napkins. Reider lunged back and forth from the kitchen,

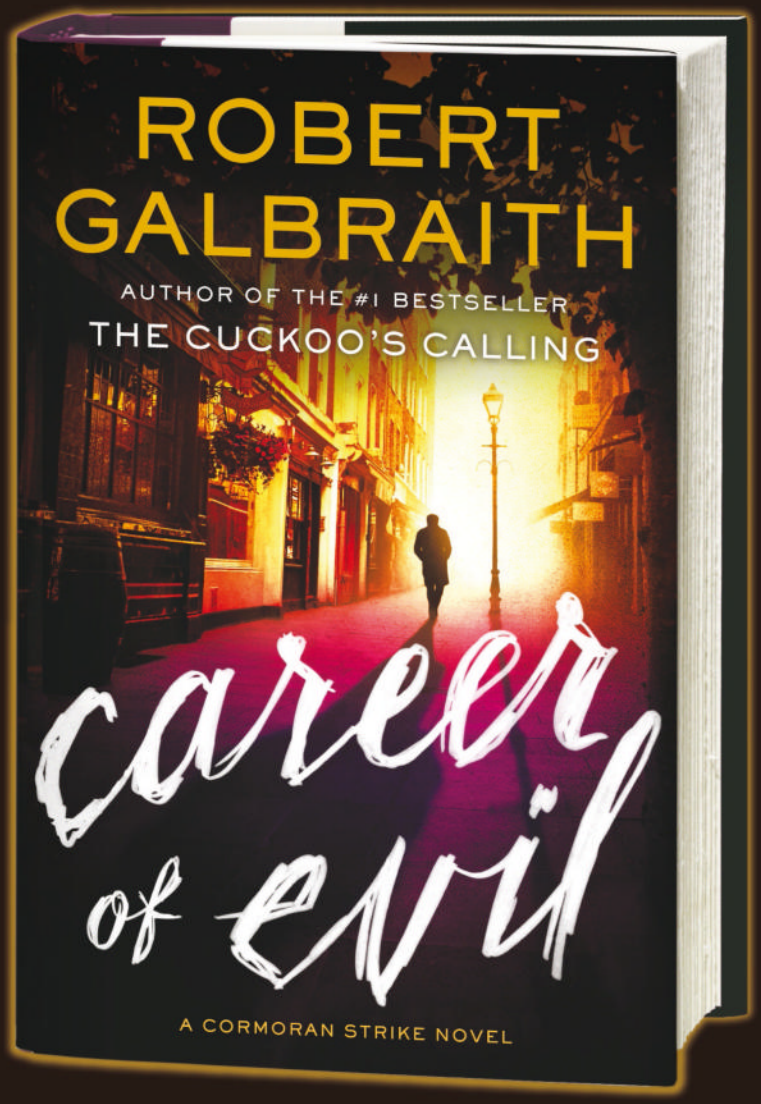
FROM

ROBERT GALBRAITH

AUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLERS THE CUCKOO'S CALLING AND THE SILKWORM

HAS STRIKE MET HIS MATCH?

Detective Cormoran Strike must outwit London's most twisted killer... before it's too late.



"[Strike and Robin are] a gumshoe team that's on its way to becoming as celebrated... as Nick and Nora Charles... and Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander."

–Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*

"A fresh voice in mystery fiction."

–*The Wall Street Journal* on Robert Galbraith

Available in hardcover, ebook, audio, and large print wherever books are sold

#CareerOfEvil
Robert-Galbraith.com

MULHOLLAND BOOKS
Little, Brown and Company

ferrying celery-root soup with pumpernickel toast, perfectly seared steak with red-pepper sauce and turnips, pollock with fresh-herb jam, barley with prunes and shallots, a medley of English peas, pancetta, and hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, and a fennel-and-spinach salad with roasted golden beets.

Martha Stewart's name came up, and Reider said, "Yo, they just scheduled it: me and Martha are doing a selfie video."

"You are, like, Martha's ticket to relevance with the millennials," John said.

Over vermouth-and-grapefruit granitas, talk turned to composting. Caitlin was devoted; Reider admitted that he hadn't started.

"Just put it in the freezer," Caitlin said. (That way, no bugs.)

Reider stood to clear the dishes. He had a math midterm the next day.

—Emma Allen

OVER HERE
COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

Gad Elmaleh has been voted "the funniest person in France." He is also probably the funniest person around the Monegasque royal family. (He and Charlotte Casiraghi have a twenty-two-month-old son.) He was definitely the funniest person, the other Friday afternoon, in the lobby restaurant at the Carlyle Hotel. "I think I'm going to have to add another show," he said, opening a menu and clocking a thirty-two-dollar salad. "*C'est quoi,* Cobb?" As for his place in the American comedy hierarchy, he ventured, "Like, seventeen?" Then he turned his gelcap-blue eyes toward the tablecloth and started messing with the saltshaker. "No, I'm not even in the rankings yet."

Elmaleh was born in Casablanca in 1971. He grew up introducing his father, a mime, with a placard; by the age of four, he could pull on an imaginary rope, accompanied by Chopin. In the early nineties, after a stint at university in Quebec, he moved to Paris to study drama. He became famous there, playing characters such as Chouchou, a buoyant North African transvestite, and Coco, a Sephardic sparkling-water mogul. "France gave me everything," he said. "But I am in love with New York." A few years ago, in Cannes, he met Jerry Seinfeld. "We were booked on the same talk show," Elmaleh recalled. "They told Jerry, 'There's this guy who wants to meet you, a comedian here in France.' We were sitting in a room with maybe twelve people, and then Jerry opens the door and looks straight at me and goes, 'So you're the funny guy.'" Seinfeld ended up passing his role in "Bee Movie" to Elmaleh for the French version. He has become Elmaleh's patron in America, and Elmaleh his in France. "Don't forget your little scarf!" Seinfeld teases Elmaleh in an episode of "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee," before the two go tooling around town in a 1950 Citroën.

Elmaleh was in the middle of a run at Joe's Pub, performing standup in English for the first time. (He also speaks French, Arabic, and Hebrew.) "In France, they hand me my jacket, and *boom!*" he said. "The first night, I checked my button for twenty minutes, if it was falling off, if my shirt was ironed." His nerves were such that he'd been spending almost every night after the show alone in his hotel room, going over the set. "*Je suis un bon élève,*" he said. "Normally, I go to the restaurant, I have some fun, I have drinks. But here I'm nervous about maybe not being in a good shape the day after."

Elmaleh's phone rang.

"Hello?" he said. "You're calling me, and you're the one who sounds busy."

He apologized for the interruption, explaining that it had been Tanya Blumstein, his dialect coach.

"You know what's the worst word?" he said. "*Tiroir.* I don't even want to say it."

"Say it," his lunch companion insisted.

"O.K. Drawer, drawer, drawer!"

Many of Elmaleh's best jokes involve language. A pen and a pad—he carries them everywhere—sat to the left of his plate. He'd been jotting down Americanisms to work into his act. He has a good ear: "Window of availability," "Would you care for another drink?," "Juicing." Ask an American whether he speaks French, Elmaleh has observed, and he'll say that he had two years in high school and then forgot everything. "It gets better!" he said, impaling a chunk of avocado on a silver tine. "I was at the Waverly Diner, and the waitress started talking to me, and I said, 'Do you speak French?' She said, 'No, but I have a friend who passed from cancer—she spoke French.'"

In November and December, Elmaleh is taking his show on an American road trip. Many of the dates are in places he's never been.

"Austin," his companion said. "What's your first thought?"

"Car."

"Portland."

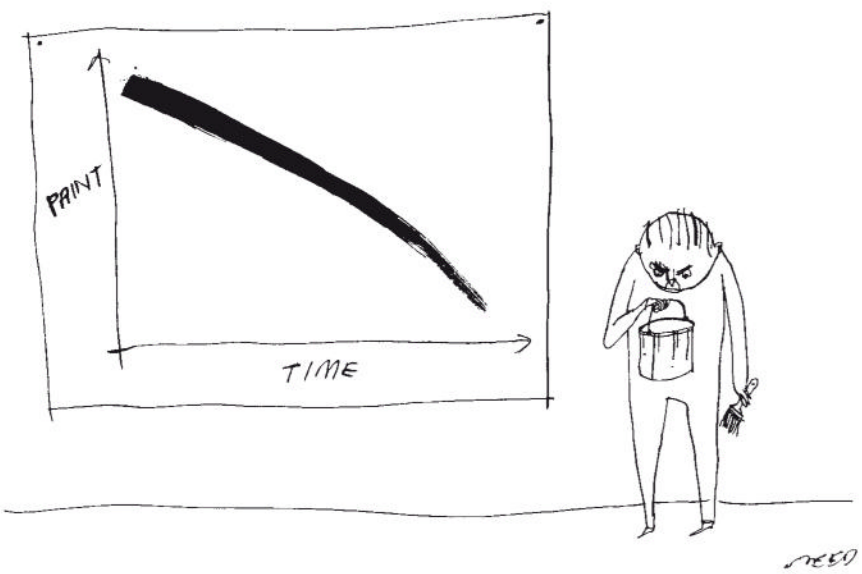
"Fish."

"Philadelphia."

"Sandwich."

"Dallas."

"Bobby Ewing!"



Elmaleh got the check. "*Il y a une femme avec un collier de Ping-Pong balls,*" he said, as he waited for the waiter to run his credit card, resorting to Franglish to comment on another patron's statement necklace. He really did have a little scarf. He put it on, returned the notebook to a pocket, flicked the crumbs from his navy-blue blazer, and stepped outside. It was pouring.

"I hope Joaquin doesn't come here."

"What's Joaquin?" Elmaleh said.

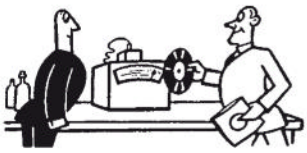
"The name of a hurricane."

"Joaquin," he said, with a goofy smile. "Joaquin closet!"

—Lauren Collins

THE MUSICAL LIFE

ALIEN GIRLS



Sierra and Bianca Casady, the two sisters who form the freak-folk band CocoRosie, were grabbing lunch in a Williamsburg loft the other day before heading to a concert. The loft used to belong to Bianca, and it is still filled with her art work, including a photograph of a brown dildo encased in purple quartz. ("I'm interested in exploring black-male sexual stereotypes," she said, laconically.) Now it serves as home to a group of the sisters' women artist and filmmaker friends, who were dishing out homemade tacos at a long trestle table. The mood was convivial. The other CocoRosie bandmates, a French beatboxer named Tez and the instrumentalist Takuya Nakamura, ate quickly. The sisters sipped maté tea and sorted through fright wigs for that night's concert.

Costume is a crucial element of the CocoRosie effect. Bianca, who is thirty-three, was wearing flame-patterned basketball shorts, white kneesocks, and a bowler hat; Sierra, who is two years older, looked comparatively demure in a seersucker jacket and red clown makeup. "Our biggest fight over the years has been about Sierra not getting my bad taste," Bianca said. "It's about seeing what happens when you push geekiness through to the other side."

CocoRosie was formed, in 2003, when Bianca, then a New York poet, showed up in Paris, where Sierra was studying classical voice at the Conservatoire. The two sisters were brought up by "alternative" parents—their father a devotee of Native American shamanism, their mother an artist who dragged her children across California, Hawaii, and New Mexico—and they had lost touch with each other. "We were estranged by our childhood," Sierra explained. "Our work's a going-through-time-in-reverse journey, recovering memories that come from black areas in the mind."

"Blackout-childhood syndrome!" Bianca joked.

Their first album, "La Maison de Mon Rêve," was recorded on a Dictaphone in Sierra's bathroom. Their music combines Bianca's surrealistic lyrics and Sierra's operatic arias with children's windup toys and broken instruments. Antony, of Antony and the Johnsons, who has sung on many of their records, was an instant fan.

The sisters describe "Heartache City," their newly released sixth album, as a return to their roots. It was composed on a farm, in the Camargue, that belonged to their mother, and which both sisters refer to as "home."

"The Camargue's a landscape with just the right amount of darkness and death," Bianca said. "Pale-wheat land and gray skies, the migration of storks in December, this Gypsy fête where they take the black Madonna into the sea. But it's also harsh and ugly, trashed with lying-around junk. I'm in love with West Texas, and this part of France is completely Texan, ancient cowboys with leathery skin and light-blue eyes." She went on, "We've started this thing called white-trash Sundays, where we burn wooden palettes, have our way with tractors. At night, the baby screech owls scream for food—it's the most demonic sound I've ever heard."

"We record in our courtyard at dusk," Sierra added. "The birds are leaking into every song."

Recently, CocoRosie has branched out into film and theatre. The Williamsburg loft's kitchen wall is scrawled with notes and drawings for a production of "Peter Pan" that the sisters collaborated on with Robert Wilson, two years ago. "Bob did this forty-eight-hour audition, where he asked musicians to write an original song," Bianca recalled. CocoRosie came up with "Lost Girls," which became the third track on "Heartache City."

"We have a definite fascination with orphans and runaways," Bianca said. "I spent a lot of time on the street as a kid, hustling to have my own money. I was already big time into this myth of the wanderer who's seeking a home but is never going to find it, feeling like an

Sierra and Bianca Casady

alien, pretty much. Pippi Longstocking is my hero—this orphan girl so strong she can lift a policeman."

After working with Wilson, Bianca said, "I'm just discovering what a fairy tale really is. Everything's symbolic in our work. The bloody twins, the scarecrow; these are dark figures from your own psyche. I don't want to give people what they want. I'm already thinking CocoRosie is too pop."

At the kitchen table, an artist named Eve Bradford was planning a potluck dinner for the night before the band's departure on a Latin-American tour. The theme would be "Feasting the Enemy," with each guest bringing a dish native to her ancestral foe. It was decided that Nakamura should cook a burger, since, growing up in Japan, he'd surely seen America as the enemy.

"But now I feel American," he protested. "What are you bringing, Bianca?"

Bianca, who had concluded that the ancestry of her and her sister is part Cherokee, "but more Syrian than anything else," said that she was going to wing it. "I really like to surprise myself."

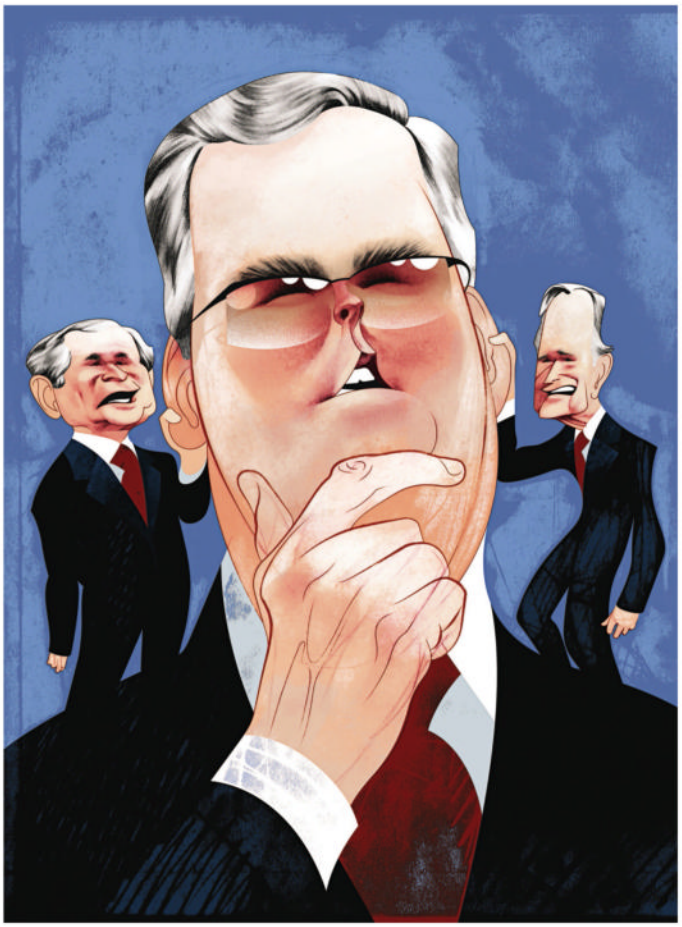
—Fernanda Eberstadt

THE POLITICAL SCENE

WHAT WOULD JEB DO?

An ex-front-runner looks to his brother's advisers.

BY RYAN LIZZA



"He's gotta convince people that three Bushes are not one too many," one rival says.

On Friday, October 2nd, Jeb Bush was onstage at a college auditorium in Greenville, South Carolina, for a public interview with Alan Wilson, the state's attorney general and a prominent figure in the right-wing firmament. Bush is sixty-two, but, thanks to a low-carb Paleo diet, he looks younger than he did when he left the Florida governor's office eight years ago for a life in the business world. A trim physique, however, hasn't boosted his appeal to potential voters. A new national poll showed that Bush's support had sunk to four per cent; South Carolina, which has one of the most conservative Republican electorates in the country, and will hold its primary early next year, just after Iowa and New Hampshire, is crucial to winning the nomination. Once considered the front-runner, Bush is trailing a clutch of candidates, among them Donald Trump and Ben Carson, who have never held public office and encourage comparison to buffoons.

Jeb has presented himself as the most electable Republican candidate: willing to break with Republican orthodoxy on domestic issues such as immigration and education, and committed to breaking, if vaguely, with his brother's legacy on foreign policy and to being, as he has said, his "own man." Before Bush officially entered the 2016 campaign, he remarked to a group of C.E.O.s at a conference in Washington, D.C., that a successful candidate had to be willing to "lose the primary to win the general," and should campaign "without violating your principles." He meant that one must avoid the perennial trap of party primaries, in which "base voters," the hard-core conservatives, force politicians to take extreme positions that will prove unpopular in a general election and, when later disavowed, expose the candidate as a phony. "It's not an easy task, to be honest with you," he noted. (Hillary Clinton faces a similar problem in her race for the Democratic nomination.)

But in his conversation with Wilson, and in a subsequent interview with me and other reporters, Bush veered toward the right. On domestic affairs, his view was neatly summarized by his answer to a question about gun control. It was the day after the mass shooting in Roseburg, Oregon, and yet Bush rejected any calls for new legislation. He noted that he had confronted similar pressure for government action after tragedies while he was governor: "Look, stuff happens. There's always a crisis, and the impulse is always to do something, and it's not necessarily the right thing to do."

Bush was pilloried by Democrats for his "stuff happens" remark, but he defended it, telling me that the government doesn't have a solution to every problem, and that sometimes government action makes matters worse. Some variety of a laissez-faire philosophy is standard for modern Republicans, at least on most domestic issues. But, increasingly in recent months, Bush, like a number of his colleagues, has been making the case for aggressive intervention abroad. Two days earlier, Russia had carried out its first air strikes in Syria. When I asked Bush how he would respond if he were President, he said that it was the lack of American action that had created the dire situation in Iraq and Syria, and invited the Russian military to bolster the Assad regime.

"I think we need to stand up to Putin, not just as it relates to Syria," Bush told me. "This sends a signal all around the world of the United States pulling back, not being serious. Our allies don't believe that we're going to have their back. And this emboldens our enemies." Bush offered no details on how to "stand up

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDRÉ CARRILHO

to Putin" or what, exactly, he would do to pacify the killing floor of the Middle East and South Asia and reconcile the tangled rivalries and interests there. But his message to the base was clear: We must do something. And we must do it now.

Bush's view represents a return to a simplistic interventionism that seemed discredited in the wake of the Iraq debacle. For decades, the G.O.P. has been split into two camps. The realists, who dominated the Presidency of Bush's father, George H. W. Bush, emphasized diplomacy and coalitions over go-it-alone displays of force, and a skepticism about America's ability to shape the internal dynamics of foreign countries. They also expressed a willingness to tolerate tyrannical regimes that advance U.S. interests or create greater stability in volatile regions of the world. The other camp—variously described as idealists, hawks, and neoconservatives—dominated the Presidency of Bush's brother. They have more often called for the overthrow rather than the containment of hostile regimes, and they remain committed to exporting American-style democracy to places where it has never flourished.

The hyper-interventionist foreign policy of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney was widely blamed for the Republican Party's loss of Congress in 2006 and of the Presidency in 2008. But many hawks, once more in full voice, now believe that the Obama years—the emergence of ISIS, the crisis in Syria and Iraq, Obama's nuclear deal with Iran, the rise of Putin at a time of Russian isolation and economic weakness—have vindicated Bush. "Any Presidential candidate, the first thing he or she needs to do is put up a map of the Middle East in 2009 and one today," John McCain, a leading hawk in the Senate, told me, as we discussed foreign policy in his office. "And point out that it is this President's failures. He said he got out of conflicts. He got out of conflicts, but the conflicts didn't end."

Obama thinks that intractable foreign-policy crises should be guided by the physician's maxim of "first, do no harm"—or, as his aides have said privately, "Don't do stupid shit." To Republican hawks, this sounds like a willful and dangerous abdication of American power and influence. Lindsey Graham, who is one of the long-shot Presidential candidates and McCain's closest ally in the Senate, has called for ten thousand American troops to be sent back to Iraq. Last week, Chris Christie said that he would set up a no-fly zone in the Syrian airspace in which the Russians are now operating, and shoot down any planes that entered it.

But of all the Republican candidates vying to reform the world of foreign affairs only one belongs to a family of Presidents that, for better or worse, did so much to give that world its present shape. When Jeb Bush began his campaign, he enlisted as advisers some of the realists from his father's camp, including the former Secretary of State James Baker. But the heaviest contingent consisted of his brother's liege men: Paul Wolfowitz, the Defense Department official who made the ideological case for invading Iraq; John Hannah, who had been an adviser to Dick Cheney and pushed bad intelligence into Colin Powell's famous speech at the U.N. making the case for war; Porter Goss, the former C.I.A. director who condoned waterboarding as an interrogation technique; and Stephen Hadley, the former national-security adviser, who took the blame for false assertions that President Bush made about nuclear yellowcake allegedly sought by Saddam Hussein from Niger.

Another adviser on his team is Otto Reich, who served in various foreign-policy roles in the Reagan Administration and in both Bush Administrations, and is perhaps best known for his participation in the 2002 attempted coup against Hugo Chávez, the late socialist leader of Venezuela. (Reich denies that he or the U.S. played any role in the coup.) In May, Jeb Bush, after providing a series of confusing responses on the issue, said that, given what is now known about the condition of Saddam Hussein's nuclear-, biological-, and chemical-weapons program in 2003, he would not have invaded Iraq. Not all of his advisers share this sentiment.

"I can defend the invasion of Iraq," Reich told me. "What did the invasion of Iraq do? It caused all of the people who would've otherwise come and attacked us and killed Americans on our soil—it caused them to go to Iraq and die there. That may sound very brutal, or whatever, but we have

Advertisement

FALL SHOWCASE

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT NEW PRODUCTS AND SPECIAL OFFERS FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

***Stone Soup* Magazine**

Stories, poems, and art by kids.
A perfect gift! Ages eight to thirteen.

Subscribe at StoneSoup.com
800.447.4569

Your Anniversary in Roman Numerals

XII XI MCMLXXXIX
DECEMBER 11, 1989

john-christian.com • 888.646.6466

JOHN CHRISTIAN

The Tapper Twins are taking over New York City! Get your kids reading (and laughing!) with Geoff Rodkey's best-selling series. Available wherever books are sold.

TapperTwins.com

LB
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Jellyfish are survivors of everything that ever happened. That's **"The Thing About Jellyfish."** Read the bestselling début novel, a National Book Award finalist. Available wherever books are sold.

b-kids.com

LB
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

@NEWYORKERPROMO
NEWYORKERONTHETOWN.COM

seen what has happened when you have an Administration like the current one, that did not realize what Bush had done; sent the troops home from Iraq; created a vacuum that was filled by ISIS. And they're killing Americans and everyone else—they're mostly killing Muslims. I lay that at the feet of the Obama Administration."

He added, "All Republicans say what I just did . . . but it's not reported. Nobody listens. It goes against conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom is that Bush was a failure in foreign policy, because of Iraq. Well, history is beginning to tell a different story."

The American public's appetite for military interventions runs in cycles. After the triumph of the Second World War, policymakers were emboldened to roll back Communism, but the miasma of Vietnam instilled a wariness of major overseas military entanglements that spanned the Carter and Reagan Presidencies. In 1991, the relatively quick and successful Gulf War sparked a new bipartisan consensus that American force could again be deployed wisely if it was undertaken with overwhelming strength and with the benefit of an international coalition. The lack of intervention in Rwanda was widely seen as a moral calamity for which politicians, including Bill Clinton, have apologized.

That uneasy consensus lasted through the 2001 toppling of the Taliban in Afghanistan. But the invasion of Iraq in 2003 came to be seen as such a catastrophic mistake that even its progenitor could not avoid casting blame on his own circle. George W. Bush, during his last two years in office, forced out Donald Rumsfeld and marginalized Dick Cheney. It was too late to save his own popularity. When voters went to the polls in November, 2008, Bush's job-approval rating dipped to twenty per cent, the lowest of any outgoing President in the history of polling.

Voices of restraint can still be heard in the Party's debates, including on Jeb Bush's team. One adviser, in contrast to Reich, told me, "I'm sure he's not going to invade Iraq again. We did that one. You can't compare him to his brother, because his brother was operating in a different environment. We had just been attacked; we didn't know what was coming next."

Senator Lindsey Graham, whose candidacy is essentially limited to a hard-line foreign policy, said his opponents were trying to sort out the politics of interventionism. "Here's the problem," he said, "Republicans know it's not popular to be for Obama's foreign policy, but they're nervous about how far to go. They're trying to find out where the public is, and trying to take the public's pulse. They're trying to figure out where the market is—where's the sweet spot?"

Ted Cruz, the senator from Texas, who is also running for President, told me that he thinks he's found it: a foreign policy that channels Reagan, by far the most popular Republican in modern history. In Cruz's Senate office, we sat under an enormous painting depicting Ronald Reagan's 1987 speech at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, in which he declared, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

Cruz is forty-four, eighteen years younger than Jeb Bush. Other politicians of his generation, including Marco Rubio, also forty-four, were strongly influenced by 9/11, but Cruz told me that he draws more lessons from Reagan's fight against Communism than from Bush's and Obama's fight against terrorism. "The foreign-policy events that shaped my world view the most did not occur in the past two Presidencies," he said. "I believe in peace through strength. It's worth underscoring. Reagan went through eight years in the Presidency, and the biggest country he ever invaded was Grenada."

He emphasized that "among Republicans there is a spectrum of views of foreign policy. At one end, there is Rand Paul"—a non-interventionist who is the most skeptical of further involvement in Syria and Iraq. "At the other end, I would put John McCain. Lindsey Graham and Marco Rubio are very similar to McCain. I would describe my views as a third point on the triangle." He believes that "America should always be a clarion voice of liberty, and that the bully pulpit of the Presidency has enormous power. There is power to speaking the truth on a global stage." He added, "However, speaking for freedom is not the same thing as using U.S. military force. Historically, America has always been reluctant to engage in military force."

Reagan's foreign policy was rhetorically idealistic but also deeply pragmatic. Although he described the Soviet Union as "the evil empire," he was quick to negotiate with Gorbachev. Soon after Hezbollah attacked the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, in 1983, killing two hundred and forty-one Americans, Reagan said that a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Lebanon would send a "signal to terrorists everywhere: they can gain by waging war against innocent people." But then he did it anyway, after concluding that the troops' mission was unclear and that their presence offered too inviting a target to extremists.

This strain of pragmatism was powerful enough that George W. Bush called for a "humble" foreign policy in his 2000 campaign, and condemned the kinds of democracy-building interventions for which he would later become known. Cruz strives to return the G.O.P. to its pre-9/11 philosophy. "If and when U.S. military force is required," he told me, "it should, No. 1, always be to directly further the vital national security of the United States. No. 2, we should use overwhelming force. And, No. 3, we should get the heck out. It should not be the objective of our armed forces to engage in nation-building, to transform foreign nations into robust, utopian democracies."

While many Republicans now criticize Obama for not doing enough in Syria, Cruz was among those who opposed Obama's 2013 request to strike Syria. "He repeatedly tried to justify this as 'vindicating international norms,' or as 'the violation of international law,' " Cruz said. "It's not the job of our military to behave like a law professor in a faculty lounge, vindicating international law. It's the job of our military to protect the safety and security of three hundred and thirty million Americans." He said that although "Assad is a monster" who "has used poison gas" and "killed

hundreds of thousands of his own citizens," he worries about what might happen "if the attack succeeds and you topple Assad, and the weapons then fall into the hands of Al Qaeda or Al Nusra or ISIS or any of the other radical Islamic terrorists." (Donald Trump has said that he's happy to have Russia in Syria fighting ISIS, though he failed to note that, so far, Russia has been mainly targeting U.S.-trained rebels, not ISIS.)

Cruz added that the military commanders he has consulted insist that "the most potent tool to use against ISIS is overwhelming airpower." He maintained that arming the Kurds in northern Iraq was a better alternative to sending U.S. troops. "We need boots on the ground, but they don't necessarily need to be American boots," he said. "The Kurds are our boots on the ground."

But Cruz's prescription may be more like Reagan's supply-side tax cuts than like Reagan's foreign policy: it promises enormous benefits with very little sacrifice. Graham, who wants American troops to lead the fight, scoffed at Cruz's argument. "The Kurds don't have any offensive capability," he said, pointing out that Shiites and non-Kurdish Sunnis in Iraq and Syria would be as concerned about Kurdish advances as they are about ISIS. "They're not gonna go down to Ramadi! Go ask the Kurds, 'Would you help us liberate Syria?' And they'd say, 'Thank you, but no thank you.' If you want to create a war to end all wars, have a marauding band of Kurds going through the Middle East."

Cruz has calculated that, despite the rise of ISIS, Republican voters are still hungover from the costly interventions of the Bush years, and that they share his skepticism about the ability of American troops to accomplish much in Iraq and Syria. "There are some politicians in Washington who approach foreign military action as if they're playing Risk," he said. "They want to deploy troops and command them in battle." He added, "A number of politicians treat American boots on the ground as a talisman to demonstrate that they're really tough."

Obama, who has said that he was elected to end wars, not start them, has bombed more countries than George W. Bush did. But in fighting terrorism he has chosen to use drones and other forms of airpower, Special Forces, and proxy armies. Obama was skeptical about intervening to stop Muammar Qaddafi's forces as they marched on a helpless population in Benghazi, Libya. He had to be talked into the operation by, among others, Hillary Clinton, and the result—a failed state in Libya that has created a haven for terrorists—shaped his skepticism about intervening in Syria.

Early on, key Republicans seemed to endorse Obama's cautious approach. When Marco Rubio ran for the Senate in 2010, he supported Obama's drawdown of troops in Iraq. As a former city commissioner in West Miami and then a state legislator, Rubio knew the foreign-policy issues that important Florida constituencies care about, such as the Jewish community's staunchly pro-Israel views and the Cuban-American community's fierce opposition to Castro. He had little experience with broader foreign-policy questions. In his early months in Congress, he supported attempts at diplomacy with Iran. During the 2013 fight over budget cuts, Rubio advocated for government-spending reform. He has since grown less cautionary, arguing for an increase in military spending and calling it the "most important obligation of the federal government."

"Maybe it's always the person you least suspect because you're not a good detective."

• •

Rubio, who was a leader in the Florida House while Jeb Bush was governor and is now his nearest opponent in the race, though they are both well behind Trump and Carson in most national polls, has recently positioned himself as one of the most hawkish Republicans running for President. McCain noted that Rubio, like others, had shifted into his camp after the emergence of ISIS, and he joked that Rubio has a history of switching positions, which McCain gently mocked by licking his finger and holding it in the air.

Recently, Rubio told me that he no longer believes that Obama's drawdown was wise. "We are retreating from Afghanistan and Iraq, not anticipating the vacuum that would be left behind and the potential that creates for radicalism," he said. His shift might seem political, but he suggested that it was the result of becoming immersed in issues, as a senator, to which, as a candidate, he had given little thought. He noted that some of his opponents, including Jeb Bush, have never held federal office. "I'm a

member of the Intelligence Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee," Rubio said. "I spend a significant amount of time working on these issues on a daily basis. So most certainly I'm going to have more insight than someone reading briefings from the staffers."

Rubio's foreign policy is a clear response to Obama's alleged retreat from the world. The President's biggest mistakes, in this view, were all failures to intervene more aggressively. Rubio has said that he would have forcefully taken the side of demonstrators in Iran during the 2009 Green Revolution. "The President was so intent on negotiating with Iran's tyrants that he did little to help its people," he remarked in a speech in Washington in 2011.

But the key issue for many emerging Republican hawks was Obama's failure to attack Assad when he used chemical weapons. Obama had drawn a "red line," but then retreated. Instead, he accepted a deal negotiated with Putin to place the weapons under international control. "Everyone heard him," Reich said. "He said, 'I didn't draw the red line, the world drew a red line.' No, Mr. President, the world didn't stand before the cameras in the White House and say that it was drawing a red line; you did. . . . It's very dangerous."

George Shultz, who is ninety-four and is also a Bush adviser, was Reagan's Secretary of State. He said that the red line was one of the biggest mistakes of Obama's Presidency. "I don't think the President realizes how much damage was done," he said. "I remember when I was in marine boot camp, at the start of World War Two, and the sergeant hands me this rifle and says, 'Take good care of this rifle—this is your best friend. Remember one thing: never point this rifle at anybody unless you're willing to pull the trigger.' No empty threats. That's boot-camp wisdom. With Obama there are empty threats lying all over the place, and they undermine his credibility."

This outlook relies on some revisionist history. When Obama asked Congress for authorization to bomb Syria in 2013, several Republicans, Rubio among them, voted against the resolution in the Foreign Relations Committee, and many others announced that they would oppose it on the Senate floor. It never came to a vote. Rubio said that the Administration's proposed attack was not sufficiently robust; now he cites the failure to use force as the reason for much of the current chaos, including Putin's recent involvement.

Rubio told me that years ago he warned that the power vacuums in the Middle East were being filled by Islamic extremists, and he noted ISIS's growing role in Afghanistan, where it had previously had little presence. "If they continue unabated a year from now, we could live in a world where ISIS is now operating in vacated spaces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Libya," he said. Rubio is a favorite of G.O.P. hawks. Sheldon Adelson, the Las Vegas billionaire who spent some $100 million in the 2012 election and is wooed by almost every Republican candidate, is reportedly also a fan. But Rubio sounds more cautious when asked for details about how to defeat ISIS.

"Intervening doesn't mean ground troops," he said. "Intervening can be a lot of things." He went on, "A full-scale invasion, sending a hundred thousand troops to Iraq right now, is probably not the best way to defeat ISIS. Because it very well may be what they hope will happen, because it will allow them to point to radicals around the world and attract more recruits and more funding. I think that the better approach is to empower Sunni tribes to defeat them. And they need a lot of help from us, including air strikes and special-op forces."

What Rubio laid out wasn't very different from Obama's current plan. When pressed, he conceded that many more American troops might be necessary. "There's no magic number," he said. "I don't know if nine thousand is worse than eleven thousand. What matters is: first you have to establish a mission—what are you trying to achieve? Then you have to allow the military to come up with operations and how to achieve that mission. And that will determine the number in the mission, not the other way around."

Rubio, Graham, and many other Republicans believe that the nation's foreign policy suffers from timidity, not from overexertion. The problem is in the execution, not the intervention itself. "Here's what I've learned," Graham told me. "If you don't have a plan after you take Afghanistan down, after you take Iraq down, after you take Libya down, after you take Syria down, you're going to regret it."

Given the failed states and the civil wars gripping Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, I asked Graham for an example of a successful intervention that would bolster his case for a more hawkish foreign policy. We were sitting outside, in Manchester, New Hampshire, and he was eating nachos. He looked at me excitedly, racing to swallow so that he could get to his answer: "How about Germany and Japan?"

Even as Bush watches his opponents solidify their foreign-policy positions, he has struggled to come to terms with his brother's ideology. His opponents criticize him for being vague or unengaged. Graham told me, "I think he's a work-in-progress. I think he's been out of the game for ten years. . . . He's gotta convince people that three Bushes are not one too many."

Jeb Bush's troubles began almost as soon as he declared his candidacy and included the eighty-five-year-old James Baker on his list. As Communism began to collapse, in 1989, Bush and Baker helped engineer a soft landing for the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the gradual reorientation of Europe's Eastern Bloc countries toward the West. Hawks pilloried them for not asserting themselves strongly enough. When Bush went to Kiev, Ukraine, for instance, and warned Ukrainians not to secede from the Soviet Union, the address was mocked as the "chicken Kiev" speech. In 1991, after assembling a United Nations-backed coalition to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, Bush and Baker ignored the pleas of American neoconservatives who wanted U.S. forces to march on Baghdad and overthrow Saddam following the uprisings against his rule. They were again demonized. Wolfowitz said that it was as if America were "idly watching a mugging." In 2006, Baker co-chaired the Iraq Study Group, which recommended a dramatic change in Bush's policy in the Middle East, including the withdrawal of most U.S. forces from Iraq and diplomatic engagement with Iran and Syria, policies that Bush rejected.

When Baker appeared on Jeb Bush's list, neoconservatives expressed alarm.

His foreign-policy views—diplomacy, stability, and serious doubts about interventions requiring large numbers of U.S. troops—are closer to Obama's than to George W. Bush's. Jeb Bush faced a revolt from donors and excoriation in neoconservative publications. A few weeks after Jeb's announcement, Baker was scheduled to be the keynote speaker at a Washington gala dinner for J Street, the liberal-leaning pro-Israel group founded in 2008 to act as a counterweight to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. *Commentary* published an article about "Jeb Bush's James Baker Problem" and warned that Jeb may be Baker's "kindred spirit." Mark Levin, an influential talk-radio host, wrote that "Jeb Bush turns to Israel-hater, Jim Baker, for foreign policy advice." Adelson reportedly sent word to Bush that he should pressure Baker to cancel the speech. Bush declined, and Adelson's allies leaked that Adelson wouldn't support Bush.

At the J Street dinner, Baker criticized Benjamin Netanyahu for "diplomatic missteps and political gamesmanship," and spoke about his own role in the first Bush Administration's withholding of loan guarantees to Israel in order to pressure the government to halt settlement construction. William Kristol, the editor of *The Weekly Standard*, called Baker "anti-Israel," and tweeted, "Thankfully, James Baker doesn't speak for today's Republican Party." Morton Klein, the president of the conservative Zionist Organization of America, told Bloomberg that Bush's association with Baker would cost the candidate: "There are many mega-donors who will not be with him because of that."

In May, Bush appeared in New York, at the Metropolitan Club, before an audience of financiers organized by Paul Singer, a hedge-fund manager and the kind of Republican mega-donor Klein had warned about. Someone asked Bush to explain Baker's influence on his policymaking. According to the Washington *Post*, Jeb "said that he respected Baker, but maintained that he is not part of his foreign-policy team." CNN, which cited four sources and the notes of someone present, quotes Bush as saying, "What you need to know is that who I listen to when I need advice on the Middle East is George W. Bush." The Bush campaign later insisted that Jeb was speaking narrowly about Israeli policy. Either way, the message was clear: the hawks were back in control of Republican foreign policy.

Lately, in his effort to be his "own man," Bush has displayed a willingness to move even further to the right than his brother. At the October 2nd interview in South Carolina, Wilson asked him about the U.S. prison at Guantánamo Bay. During George W. Bush's tenure, the prison became such a source of shame for America that even Bush, who was loath to acknowledge mistakes or to bow to international pressure, said in 2007, "It should be a goal of the nation to shut down Guantánamo." Jeb disagrees. Wilson asked if Guantánamo prisoners should

be moved to maximum-security facilities in the U.S. "No," Jeb said. "There is no option for these folks. They should stay where they are. Even if it's—it's expensive. It's the nicest prison you'll ever want to be in, by the way. And the rights of these terrorists are way beyond what a lot of people get in a lot of different circumstances. They're not being mistreated at all. But there is no other option."

If the economy improves, and Democrats continue to maintain an advantage on domestic issues, the Republican candidates will increasingly highlight foreign policy, an area of perceived vulnerability for Obama and Clinton. McCain, who lost to Obama in 2008, said, perhaps hopefully, "National security, foreign policy, and terrorism will play a greater role in the decision-making of the American people than at any time since 1980." He insisted that although Bush's record on foreign policy contributed to his own defeat, "it has gone from a significant negative" at the start of the Obama Administration "to what has become more and more of a positive."

In August, Bush travelled to Simi Valley, California, to give a speech on foreign policy at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Bush called Reagan "a leader of clarity and resolve, not given to idle words," someone "who took command of events, rebuilt America's strength, and moved the world toward peace." But when he shifted from Reagan's Cold War successes to more recent events his speech sounded more like a tribute to the Administration of George W. Bush.

"No leader or policymaker involved will claim to have gotten everything right in the region, Iraq especially," he said. But he argued that, whatever mistakes were made, it was the surge of troops in 2007 that "turned events toward victory." The surge "was a success—brilliant, heroic, and costly." It was Obama who lost Iraq, not his brother. The "premature withdrawal was the fatal error," Jeb said, referring to Obama's gradual drawdown, "creating the void that ISIS moved in to fill—and that Iran has exploited to the full as well."

He then turned this logic against the Democrats' most likely nominee. "ISIS grew while the United States disengaged from the Middle East and ignored the threat," he said. "And where was Secretary of State Clinton in all of this? Like the President himself, she had opposed the surge, then joined in claiming credit for its success, then stood by as that hard-won victory by American and allied forces was thrown away. In all her record-setting travels, she stopped by Iraq exactly one time."

Clinton herself has tried to create some distance from Obama's record. Since leaving the Administration, she has repeatedly said that as Secretary of State she urged Obama to do more in the early days of the Syrian uprising against Assad, when moderates could still be found in that country and American intervention could, arguably, have made a difference. Obama has dismissed that view as "a fantasy." But, whatever Clinton actually believes about the correct course in the Middle East, she has already shown that she will adopt the campaign position that best suits her politically. In early October, facing a challenge from the left from Bernie Sanders, she reversed her position on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade deal that she championed as Secretary of State.

It's easy to attack Obama as feckless in the face of the chaos in Libya, Syria, and Iraq. Less apparent is how to translate vague campaign promises to do *something* into a plan that won't put more American lives at risk. After Jeb Bush spoke with Wilson in South Carolina, he met with reporters backstage. His aides were scrambling to contain any fallout from the "stuff happens" remark, which had immediately elicited a response from President Obama, and echoed one of the most notorious statements of the Bush Administration: Rumsfeld's declaration during the chaos in Iraq that "stuff happens." After defending his remark, Jeb Bush then took some questions about Syria, Iraq, and Putin.

He has called for a no-fly zone over Syria that would help a Sunni-led army fight a two-front war against Assad and ISIS, but it's unclear who would make up the forces. He told reporters that American airpower in Syria is "restricted by lawyers kind of imposing all sorts of conditions." He would change the rules, he said, so "that it would be there to fight to win." He didn't specify which rules he would lift, but, as Graham noted, almost every military expert dismisses the idea that airpower alone can defeat ISIS. "The only way you destroy a big ground opponent is with another big ground opponent," Graham told me. "You're not going to bomb ISIL into submission. You gotta go tear the caliphate up by the roots. That means going into Syria on the ground."

To fight ISIS in Iraq, Bush made the familiar argument that America should arm the Kurds and "embed with the Iraqi military," both of which Obama is effectively doing. When asked whether he would send more troops, Bush said that the U.S. already has thirty-five hundred troops in Iraq and that the real issue was how to better integrate them into Iraqi forces. Pressed further, he conceded, in a roundabout way, that he would be willing to send more American troops back to Iraq.

"I would listen to the military commanders and I would create a strategy," he said, a phrase that politicians revert to whenever they want to avoid details. "If it required more supportive troops, fine." The statement was a reminder of Bush's continuing dilemma: can he get the nomination without violating his principles? In the months since the start of his campaign, he has only clouded the matter of what, precisely, he stands for.

At one point, someone asked Bush a churlish question about his father's 1991 statement regarding the possibility of "a new world order" after the Cold War ended. Bush used it as an opportunity to talk about Obama's alleged retreat from the world.

"I don't even know what that means anymore," he said. "In 1992, it meant the end of Communism, and that the United States needed to play a constructive role in forging peace and security, and we still have that role to play. We have threats that are created by our absence. Just look at what's going on in Syria as an example of that, where we have no strategy, where Putin, agile as he is, ends up injecting himself into something that makes it harder for me to imagine that this brutal Assad regime will depart." He thought for a moment and added, "American leadership matters." ♦

DIAGNOSTIC EXAM: DO YOU HAVE MATH ANXIETY?

BY PAUL RUDNICK

YANN KEBBI

1. When your first grader asks for help solving a Common Core math problem involving subitizing and stable order, how do you respond?

(a) I strangle my child while shrieking, "*This . . . is . . . why . . . we . . . bought . . . you . . . that . . . fancy . . . computer, Liam!*"

(b) I tell my child, "Go ask your mother. Your birth mother. I think she lives in Canada."

(c) I ask to see the equation, then discuss it with my child using nonsense terms. Example: "Simply tri-dram the hexabop until the tetramint indoles." If my child appears confused, I say, "I wish you were smarter."

2. If you need to divide a restaurant check by four and calculate the tip, do you:

(a) Leave your wife's earrings on the table instead?

(b) Hand the server a printed card reading, "I have math anxiety. Please add an appropriate gratuity to my portion of the check. I don't care if you overcharge me. *I don't care.*"

(c) Calmly hand the check to your husband and say, "Here. Justify your existence."

3. When you watch a movie in which the main character rapidly scribbles long, complex equations across a blackboard, what are you thinking?

(a) I read somewhere that Russell Crowe used a hand double for that scene.

(b) I bet that after they filmed this scene Eddie Redmayne fired his agent.

(c) In real life, Benedict Cumberbatch can't remember his PIN number.

4. What is a hypotenuse?

(a) A very graceful hypot.

(b) An overweight chanteuse.

(c) The French word for profound boredom.

5. How do you calculate your car's gas mileage?

(a) By driving off a bridge.

(b) I put my head on the hood and listen for the mileage fairy.

(c) I ask Siri to do it, and then wait patiently for her to stop laughing and calling me "a sad little man."

6. True or false: $E=mc^2$

Answer: D-minus.

7. When was the last time you needed to do math?

(a) Never, just like everyone else in the history of the entire world.

(b) When I was measuring a wall for a bookcase and then decided that I'd rather move.

(c) I don't remember, because the last time I heard the words "subprime interest rates," "the Dow," and "refinance," I blacked out, and when I woke up everyone in the bank was dead.

8. Which would you rather do:

(a) Use a slide rule to solve a trigonometry problem.

(b) Use a slide rule as a rectal thermometer.

(c) Give a slide rule to a math geek as a gift and say, "Finally, you have a genital."

9. Who is the greatest mathematical genius of all time?

(a) The person who invented the accountant.

(b) Whoever realized that an abacus is just a decorative accent piece on an East Hampton coffee table.

(c) The "Sesame Street" character who, when asked to add two plus two, replied, "Ask a Muppet who gives a damn."

10. What do you do when you travel to a foreign country and need to figure out the currency?

(a) I ask, "How much is that in real money?"

(b) I remind every salesclerk who won the Second World War.

(c) I hold my American Express card in front of my face and say, in a Pepé Le Pew accent, "Oh, I the-e-enk ju understond vat I'm talking about, Señor Funny Money." ♦

LIFE AND LETTERS

THE MEMORY KEEPER

The oral histories of Russia's new Nobel laureate.

BY MASHA GESSEN

"Please bring the lady one green tea," went the request. "She has won the Nobel Prize." Svetlana Alexievich, the sixty-seven-year-old winner of this year's prize in literature, was at a table for ten in the front of a noisy restaurant in Berlin, where she held her Nobel press conference, two weekends ago. Alexievich is a little over five feet tall and stocky; her straight shoulder-length hair is dyed a redder shade of brown than it once was. The waitress nodded respectfully, motioning toward a stack of books on the table to show that she understood. Germans were protesting a trade agreement between the United States and the European Union, and the center of the city was closed to traffic. After answering an hour's worth of questions—most of them about Belarusian and Russian politics—Alexievich had walked for blocks in the cold wind before ducking into the restaurant with a group of friends and publishers.

This year's literature Nobel is the first to be awarded to a writer who works exclusively with living people. Her books deal with historical crises—the Second World War, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, and the collapse of the Soviet Union—through the voices of ordinary individuals. This is oral history stripped down to segments so raw that it can stretch both credulity and the reader's tolerance for pain. At the beginning of "Voices from Chernobyl," published in Russia in 1997, a young woman describes watching her husband, a firefighter, die from radiation poisoning:

> At the morgue they said, "Want to see what we'll dress him in?" I do! They dressed him up in formal wear, with his service cap. They couldn't get shoes on him because his feet had swelled up. They had to cut up the formal wear, too, because they couldn't get it on him, there wasn't a whole body to put it on. It was all—wounds. The last two days in the hospital—I'd lift his arm, and meanwhile the bone is shaking, just sort of dangling, the body has gone away from it. Pieces of his lungs, of his liver, were coming out of his mouth. He was choking on his internal organs. I'd wrap my hand in a bandage and put it in his mouth, take out all that stuff. It's impossible to talk about. It's impossible to write about. And even to live through. It was all mine. My love. They couldn't get a single pair of shoes to fit him. They buried him barefoot.

Alexievich told me, "We live in an environment of banality. For most people, that's enough. But how do you get through? How do you rip off that coating of banality? You have to make people descend into the depths of themselves." Announcing the award, the Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, Sara Danius, credited Alexievich with inventing a new literary genre, which she called "a history of emotions—a history of the soul, if you wish."

Alexievich's books are published all over the world, but mostly by small presses. "Voices from Chernobyl" came out ten years ago in the United States, released by Dalkey Archive Press, a small nonprofit publisher. (The translator was my brother, Keith Gessen.) She has won awards, including a 2005 National Book Critics Circle Award and, in 2013, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. But her most recent major prize before the Nobel was the French Prix Médicis Essai, reserved for writers whose fame has yet to match their talent.

Alexievich, who writes in Russian, is from Belarus, a country of fewer than ten million people, which has been run since 1994 by Alexander Lukashenko, a former Soviet Army officer. Belarus has maintained a close relationship with Russia, and is probably the most Soviet of the fifteen post-Soviet countries, with a largely state-controlled economy and stringent restrictions on free speech and assembly. For a long time, Alexievich's books were brought into Belarus from Russia and sold on the black market. In recent

"You have to make people descend into the depths of themselves," Alexievich says.

SOURCE: ULF ANDERSEN/GETTY

ILLUSTRATION BY THOMAS FUCHS

years, as Lukashenko has attempted to improve relations with the West, her books have been allowed in stores.

Alexievich has lived most of her adult life in a small apartment—two rooms and a kitchen—in a ten-story Soviet-era apartment block in central Minsk, the capital. Her parents are dead, and her daughter—who is, in fact, the daughter of her late sister, whom she adopted when the girl was four—teaches at a trade school in Minsk and is raising her own daughter. A longtime companion lives in the apartment next door.

In recent years, Alexievich has been looking for a bigger apartment, but she is reluctant to give up the bright light and the view of the Svisloch River, and hopes to get a place in the same building, with windows facing the same direction. The thought of moving fills her with dread. The prize money—a little less than a million dollars—will not help, she told me, because she cannot delegate the renovations: she cannot find anyone in Minsk whose taste matches hers. She likes solid shapes, simple lines, and no clutter.

Alexievich is the first person to receive the Nobel for books that are based entirely on interviews. This has led some writers to laud the committee for recognizing a journalist. The headline of a Los Angeles *Times* piece announcing the prize called Alexievich a reporter, a term she finds almost insulting. "I've known since I was five that I wanted to be a writer," not a journalist, she said. In Russian publishing, the line between fiction and nonfiction is often blurred—her books tend to be classified as *proza*, with literary novels—but the border between journalism and literature is inviolable.

Her parents were rural schoolteachers, and she grew up the oldest of three children in a family that began in abject poverty and achieved a life that was modest even by Soviet standards. She applied to the journalism department of Belarusian State University, because it was the closest thing she could imagine to a writing school. A generation earlier, during Stalin's reign, her father dropped out of the department to serve in the Red Army, and later, after a relative was arrested, left his career in journalism.

She worked at a newspaper, wrote poetry and plays and screenplays, but kept looking, as she puts it, "to create a new text." She drew inspiration from her mentor, the Belarusian writer Ales Adamovich, whose genre was oral history, but she had less patience for authorial intrusions than Adamovich did. His best-remembered work, "The Book of the Siege," written with Daniil Granin, a fellow Soviet-era liberal, is a people's history of the siege of Leningrad, from 1941 to 1944. "There is this story of a boy and his mother, who share an apartment with a woman who steals," Alexievich told me. "The boy and his mother are starving to death." As Alexievich recalled, the boy knows that the woman's stash includes half a meatball, and he struggles over whether to take it. "And suddenly there are three pages of ruminations on the nature of the Russian intelligentsia. The thing I always say is 'Don't put yourself next to the meatball. You'll lose.'"

Alexievich wanted to dispense with the author's voice and with the usual chronologies and contexts. She wanted to approximate the voices she heard in her childhood, when village women gathered in the evenings and told stories about the Second World War. It was always women, because most of the men had been killed in the war, and the few remaining ones were typically passed out drunk. Alexievich was born three years after the war ended, in Soviet Ukraine, and grew up in Soviet Belarus, where the Nazis had exterminated Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs, and burned down entire villages.

When she started gathering material for her first book, she told me, she looked for women who had stories similar to those she remembered from her childhood and asked them "about the things I wanted to know." She spoke to women who had been in the military. "I had no interest in how many people they had killed or how; I wanted to know how a woman feels." She added, "I was young, so they told me stories as older women do to a younger one." Focussing on women was a wise decision, Alexievich said: "Women tell things in more interesting ways. They live with more feeling. They observe themselves and their lives. Men are more impressed with action. For them, the sequence of events is more important." Women's voices

Advertisement

FALL SHOWCASE

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT NEW PRODUCTS AND SPECIAL OFFERS FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

"The Horse," by Wendy Williams

"A beautiful celebration of the deep evolutionary fellowship between horses and people." —*David George Haskell, author of "The Forest Unseen"*

Available wherever books are sold.

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN | FSG

Fortunoff Fine Jewelry is back. The new boutique by Esther Fortunoff is in Westbury and online. Generations of jewelry expertise means fabulous quality at prices that make sense.

FortunoffJewelry.com • 800.636.7886

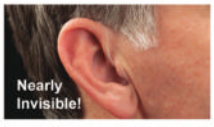
fortunoff FINE JEWELRY

Is your daughter engaging in self-destructive behaviors?

Unparalleled D.B.T. treatment from *U.S. News'* top-ranked psychiatric hospital.

mclean3east.org • 877.967.7233
Boston, Mass.

McLean 3East HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE



New, Tiny, and Affordable

MDHearingAid® AIR is a doctor-designed, F.D.A.-registered digital hearing aid. Get the same natural hearing experience as devices costing thousands of dollars for 90% less.

MDHearingAid.com • 800.873.0541
One year of FREE batteries with code CG26

MDHearingAid® AIR

@NEWYORKERPROMO
NEWYORKERONTHETOWN.COM

predominate in her later work, too.

The resulting book, "War Has Not a Woman's Face," was published in abridged form in 1984, in the Moscow-based journal *Oktyabr*, after being rejected by journals in Belarus as "pacifist and naturalistic." It consisted of a series of monologues by female survivors. The glorious victory in the Great Patriotic War was the driving myth of Soviet propaganda, and the job of Soviet writers was to praise Soviet military might and to exalt the Soviet citizen. Instead, these women recounted the bloody and messy tragedies they saw on the ground.

According to Alexievich, Mikhail Gorbachev read the piece, and then used the title in a speech, turning it into a literal Party line. This was the dawn of glasnost, a new openness in literary and intellectual life, and the Soviet people were about to focus, briefly and painfully, on the country's history. "War Has Not a Woman's Face" was published in book form in 1985 and eventually sold more than two million copies in Russian, and won Alexievich one of the highest Soviet civilian honors, the Lenin Komsomol Prize. An uncensored edition was not published until after the Soviet Union fell, six years later.

In "The Last Witnesses," written after "Woman's Face" but published the same year, Alexievich spoke to people who had experienced the Second World War as children. Unlike the women in her first book, most of these narrators had not been soldiers. Perestroika began in 1985, the year Alexievich became a nationally known author. Suddenly, it was possible to openly question the myths and policies of the Soviet Union, and Alexievich used her newfound fame to make her way to Afghanistan, where the Soviet Union had been fighting Afghan rebels and the mujahideen since 1979.

"Boys of Zinc," which featured the voices of Soviet soldiers, their mothers, and their widows, was published in 1989, the year that the Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan. (The title of the existing English translation, "Zinky Boys," is unfortunate; the reference is to the sealed caskets in which bodies were shipped back to the U.S.S.R.) Alexievich had punctured another myth of Soviet military might: she showed the soldiers as scared, confused, impoverished and humiliated boys. "It was my first time at a war," she told me. "I was so shaken by what I was seeing—the dead, how simply they kill, how then they drink vodka, sell, laugh, barter. It was the Soviet period, and they wanted to get souvenirs for their mothers, but where did they get the money? They sold bullets, which, the following day, would be used to kill them."

In 1992, some of the subjects of "Boys of Zinc," along with an organization representing the mothers of soldiers killed in the war, sued Alexievich for libelling the Soviet military. Called as a witness, a soldier's mother said, "You are saying that I should hate the state and the Party. But I am proud of my son! He died an officer in battle. His comrades loved him. I love the country we used to live in, the U.S.S.R., because my son died for it. And I hate you! I don't need your scary truth."

Alexievich prevailed in court, but the trial marked a turning point. The Soviet Union had collapsed in 1991, taking with it the idea of "restructuring" (the literal meaning of perestroika) the regime. In most of what had been the Soviet Union, reaction set in—the project of questioning Soviet mythology began to seem irrelevant or, worse, insulting to people who now felt its loss. In more recent years, with Vladimir Putin in power, the official ideology is anti-democratic, nationalist, and suspicious of voices like Alexievich's. As her fame increased abroad, her popularity in Russia faded.

On the eve of the Nobel announcement, Colta, a highbrow Russian online culture publication, posted a short item headed "Why You Should Know Who Svetlana Alexievich Is." The crux of the piece was that Russians should care about the writer because foreigners do.

The state-controlled media in Russia greeted the Nobel with an outpouring of vitriol reminiscent of Soviet newspapers' reactions to most of the earlier Russian-language Nobels. Almost invariably, the Swedish Academy has recognized writers who opposed the Soviet regime. In 1933, the prize went to the émigré writer Ivan Bunin, whom *Literaturnaya Gazeta* branded a "full-grown wolf of the counterrevolution." In 1958, Boris Pasternak was chosen, after "Doctor Zhivago" had been smuggled to the West with the help of the C.I.A. "He has been rewarded for his willingness to play the bait on the rusty fishing hook of anti-Soviet propaganda," *Literaturnaya Gazeta* wrote. Pasternak was forced to decline the prize. When Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn won, in 1970, his books were banned in the Soviet Union. After the first volume of "The Gulag Archipelago" was published in the West, in 1973, Solzhenitsyn was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and exiled. Joseph Brodsky had been kicked out of the country, for

UNFORCED ERROR

Once: those long wet Vermont summers.
No money, nothing to do but read books, swim
in the river with men wearing their jean shorts,
then play bingo outside the church, celebrating when we won.
Nothing seemed real to me and it was all very alive.
It took that long to learn how wrong I was—
over the rim of the horizon the sun burns.
Heidegger: "Every man is born as many men
and dies as a single one."
The bones in us still marrowful.
The moon up there, too, an arctic sorrow.
I'm sorry, another Scotch? Some nuts?
I used to think pressing forward was the point of life,
endlessly forward, the snow falling, gaudily falling.
I made a mistake. Now I have a will. It says when I die
let me live. A white shirt, bare legs, bones beneath.
Numbers on a board. A life can be a lucky streak,
or a dry spell, or a happenstance.
Yellow raspberries in July sun, bitter plums, curtains in wind.

—*Meghan O'Rourke*

insisting on writing poetry instead of working a regular Soviet job, fifteen years before he received the Nobel, in 1987.

This year, in *Izvestia*, Zakhar Prilepin, one of Russia's best-known writers, said that Alexievich was "not a writer," and that she had been chosen only for her opposition to the Kremlin—and for not actually being Russian. "We get the picture: Bunin, Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, Brodsky," he wrote. Alexievich's agent, Galina Dursthoff, who lives in Cologne, told me that she had accumulated a pile of hate mail from Russia comparable to the pile of congratulations from elsewhere in the world. The writers blasted the Nobel committee for awarding the prize to "a Russophobe" as well as "a Jew and a lesbian." (Alexievich is not Jewish and has never made any public statements about her personal life.)

Alexievich says the word "information" with the kind of disdain that a different kind of Belarusian might reserve for "capitalism." Information, in her view, rules the world and means nothing. "I just don't believe that 'new facts' can help us understand anything," she told me, referring to the slew of recent books about Russia and the former Soviet Union. Often, she includes in her books only the subject's name, age, and profession. These are important, she said, because they express the "measure of our time on earth" and "the angle at which we view life." Occasionally, she gives the briefest of descriptions, meant to confirm the subjects' testimony, as at the end of this fragment from a conversation with a fifty-seven-year-old writer—a survivor of internal exile that killed her parents—included in "Second-Hand Time" (2013), an oral history of the post-Soviet legacy:

> I am walking with Vladya. . . . We are carrying a feather shawl. . . . It's a beautiful thing for some other world. It's made to order. Vladya knew how to knit, and we lived on that. The woman paid us and then said, "How about I cut some flowers for you?" A bouquet for us? . . . We had only ever thought about bread, but this person saw that we were capable of thinking of other things too. That meant we weren't different from other people. You were locked in, shut down, and a window was cracked for you. . . . She wasn't going to pick them or grab them, she was going to cut them for us in her own garden. That was the moment. . . . It may have been the key. . . . I was handed the key. . . . It turned me around. . . . I remember those flowers. . . . A large bunch of asters. . . . I always plant them at my own dacha now. (*We happen to be talking at her dacha. The only things growing here are flowers and trees.*)

The woman describes surviving events more tragic, difficult, and frightening than many readers could imagine: being exiled, living in a mud hut, losing her parents and her older sister. But Alexievich answers questions of consequence—Did this person survive? Did she see her family again? Was the truth discovered?—not when they would naturally occur to the reader, as a journalist might, but, in the way of a novelist, when her character addresses them, which may be never. "I am a writer who happens to use some tools of journalism," she said.

When she began writing down speech, around 1980, Alexievich realized that she could not take notes by hand. She needed to preserve the subject's every word, including the silences. "When people talk, it matters how they place words next to each other," she said. A tape recorder in Belarus cost about five hundred rubles, roughly three months' salary, money that she borrowed from Adamovich and several other older writers. She developed a process that she still uses: she tapes conversations, has them transcribed, then writes from transcripts, longhand, often rehearsing the monologue out loud. A book takes between five and ten years and represents the voices of anywhere from three hundred to five hundred interview subjects. It contains about a hundred voices, of which ten to twenty are what she calls "pillars," subjects she'll interview up to twenty times each. "It's like painting a portrait," she said. "You keep going back and making calls, adding a stroke at a time."

Alexievich told me that "Voices from Chernobyl" was her easiest book to write: nothing like those events had happened before, "so people had no culture to protect them." She began researching the book almost immediately after the disaster, in 1986, so she was able to capture raw feeling on the page. "I realized you have to follow history," she said. "This genre works for epic stories only." Still, the events serve to get at the hidden heart of a person. "I work to create an image of time and the person who lived through it."

While Alexievich was working on the book, she came to realize that she was writing a cycle on what she calls the Red man, the Soviet person. It began with the most mythologized event in the

"Studies show that people who allow art into their lives can substantially reduce their dependency on selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors."

• •

formation of the Red man—the Great Patriotic War—and ended with the collapse of the Soviet Empire. "Voices from Chernobyl" was the fourth book in the series. The fifth and final volume, "Second-Hand Time," is her most ambitious work: many women and a few men talk about the loss of the Soviet idea, the post-Soviet ethnic wars, the legacy of the Gulag, and other aspects of the Soviet experience. Alexievich said, "We are surrounded by victims. Who did it all to them? Aliens? Questions like that come up, but these are working questions—I only need them in the process."

Alexievich is now working on two books—one about old age and dying, and the other about love. Neither centers on a historical event, and neither, she says, is going very well: "When I started recording, I found I had a problem. The older generation is a Soviet generation. They have to talk about themselves and they have no experience of doing that. You start talking to them about love, and they talk about how they built Minsk. You start talking to them about old age, they tell you how difficult life was after the war. It's like they never had a life of their own."

Perestroika was a blessed time, Alexievich said: "People became more interesting. They actually started paying more attention to details of the past. They were a different kind of people." When she was writing "Second-Hand Time," she had the sense that her subjects were finding nothing new for themselves in the past or in the present. The hope engendered by perestroika was gone, and people were trying to recycle old ideas and attachments. This pursuit appeared so desperate that for a while Alexievich thought she was writing a book about suicide. In 1993, she published a short book on the subject, called "Enchanted by Death"; those stories later became a part of "Second-Hand Time."

Alexievich keeps in touch with many of her subjects, who often tell her new stories; a phone call, she said, can "just blow up that previous knowledge." She often expands her books for new editions. "For, what is a person?" she asked. "It depends on his mood, and who his friends are, and what books he's read, and even whether you are visiting in the morning or in the evening. Everything means something." So what *is* a person? "Of course, you can never come face to face with reality—it is unknowable—but you can grab a solid substance, something." Mostly, she encounters pain. Many of her subjects talk about "carrying" pain or "handing over" pain, as if that is how they understand their relationship with the interviewer—as the process of transferring their pain.

In the early aughts, Alexievich decided to leave Belarus, in part to protest the authoritarian politics of Lukashenko, in part to save her energies for writing. "No one was chasing after me with a Kalashnikov," she said. Unlike some Belarusian intellectuals who were arrested or "disappeared," Alexievich was protected by her international renown. At the same time, as a public person, she felt she had to add her voice to the opposition's weak chorus. In 2000, she co-founded a human-rights group called Helsinki XXI. "But I was tired of being on the barricades," she said. "I realized I was giving in to the passion of the fight. That's the most dangerous thing that can happen to an artist: revolutions are dangerous, barricades are. They are intellectual traps. Russian culture is a culture of the barricade. I needed to free myself of this, and I realized that in the world in which I was living there was no one whose example I could follow—no one who had freed himself of this." One escape route that intellectuals had used since the nineteen-seventies was religion (Lyudmila Ulitskaya and Alexievich's friend Olga Sedakova are two writers who took this path), but this did not appeal to Alexievich. "When I see a garden in flower, then I believe in God for a second," she said. "But not the rest of the time."

She moved to Western Europe, where she could secure writing fellowships for one or two years. She lived in Italy, Germany, France, and Sweden, never learning more than a word or two of the language. She made friends with her translators, she saw plays based on her books—with their emphasis on human speech, they lend themselves to the stage. "The world became more multicolored, more layered," she said. She hoped that while she was abroad Lukashenko's reign might end. But eventually, she said, "I was wrong to think I could sit him out." She found herself in a different kind of intellectual trap: she was living where she could write freely but not use her

immersion method. She went many months between trips to the former Soviet Union, and found that her subjects' language was changing. A few years ago, she returned to Minsk.

The choice proved even lonelier than Alexievich expected. Her mentors are dead. Her peers have either emigrated or faded from view. In Western Europe, she said, she has fascinating friends who are in their seventies, but in Belarus people over fifty believe that life is over. Even casual acquaintances have disappeared. "I noticed that when I fly somewhere I don't run into people of my generation at the airport anymore," she said. "No one is going anywhere."

The conventional ways of broadening her social circle do not appeal to her. "I cannot teach, because I can't stand to repeat myself," she said. "Also, there are very few talented young people." Now that her books are openly sold in Belarus, she has readers, but "readers can give you nothing but banalities." Not that she doesn't like her readers—she just does not want to talk to them. "I'm not interested in people as such," she said. "A conversation with someone who can be a real interlocutor, an actual exchange—but that happens so rarely." She goes to Moscow to see photography exhibits. The visual images, she finds, stay with her for a long time and help with work. Music also helps: Alexievich listens to contemporary post-Soviet composers such as the Ukrainian Valentin Silvestrov, the Estonian Arvo Pärt, and the Russian Sergei Nevsky.

She no longer has much patience for fiction, even some that she used to love: "I tried rereading Platonov, but that kind of baroque voice doesn't do it for me anymore. Even Tolstoy—I went to read his 'Sevastopol Sketches,' but I just can't abide those masculine superstitions now." She's more interested in nonfiction, but, as Russia continues to isolate itself from the world, fewer interesting books are available in translation.

Still, she has all that is essential for work: time and solitude. Alexievich thinks a lot about privacy, both her own and that of her subjects. The last story in "Voices from Chernobyl" is narrated by a woman who took care of her dying husband at home:

> Is this something I can talk about? Give it words? There are secrets—I still don't understand what that was. Even in our last month, he'd still call for me at night. He felt desire. He loved me more than he did before. During the day, I'd look at him, and I couldn't believe what had happened at night. We didn't want to part. I caressed him, I petted him. . . . Do I need to talk about it? Can I? I myself went to him the way a man goes to a woman. What could I give him aside from medicine? What hope? He didn't want to die.
>
> But I didn't tell my mother anything. She wouldn't have understood me. She would have judged me, cursed us. Because this wasn't just an ordinary cancer, which everyone is already afraid of, but Chernobyl cancer, even worse. The doctors told me: if the tumors metastasized within his body, he'd have died quickly, but instead they crawled upward, along the body, to the face. Something black grew on him. His chin went somewhere, his neck disappeared, his tongue fell out. His veins popped, he began to bleed. From his neck, his cheeks, his ears. To all sides. I'd bring cold water, put wet rags against him, nothing helped. It was something awful, the whole pillow would be covered in it. I'd bring a washbowl from the bathroom, and the streams would hit it, like into a milk pail. That sound, it was so peaceful and rural. Even now I hear it at night.

When Alexievich published an excerpt from the book, she changed the woman's name. "Two days later, she calls me and asks, 'Why did you change my name?'" Alexievich said. She told the woman, "'I didn't want to expose you to god knows what!' She said, 'I suffered so much and he suffered so much that I don't want there to be any untruth.'"

Alexievich kept the speaker anonymous. She has overruled other subjects who she thought were willing to take too great a risk. "The mob accepts art but tears apart people," she said. Her subjects sometimes recoil at what they've shared. The women in "War Has Not a Woman's Face" wanted to rewrite the book, to replace the pain with the very banalities Alexievich had fought. "I thought, That's as if the subjects of 'The Gulag Archipelago' had tried to rewrite the book."

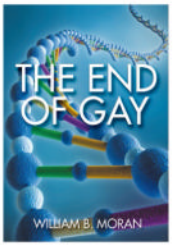
Solzhenitsyn's Nobel was awarded forty-five years before hers, to the day. Now, she said, she felt surrounded by "the great shadows" of past Russian Nobels. She listed Bunin, Pasternak, and Solzhenitsyn. "I have to work," she said. ♦

Advertisement

FALL SHOWCASE

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT NEW PRODUCTS AND SPECIAL OFFERS FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

Arched Shaker Bed
Handcrafted in Maine.
Chilton Furniture
Scarborough and Freeport, Me.
chiltons.com • 866.883.3366



L.G.B.T.A. meets DNA
Available at Amazon and at Barnes & Noble. Hardcover and electronic.

Providing integrated, comprehensive treatment for men and their families who experience mental illness and substance-use disorders.
westbridge.org • 877.691.9569

"A wild ride from beginning to end." –*Carl Bernstein*
"David Black is a master storyteller." –*James Grady*
Available at Amazon and at bookstores.

@NEWYORKERPROMO
NEWYORKERONTHETOWN.COM

A REPORTER AT LARGE

TEN BORDERS

One refugee's epic escape from Syria.

BY NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

In 2012, the Syrian civil war reached the suburbs of Damascus. Army tanks rolled over anti-government protesters in Ghouta; artillery shells fell on Darayya. One morning that May, a car bomb exploded in the town of Jdeidet Artouz, southwest of the capital. The blast jolted Ghaith, a twenty-two-year-old law student, out of bed. He lived in a two-bedroom apartment with his mother; his father had died when he was an infant, and his siblings—four sisters and a brother, all older—had left the house after getting married. Ghaith stepped to the window and pulled back the curtain. Across the street, a sedan was spewing flames. Body parts littered the road.

The victim was Ghaith's neighbor, an Alawite man whom rebels had apparently targeted for assassination. In the weeks that followed, the government crackdown intensified. One of Ghaith's nieces, a teen-ager, was imprisoned for posting a comment on Facebook that condemned a barrel-bomb attack by the Syrian Air Force on civilians in Homs. Government agents snatched two of Ghaith's friends off the street and took them away. That August, the Army moved into Jdeidet Artouz and massacred dozens of people.

Ghaith studied criminal law at the University of Damascus, and hoped to become a judge. But simply commuting to class had become an ordeal. At one point, the bus he took travelled on a road that formed the boundary between regime territory and rebel territory. Rival sniper bullets frequently pinged the sides of the bus. "We ducked our heads as we drove through," Ghaith recalls.

That fall, his brother, Ghalib, a barber with three young children, fled Syria, with the permission of his wife. Ghalib went first to Turkey, by air, then to Greece, by sea, and, eventually, to Sweden, by truck, hidden inside a wooden crate. In Gothenburg, he took a job at an auto-repair shop. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians were attempting similar escapes. The wealthiest went directly to Europe, but most headed for Jordan, Lebanon, or Turkey, where they often got stuck in refugee camps. Syria's President, Bashar al-Assad, did not seem particularly troubled by the exodus; after several of his advisers defected, he characterized their departure as a "self-cleaning process of the state."

To support his mother, Ghaith had two part-time jobs: stocking shelves at a supermarket and making kebabs and falafel at a restaurant. In 2013, he married his high-school sweetheart. (At Ghaith's request, her name has been withheld.) With these relationships and responsibilities, leaving seemed out of the question. Once he graduated, however, he would become eligible for conscription, and Ghaith—who was just over five feet tall, with a jockey's physique—questioned his aptitude for combat. Speaking through a translator, he told me recently, "The thing that frightened me most was that I would become a victim of the civil war—or, even worse, a killer in it."

His wife and his mother insisted that he follow his brother to Europe.

At first, Ghaith contemplated trying to secure a visa to a European country. But the rising violence in Syria had led most European countries to close their embassies in Damascus. Syrians could travel to Turkey or to Lebanon without a visa, but the European consulates there were inundated with immigration requests and issuing very few visas.

Ghaith's other option was to apply for asylum. The European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees that no asylum seeker can be "removed, expelled, or extradited" to a country where he might face "degrading treatment or punishment." By this logic, any Syrian who made it to Europe would be eligible to stay there. But the matter wasn't that simple. In 1990, the E.U. had passed a law, now known as the Dublin Regulation, requiring asylum seekers to be registered, and fingerprinted, in the first E.U. state they entered. The measure, which was designed to discourage refugees from roaming Europe before choosing where to settle, posed a formidable challenge for asylum seekers, who often desired to live in one of the prosperous nations of Northern Europe, and thus had to find ways to traverse the countries in between without being noticed by the authorities. "Wherever you get stamped, you have to stay," Ghaith told me. Some refugees, upon reaching Italy, would burn their fingertips in order to make their prints temporarily indecipherable.

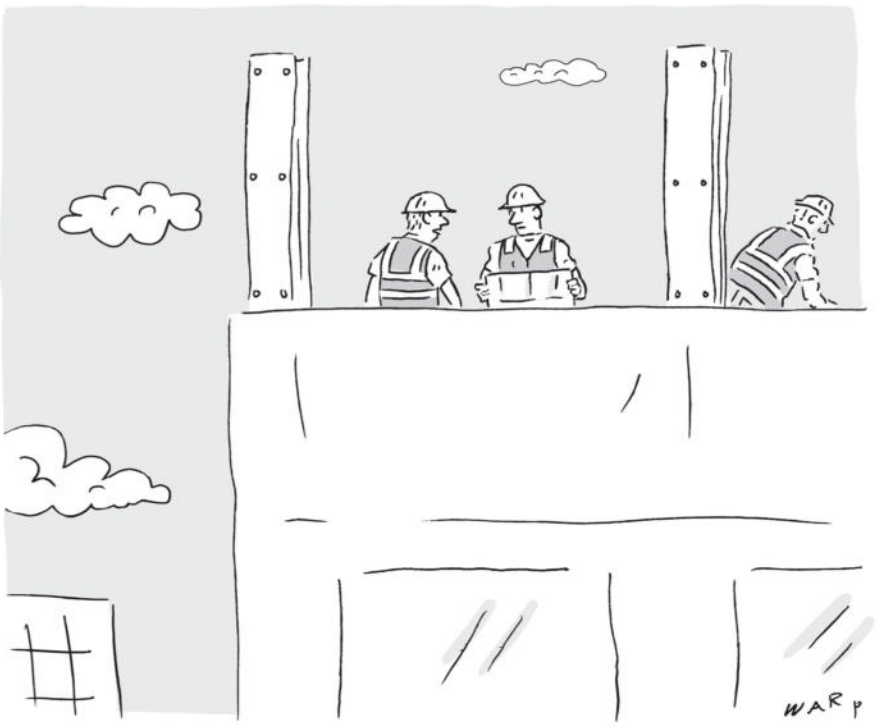
In May, 2014, Ghaith got a Facebook message from his brother. "You might be able to leave in about twenty days," Ghalib wrote from Sweden. "Don't tell anyone until it's all arranged. But prepare yourself so you'll be ready if it goes through." Ghaith replied, "Will do. May you always be there, brother."

Ghalib instructed him to drive to the Lebanese town of Bar Elias, ten miles west of the Syrian border, where a smuggler would give Ghaith a fake passport and a plane ticket to Oslo. The night before his departure, Ghaith's mother prepared him a farewell meal that included *kabsa*, an aromatic dish made from chicken and rice and tomatoes. He recalls his mother telling him, "I would rather you go than die from the pain of losing you here, like Umm Khaled"—a relative whose husband and four sons had been executed

MAGNUM

Ghaith, a law student, fled Syria with a backpack containing four shirts, a pair of pants, and a black scarf knitted by his wife.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MOISES SAMAN



"I'm tired—let's call it tall enough."

• •

when the Army first swept into Jdeidet Artouz.

The next day, Ghaith said goodbye to his mother and his wife. He told his wife, "We won't be apart long. I won't change or forget you." He was determined to give her a better life. "I do everything for her," he told me.

Ghaith had three thousand dollars in cash, mainly in hundred-dollar bills. He hid the money in pockets that he made by cutting open the stitching on the tongues of his shoes.

His uncle drove him to Bar Elias. Ghaith met the smuggler at a restaurant, and paid him five hundred dollars for the plane ticket and the fake passport. He was to pay the remaining twenty-five hundred dollars upon reaching Sweden. Examining the passport, Ghaith was impressed by his resemblance to the nineteen-year-old Italian in the photograph. The smuggler warned him to project confidence at the airport, saying, "Any hesitation will pinpoint that there's something wrong."

Ghaith arrived at the international terminal in Beirut three hours early. When he presented his passport at immigration control, the officer's actions seemed fluid and routine: he glanced at the photograph, flipped to the back, and lifted his arm to stamp the page. Suddenly, Ghaith recalls, the officer's arm "froze in midair." He stared at the Italian in the picture, then at Ghaith. "This passport is not yours," he said.

Ghaith pretended not to understand Arabic, so the officer switched to English and asked for Ghaith's Italian I.D. card. Ghaith went on feigning incomprehension. But then an Italian-speaking immigration officer showed up, and Ghaith failed to make out a word. "I couldn't do a thing—I surrendered," he told me. The officers discovered Ghaith's Syrian passport in his backpack and arrested him.

He was taken to an interrogation room, where a plainclothes security official "wanted to know who gave me the passport, and I told him what I knew, but that wasn't much," Ghaith said. "When he saw my university I.D. card, he said, 'Look at you. You're studying law? You think you know what the *law* is? Look what you're doing!'" Ghaith was slapped repeatedly across the face, then sent to jail, where he was strip-searched. "You reach a point when you become numb," he recalls. "I was standing there naked. I felt like I was not a human anymore."

He and about fifty other foreigners shared a dark cell, sleeping on the floor. They had to defecate in buckets. Ghaith didn't know where he was, or who was in charge. In 2013, the Lebanese Center for Human Rights revealed the existence of a fetid, overcrowded detention facility for foreign nationals in a former underground parking garage in Beirut. Nadim Houry, a Human Rights Watch researcher, said that some refugees had been kept there for "weeks, months, and even years" while awaiting deportation. One day, Ghaith watched, horrified, as a pregnant prisoner fell to the floor, blood pooling around her. "I don't know what happened to her," he said.

Ghaith was relatively fortunate: he was released after six days. But he had to wait two months at a friend's house, outside Beirut, before a judge returned his Syrian passport. Stapled inside the document was a court order banning him from entering Lebanon again. On July 9, 2014, he returned to Syria. Assad had just won reëlection, receiving more than eighty-eight per cent of the vote—a dubious tally for a society in revolt. He assured the Syrian people that he remained firmly in control, likening his election victory to "a bullet directed toward the chests of the terrorists." Soon afterward, ISIS posted footage of Syrian soldiers being marched to their deaths.

Ghaith saw the war as "a battle between two losing sides." He told me, "Each side thinks that you're either with them or against them. My family was not with any side. We just wanted to get by." Every day in Jdeidet Artouz seemed worse than the last, so every night, Ghaith said, he and his wife would "mourn the day that just passed." He felt imperilled whenever he left the house. The Assad regime had set up dozens of checkpoints in the area, and Ghaith was frequently stopped and asked why he hadn't started his military service yet. When he explained that he was a student, officers responded angrily. "Nothing hurts this

country more than young men who are students," one said.

While Ghaith tried to devise a new plan to get out, traffickers were raising their prices, charging at least four thousand dollars to smuggle a Syrian into Italy—fifteen hundred more than Ghaith's remaining savings. He found another part-time job, handling auto-insurance claims, and picked up weekend shifts at the restaurant. "Every dollar I made was another dollar closer to me leaving," he said.

One friend after another was fleeing. A law-school classmate made it to Sweden. One of his friends who had been detained was released from prison; cigarette burns covered his back, and several teeth had been yanked out with pliers. He, too, left for Europe. Ghaith's other imprisoned friend died in detention. When Ghaith looked around, he felt alone. "All my friends were either dead or gone," he said. Time was running out. That December, he would graduate from law school, and his name would be submitted to the military.

Ghaith borrowed fifteen hundred dollars from his uncle, stitched bills into his shoes again, and on November 29, 2014, he flew to Istanbul. In a backpack, he had four shirts, a pair of pants, and a black woollen scarf that his wife had knitted for him.

He took the metro to Aksaray, a neighborhood on the European side of the city, which was recently described, in a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation report, as Istanbul's "human-smuggling hub." He had learned about a hostel there by reading posts on the page of a private Facebook group called Asylum and Immigration Without Smugglers. It functioned rather like TripAdvisor: members, many of them Syrian refugees, shared candid information about refugee-friendly hostels, untrustworthy smugglers, and the latest sea conditions.

The impact of social media on the Syrian refugee crisis has been profound. In a 2012 paper, Rianne Dekker and Godfried Engbersen, professors at Erasmus University, in Rotterdam, write that social media has not only helped in "lowering the threshold for migration," by allowing people to remain connected with distant family members; it has also democratized the process, by facilitating "a form of silent resistance against restrictive immigration regimes."

The Asylum and Immigration Without Smugglers group was created in June, 2013, by a thirty-one-year-old Syrian known as Abu Amar. At the time, Abu Amar, a former kitchen contractor, was living in Turkey with his wife and two children, trying to reach Germany in order to receive medical care for an injury: in Syria, shrapnel from an explosion had pierced his spinal cord, paralyzing him below the waist. He had attempted to reach Europe by sea, from Egypt, but he had been arrested before setting off and was deported to Turkey. "I didn't have much to do, because of the injury," he told me. He heard stories of people being abused by smugglers. "My heart was aching," he explained. "So I started studying the history of immigration, especially among Afghans and Iraqis, looking at maps to analyze what these smugglers were doing." He found routes that saved time and money, launched the Facebook group, and began posting annotated maps.

Smugglers threatened to kill Abu Amar, and, in an act of sabotage, nude photographs were repeatedly posted to the group's page, causing Facebook to shut it down. He has since created

a new iteration of it, and for Arabic-speaking refugees Abu Amar has become an essential guide. At one point this summer, Asylum and Immigration Without Smugglers had more than sixty thousand members. Joel Millman, a spokesman for the International Organization for Migration, told me that when Syrians arrive in Italy or Greece "they just melt away at the pier—they get on Facebook, and they know where to go."

Ghaith checked into the Aksaray hostel, where he slept on a bunk bed in a room with seven other men. His roommates confirmed something that he'd read online: smugglers were now charging about five thousand dollars. "I didn't have that much," Ghaith said. He considered using his money to bring his wife to Istanbul, but decided against it. "I really like studying, and Turkey doesn't have good educational opportunities," he said. He felt mired. "You're thinking all the time, What should I do? How should I do it? You spend twenty-four hours a day thinking."

On Facebook, Ghaith searched for information about upcoming voyages. He found a post offering a discounted trip on a boat bound for Italy, run by a smuggler known as Abu Emad. It departed soon from Mersin, a city on Turkey's southern coast, across from Cyprus. Ghaith travelled fourteen hours by bus to Mersin, and, the next morning, he followed instructions from the Facebook post and went to an insurance office, where he deposited four thousand dollars into an account, accessible by a four-digit code. Once he reached Italy, he would release the code to Abu Emad, and the payment would be complete.

The insurance office was crowded with other refugees, and Ghaith befriended one of them, Osama, a twenty-three-year-old Palestinian journalist from the Gaza Strip. They shared a hotel room as they waited for the boat journey to begin. Osama told me that Ghaith was admired by their fellow-refugees for his witty impersonations of Abu Emad and his associates, adding, "He could mimic their voices perfectly."

After several days, Turkish smugglers herded Ghaith and the others onto buses. Ghaith had read online about this division of labor: Arabs like Abu Emad acted as salesmen and brokers, while toughs from Turkey or the former Soviet republics did the actual smuggling. "Abu Emad had the face of a chess player," Osama told me. "He was just the middleman."

The Turks drove the refugees to a dockside warehouse where fishermen stored their catch. Ghaith was standing beside a giant refrigerator, waiting

for the Turks to load them onto a boat, when several police officers burst in. Why, they demanded, had two hundred foreigners gathered in a chilled warehouse? Osama, who spoke passable Turkish, told the officers that they were orange pickers from Syria, looking for work. The officer asked why some of them were wearing life jackets. "This was what gave us away," Ghaith said.

Ghaith sensed that the police were more interested in catching Abu Emad than in dealing with refugees. Nevertheless, Osama told me, they didn't want to be detained, because "there were rumors of a new law by which Syrian refugees in Turkey would be forced to establish residency there"—effectively extending the Dublin Regulation's reach. Osama told Ghaith that it was unwise to have their fingerprints on file in Turkey. Sneaking behind the mass of refugees, Osama stuck a hat between his teeth, bit down, and rubbed a lit cigarette against the swirls of his fingertips. Ghaith balked. He told me, "I studied law—I told Osama that Turkey was not a signatory to Dublin." In the end, Osama's precaution was unnecessary: the police simply ordered the refugees to disperse.

Ghaith hitched a ride to the center of Mersin in the back of a produce truck, among piles of oregano, mint, and parsley. He returned to the insurance office and ended his arrangement with Abu Emad. He met up with Osama, and they, along with six others, split a hotel room without proper heat. Ghaith and Osama celebrated New Year's Eve in the hotel's basement, playing Ping-Pong.

A few weeks later, Ghaith heard about a trip being brokered by another smuggler in Mersin, known as Abu Safar, who claimed to have a two-hundred-foot ship that could transport hundreds of refugees across rough seas. Abu Safar planned to anchor his ship just beyond Turkish territorial waters, to evade the coast guard, and then load the refugees in shifts. Ghaith and Osama liked this strategy, and linked their accounts at the insurance office with Abu Safar.

Two weeks later, the operation got under way when the first skiff safely carried about a hundred refugees out to the waiting ship. The second skiff began to sink, however, and the captain of the ship entered Turkish waters to save it. He rescued the passengers, but the coast guard seized his ship. Ghaith was due to be on the third skiff; when he heard what had happened, he hurried to the insurance office and withdrew his money.

The Turkish coast guard began aggressively patrolling the waters off Mersin, so Ghaith and Osama considered other options. An increasingly popular route involved a boat trip to Greece, followed by a long hike through the Balkans and into Central Europe. "I was excited to go," Ghaith told me. But his brother cautioned him that trekking through Europe might be even more dangerous than going by sea. "It was winter, and there was a lot of snow," Ghaith said. "He had heard about people who had died." Osama, undaunted, decided to risk it, leaving Ghaith behind.

In February, Ghaith learned of another boat journey. The broker this time, a Syrian named Jamil, ran a minimarket at an upscale shopping center in Mersin. He wore aviator glasses and smelled of strong cologne. He said that he owned a yacht that could take people to Italy in less than thirty-six hours; such trips often took more than a week. Ghaith asked Jamil how his ship would evade the coast guard. "He bragged that he had 'special relationships' with them," Ghaith said. The passengers had to pay Jamil up front. One of Ghaith's sisters, who had lived in Saudi Arabia since 2010, wired him a thousand dollars, which he added to his four thousand to cover the cost of the ticket.

One can choose to become a refugee, but to be smuggled is to be at the mercy of others. Jamil kept in touch with Ghaith and the other passengers through the mobile messaging service WhatsApp. Although Jamil, whose user name was Godfather, assured them that they would be departing soon, time dragged on. One passenger from Syria, Bahaa, a nineteen-year-old engineering student from the University of Homs, had been waiting several months for Jamil to set off. He recently let me read his chat logs with the smuggler.

December 30th: "Is there anything today?" ("*Inshallah*," Jamil replied.)

January 3rd: "Shall we get ready to go or not?" (No reply.)

March 17th: "When? I have no more patience." ("I'll get back to you.")

When a Syrian doctor demanded his money back, Jamil struck him several times in the face with a metal cane. "I saw him after the beating," Ghaith said. "He was wearing sunglasses and his eye was badly swollen." Ghaith considered asking for his money back, too, but he changed his mind after that. "Jamil told me, 'If you leave, you're going to lose fifteen hundred dollars, as a penalty,'" he said. "I couldn't afford that, and he also hinted that I'd be beaten up, just like the doctor was. I was losing all hope. My money was gone, and I was tied down with Jamil."

In mid-February, Osama called Ghaith to let him know that he had made it to Austria. They didn't talk for long. "Ghaith was in bad shape," Osama told me. "He was very frustrated. So many of his attempts had failed, and then he saw others like me making it."

Ghaith contacted his brother's wife, Noor, on WhatsApp, and broke down. "I swear, I'm done," he said. "That is it. My whole life is gone." He said that he woke up every night "in a cold sweat," and noted, "All I ate today was plain bread." When Noor told him, "Don't get too frustrated," Ghaith replied, "I'm losing my mind. I want this to end." He told her, "I'm about to die," and demanded, "Why did you ever tell me to come? I was having the best days of my life, getting married and planning to graduate. Now I am like a homeless person."

"God is generous," Noor said. "All will be well soon, *Inshallah*."

Ghalib, his brother, felt responsible for Ghaith's misfortune. "I gave him bad advice," he told me.

In late May, Jamil announced on WhatsApp that the boat was finally ready. A hundred and fifty-four passengers boarded buses and spent a week hopping from one hotel to another along the coast. Eventually, they were dropped off late one night at a gas station near Alanya, a tourist town on the

Turkish Riviera, two hundred and twenty miles west of Mersin.

Ghaith got out and followed the other passengers into the woods behind the station. There was a river up ahead, he was told. It was almost pitch black, and he struggled to keep up with the rest of the group. One of the other refugees was Bilal, a thirty-year-old Iraqi who had fled Baghdad after Shia militiamen tortured him with an electric drill. Bilal told me that, in the woods, "dogs were howling like wolves." Bats swooped amid the trees. A man cupped his hand over the mouth of his son, who was crying. People began to run in fear, and Ghaith sprinted to the front. Were they being chased by the police? What if the boat's captain decided that too many people had come, and took only some of them? Ghaith thought of his life in Syria. "We'd be on our way to work and hear sniper fire, and we'd run to get safe," he said. "We used to run wherever we went. That night, we were doing the same thing—running for our lives."

Ghaith headed down an embankment, toward the river. In the hazy moonlight, he saw a boat at the end of a narrow dock. It was a white trawler, thirty-eight feet long, with a knee-high railing around the bow—hardly a yacht. But, Ghaith told me, "No one cared. We just wanted to leave. We just wanted to get on some boat and go."

While boarding, Ghaith carried a toddler, Fayez, who turned back to his mother, Reem, and asked her where they were going. Reem was an English teacher from Al-Hasakah, Syria, who had fled the country after several large explosions went off near Fayez's preschool. Reem's husband, a dentist, had recently flown from Damascus to Düsseldorf, on a student visa. "Finally, we are going to see Baba in Germany," Reem said, smiling. She was several weeks pregnant.

Reem told me that she was "astonished" when she got on the boat, adding, "It was *very* small for a trip to Italy." There was little air circulation inside the cabin, and it was soon sweltering. She and Fayez had put on life jackets but removed them to cool off. In the inky predawn light, the boat ventured into the Mediterranean.

Shortly after sunrise, the captain announced that they had entered international waters. Passengers cheered the news, but the swells grew perilously high, and the captain fought to keep the trawler steady. Ghaith, like many others, was overcome with nausea; he vomited into ziplock bags, then tossed them into the sea.

Reem's seasickness was particularly acute, likely because of her pregnancy. She recalls, "I thought I might vomit out my stomach." Another passenger splashed water on Reem's face, in an attempt to keep her from fainting. At one point, Reem dragged herself onto the deck to get some fresh air, leaving Fayez in the cabin. "I was too weak to care for my own son when he needed me most," she told me. "I can't forgive myself for that."

The captain was afraid that the boat might capsize. He called Jamil on a satellite phone, and broadcast their conversation over the ship's intercom. "If we go to Italy, we will die!" the captain shouted. But Jamil insisted that they press on, saying, "These people are desperate. They are willing to cross the sea on a piece of wood."

They maintained course, until, a few hours later, somewhere north of Cyprus, the captain defied Jamil and turned the ship around. Ghaith felt relieved, though the seas were no calmer on the way back. Water slopped over the gunwales and a gaseous odor filled the cabin. Passengers quietly recited the *shahada*—"There is no God but Allah. Muhammad is the

MAP BY OLIVIER KUGLER

messenger of God"—as a final declaration of faith. Ghaith heard splintering wood, and feared that the ship was breaking apart. Finally, shortly after midnight, he saw the lights of the Turkish Riviera on the horizon. As the boat neared the shore, the captain jumped overboard to avoid arrest, leaving the vessel to careen into the shallows, its propellers jamming on rocks. There was only one door to the cabin, and, according to Ghaith, the passengers stampeded toward it, with "everyone crying and screaming." Some people lost their balance and ended up with bloody faces or broken bones. "It felt like the apocalypse," Ghaith recalls. Someone shattered a window, and he climbed through it, leaped into the surf, and swam to shore.

He gathered with others on the beach. No one had died, Ghaith realized with relief. Fayez wandered around in circles, bewildered. "Where's Baba?" he kept asking Reem.

Police officers arrived and stretched crime-scene tape around a swath of the beach. Ghaith and the other passengers were given shelter at a nearby indoor basketball court. An ambulance rushed Reem to a hospital, where she was treated for dehydration. The authorities passed out boxes of donated clothes to the other refugees. Ghaith picked out a green sweater and white shorts. His phone had been soaked, so he borrowed one to call his wife. Normally, they texted throughout the day, but they had been out of contact for more than seventy-two hours. "She just kept repeating, 'Thank God for your safety, thank God for your safety,'" he said.

Ghaith, Reem, and some of the others made their way back to Mersin, and pooled their money to rent a cheap apartment. Ghaith slept on the floor. Once again, they were stuck, and the boredom was excruciating. Ghaith busied himself each day by using an app, Fabulo, to study Swedish. "I was going to crawl on my hands and knees to get to Sweden, no matter what," he said. He took Fayez to play at a local park.

Jamil dangled the possibility of another trip, but refused to return anyone's money. Bilal, the Iraqi, told me, "I was scheming how I could kill Jamil." In mid-June, Bilal learned that yet another smuggler from Mersin, known as Abu Omar, was running rubber dinghies from Izmir, on Turkey's western coast, to Lesbos, a Greek island fifteen miles away. The crossing took only a few hours. Abu Omar offered to take Bilal and his friends for nine hundred dollars each. "Everyone else was asking twelve hundred or more," Ghaith said. His sister in Saudi Arabia wired him twenty-five hundred dollars. The refugees left for Izmir that night.

The next day, at around noon, they met Abu Omar at the Sinbad Café, near Basmane Square, in central Izmir. The square was full of Syrians and Iraqis toting orange life jackets. While drinking coffee, Ghaith smoked cigarettes—a habit that he'd picked up in Turkey. Everyone in his group paid Abu Omar in cash, and they finalized plans to leave that night. Ghaith, who had around four hundred dollars left, bought boots and a life jacket.

At eight o'clock, Turkish smugglers hustled them onto a bus; along the way, they collected another group of refugees, many of whom had to squat in the aisles. "We were sitting on top of each other," Bahaa, the engineering student from Syria, said. The smugglers behaved like jail wardens, Bahaa added, "throwing us around, left and right." Abu Omar was not on the bus.

After several hours, they stopped in a forest. One of the Turks led Ghaith and the others to a beach, where three smugglers used hand pumps to inflate a twenty-five-foot black raft. An outboard motor was attached. A smuggler asked, in broken Arabic, if anyone knew how to steer. Nobody did. Bahaa—young and adventurous—volunteered to help the raft.

The Turk pointed to the horizon. "See those lights?" he said. "Go toward them." He then directed everyone to switch off their phones—the coast guard picked up transmission signals—and gave Bahaa a pocketknife. Destroy the raft when you get to Greece, he told Bahaa. Ghaith recalls, "We heard stories that if you arrived and your raft was still in good condition the Greek coast guard would fill your motor with gas and turn you back to Turkey."

Ghaith took a seat along the gunwale, and the raft puttered away. The sea was calm, and no one spoke for the first few hours. "We just kept our eyes on the lights," Ghaith said. As they drew closer to Lesbos, Ghaith could make out, in the early-morning light, mountains studded with olive trees.

The refugees cut the motor and the raft floated to shore. Ghaith helped Reem and Fayez scramble over slippery rocks. Bahaa slashed the raft with the pocketknife, then helped pitch the motor into the water. Ghaith joyfully snapped selfies, the Aegean glimmering in the background. He looked much like a tourist: Ghaith, who prided himself on his appearance, was wearing a clean red polo shirt, and before leaving Turkey he had trimmed his hair and

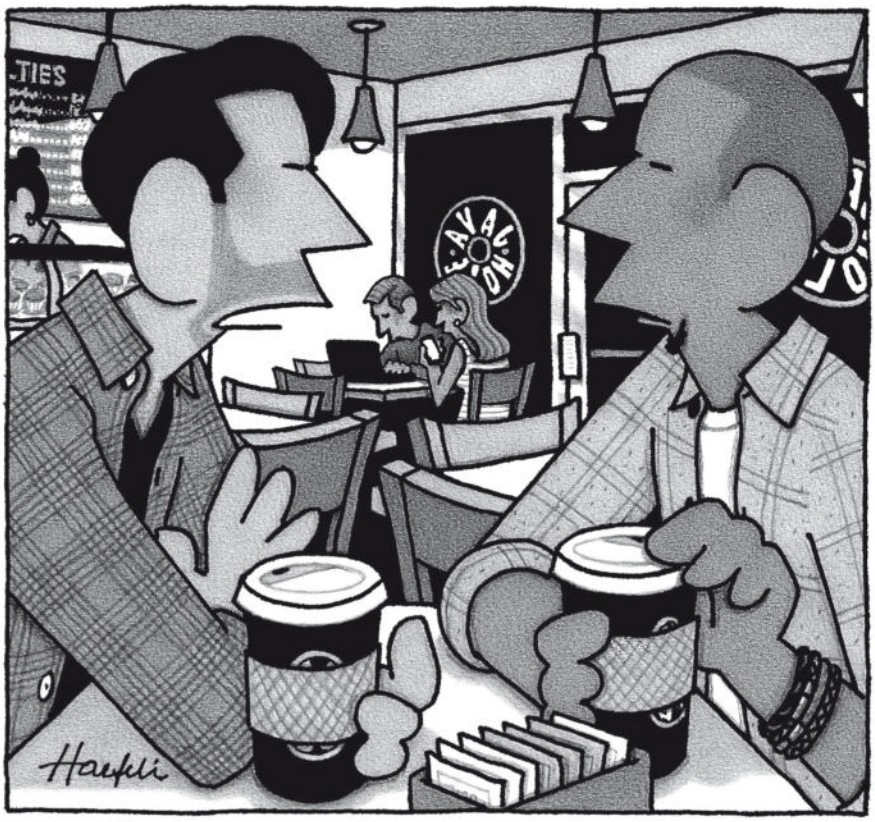
beard. He called his wife, who burst into tears.

Ghaith and his friends set out on foot for the nearest police station. In Greece, refugees who registered with the police were given a six-month permit that essentially circumvented the Dublin Regulation, forestalling deportation but also not requiring settlement in the country. They walked for hours under the oppressive morning sun. When they got to the station, Reem asked an officer if they could register. He shouted, "Go back to Turkey! Why did you come to our country? Why do you Muslims want to come to Europe? Christians don't like you." The closest immigration center, he told them, was more than forty miles to the south, over steep hills.

In Greece, it was illegal for anyone to transport refugees who lacked permits, but a Dutch couple witnessing the confrontation quietly offered to drive Reem and Fayez part of the way. The others continued on foot. Some motorists stopped to hand out bottles of water. An elderly woman gave them apricots that she had picked from a tree in her yard. In a few days, Greece, which had amassed an enormous national debt, would hold a referendum on whether to adopt stringent new austerity measures. Ghaith recalls, "They were going through their own crisis, and they were still kind to us."

Sometime past midnight, Ghaith reached the immigration center. It was closed, so he went to a former swimming facility next door, which had been converted into a shelter. He slept on the tiled floor, using his backpack as a pillow. "That was the best feeling in the world," he said. "For the first time in years, I knew that I could sleep without waking up with sweats, from fear. No bombs could fall on my head, no one would try to take me." He went on, "In Europe, it's better to sleep for two hours than it is to sleep for fifty hours in Syria. Because, in Syria, in each one of those hours you'll have hundreds of nightmares."

The next morning, Ghaith and scores of other refugees were taken by bus to Moria, a hillside town with a beautiful Roman aqueduct. They were dropped off at a refugee center that resembled a prison: high fences, watchtowers, concertina wire. Ghaith and his companions slept outside the first night; then, after downpours turned the ground to mud, they found space in a canvas tent.



"Can I ask your advice about something you'd rather not know about me?"

• • •

On the fourth day, Ghaith received his temporary-residency permit, and the next evening he was on an overnight ferry to Athens. He and Bahaa stood on the deck, watching the sun set on the terra-cotta roofs of Mytilene, Lesbos's capital. Ghaith congratulated himself for having made it this far. But he knew that the hardest part of his journey—getting to Sweden without being arrested or stamped—still lay ahead. Bahaa recalls, "That's when the trip really began."

The ferry docked in Athens the next morning. Reem's mother had arranged for a smuggler known as Abu Haider to meet them at the port. Reem and Fayez planned to fly to Düsseldorf, using fake passports. Abu Haider offered to provide the same service to the others, for thirty-five hundred euros a person. Ghaith, Bahaa, and Bilal didn't have that much money, but they went with Reem and Fayez to an apartment that Reem's mother had rented for her, and rested for the day. That night, they parted ways. "It was like saying goodbye to family," Ghaith said. "We weren't sure if we were going to see them ever again."

Ghaith and his friends bought sleeping bags, then travelled to Thessaloniki by bus. At a coffee shop near the city's train station, they charged their phones while Ghaith waited for Ghalib to wire him fifteen hundred euros, through Western Union. They planned to head north, into Macedonia. Uncertain what they might find, they all pitched in to buy chocolate bars, canned tuna, and flatbread.

Shortly after 6 P.M., they got on a northbound train destined for Belgrade. Instead of taking seats, Ghaith and his friends squeezed into a bathroom to hide; one of them had heard that the Greek authorities were throwing refugees off trains, whether or not they had tickets. After Ghaith took a group

• •

selfie, they switched off their phones, locked the door, turned off the light, and kept quiet whenever someone fidgeted with the doorknob.

Thirty minutes into the journey, a man holding a child began beating on the locked door. In frustration, he called a conductor, who sensed that people were inside and demanded that the door be opened. Ghaith and his friends stumbled out, their faces slick with perspiration. To their surprise, the conductor let them stay on the train. They played Trex, a card game, with two British women for the next hour.

They hopped off in Evzonoi, two miles south of Macedonia, and hiked toward Gevgelija, a small casino town just north of the border. When they got to a beam bridge that crossed the Konska River into Gevgelija, they found a dozen police officers holding back a crowd of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Africa. The officers began marching the refugees, in a column, back to Greece. Bahaa proposed making a run for it. "With this many people, they'll never let us in," he told Ghaith, before sprinting off into the woods. Ghaith and two others followed him. Bilal did not break away in time, and was left behind.

After the four men were sure that they had shaken the police, they returned to the bridge and hustled across. They got into Gevgelija around midnight, and near the train station they noticed several African refugees sleeping on the sidewalk. "We didn't know where to sleep, so we just opened our sleeping bags there," Bahaa told me. The next thing he knew, he said, "I woke up to a policeman hitting me with a metal rod." He scooped up his sleeping bag and ran off. Though he got away—as did Ghaith and the others—Bahaa left his shoes behind.

In a dimly lit park, Ghaith and Bahaa climbed back into their sleeping bags. It wasn't long before Bahaa felt a baton cracking again on his shoulders. It was the same officer as before, and he pounded Bahaa for several minutes. Joel Millman, of the International Organization for Migration, told me that in southeastern Europe the goal of the police was usually not to arrest refugees but to intimidate and harass them. If the Macedonians started arresting everyone, refugees "would overwhelm the jails," he said, adding, "What would it cost to house them all? It's astronomical."

The Macedonian police collected Ghaith and his friends in a paddy wagon and took them back to the Greek border. Hiding in the woods, the refugees weighed their options. From a text message, Ghaith learned that Reem and Fayez were still stuck in Athens; relatives of theirs, however, had just flown to Germany using fake documents provided by Abu Haider. Ghaith, feeling that a land journey was hopeless, proposed returning to Athens, finding Abu Haider, and flying to an E.U. country on a fake passport.

"We don't have enough money to go back that way," Bahaa insisted. "We have to keep trying on foot." Bahaa prevailed, but the men were too afraid of the Gevgelija police to enter town again. On WhatsApp, Ghaith contacted Abu Amar, the host of the Facebook group. Abu Amar had turned his phone into a hotline for refugees; he was up late every night, guiding Syrians across borders and sending them annotated maps. His Facebook group continued dispensing advice. One post read, "The sea today and tomorrow is fatally dangerous. Don't underestimate the situation. We have enough victims." Three days later: "The storm is practically over. The best island to leave for today is Mytilene."

Abu Amar recently told me, "Sometimes I get a call when I am just about to go to sleep: 'We are stuck in the middle of the forest—can you help us?' I go to sleep between 5 and 6 A.M., sleep until about 2 P.M. Very few people reach out to me then." He had established his own channel on Zello, a walkie-talkie app, becoming a real-time Harriet Tubman. "I've been told that if you go into any coffee shop in Syria these days people are talking about me and asking for my number," he said. (Not long ago, he made his own journey, travelling to Greece on a rubber raft, and then flying to Germany. He now lives outside Hamburg.)

In a text message, Ghaith explained his dilemma to Abu Amar, who sent a map directing him and his companions to a nearby hill. They could easily skirt Gevgelija, Abu Amar said, without drawing attention from the authorities. The refugees climbed to the top of the hill, ducked in the bushes, ate from a blackberry patch, and rested until nightfall. "People don't cross borders during daylight," Bahaa explained to me.

They descended the hill around 8 P.M. and started following the railroad tracks that extended north from Gevgelija, through thick forest. They walked silently through the night. Wild dogs called in the distance. Ghaith strained to listen for police, bandits, or oncoming trains. Two months earlier, a train northbound from Gevgelija had killed fourteen refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan. "They didn't hear it coming," Ghaith said.

At dawn, they saw a convenience store near the tracks, and stopped. Ghaith was delighted to be somewhere with modern plumbing: he had refused to relieve himself in the woods. In his youth, he had never gone camping—he told me that he didn't see the appeal of "sleeping in the middle of nowhere." At the store, they bought bottled water, a loaf of bread, and Nutella. In the bathroom, Bahaa cleaned his feet, which were blistered and bloody from trudging through brambles in flip-flops. They unrolled their sleeping bags in a grassy area outside the store and fell asleep for a few hours.

They resumed following the tracks, and in midafternoon they reached a village five stops north of Gevgelija. In a text, Abu Amar advised them to take the next train going north. They boarded with dozens of other refugees. When the train halted for a few minutes in Skopje, Macedonia's capital, human-rights activists were roaming the platform with baskets full of water bottles, bananas, apples, vitamin packs, and croissants. Ghaith leaned out the train window, catching items as they were lobbed up to him.

They disembarked at the last stop before the Serbian border and took directions from a Macedonian police officer about how to sneak across. Local authorities, it seemed, were happy to lend assistance to refugees who were leaving the country.

It was terrible weather for trekking—"raining and muddy and very cold," Bahaa recalls. Ghaith was out of contact with his wife; he was trying to preserve his phone's battery life, in case he needed to use G.P.S. At dusk, they joined a group of Afghans, until one of them turned to Ghaith and said, "If you want to keep walking with us, you'll have to pay." Ghaith and his friends split off.

Bahaa led the group through the woods. When he glimpsed a flashlight through the trees, he told the others to lie flat on the ground. He waited until the beam panned away, then popped up.

"Stop!" a Serbian guard yelled. The refugees froze. "You can't cross there!" he told them. Then, unexpectedly, he pointed in another direction, urging them onward into Serbia.

Ghaith and Bahaa made it to Preševo, one of the southernmost towns in Serbia, around 10 P.M. They were pleasantly surprised when a resident greeted them with "*Salaam aleikum.*" Bahaa asked the man if any restaurants were still open, and was given directions to a burger joint around the corner. At the counter, Bahaa recalls, "I ordered some sandwiches, and asked them, 'Is this halal meat?' And they said, 'Of course. This is a Muslim town.'" That night, in Preševo's main mosque, Ghaith and Bahaa offered a token donation of one euro, then pulled out their sleeping bags and crashed on the floor.

The next day, they got on a bus to Belgrade, where they reunited with Bilal, the Iraqi, who had made it to Serbia independently. The refugees were immediately bombarded by taxi-drivers shouting the names of Hungarian towns just over the border. Ghaith was excited, but he also knew that the next stage of the journey posed a big risk. Unlike Serbia and Macedonia, Hungary was an E.U. member, and was covered by the Dublin Regulation. Ghaith dreaded the idea of being forced to settle in Hungary. "I knew we needed to be careful not to get stamped," he said.

At the Belgrade train station, a man asked them if they needed a place to stay. They followed him to an apartment that had two mattresses on the floor, and each traveller paid fifteen euros for the night. Ghaith took a shower to wash off the mud caked behind his ears. A short time later, a young couple—friends of the apartment's owner—stopped by, in a silver Peugeot coupe. Alejandro, as he was known, was tall, with shaggy hair and sunglasses; his girlfriend, who went by Tina, spoke English and wore coral-colored lipstick.

Alejandro said that he knew a Roma man who had been shuttling Syrians into Austria for the past two years, through Hungary. Tina told the refugees that the trip cost thirteen hundred euros per person, and that they could pay upon arriving in Vienna. At 8 P.M., Alejandro picked up the refugees at the train station and headed north on a motorway, toward the Hungarian border. But, Tina noted in a recent message, there were "a lot of police officers" on the road. Alejandro got spooked and turned back.

Tina, who has a day job in a furniture store, told me that "smuggling is dangerous." At one point this summer, she was moving fifty people a week across borders, and making as much as fifty euros per refugee. Though the work was illegal, she considered it honorable. "We help them to go on to some better place, to have a better life," she told me. She was from Bosnia, and Alejandro was from Kosovo; both of their families had been displaced by war, and they empathized with the refugees.

Three days later, on June 29th, Ghaith and the others set out again with Alejandro. This time, there were few police along the road. Not far from the Hungarian border, Alejandro handed the refugees over to his Roma friend, who led them for two hours through a forest. Weaving through the trees, Ghaith felt his stomach clench in fear of being caught. The Hungarian government had become increasingly hostile to refugees: it had recently announced a plan to construct a thirteen-foot-high wall at the Serbian border.

At some point in their trek through the woods, Ghaith and his friends crossed into Hungary. They reached a

road, and a third smuggler, Miki, loaded them into a van. Ghaith, Bahaa, and Bilal crouched on the floor, so that they couldn't be seen through the windows. It wasn't particularly comfortable, but, as Tina put it, "they could breathe." Soon, Miki was speeding on a highway toward Vienna while the refugees slept. "We were almost done," Ghaith recalls.

The sky was a clear blue when they got to Vienna, the next morning. Miki parked in a garage, unloaded the refugees, collected their money, and left. Ghaith and his friends sat in an elegantly landscaped park and picnicked on dates and tuna fish.

That afternoon, Bahaa tried to ask passersby how they could get to Germany, but people shrugged and kept walking. "They didn't want to get in trouble," he said. The men bought tickets for a train to Salzburg, and sat separately, to be inconspicuous; to Ghaith's relief, no one asked to see his immigration papers.

At the Salzburg station, a taxi-driver asked the men if they needed transportation. Bahaa negotiated with him, ultimately agreeing to pay the driver eight hundred euros to take them to Munich. Two hours later, they pulled up in front of an apartment outside the city. The cousin of one of Ghaith's friends lived there, and was willing to let them use the apartment as a way station. Within hours, the refugees began dispersing. Bilal left for Düsseldorf, to stay with family members of Reem. Bahaa booked a ticket for a train to Dortmund, where his brothers were living. Ghaith embraced him and said goodbye. "We'll keep in touch," he promised.

Ghaith then called his brother, Ghalib. "Don't you miss me?" Ghaith joked. "I'm here. What should I do?"

Ghalib asked Ghaith if he was teasing him, and Ghaith sent him a dropped pin on Viber, the messaging app, confirming that he was indeed in Germany. The next day, Ghalib flew to Munich from Sweden.

Ghaith waited for him at the apartment. When he opened the door, Ghalib kissed Ghaith's neck and wept, then collapsed onto a couch and covered his eyes. They hadn't seen each other in three years. "It was the most beautiful moment in my life," Ghalib told me recently. "I knew the amount of suffering that Ghaith had been through." He added, "I felt that I had gotten him into trouble, and he's my brother. I felt like a mountain has been lifted off my shoulder."

But there was something more. "When I hugged him, I could smell our home, and I could smell our mother," Ghalib said, quavering with emotion. "I was hugging the old Syria."

On a sunny Sunday in late August, Ghaith and his friend Taher, who was also from Jdeidet Artouz, decided to go to a Swedish beach. Ghaith had on denim shorts and a turquoise polo shirt, and his hair was trimmed close around his temples—thanks to a fresh clipper cut from Ghalib. We got on a bus to Askimsbadet, on the North Sea, six miles south of Gothenburg. Ghaith had been living in Sweden since July 4th. He had travelled by train from Munich to Copenhagen and then to Malmö, crossing into Sweden on the Øresund Bridge. Nobody ever asked to see his passport.

He went to the front of the bus to pay our fare, intending to use an A.T.M. card that had been provided by the Swedish government. He was receiving a monthly allowance of approximately two hundred dollars. "Sweden is good to us," he told me. The bus driver, sensing that Ghaith was a refugee, waived the fare.

When Ghaith arrived in Sweden, an immigration officer recorded his fingerprints, ran the data through an E.U. database, and confirmed that he had not previously been processed in Europe. "You are now under the custody of Sweden," she told him. "Sweden will take care of you." Ghaith subsequently attended an orientation session to learn, as he put it, "what Sweden owes to me and what I owe to Sweden." Given the dire nature of the situation in Syria, he is almost certainly assured of being granted residency. "They were promising me the same things that any Swedish citizen would get," Ghaith said. He was planning to enroll in a free daily language course. In Europe, Sweden is providing Syrian asylum seekers with the most direct route to permanent residency, though other European countries offer comparable financial assistance, and, in August, Germany began allowing Syrians to bypass the Dublin Regulation.

On the bus, Ghaith scrolled through music files on his phone. The Swedish

national anthem started up, loud enough to turn heads. "I listen to it each morning," Ghaith said, proudly.

His wife remained in Syria. Did he feel guilty enjoying days at the beach? "She's coming, too," he said, though he acknowledged that it would take time. Sweden provides a family-reunification program, but only for asylum seekers with residency status. The program had recently brought Ghalib's wife and children to Sweden. Ghaith told me that his wife is currently using an app on her phone to study Swedish, and can eventually join him—though first she will have to cross the Syrian border into a country, such as Jordan, that has a Swedish consulate, and apply for residency.

The refugees who had gone to Germany sounded less enamored of their new lives. Bilal told me that he couldn't find work and felt "out of luck." Bahaa was collecting a monthly stipend, and, though he wasn't supposed to be working yet, he was doing shifts at a supermarket and being paid under the table. "I just want to get back to my engineering studies," he said. Reem and her son eventually made it out of Athens, using fake Italian I.D. cards, and reunited with her husband in a town near Düsseldorf. She said that her husband is eager to resume his dentistry practice, but there are several barriers: he first needs to become certified in Germany, and, in addition, he has to complete the lengthy culture-and-language program required to establish long-term residency. "We are ready to work," she said. "I don't want to just sit around." She is due to give birth any day now.

At Askimsbadet, Ghaith and his friend followed blanket-toting beachgoers to the shore, where Syrian and Somali families picnicked among hundreds of blond heads. Kites fluttered in the air.

An hour later, six more of Ghaith's friends—all Syrian refugees whom he knew from law school or from Jdeidet Artouz—showed up carrying a grill, a bag of charcoal, and a three-foot hookah. They stripped to their underwear and prepared to go swimming. These were friends for life, Ghaith said, though he otherwise cared little for Syria anymore. Once his wife arrived, they would have children and he would raise them as Swedes. He didn't care if his kids spoke Arabic. He added, in broken English, "I worship Sweden."

During the next several weeks, his mood fluctuated. He was excited when he picked up a few shifts on a crew that was building a new pizzeria in Gothenburg. But he was deeply disturbed when he saw the widely circulated photograph of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler who had drowned at sea and washed up on a Turkish beach. "That picture should shake humanity," he told me. On Facebook, he reposted the image, writing, in Arabic, "The best thing about your death, my dear, is that your shoe is in our faces." He called his wife and they talked about the photograph; they agreed that if they had a son they would name him Aylan.

Around the same time, Austrian authorities found an abandoned poultry truck with seventy-one dead refugees inside. Ghaith said that he couldn't help but feel lucky: "I made it, while thousands of others didn't. Some died on the way, some died in Syria. Every day, you hear about people drowning. Just think about how much every Syrian is suffering inside Syria to endure the suffering of this trip." He paused. "In Greece, someone asked me, 'Why take the chance?' I said, 'In Syria, there's a hundred-per-cent chance that you're going to die. If the chance of making it to Europe is even one per cent, then that means there is a one-per-cent chance of your leading an actual life.'" ♦

"Keep in mind, this all counts as screen time."

• •

THEATRE LAID BARE

Ivo van Hove's raw productions bring out the elemental drama of classic works.

BY REBECCA MEAD

When Tony Kushner's "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches" opened on Broadway, in 1993, in a production directed by George C. Wolfe, the play ended with a winged angel crashing into a dying man's bedroom from above, shattering lath and plaster. Subsequent directors, including Mike Nichols, who filmed "Angels" for HBO, have also hewed closely to Kushner's stage directions, which call for unearthly lighting, "a terrifying CRASH as something immense strikes earth," and an Angel who floats.

In a radically stripped-down interpretation by the Belgian director Ivo van Hove, which was first staged in Amsterdam in 2008, none of that happens. Van Hove's Angel is a wingless male nurse in white hospital scrubs. There is no ceiling, no bed. The Angel quietly approaches as Prior Walter, who is suffering from AIDS, writhes on the stage floor. The grand words of annunciation with which Kushner's play culminates—"Greetings Prophet; / The Great Work begins: / The Messenger has arrived"—are delivered by the Angel with conversational mildness.

Van Hove, who is the general manager of the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, the city's principal theatre, often uses few props and employs minimal sets. In "Angels," the stage is bare except for a record player and the occasional I.V. pole. When collaborating with his perennial set designer, Jan Versweyveld, who is also his partner of thirty-five years, van Hove establishes mood with music, video, and lighting, and uses actors' bodies to convey the emotional core of a work. "Angels" takes place in 1985, at the height of the AIDS crisis, but as enacted by the Toneelgroep Amsterdam the play is not about the ravages of an epidemic. "Ivo said that the sickness was a metaphor for change," Eelco Smits, the actor who played Prior Walter, told me recently. Unlike Stephen Spinella, who played the role on Broadway, and who was so emaciated that audiences gasped when he disrobed, Smits's Prior did not look unhealthy. "It wasn't about showing people who were sick but about showing people who are in a transition phase," Smits said.

Van Hove initially directed the Angel and Prior to sit together and listen to music. But this went too far in downplaying the encounter. The day before opening night, he told the actor playing the Angel to pull Smits up by the hands and spin with him around the stage, like children at the playground, and then release him violently to the floor. Smits objected. "I said, 'I think I need protection for my knees,' and Ivo was just, 'No—go, go, go, do it,'" Smits told me. "I got angry with him. We didn't have time to rehearse it, and I thought, This is stupid."

But the result is stunning. Over a swelling soundtrack of David Bowie singing "The Motel," the Angel spins Prior and hurls him down over and over again. Audience members who have lost friends or lovers to AIDS sometimes approach Smits afterward in tears. "One man told me, 'That throwing around—*that* is what that disease is,'" Smits recalled. "Somehow Ivo knew what there was, in the utter simplicity of that movement. He was thinking more about stuff like that—of using abstract movements of the body—more than making up your face to look gaunt."

Kushner first saw van Hove's rendering of "Angels" in 2009, and wept at the scene. "It was shattering," he told me. "By the sixth time you watch this guy get thrown and land on his butt, *your* butt starts to hurt. The playfulness of it made the cruelty of it so much more sharp and disturbing: you are dying, with this very silly, undignified thing going on. It made the audience work hard to recuperate dignity from the moment, and cherish it all the more."

Van Hove said, "I felt very strongly that the appearance of the Angel happens in the mind of Prior. I made it so that everything happens also in the *audience's* mind. So we see the Angel just as a nurse. And then the Angel overthrows Prior's whole life within this moment of swinging him around. I tried to bring out his inner world—of losing his friend that he was in love with, of being alone with AIDS. That is the feeling I tried to express by having him beaten up by this Angel."

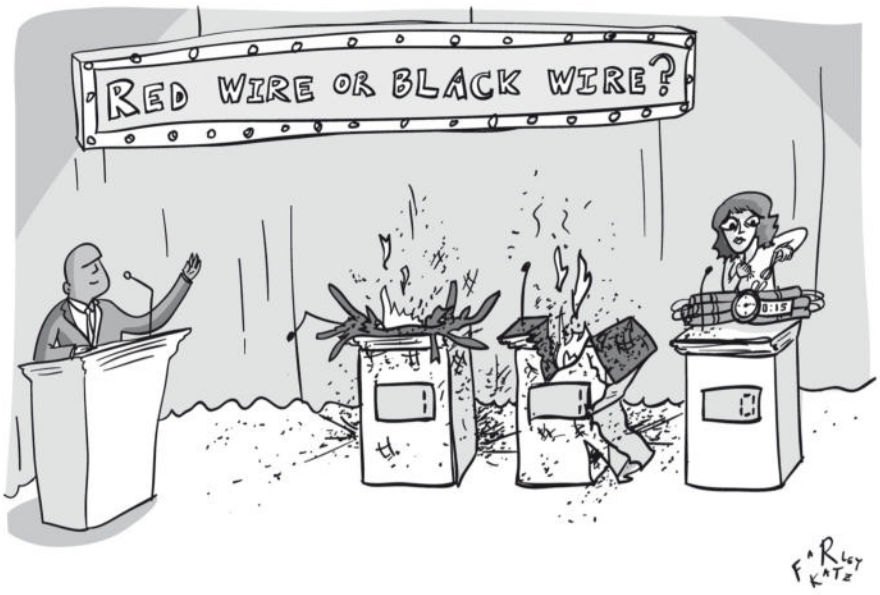
Kushner says that one of van Hove's gifts is to "make the audience confront the failure to create completely convincing illusions—and the power of the theatre *is* that failure to create convincing illusions. It is the creation of a double consciousness. Ivo's impulse is to take that very seriously, and to ask the audience to collaborate in making this thing real."

Van Hove's "Angels" played at BAM last year for three nights. ("I could have run it for weeks," Joe Melillo, BAM's artistic director, says.) This fall, far greater numbers of American theatregoers will have a chance to see van Hove's work. In November, he makes his Broadway début, with Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge," which he staged at the Young Vic, in London, last year. "Lazarus," a new musical work by David Bowie and the Irish playwright Enda Walsh, opens in December at New York Theatre Workshop, which has collaborated with van Hove since the nineties. Van Hove will also be directing a new Broadway production of Miller's "The Crucible," starring Ben Whishaw, in early 2016.

"A View from the Bridge" was nominated for seven Olivier Awards, the British equivalent of the Tonys, after

Van Hove once wrote plays, but discovered that he "could make much more personal work through the filter of a text by Shakespeare."

PHOTOGRAPH BY NADAV KANDER



• •

it transferred to the West End; it won three, including the award for best director. Like "Angels," it offers the spectacle of radical condensation: with the actors barefoot on a stage devoid of props, the domestic activities of the Carbone family unfold inexorably, as in a Greek tragedy. The production has a disquieting erotic intimacy and the hurtling pace of a thriller's climax. Van Hove does not always rely on spareness to make a familiar play seem new. In a controversial production of "A Streetcar Named Desire," at New York Theatre Workshop in 1998, a claw-footed bathtub dominated the stage. The characters talked around the tub, fought around it, bathed in it, and—in a moment of theatrical wizardry—dived into it fully clothed.

Earlier this year, I went to see van Hove at work with members of the Toneelgroep Amsterdam's ensemble. They were rehearsing "Kings of War," an epic production in which five of Shakespeare's English histories—"Henry V," "Henry VI," Parts 1, 2, and 3, and "Richard III"—are condensed into one four-and-a-half-hour-long drama. This was van Hove's second Shakespearean distillation: several years ago, he and Versweyveld created "Roman Tragedies," which combined "Coriolanus," "Julius Caesar," and "Antony and Cleopatra." Set in an environment suggesting the war room of a contemporary political campaign, "Roman Tragedies" incorporated live and recorded video. Large screens showed footage from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or closeups of actors' faces while a digital ticker above the stage broadcast headlines from CNN. Between acts, audience members were invited to go onstage—where they could perch on the couches, sit on the floor, or visit a bar that had been set up toward the back—and then remain there when the play resumed. This had the startling effect of transforming the audience into the Roman populace, whose moods and whims the actors were manipulating.

Whereas "Roman Tragedies" explored the dynamic between politicians and the public, "Kings of War" highlights the demands of power on an individual. The set evoked Churchill's wartime bunker in Whitehall: beige walls, old maps, a narrow cot with a military-issue blanket. Behind the room was a hidden structure of interconnected corridors, painted white and brilliantly lit. Much of the action of the play is conducted there, captured by a roving cameraman and projected onto a screen above the bunker. In the corridors, Henry V covetously fondles the crown of his not quite dead father, and Richard III approaches Henry VI, preparing to strangle him. "They are like corridors in a big palace, or in the White House, or wherever people are negotiating and making decisions," van Hove explained at the rehearsal, which took place in a studio on the outskirts of Amsterdam. "What happens in the corridors is something you shouldn't say in the public world, in open life."

Van Hove, who is fifty-six, is soft-spoken and precise. Slim and upright, he has an air of imperturbable self-possession that is occasionally softened by a display of humor. He exudes discipline. In "Kings of War," he explained, "a leader has to decide on the most extreme thing—to go to war or not." He continued, "That is, for a president or a king, the most difficult decision to make. Because you can win a war, and then you are a hero, but even then there may be a lot of casualties. Even when you win a war, in the people's mind you can have lost it."

Earlier in the season, the company had presented a production of Friedrich Schiller's "Mary Stuart" and a new play adapted from Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead." "Ivo is very interested in leadership," Versweyveld, who was at the rehearsal, told me. Versweyveld, who is fifty-seven, is compact, with a shaved head; that afternoon, he had been taking photographs of the actors as they rehearsed. He said of van Hove, "He reads about other leaders, and he is always trying to make himself a better leader, and so this of course is at the center of his existence."

In rehearsal, van Hove usually works steadily through the text, reaching the end of the play just before the first public performance. There are occasional deviations from this practice. Thomas Jay Ryan, who played Philinte in van Hove's version of "The Misanthrope," at New York Theatre Workshop, said, "I had a very big speech he would never let me do in rehearsal. We would get right up to the speech and he would say, 'You are not ready yet.'" By the time van Hove was willing to rehearse it, Ryan said, "I had all this emotion that came naturally." He went on, "It had this other layer and life. I was shouting and throwing things. I would never have been able to do it a week earlier. Afterward, Ivo said, 'I'm sorry, Tom. That is the way you are going to have to do it.'"

Van Hove hates auditions: he makes decisions quickly, and resents the time lost to politesse. When working with his permanent company, he casts by

fiat, assigning actors to play characters who, among other things, may have to fight each other or have sex with each other—both fairly frequent occurrences in van Hove productions. "Because he knows everyone very well, sometimes he likes to make explosive combinations—like a kid who lets insects fight," Eelco Smits told me. "Sometimes the chemistry between actors is really sexual, and he uses it." Actors are expected to be "off book"—know all their lines—from the first day of rehearsal, a practice that Americans often find disconcerting. Van Hove likes to rehearse only five hours a day. Juliette Binoche, who is currently starring in a touring production of van Hove's "Antigone," which was at BAM this fall, told me, "It has to print inside you very quickly. You don't go back often. It is very raw. In a way, it is very frightening."

A van Hove rehearsal often begins after many months of forensic preparation. Chris Nietvelt, a Belgian actress and a member of the Toneelgroep Amsterdam, who has worked with van Hove for more than thirty years, told me, "He has one piece of paper—'That is what the play is about. That is why I want to do it.'" When I was in Amsterdam, the première of "Kings of War" was just over three weeks away, and van Hove was still only on "Henry V," rehearsing the prelude to the Battle of Agincourt with Ramsey Nasr, a Dutch-Palestinian actor who had been cast as Henry V. Van Hove described the monarch as "a good leader who listens to his advisers, who puts forward again and again the right questions."

Nasr is an actor of intense intelligence; he is also a writer and a former poet laureate of the Netherlands. He knelt by the bed, in a contemporary officer's uniform, as he delivered Henry's prayer for his men before battle. At the scene's end, van Hove joined Nasr onstage, speaking intently to him in a low voice. Van Hove modulates his directives to match the actor's temperament. "Ramsey is a control freak," van Hove told me later. "If something on the table is here, and tomorrow it is over there, he would be, like, 'But yesterday this was *here*.' So I know I have to deal with that, because then he feels good. If I were to say, 'Ramsey, I don't mind where it is,' that would be disturbing to him."

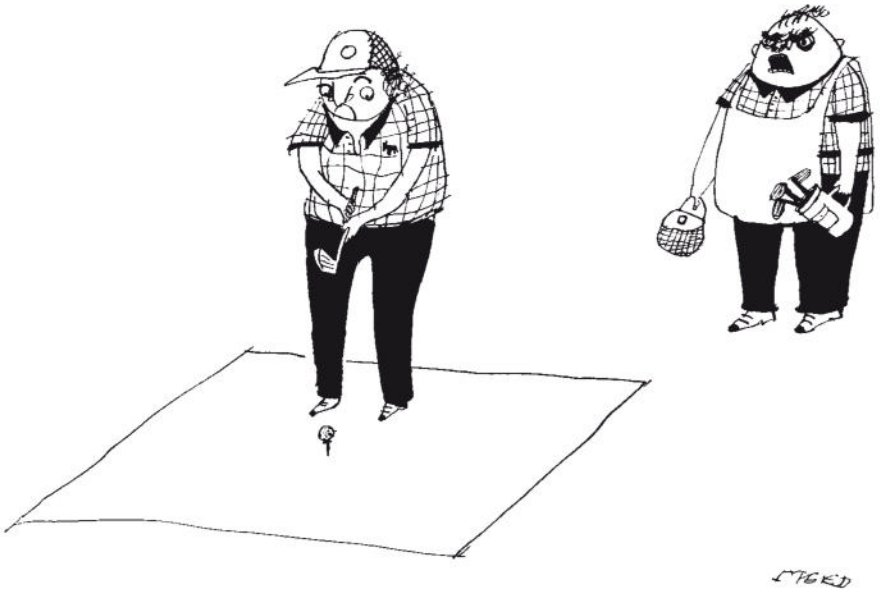
In preparing "Kings of War," van Hove gave particular attention to a soliloquy in "Henry VI, Part 3," in which the monarch, preparing to lead his troops, wishes instead for the simple life of a shepherd. ("How lovely! / Gives not the hawthorn-bush a sweeter shade / To shepherds looking on their silly sheep.") Van Hove, along with Versweyveld and Tal Yarden, their long-standing video collaborator, had decided to dramatize Henry's failure to shoulder his kingly burden by bringing his fantasy to life. On the overhead screen, a flock of real sheep would suddenly materialize within the white corridors of power, as if from Henry's imagination.

It was not the first time that van Hove had included animals in a production: his Macbeth rode a cart horse into battle; a memorable version of O'Neill's "Desire Under the Elms" featured eight cows onstage. That evening, after Nasr and the other actors in "Henry V" had left, van Hove and the production team stayed on. Outside the rehearsal space, a truck pulled up, from which bleats emanated. Several animal wranglers laid black vinyl matting on the floor of the bunker. When forty-odd sheep came skittering down the gangplank into a temporary enclosure, the production team gathered around, everyone exclaiming with delight. Van Hove walked the other way. "I hate animals," he muttered.

The sheep were herded stage left, into the white corridor. Smits, who was playing Henry VI, entered the corridor stage right and, followed by a cameraman, approached the flock. But, instead of gathering around him, the sheep fled in the opposite direction, bumbling into each other and defecating indiscriminately on the white floor. The crew cast anxious glances at van Hove and Versweyveld. Someone asked if the shit could be cleaned up in postproduction.

Van Hove, looking irritated with the proceedings, gave curt instructions to the cameraman, who was supposed to keep the shot low, filming only Smits's legs and back, so that other actors could eventually take on the role; but the camera kept capturing the back of Smits's head, or his face. Exasperated, van Hove repeated his intentions. Smits persevered with the sheep, whose greasy wool was staining the walls of the corridor. He picked up a lamb in his arms. Finally, the sheep ran toward the camera. "*This* is what we need," van Hove exclaimed. "*This* is the enthusiasm I need."

After an hour, the sheep were herded back into the truck, and a crew member appeared with a bushel of brooms and mops. Van Hove drove back to the center of Amsterdam, where he and Versweyveld live in an impeccably ordered apartment overlooking a canal. Van Hove coughed. "It's these fucking



"You're not bending your knees."

sheep," he said. "I don't really hate animals. I just cannot communicate with them, really."

Van Hove grew up in rural Belgium, amid farmers and coal miners. His father was the pharmacist in the village where the family lived, which had a population of two thousand. "In such a small community, that is considered as being of the higher class," van Hove told me one afternoon over coffee at Café Stanislavski, in the lobby of his theatre, which is on a busy square criss-crossed by clanging trams and insouciant cyclists. "The doctor came to our house, and the architect, and sometimes the mayor, and the priest, and they drank Cognac every morning at eleven o'clock. I remember that happening every day—though of course it's not true." Van Hove says that he felt like an outsider among his working-class schoolmates, and told himself, "I have to go from here. This is not my place."

At eleven, he went to boarding school. "For the first three weeks, I wept," he said. "Then it became the best time of my life." Van Hove discovered theatre there. "On Wednesday afternoons, there was no class, so you could do sports, or you could go to the city to meet girls, or you could join the theatre company," he said. "We would work on a play that we would present at the end of the year. It felt like the boarding school was a walled world within the world, and the theatre was another walled world within it. That felt so warm, so good." He went on, "I learned there the awareness that, once you close that rehearsal-room door, everything is allowed—I can express every fantasy and obsession. It is total freedom of your mind, of your life."

At boarding school, he realized that he was gay. It was the early seventies, and homosexuality was not openly discussed. "But boarding school is a perfect place, of course," he said. He fell in love with a classmate who later died in a bicycle accident. "I have the feeling that I lived my life once through already, in boarding school. That I experienced everything—deep unhappiness, deep mourning," he told me. When one of van Hove's teachers taught a class about the atomic bomb, he did so not by showing pictures of atrocities but by explaining how an atomic bomb worked. "I didn't sleep for three nights," van Hove said. "In my fantasy, I could imagine it." From this, he learned that "you don't have to show everything in a graphic way."

He went to law school, at his parents' insistence. "But I am glad I studied law, because in Belgium, for the first two years, you do philosophy, you do psychology," he told me. "I studied American law, with all these precedents—and I loved that, finding your way into a system. But, in the third year, at a certain moment I looked up and thought, I am in a library. I was in a library yesterday. I will be in a library tomorrow. And I will be in a library in ten years' time, in twenty years' time. I stopped that day." His parents were dismayed by this decision, and by his coming out. "They didn't know how to cope with it, and I didn't discuss it with them," van Hove said. "I think they are allowed to feel how they feel—I cannot make them feel something that they don't feel. And so I kept my distance."

He transferred to an arts school, in Antwerp, where he began to study directing. Soon thereafter, he met Versweyveld, an aspiring artist, at a modern-dance workshop in the city. "We started as a couple, but it was immediately clear that to survive as a couple we had to do something together," van Hove told me. "Two young men of twenty—it's a lot of testosterone going on. And two people who are ambitious in a deep

way—not 'I want to be' but 'I want to do something in life.'" The partnership has been remarkably durable and productive. Van Hove has never made a play without Versweyveld, and administrators and actors with whom they work testify to the inextricability of their talents in producing the final result. "We never broke up," van Hove told me. "That is amazing—as a homosexual, in that time, working in the theatre. I think we did well."

While studying in Antwerp, van Hove was reading the work of such theatre theorists as Antonin Artaud. "He talks much about the hidden things in human beings, and says that the theatre is about bringing out these darker sides of us," van Hove said. He and Versweyveld were also inspired by new work coming out of the United States; among other things, they saw the Wooster Group perform "Point Judith," a theatre piece based on "Long Day's Journey Into Night," at a festival in Brussels in 1981. "There was video, there was dancing—it was a totally new attitude toward theatre," van Hove said. At the time, Belgian theatre was very conventional, and the route to success was to apply for government subsidies. "There was a new generation who were dissatisfied, and they started to make their own theatre," Johan Thielemans, a professor of theatre history at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, said. "They didn't work in established theatres. They thought they had to work in the margins."

Van Hove and Versweyveld opened a brasserie in Antwerp to fund theatre projects. Their first production, in 1981, titled "Rumors," was somewhere between a play and performance art, and was staged in a deserted laundry facility. Written by van Hove, it featured a young man named Matthias, who is possibly schizophrenic, and who must navigate among doctors, controlling women, and punk teen-agers. The production came to the notice of David Willinger, who teaches theatre at City College, in New York. "I didn't know Flemish, but it didn't matter—I walked out saying, 'This is one of the best things I've ever seen,'" Willinger told me. "It was totally original, and had a level of abstraction I would not have expected. It used all the levels in this warehouse, and Jan's lighting was like a character in the play.'"

"Rumors" was based, in part, on a drama in van Hove's own family: his brother, two years younger, had been given a diagnosis of schizophrenia in his late teens. As children, van Hove and his brother were very close—"I bullied him, he bullied me, you know"—but they had grown apart. "His illness

happened at the same time as my detachment from our parents was happening," van Hove told me. "I regret that I couldn't be there for him much more. I was selfish, probably. But I was developing my own life more, in quite difficult circumstances, and I couldn't help my parents deal with it." As a young man, van Hove was "more arrogant and cold and driven," Willinger says. "I think he wanted to accomplish something really hard in life, and he sensed all the resistance—bureaucratic, environmental. I think he was wearing blinders. He would allow in only what was going to serve him. I imagine the young Brecht was like that, too."

Van Hove began to adapt and direct the work of other, usually long-dead writers. "I discovered I could make much more personal work through the filter of a text by Shakespeare that was four hundred years old—that it was much more directly about me, and about my life," he told me. "My productions are my massed autobiography: if you look at all the plays I've done since I was twenty, you know who I am." In 1987, he staged Euripides' "The Bacchae." "The performance started with the prologue, and Dionysius completely nude," Pol Arias, a Dutch critic, recalls. "Later, we saw him in pumps, wearing a small transparent cloth, with little wings on the back of his head—a very ambiguous character, neither good nor bad." At intermission, Arias was approached by a couple he'd never met—van Hove's parents. "His mother told me, 'Let us say we are quite a bit more conservative than what our son is doing in theatre.' I answered that there was no need to be ashamed—that they could be proud of what their son was doing, because he was a little genius."

More recently, he and Versweyveld have staged versions of movies, with adaptations of films by Antonioni, Bergman, and Cassavetes. "When you get to do a movie script onstage, it is like a world première," van Hove told me. "It is like you get to be the first director to do 'Hamlet.' You have to invent a theatrical world for the first time."

For Ingmar Bergman's "Cries and Whispers," which van Hove directed in 2009, he set himself the challenge of representing death onstage in an honest way. "Death is always nothing in theatre—it is very difficult to do," he said. His father had recently died, and his memories of that experience guided his vision of the central character, Agnes, who is an artist succumbing to cancer. As Agnes, Chris Nietvelt flung herself around the stage, smearing her body with Yves Klein-blue paint. Lying lifeless, she was stripped naked and washed by her maid. "I had her die twice—once the way you want to die, like my father died, with people all around him, caring for him," van Hove said. "And then there is the other moment of the horrific death struggle—alone. The way I am afraid it will be." Nietvelt said of van Hove's methods, "We go very far, physically, mentally. But that is the way we want to make theatre. It is what we call, in Dutch, *waarachtig*. It means something that's not true but feels so true that you believe it. And that truthfulness can also be conveyed by your body." Nietvelt added, "I never fall on my knees in normal life. I fell on my knees, I think, five hundred times for Ivo."

In the mid-nineties, his productions came to the attention of Jim Nicola, of New York Theatre Workshop. Nicola began inviting him to remount his productions of works by O'Neill, Williams, and other American playwrights, but with American actors instead of Dutch ones. The young American director Sam Gold says, "It was seeing American plays filtered through a director whose vision wasn't mired in the conventions of contemporary American revivals—a director who wasn't married to the text, and was trying to tell the story about how the plays related to him and his consciousness." Gold, who won a Tony this year for "Fun Home,"

"Whoa—you're gonna need a whole new string!"

• •

is a guest director at the Toneelgroep Amsterdam this season, working on a new, Dutch-language production of "The Glass Menagerie."

In New York, van Hove established almost an alternate company: a coterie of familiar actors, many of whom he has now been working with for years. "He never asks me to do what I can do—he leads me to do things I didn't know I could do," the actress Elizabeth Marvel told me. In his 2010 production of "The Little Foxes," at New York Theatre Workshop, Marvel was directed to play Regina as someone whose anger at her relatives was so intense that she seemed on the verge of losing all self-control. "We were surfing this crazy Jungian tidal wave," she said. "It was hypersexual. I would literally climb the wall, and hump the wall. It is hard to explain. It is a dream state that is more real than reality that I sometimes find myself in, that Ivo helps create." When the show ended, Marvel said, it was disorienting to work again with more conventional directors: "I remember Neil Armstrong talking about what it was like when he returned from space, how it took him a very long time to re-assimilate. The earth was not what he knew it to be anymore—he knew there was this whole other realm. That is very similar to my experience with Ivo."

In 2005, Hans Kesting, who has played many important roles in van Hove's productions, played Petruchio in "The Taming of the Shrew." In a scene in which the title character, Katherina, was meant to be enraged, the actress playing her, Halina Reijn, stood on a table, screaming. "In rehearsal, we were pushing to the limits," Kesting told me. "And Ivo said, 'Something should happen that she can't hold it in anymore. Her anger is not sufficient anymore, screaming is not sufficient, she is so frustrated now. What should she do now?'" Jan Versweyveld supplied an answer: "She should pee on the table." Kesting told me, "It was water, of course—we had to find some sort of contraption to put on her." In an added degree of boundary crossing, Kesting licked up the urine. The staging wasn't merely shocking, Kesting said, for it wittily captured the delirious one-upmanship of Katherina and Petruchio. "In the show, it was always such a strong moment," he said.

Physical injuries are not uncommon among van Hove's actors. Joan MacIntosh still sees a chiropractor for a neck injury that was exacerbated by the demands of playing Alice James in Susan Sontag's "Alice in Bed." She spent the whole play in a specially constructed chaise longue that was molded to her body but off-kilter, so that her pelvis was permanently cocked at an odd angle. It was palpably clear to the audience that Alice, though reclining, was not relaxed. MacIntosh has no complaints: "I would do anything Ivo asked me to do that was humanly possible onstage."

Van Hove does not choreograph his fights. In "Scenes from a Marriage," an adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's TV miniseries, which he directed in New York last year, three pairs of actors—each representing the same married couple—engaged in fifteen-minute brawls. Alex Hurt, one of the actors playing the husband, Johan, told me, "It was one of the most unsafe, and particularly fantastic, things I have ever done in a play. Ivo just said, 'Now you kill her—kill her with your words.' So we'd all be veining at the neck, screaming our heads

GREEN MIGRAINE

Some dragonflies
down there some static
and dirty diapers

I'll never
get back to sleep this way

Dandelion teeth drop from a spring sky and skitter the surface of a pond and the perfectly still grass

Shake
shake
shake it but don't
break break break it

I can almost get it with these
tweezers

Chlorine in the cupola

Feedback out of ferns

*

The eyes in frogs
like eggs all burst at the same time
from eggshells

Green sky
Green sky
Green sky

Some moss
up there some clouds
getting sick

See those hummingbirds?

I painted those with a silver-tipped paintbrush and an unopened
bottle of mint-cream amitriptyline

The peas in the pod cry out and then roll to the floor

In flames
the rind on the watermelon smiles

*

Tree ants melt
in my mouth and leaves
end in algae

Grasshoppers vibrate

The night was green the morning was green and now it's late
afternoon inside of a lawnmower

Some kids in there
some chlorophyll and
sunburn

It doesn't hurt so much with the blinds shut

It doesn't hurt
when a leaf falls
to the ground

It's the sound

The grass in the yard stands straight up

—*Michael Dickman*

off, going at it. And then he would go up to the wives and say, 'Kill *him.* Now you kill him.'"

With Versweyveld and Tal Yarden, the videographer, van Hove often attempts to subvert received wisdom about famous works, sometimes to very controversial effect. He directed a Dutch-language production of "Rent," in 2000. In the original production, which ran on Broadway for twelve years, the character of Mimi almost dies but is miraculously resurrected. In van Hove's pitiless version, Mimi dies, with her last moments represented on video. Van Hove's iconoclasm is, in part, a function of his position as a native speaker of Flemish working principally in Dutch, which has relatively few speakers and a limited literary canon. Just as, when working in English, van Hove feels no duty to Elia Kazan in his interpretation of the works of Tennessee Williams, he does not feel bound to the text of an English-language masterpiece when he is using a Dutch translation. There is inevitably a poetic diminishment when Shakespeare is rendered in a language other than English, but there can also be a recovery of a play's elemental drama. Van Hove's "Roman Tragedies" eliminates the first scene of "Antony and Cleopatra," which includes a voluptuous embrace and depicts "the triple pillar of the world / transform'd into a strumpet's fool." But this elided verse is later enacted, during Antony's passionate leave-taking of Cleopatra before battle. As Antony dresses, the couple laugh and fumble cupidinously; they kiss passionately for a full minute as the music—Bob Dylan singing "Not Dark Yet"—surrounds them, and Antony's advisers look sternly on. Joe Melillo, of BAM, said of the production, "People couldn't talk at the end—the death of Cleopatra was so emotional that people were sobbing." Van Hove's "Kings of War," which had its première in Vienna in June, eliminated the buildup to the War of the Roses—a cut that an English director would probably have found harder to make. What remained was "like watching a great cable miniseries," Sam Gold said. "It has this populist thing—this page-turning energy. You feel like you are watching Netflix, and when you get to the end of 'Henry V' you just hit 'Next Episode.'"

When David Lan, the artistic director of the Young Vic, first suggested to van Hove that he might direct "A View from the Bridge," he resisted. As Versweyveld recalls it, van Hove said, "It's a well-made play. I hate it. There is little room for any roller-coaster ride." Lan had wanted to work with van Hove after seeing "Roman Tragedies." "I like theatre that is as complicated and as intellectually and emotionally contradictory and complex and challenging as my life," Lan told me. " 'Roman Tragedies' was like that—the ludicrous ambition of it, and the craziness of it. It's a cliché to say you want art to change you, but I didn't know you could experience things onstage in that way."

For the Young Vic, Lan wanted van Hove to take on a well-known work. "I wanted people to see what he could do, and I thought, If they see a play that they think they know, or think they know what it should be like, then they will really see what he is capable of," Lan told me. He also wanted English actors to play the inhabitants of Red Hook, Brooklyn. "English theatre is

often tentative, hesitant, commercially driven, wanting to be loved," he said. "If we used American actors, I would be apprehensive that people would say, 'Oh, you have to be American to do that.'" (A New York audience may take a few moments to adjust to the cast's accents; van Hove called for them to be generically American rather than specific to Brooklyn. "It is not a historically accurate production," he told me.)

Miller's play centers on an Italian-American longshoreman, Eddie Carbone, who becomes suspiciously hostile when one of his immigrant relatives expresses romantic interest in his niece. Versweyveld recalls telling van Hove not to dismiss it: "I said, 'I see a lot of layers: the incest relation, the matrimonial relationship, the workers from Italy, the poor who come to a rich country.'" Eventually, van Hove established some personal connections with the text. The milieu of Italian immigrants coming to work in a foreign country reminded him of his home village, where Italian neighbors filled the mining jobs that Belgians disdained.

Versweyveld's set is an enclosed square space, like a boxing ring. It alludes to the footprint of a row house in Red Hook. "It is a house, but it is a ruin of a house, almost like Pompeii," van Hove told me. "It is a house that has been. You see a wall, a door—you can imagine there has been a kitchen, a table, but it is all gone."

The rehearsal process was an unusually intense three weeks. The original plan had called for five weeks—already a tight schedule. "Then I get this phone call from Ivo saying, 'David, I have completely fucked up, I forgot to tell you I am going to be in Australia the beginning of the second week of rehearsal,'" Lan told me. "I said, 'Well, you do the first week, and then you go to Australia.' He said, 'Look, I have got a better idea. I won't do the first week, or the second week, either.' It was the only time he got a bit cross with me. He said, 'You have to trust me. Now you are coming into my territory.'" In the middle of tech rehearsals, with previews only days away, van Hove informed Lan that he needed to make a trip back to Amsterdam. "I thought to myself, O.K., there is something else going on here," Lan said. "He doesn't want the time."

The actors worked in an empty studio. "In another room, we had all the props, but the actors didn't know it," Versweyveld said. Mark Strong, who plays Eddie Carbone, told me, "The first day, we all arrived and said hello, and were shown a model box of the set, with the absence of furniture. We all kind of looked at each other and went, 'Oh-*kaaay*.' But, as time went on, if they told you a prop was unnecessary you began to tell that they were right. There wasn't any need for props." About a week into rehearsal, Strong said, van Hove commanded the cast to go barefoot: "Ivo said, 'We don't need shoes,' and we took them off, and we never thought about them again." Initially, a knife was brought out for the climactic fight between Eddie and his wife's cousin Marco. "But it just seemed absurd," Strong said. In the show, the battle is staged without a weapon: there is just a bloody, obscure clashing of bodies, a nightmare out of Caravaggio.

On Broadway, as in the West End, the most prized seats may be those which are set up onstage, on either side of Versweyveld's arena, almost within reach of the actors. "You really felt as though at any moment Eddie Carbone could come off that stage and grab your throat," Joe Melillo told me. "It was, like, 'Oh, my God, I am given license to be a witness to a murder. I am really going to see someone kill someone.'"

In September, van Hove was back at the Young Vic with a smaller production: "Song from Far Away," a one-man play by the young British playwright Simon Stephens. It was written specifically for Eelco Smits, who first performed it, in English, earlier this year in São Paolo. Van Hove rarely directs a new work. He doesn't like to commission plays, for fear of receiving something that he doesn't like and then feeling obligated to present it.

Stephens had spent a week in Holland, at van Hove's invitation, and had devised a story about a young Dutch banker, living in New York, who returns to Amsterdam after the unexpected death of his brother. Smits had performed "Song" in Amsterdam, in Dutch, a few weeks earlier. For the London production, which was in English, van Hove had scheduled only a few days of rehearsal before the play's first preview. The show is emotionally and physically demanding: Smits spends forty-five of the play's seventy-five minutes naked, his nudity underscoring his character's vulnerability. "It's what you want to do, because you feel that what Ivo creates,

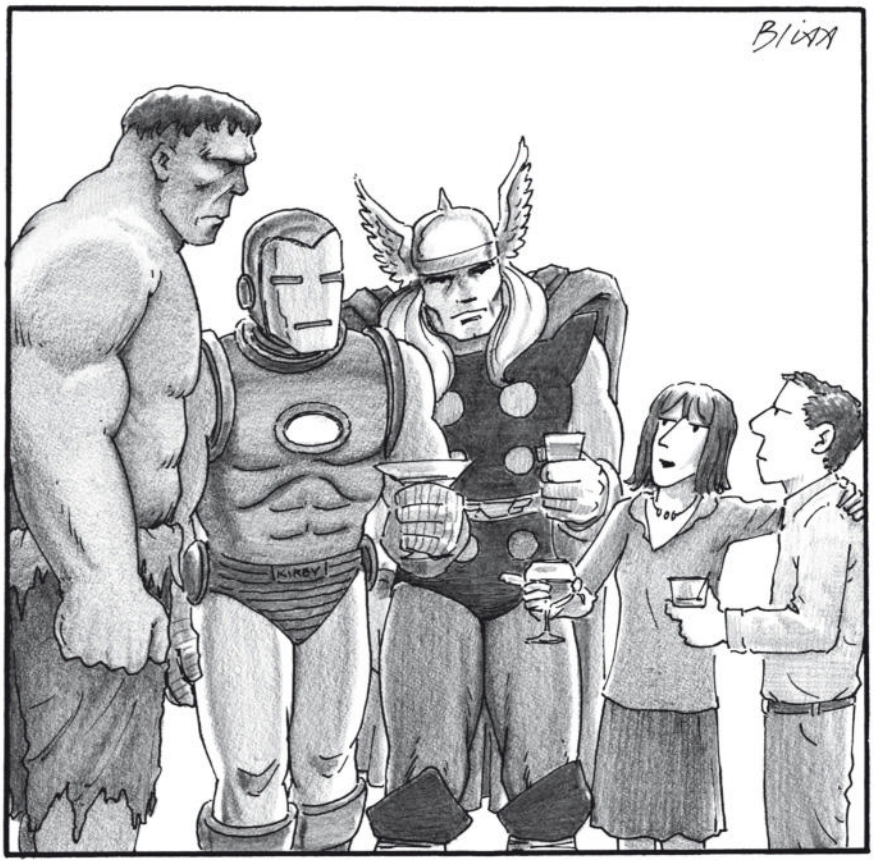
"I hoped your father had missed the latest men's-fashion supplement in the New York 'Times,' but—alas—he did not."

and what Jan creates, is at that level," Smits told me in London. "It is taken to a certain point, at which you don't want to say, 'Can I keep my underwear on?' You don't want to be that actor—you want to go there."

As the crew readied the stage for a run-through of the play, van Hove sat on one of the upholstered benches that had been set up for the audience. He had been busy since I'd seen him working on "Kings of War." In Amsterdam, he had been rehearsing a new play, and, for once, it was based on a Dutch source: a novel, from 1900, titled "The Hidden Force." Set in the colonial East Indies, the book was written by Louis Couperus, whom van Hove compares to Thomas Mann. In New York, he'd been casting for "Lazarus," the Bowie project, and for "The Crucible." Despite the logistical demands of mounting so many works in succession, van Hove anticipated the exposure with pleasure. "I want to make the most extreme, personal theatre, but for as big an audience as possible," he said at one point. "I am not the kind of theatre-maker who likes it for small audiences. I don't do something to please, or to entertain. I don't think theatre is there for entertainment, purely."

Van Hove told me that he and Versweyveld had already devised the "universe" in which "The Crucible" was to take place, and that he had been working with his dramaturge to tease out deeper implications from the text. To explain his process, he laid his hands on the bench in front of us. "If this bench would be a play, I would look at it first in total, and I would say, 'Wow, there is something that is striking here'"—he stopped at the brass plaque naming a sponsor—"and say, 'Look, this one has a name, but they do not all have names.' And then I would take this backrest down, and unscrew it, and see what is inside. I would undo it, and then put it back together again."

His preliminary dismantling of "The Crucible" had highlighted some of the themes that it shares with "A View from the Bridge." Van Hove remarked, "It is very strange—in both plays, at a certain moment, the leading character says, 'I want my name.' Your name is your identity, and you don't want to lose your identity in society. You don't want to be pushed aside into the margins of society. You want to be at the center of society. And that need, that urge, is also deep in me."



"Incredible Hulk, Invincible Iron Man, Mighty Thor, meet Unremarkable Ed."

• •

The house lights went down. Although preparations were still under way, the voices of the crew dropped. "That's the beauty about theatre—it can be silent suddenly," van Hove said, with a slight smile. Nonetheless, he continued to speak.

"With 'The Crucible,' I want to make you *believe*," he continued. "For instance, the hysterical outbursts of the girls. I want to make it really frightening." Miller has a reputation as a moralist who wants to make his opinions about the characters clear. "I want to try not to do that, so that you can make up your own mind at the end," van Hove said. "For me, it is not a play about good and evil. It is about evil within goodness, and goodness within evil." He spoke about the character of Abigail Williams, a teen-ager who accuses others of witchery in order to avenge her spurning by John Proctor. "Abigail—she is in pain," he said. "She is not an evil person. Abigail wants to be somebody, and a girl cannot be somebody in this society. This is the way that I think about it: this society, which seems to be a society, is a bunch of individuals with totally different stories."

"Ivo?" Versweyveld called from the darkness.

"Yes?" van Hove responded. The crew was ready to begin the run-through of "Song from Far Away."

The monologue, van Hove told me at one point, was informed by Stephens's observations about Amsterdam, such as the habit among the Dutch of leaving their curtains open to the street. "I always close my curtains," van Hove said. "I don't want people to look inside, because I have a lot to hide. The Dutch, being Calvinist, don't look inside one another's windows." He smiled. "I *always* look inside. I cannot hold myself back from looking inside." ♦

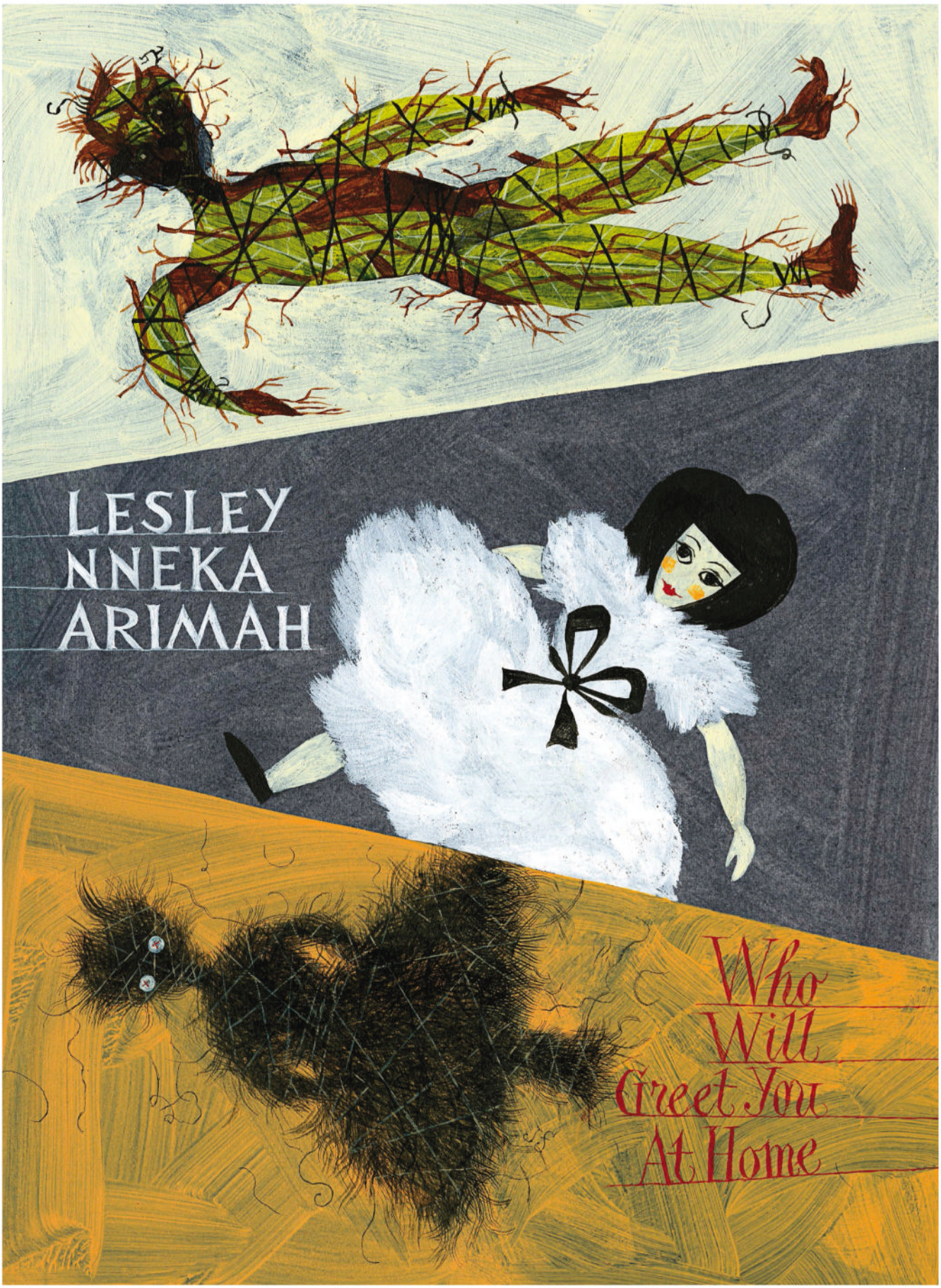


ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY FISHER

The yarn baby lasted a good month, emitting dry, cotton-soft gurgles and pooping little balls of lint, before Ogechi snagged its thigh on a nail and it unravelled as she continued walking, mistaking its little huffs for the beginnings of hunger, not the cries of an infant being undone. By the time she noticed, it was too late, the leg a tangle of fibre, and she pulled the string the rest of the way to end it, rather than have the infant grow up maimed. If she was to mother a child, to mute and subdue and fold away parts of herself, the child had to be perfect.

Yarn had been a foolish choice, she knew, the stuff for women of leisure, who could cradle wool in the comfort of their own cars and in secure houses devoid of loose nails. Not for an assistant hairdresser who took danfo to work if she had money, walked if she didn't, and lived in an "apartment" that amounted to a room she could clear in three large steps. Women like her had to form their children out of sturdier, more practical material to withstand the dents and scrapes that came with a life like hers. Her mother had formed her from mud and twigs and wrapped her limbs tightly with leaves, like moin moin: pedestrian items that had produced a pedestrian girl. Ogechi was determined that her child would be a thing of whimsy, soft and pretty and tender and worthy of love. But first she had to go to work.

She brushed her short choppy hair and pulled on one of her two dresses. Her next child would have thirty dresses, she decided, and hair so long it would take hours to braid, and she would complain about it to anyone who would listen, all the while exuding smug pride.

Ogechi treated herself to a bus ride only to regret it. Two basket weavers sat in the back row with woven raffia babies in their laps. One had plain raffia streaked with blues and greens, while the other's baby was entirely red, and every passenger admired them. They would grow up to be tough and bright and skillful.

The children were not yet alive, so the passengers sang the call-and-response that custom dictated:

Where are you going?
I am going home.
Who will greet you at home?
My mother will greet me.
What will your mother do?
My mother will bless me and my child.

It was a joyous occasion in a young woman's life when her mother blessed life into her child. The two girls flushed and smiled with pleasure when another woman commended their handiwork (such tight, lovely stitches) and wished them well. Ogechi wished them death by drowning, though not out loud. The congratulating woman turned to her, eager to spread her admiration, but once she had looked Ogechi over, seen the threadbare dress, the empty lap, and the entirety of her unremarkable package, she just gave an embarrassed smile and studied her fingers. Ogechi stared at her for the rest of the ride, hoping to make her uncomfortable.

When Ogechi had taken her first baby, a pillowy thing made of cotton tufts, to her mother, the older woman had guffawed, blowing out so much air she should have fainted. She'd then taken the molded form from Ogechi, gripped it under its armpits, and pulled it in half.

"This thing will grow fat and useless," she'd said. "You need something with strong limbs that can plow and haul and scrub. Soft children with hard lives go mad or die young. Bring me a child with edges and I will bless it and you can raise it however you like."

When Ogechi had instead brought her mother a paper child woven from the prettiest wrapping paper she'd been able to scavenge, her mother, laughing the whole time, had plunged it into the mop bucket until it softened and fell apart. Ogechi had slapped her, and her mother had slapped her back, and slapped her again and again till their neighbors heard the commotion and pulled the two women apart. Ogechi ran away that night and vowed never to return to her mother's house.

At her stop, Ogechi alighted and picked her way through the crowded street until she reached Mama Said Hair Emporium, where she worked. Mama also owned the store next door, an eatery to some, but to others, like Ogechi, a place where the owner would bless the babies of motherless girls. For a fee. And Ogechi still owed that fee for the yarn boy who was now unravelled.

When she stepped into the Emporium, the other assistant hairdressers noticed her empty arms and snickered. They'd warned her about the yarn, hadn't they? Ogechi refused to let the sting of tears in her eyes manifest and grabbed the closest broom.

Soon, clients trickled in, and the other girls washed and prepped their hair for Mama while Ogechi swept up the hair shed from scalps and wigs and weaves. Mama arrived just as the first customer had begun to lose patience and soothed her with compliments. She noted Ogechi's empty arms with a resigned shake of her head and went to work, curling, sewing, perming until the women were satisfied or in too much of a hurry to care.

Shortly after three, the two younger assistants left together, avoiding eye contact with Ogechi but smirking as if they knew what came next. Mama dismissed the remaining customer and stroked a display wig, waiting.

"Mama, I—"

"Where is the money?"

It was a routine Mama refused to skip. She knew perfectly well that Ogechi didn't have any money. Ogechi lived in one of Mama's buildings, where she paid in rent almost all of the meagre salary she earned, and ate only once a day, at Mama's canteen next door.

"I don't have it."

"Well, what will you give me instead?"

Ogechi knew better than to suggest something.

"Mama, what do you want?"

"I want just a bit more of your joy, Ogechi."

The woman had already taken most of her empathy, so that she found herself spitting in the palms of beggars. She'd started on joy the last time, agreeing to bless the yarn boy only if Ogechi siphoned a bit, just a dab, to her. All that empathy and joy and who knows what else Mama took from her and the other desperate girls who visited her back room kept her blessing active long past when it should have faded. Ogechi tried to think of it as a fair trade, a little bit of her life for her child's life. Anything but go back

to her own mother and her practical demands.

"Yes, Mama, you can have it."

Mama touched Ogechi's shoulder, and she felt a little bit sad, but nothing she wouldn't shake off in a few days. It was an even trade.

"Why don't you finish up in here while I check on the food?"

Mama was not gone for three minutes when a young woman walked in. She was stunning, with long natural hair and delicate fingers and skin as smooth and clear as fine chocolate. And in her hands was something that Ogechi wouldn't have believed existed if she hadn't seen it with her own eyes. The baby was porcelain, with a smooth glazed face wearing a precious smirk. It wore a frilly white dress and frilly socks and soft-soled shoes that would never touch the ground. Only a very wealthy and lucky woman would be able to keep such a delicate thing unbroken for the full year it would take before the child became flesh.

"I am looking for this Mama woman. Is this her place?"

Ogechi collected herself enough to direct the girl next door, then fell into a fit of jealous tears. Such a baby would never be hers. Even the raffia children of that morning seemed like dirty sponges meant to soak up misfortune when compared with the china child to whom misfortune would never stick. If Ogechi's mother had seen the child, she would have laughed at how ridiculous such a baby would be, what constant coddling she would need. It would never occur to her that mud daughters needed coddling, too.

Where would Ogechi get her hands on such beautiful material? The only things here were the glossy magazines that advertised the latest styles, empty product bottles, which Mama would fill with scented water and try to sell, and hair. Hair everywhere—short, long, fake, real, obsidian black, delusional blond, bright, bright red. Ogechi upended the bag she'd swept the hair into, and it landed in a pile studded with debris. She grabbed a handful and shook off the dirt. Would she dare?

After plugging one of the sinks, she poured in half a cup of Mama's most expensive shampoo. When the basin was filled with water and frothy with foam, she plunged the hair into it and began to scrub. She filled the sink twice more until the water was clear. Then she soaked the bundle in the matching conditioner, rinsed and towelled it dry. Next, she gathered up the silky strands and began to wind them.

Round and round until the ball of hair became a body and nubs became arms, fingers. The strands tangled together to become nearly impenetrable. This baby would not snag and unravel. This baby would not dissolve in water or rain or in nail-polish remover, as the plastic baby had that time. This was not a sugar-and-spice child to be swarmed by ants and disintegrate into syrup in less than a day. This was no practice baby formed of mud that she would toss into a drain miles away from her home.

She wrapped it in a head scarf and went to find Mama. The beautiful woman and her beautiful baby had concluded their business. Mama sat in her room counting out a boggling sum of money. Only after she was done did she wave Ogechi forward.

"Another one?"

"Yes, Mama."

Ogechi did not uncover the child, and Mama didn't ask, long since bored by the girl's antics. They sang the traditional song:

Where are you going?
I am going home.
Who will greet you at home?
My mother will greet me.
What will your mother do?
My mother will bless me and my child.

Mama continued with her own special verse:

What does Mama need to bless this child?
Mama needs whatever I have.
What do you have?
I have no money.
What do you have?
I have no goods.
What do you have?
I have a full heart.
What does Mama need to bless this child?
Mama needs a full heart.

Then Mama blessed her and the baby and, in lieu of a celebratory feast,

"Look, I'm no scientist, and I may not know what 'consensus' means, but I think we should all start eating coal."

gave Ogechi one free meat pie. Then she took a little bit more of Ogechi's joy.

There was a good reason for Ogechi not to lift the cloth and let Mama see the child. For one, it was made of items found in Mama's store, and even though they were trash, Mama would add this to her ledger of debts. Second, everybody knew how risky it was to make a child out of hair, infused with the identity of the person who had shed it. But a child of many hairs? Forbidden.

But the baby was glossy, and the red streaks glinted just so in the light, and it was sturdy enough to last a full year, easy. And after that year she would take it to her mother and throw it (not "it" the baby but the idea of it) in her mother's face.

She kept the baby covered even on the bus, where people gave her coy glances and someone tried to sing the song, but Ogechi stared ahead and did not respond to her call.

The sidewalk leading to the door of her little room was so dirty she tiptoed along it, thinking that, if her landlord weren't Mama, she would complain.

In her room, she laid the baby on an old pillow in an orphaned drawer. In the morning, it would come to life, and in a year it would be a strong and pretty thing.

There was an old tale about hair children. Long ago, girls would collect their sheddings every day until they had a bundle large enough to spin a child. One day, a storm blew through the town, and every bundle was swept from its hiding place into the middle of the market, where the hairs became entangled and matted together. The young women tried desperately to separate their own hairs from the others. The elder mothers were amused at the girls' histrionics, how they argued over the silkiest patches and the longest strands. They settled the commotion thus: every girl would draw out one strand from every bundle until they all had an equal share. Some grumbled, some rejoiced, but all complied, and each went home with an identical roll.

When the time came for the babies to be blessed, all the girls came forward, each bundle arriving at the required thickness at the same time. There was an enormous celebration of this once-in-an-age event, and tearful mothers blessed their tearful daughters' children to life.

The next morning, all the new mothers were gone. Some with no sign, others reduced to piles of bones stripped clean, others' bones not so clean. But that was just an old tale.

The baby was awake in the morning, crying dry sounds, like stalks of wheat rubbing together. Ogechi ran to it, and smiled when the fibrous, eyeless face turned to her.

"Hello, child. I am your mother."

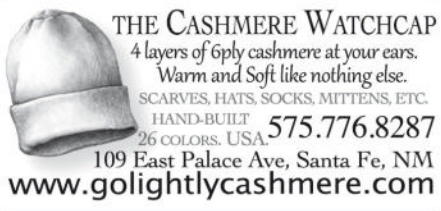
But still it cried, hungry. Ogechi tried to feed it the detergent she'd given to the yarn one, but it passed through the baby as if through a sieve. Even though she knew it wouldn't work, she tried the sugar water she had given to the candy child, with the same result. She cradled the child, the scritch of its cries grating her ears, and as she drew a deep breath of exasperation her nose filled with the scent of Mama's expensive shampoo and conditioner, answering her question.

"You are going to be an expensive baby, aren't you?" Ogechi said, with no heat. A child that cost much brought much.

Ogechi swaddled it, ripping her second dress into strips that she wound around the baby's torso and limbs until it was almost fully covered, save for where Ogechi imagined the nose and mouth to be. She tried to make do with her own shampoo for now, which was about as luxurious as the bottom of a slow drain, but the baby refused it. Only when Ogechi strapped the child to her back did she find out what it wanted. The baby wriggled upward, and Ogechi hauled it higher, then higher still, until it settled its head on the back of her neck. Then she felt it, the gentle suckling at her nape as the child drew the tangled buds of her hair into its mouth. Ahh, now this she could manage.

Ogechi decided to walk today, unsure of how to nurse the child on the bus and still keep it secret, but she dreaded the busy intersection she would cross as she neared Mama's Emporium. The


Compound for Sale
Sullivan Harbor, Maine, near Acadia;
main house, guest house, and pool.
For details contact
Teri at Sargent Real Estate.
207.667.2144 or teri@sargentre.com.



ADVERTISEMENT

Lou Romano, June 25, 2007

newyorkerstore.com

people milling about with curious eyes, the beggars scanning and calculating the worth of passersby. Someone would notice, ask.

But as she reached the crossing not one person looked at her. They were all gathered in a crowd, staring at something that was blocked from Ogechi's sight by the press of bodies. After watching a woman try and fail to haul herself onto the low-hanging roof of a nearby building for a better view, Ogechi pulled herself up in one, albeit labored, move. Mud girls were good for something. She ignored the woman stretching her arm out for assistance and stood up to see what had drawn the crowd.

A girl stood with her mother, and though Ogechi could not hear them from where she perched, the stance, the working of their mouths—all was familiar. They were revealing a child in public? In the middle of the day? Even a girl like her knew how terribly vulgar this was. It was no wonder the crowd had gathered. Only a child of some magnitude would be unwrapped in public this way. What was this one, gold? No, the woman and the girl were not dressed finely enough for that. Their clothes were no better than Ogechi's.

The child startled Ogechi when it moved. What she'd thought an obscene ruffle on the front of the girl's dress was in fact the baby, no more than interlocking twigs and sticks—was that grass?—bound with old cloth. Scraps. A rubbish baby. It cried, the friction of sound so frantic and dry Ogechi imagined a fire flickering from the child's mouth. A hiccup interrupted the noise, and when it resumed it was a human cry. The girl's mother laughed and danced, and the girl just cried, pressing the baby to her breast. They uncovered the child together, shucking a thick skin of cloth and sticks, and Ogechi leaned as far as she could without falling from the roof to see what special attribute might have required a public showing.

The crowd was as disappointed as she was. It was just an ordinary child with an ordinary face. They started to disperse, some throwing insults at the two mothers and the baby they held between them for wasting everybody's time. Others congratulated them with enthusiasm—it was a baby, after all. Something didn't add up, though, and Ogechi was reluctant to leave until she understood what nagged her about the scene.

It was the new mother's face. The child was as plain as pap, but the mother's face was full of wonder. One would think the baby had been spun from silk. One would think the baby was speckled with diamonds. One would think the baby was loved. Mother cradled mother, who cradled child, a tangle of ordinary limbs of ordinary women.

There has to be more than this for me, Ogechi thought.

At the shop, the two young assistants prepped their stations and rolled their eyes at the sight of Ogechi and the live child strapped to her back. Custom forced politeness from them, and with gritted teeth they sang:

> Welcome to the new mother
> *I am welcomed*
> Welcome to the new child
> *The child is welcomed*
> May her days be longer than the breasts of an old mother and fuller than the stomach of a rich man.

The second the words were out, they went back to work, as though the song were a sneeze, to be excused and forgotten. Until, that is, they took in Ogechi's self-satisfied air, so different from the anxiousness that had followed in her wake whenever she had blessed a child in the past. The two girls were forced into deference, stepping aside as Ogechi swept where they would have stood still a mere day ago. When Mama walked in, she paused, sensing the shift of power in the room, but it was nothing to her. She was still the head. What matter if one toenail argued with the other? She eyed the bundle on Ogechi's back but didn't look closer and wouldn't, as long as the child didn't interfere with the work and, by extension, her coin.

Ogechi was grateful for the child's silence, even though the suction on her neck built up over the day to become an unrelenting ache. She tired easily, as if the child were drawing energy from her. Whenever she tried to ease a finger between her nape and the child's mouth, the sucking would quicken, so she learned to leave it alone. At the end of the day, Mama stopped her with a hand on her shoulder.

"So you are happy with this one."

"Yes, Mama."

"Can I have a bit of that happiness?"

Ogechi knew better than to deny her outright.

"What can I have in exchange?"

Mama laughed and let her go.

When Ogechi dislodged the child at the end of the day, she found a raw, weeping patch on her nape, where the child had sucked her bald. On the ride home, she slipped to the back of the bus, careful to cradle the child's face against her ear so that no one could see it. The baby immediately latched on to her sideburn, and Ogechi spent the journey like that, the baby sucking an ache into her head. At home, she sheared off a small patch of hair and fed the child, who took the cottony clumps like a sponge absorbing water. Then it slept, and Ogechi slept, too.

If Mama wondered at Ogechi's sudden ambition, she said nothing. Ogechi volunteered to trim ends. She volunteered to unclog the sink. She kept the store so clean a rumor started that the building was to be sold. She discovered that the child disliked fake hair and would spit it out. Dirty hair was best, flavored with the person from whose head it had fallen. Ogechi managed a steady stream of food for the baby, but it required more and more as each day passed. All the hair she gathered at work would be gone by the next morning, and Ogechi had no choice but to strap the child to her back and allow it to chaw on her dwindling nape.

Mama was not curious about the baby, but the two assistants were. When Ogechi denied their request for a viewing, their sudden deference returned to malice tenfold. They made extra messes, strewing hair after Ogechi had cleaned, knocking bottles of shampoo

PROMOTION

THE NEW YORKER RADIO HOUR

The New Yorker is now on the air. Join the magazine's editor, **David Remnick**, and its award-winning writers and artists for a new weekly radio show, featuring an original mix of profiles, storytelling, and provocative conversations—plus an occasional blast of comic genius.

Coming soon to public-radio stations everywhere. Starting October 24th, listen Saturdays at 10 A.M. and Sundays at 7 P.M., on 93.9 FM, in New York, on wnyc.org, or on the WNYC app. Or subscribe to the podcast.

WNYCSTUDIOS

SPONSORED IN PART BY

audible

SQUARESPACE

LOGO ILLUSTRATION BY NOMA BAR

over until Mama twisted their ears for wasting merchandise. One of the girls, the short one with the nasty scar on her arm, grew bolder, attempting to snatch the cover off the baby's head and laughing and running away when Ogechi reacted. Evading her became exhausting, and Ogechi took to hiding the child in the shop on the days she opened, squeezing it in among the wigs or behind a shelf of unopened shampoos, and the thwarted girl grew petulant, bored, then gave up.

One day, while the child was nestled between two wigs, and Ogechi, the other assistants, and Mama were having lunch at the eatery next door, a woman stopped by their table to speak to Mama.

"Greetings."

"I am greeted," Mama said. "What is it you want?"

Mama was usually more welcoming to her customers, but this woman owed Mama money, and she subtracted each owed coin from her pleasantries.

"Mama, I have come to pay my debt."

"Is that so? This is the third time you have come to pay your debt, and yet we are still here."

"I have the money, Mama."

"Let me see."

The woman pulled a pouch from the front of her dress and counted out the money owed. As soon as the notes crossed her palm, Mama was all smiles.

"Ahh, a woman of her word. My dear, sit. You are looking a little rough today. Why don't we get you some hair?"

The woman was too stunned by Mama's kindness to heed the insult. Mama shooed one of the other assistants toward the shop, naming a wig the girl should bring. A wig that was near where Ogechi had stashed the baby.

"I'll get it, Mama," Ogechi said, getting up, but a swift slap to her face sat her back down.

"Was anyone talking to you, Ogechi?" Mama asked.

She knew better than to reply.

The assistant Mama had addressed snickered on her way out, and the other one smiled into her plate. Ogechi twisted her fingers into the hem of her dress and tried to slow her breathing. Maybe if she was the first to speak to the girl when she returned she could beg her. Or bribe her. Anything to keep her baby secret.

But the girl didn't return. After a while, the woman who had paid her debt became restless and stood to leave. Mama's tone was muted fury.

"Sit. Wait." To Ogechi, "Go and get the wig, and tell that girl that if I see her again I will have her heart." Mama wasn't accustomed to being disobeyed.

Ogechi hurried to the shop expecting to find the girl agape at the sight of her strange, fibrous child. But the girl wasn't there. The wig she'd been asked to bring was on the floor, and there, on the ledge where it had been, was the baby. Ogechi pushed it behind another wig and ran the first wig back to Mama, who insisted that the woman take it. Then Mama charged her, holding out her hand for payment. The woman hesitated, but paid. Mama gave nothing for free.

The assistant did not return to the Emporium, and Ogechi worried that she'd gone to call some elder mothers for counsel. But no one stormed the shop, and when Ogechi stepped outside after closing there was no mob gathered to dispense judgment. The second assistant left as soon as Mama permitted her to, calling for the first one over and over. Ogechi retrieved the baby and went home.

In her room, Ogechi tried to feed the child, but the hair rolled off its face. She tried again, selecting the strands and clumps it usually favored, but it rejected them all.

"What do you want?" Ogechi asked. "Isn't this hair good enough for you?" This was said with no malice, and she leaned in to kiss the baby's belly. It was warm, and Ogechi drew back from the unexpected heat.

"What have you got there?" she asked, a rhetorical question to which she did not expect an answer. But then the baby laughed, and Ogechi recognized the sound. It was the snicker she heard whenever she tripped over discarded towels or dropped the broom with her clumsy hands. It was the snicker she'd heard when Mama cracked her across the face at the eatery.

Ogechi distanced herself even more, and the child struggled to watch her, eventually rolling onto its side. It stilled when she stilled, and so Ogechi stopped moving, even after a whir of snores signalled the child's sleep.

Should she call for help? Or tell Mama? Help from whom? Tell Mama what, exactly? Ogechi weighed her options till sleep weighed her lids. Soon, too soon, it was morning.

The baby was crying, hungry. Ogechi neared it with caution. When it saw her, the texture of its cry softened and—Ogechi couldn't help it—she softened, too. It was hers, wasn't it? For better or for ill, the child was hers. She tried feeding it the hairs again, but it refused them. It did, however, nip hard at Ogechi's fingers, startling her. She hadn't given it any teeth.

She wanted more than anything to leave the child in her room, but the strangeness of its cries might draw attention. She bundled it up, trembling at the warmth of its belly. It latched on to her nape with a powerful suction that blurred her vision. This is the sort of thing a mother should do for her child, Ogechi told herself, resisting the urge to yank the baby off her neck. A mother should give all of herself to her child, even if it requires the marrow in her bones. Especially a child like this, strong and sleek and shimmering.

After a few minutes, the sucking eased to something manageable, the child sated.

At the Emporium, Ogechi kept the child with her, worried that it would cry if she removed it. Besides, the brash assistant who had tried to uncover the child was no longer at the shop, and Ogechi knew that she would never return. The other assistant was red-eyed and sniffling, unable to stop even after Mama gave her dirty looks. By lockup, Ogechi's head was throbbing, and she trembled with exhaustion. She wanted to get home and pry the baby off her. She was anticipating the relief of that when the remaining assistant said, "Why have you not asked after her?"

"Who?" Stupid answer, she thought as soon as she uttered it.

"What do you mean who? My cousin that disappeared. Why haven't you

wondered where she is? Even Mama has been asking people about her."

"I didn't know you were cousins."

The girl recognized Ogechi's evasion.

"You know what happened to her, don't you? What did you do?"

The answer came out before Ogechi could stop it.

"The same thing I will do to you," she said, and the assistant took a step back, then another, before turning to run.

At home, Ogechi put the child to bed and stared until it slept. She felt its belly, which was cooling now, and recoiled at the thought of what could be inside. Then it gasped a little hairy gasp from its little hairy mouth, and Ogechi felt again a mother's love.

"Police! Nobody moo!"

• •

The next morning, it was Ogechi's turn to open the store, and she went in early to bathe the baby with Mama's fine shampoo, sudsing its textured face, avoiding the bite of that hungry, hungry mouth. She was in the middle of rinsing off the child when the other assistant entered. She retreated in fear at first, but then she took it all in—Ogechi at the sink, Mama's prized shampoo on the ledge, suds covering mother-knows-what—and she turned sly, running outside and shouting for Mama. Knowing that it was no use calling after her, Ogechi quickly wrapped the baby back up in her old torn-up dress, knocking over the shampoo in her haste. That was when Mama walked in.

"I hear you are washing something in my sink." Mama looked at the spilled bottle, then back at Ogechi. "You are doing your laundry in my place?"

"I'm sorry, Mama."

"How sorry are you, Ogechi, my dear?" Mama said, calculating. "Are you sorry enough to give me some of that happiness? So that we can forget all this?"

There was no need for a song now, as there was no new child to be blessed. Mama simply stretched her hand forward and held on, but what she thought was Ogechi's shoulder was the head of the swaddled child.

Mama fell to the ground in undignified shudders. Her eyes rolled, as if she were trying to see everything at once. Ogechi fled. She ran all the way home, and, even through her panic, she registered the heat of the child in her arms, like the just-stoked embers of a fire. In her room, she threw the child into its bed, expecting to see whorls of burned flesh on her arms but finding none. She studied the baby, but it didn't look any different. It was still a dense tangle of dark fibre with the occasional streak of red. She didn't touch it, even when the mother in her urged her to. At any moment, Mama would show up with her goons, and Ogechi was too frightened to think of much else. But Mama didn't appear, and she fell asleep waiting for the pounding at her door.

Ogechi woke in the middle of the night with the hair child standing over her. It should not have been able to stand, let alone haul itself onto her bed. Nor should it have been able to fist her hair in a grip so tight her scalp puckered or stuff an appendage into her mouth to block her scream. She tried to tear it apart, but the seams held. Only when she rammed it into the wall did it let go. It skittered across the room and hid somewhere that the candle she lit couldn't reach. Ogechi backed toward the door, listening, but what noise does hair make?

When the hair child jumped onto Ogechi's head, she shrieked and shook herself, but it gripped her hair again, tighter this time. She then did something that would follow her all her days. She raised the candle and set it on fire. And when the baby fell to the ground, writhing, she covered it with a pot and held it down, long after her fingers had blistered from the heat, until the child, as tough as she'd made it, stopped moving.

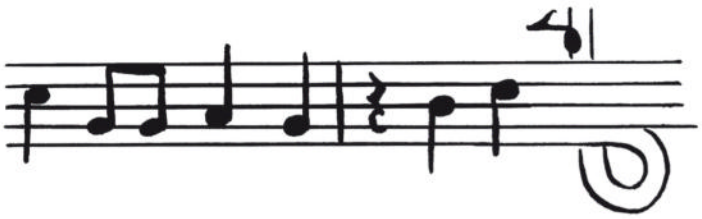
Outside, she sat on the little step in front of the entrance to her apartment. No one had paid any mind to the noise—this wasn't the sort of building where one checked up on screams. Knees to her chin, Ogechi sobbed into the calloused skin, feeling part relief, part something else—a sliver of empathy Mama hadn't been able to steal. There was so much dirt on the ground, so much of it everywhere, all around her. When she turned back into the room and lifted the pot, she saw all those pretty, shiny strands transformed into ash. Then she scooped dirt into the pot and added water.

This she knew. How to make firm clay—something she was born to do. When the mix was just right, she added a handful of the ashes. Let this child be born in sorrow, she told herself. Let this child live in sorrow. Let this child not grow into a foolish, hopeful girl with joy to barter. Ogechi formed the head, the arms, the legs. She gave it her mother's face. In the morning, she would fetch leaves to protect it from the rain. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Lesley Nneka Arimah on imagining a universe of handcrafted babies.

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAKING THE CASE

"Bridge of Spies" and "Truth."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Steven Spielberg film, "Bridge of Spies," begins with a man in a mirror. The man is Colonel Rudolf Abel (Mark Rylance), and we see three versions of him in one frame: Abel himself, holding a brush; his reflected image; and a self-portrait that he is carefully painting, in oils. The whole thing is not just a dazzling composition with which to kick off a movie but a formal introduction to the world of espionage—a haven for multiple identities. The year is 1957, the winter solstice of the Cold War, and Abel is a Soviet spy. He lives in Brooklyn, and art is both his hobby and his cover story; he sets up an easel beside the Manhattan Bridge and, after a while, feels the underside of the bench on which he sits. There, stuck fast, is a nickel, which he takes home and slits open, like a chocolate penny, along the rim. Inside is a folded slip of paper, covered with code. We are only minutes into the movie, but anyone with a soft spot for tradecraft will already be melting with fascination. Abel, however, has been rumbled. The F.B.I., having observed him as fixedly as we have, bursts in and arrests him. The guy needs legal representation, but who will be man enough, or dumb enough, to defend a Red Menace at a time like this?

Enter James B. Donovan (Tom Hanks). He is an insurance lawyer, but he was on the prosecuting team at the Nuremberg trials, and his peers in the Brooklyn Bar Association have picked him for this thankless task. In the course of it, he will be hectored, repudiated, and gazed at with loathing on the subway; the house where he and his wife, Mary (Amy Ryan), live with their children will be shot at; and he will spend a night in a foreign jail. Nonetheless, by asserting the right of the accused to a fair trial he will uphold the Constitution—or, as he calls it, "the rule book." In short, the role of Donovan verges on the saintly, and it is Hanks alone who stops it from tipping over. He unstiffens his lines, so that a statement like "The next mistake our countries make could be the last one," which lesser performers would intone with thin lips and a set jaw, is made to sound as if it just occurred to him, with a rising tone on "last." Hanks, often musing and always half-amused, hails from the grand rank of actors, like Henry Fonda, Jimmy Stewart, and Joel McCrea, who have mastered the ungrand. They make us believe that oratory, done right, belongs at the dinner table, or behind the counter of a store.

Donovan is not surprised when his client is found guilty, but, rather than quit the field, he battles on: first, by convincing the judge (Dakin Matthews) that imprisonment is more fitting than the death penalty, and, second, by taking the case to the Supreme Court. Donovan's argument is that Abel is not a traitor but a loyal servant of his country, even if that country is a sworn foe of the United States, and that America has a chance to show its moral colors by treating him as equitably as it would one of its own citizens. (Public opinion, the film implies, is against that basic privilege. Even some other lawyers reckon that it's time to let the matter drop.) But Donovan makes a further point. Imagine, he says, if an American were to be captured by the Soviet Union. Might Abel not prove handy as a bargaining chip? And lo, it comes to pass. A U-2 spy plane is shot down in Soviet airspace, and the pilot, Francis Gary Powers (Austin Stowell), bails out. He is tried, convicted, and interrogated. Each nation now has a man with a head full of sensitive information being held by the other side, and Allen Dulles (Peter McRobbie), the director of the C.I.A., asks Donovan to go to Berlin and arrange a swap. Game on.

All this is recorded history, one of the best recorders being Donovan, whose 1964 book "Strangers on a Bridge" guides us through the saga with a dry and courtly wisdom. ("When a judge compliments you, it usually means you have lost.") It's instructive to see how his account has been crunched and compacted into the screenplay for "Bridge of Spies," which is by Joel and Ethan Coen, in consort with Matt Charman. This is the first occasion on which the Coen Bros. have worked with Spielberg, and it's a happy merger. You feel a certain tautening of wit, plus a keen and very Coen-like awareness that clichés, which abound in the genre of the spy drama, are there to be flirted with.

Hence a fine scene of Donovan, complete with umbrella and hat, being trailed through the rainy darkness by a similar figure, and crouching down to hide beside a car—a maneuver that gets him precisely nowhere. Then, in Berlin, there is a gang of East German youths whom Donovan encounters in the snow. On the page, he marches through them, but the screenplay adds a mean little twist, by having them issue a threatening demand for his overcoat. He removes it, and spends the rest of the movie with a foul cold. My only regret is that "Bridge of Spies" could not find room for Abel's cellmate, Vincent J. Squillante, the king of the garbage racket in New York. The spy taught French, apparently, to the Mafia hood. How do you persuade the Coens, connoisseurs of human mismatching, to leave *that* out?

There is a curious sense of well-being in settling down to "Bridge of Spies." To

ABOVE: TAMARA SHOPSIN

Tom Hanks is a lawyer who defends a Soviet agent in Steven Spielberg's film, written by Matt Charman and the Coen Bros.

ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVIER BALEZ

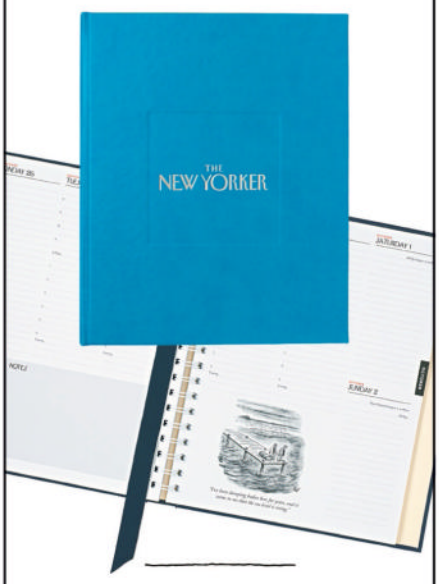
Written by Teens • Our 27th Year
"The New Yorker for teens"
-VOYA
Teen Ink
A literary magazine written by teens
fiction • nonfiction • poetry
reviews • opinions • art

Subscribe at TeenInk.com • 800-363-1986

one-bag travel
TOM BIHN
WWW.TOMBIHN.COM


Our financial times are uncertain, but your municipal bond portfolio need not be.
MMB Metrix
Protect against the downside™
Discover how.
Visit mmbmetrix.com or call (215) 591-2515.

Hot Tubs for Apartments!
Easily fits through doors and into elevators.
110V standard outlet • jets or soaker
Perfect hot tub for city living.
Hot and Cold Waterworks
furohealth.com • 888.364.8827


ADVERTISEMENT
2016
NEW YORKER
DESK DIARY


View all ten colors online at
newyorkerstore.com/diaries
or call 800-459-3037 to order

place yourself in the hands of Spielberg and Hanks is to be assured of a tale solidly told, however bitter the anxieties of the historical setting. Is it possible, however, that the solid might congeal into the stolid and the dull? Well, the title is a drag, though I guess that "Bridge of the Extremely Capable Insurance Lawyer" would have been too much of a mouthful. And, while Spielberg has shifted in his choice of composer, from John Williams to Thomas Newman, the shift is not far enough. He should have taken his cue from Otto Preminger, who leavened "Anatomy of a Murder," his courtroom masterwork of 1959, with the music of Duke Ellington. We even saw the Duke onscreen, playing piano with Jimmy Stewart. The lilt and the kick of the soundtrack didn't compromise that movie. They gave it cool.

"Bridge of Spies" ain't got that swing, so what's it all about? It's not about the U-2 missions, and certainly not about Powers, who comes across as a lunk. Nor, despite the set pieces in court, is it about the majesty of the law. No, the core of this movie is a standoff every bit as keyed up, and as gripping, as anything on the muffled streets of Berlin. What we thrill to is Rylance versus Hanks: the British actor, lauded for his stage appearances, but barely known to cinema audiences, up against the consummate Hollywood pro. You can see them prowling, probing, and wondering what the next move will be—or, in Hanks's case, wondering whether Rylance will move at all. Admirers of "Wolf Hall," on PBS, will have noted him as Thomas Cromwell, standing like a statue in the shadows, and realized, to their discomfort, that they could not look away. He does the same thing here, as Abel; we watch him watching everybody else, as if life were an infinity of spies. "You don't seem alarmed," Donovan says when they first meet, and Abel replies with a gentle question: "Would it help?" The Coens turn that into a refrain that beats through the movie, growing wryer and funnier each time—right up to the fidgety finale, where Abel is the calmest man in sight. You might suggest that "Bridge of Spies" plays everything a touch safe, and that its encomium to American decency need not be quite so persistent. But when a film is as enjoyable as this one, its timing so sweet, and its atmosphere conjured with such skill, do you really wish to register a complaint? Would it help?

Call a movie "Truth," and you're asking for trouble. That is the risk run by James Vanderbilt, who has written and directed a film of that title, about the crisis that hit CBS's "60 Minutes" in 2004. The nub is an investigation, presented by Dan Rather (Robert Redford), into the circumstances surrounding George W. Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard. By the end of the ensuing farrago, as the producer of the show, Mary Mapes (Cate Blanchett), points out, the central question—did Bush get an easy ride, insuring that he would never be sent to Vietnam?—has been all but obscured in a blizzard of extraneous details. Mapes is snowed under, and, together with Rather and other CBS employees, she endures the consequences. "You're being terminated," her boss says. Hasta la vista, Mary.

The weirdness of "Truth"—and, I fear, its involuntary comic value—arises from a disparity between the sparse and finicky minutiae of the narrative and the somewhat bouffant style of the presentation. As the program airs, those who have toiled on it are seen smiling in proud slow motion, while ordinary folk, all across the nation, in bars and in living rooms, stare up at their TV screens as if witnessing the descent of the Messiah. Later, when the report unravels, along with Mapes's sang-froid, the film offers up as tear-streaked tragedy what is, in fact, a cautionary tale about photocopying, the moral being that you should check your information at the source. Vanderbilt has marshalled his material with scrupulous care, as he did when he wrote the script for David Fincher's "Zodiac," so how come that movie was twenty times more riveting? Partly because of Fincher's scary visual command, and because deaths rather than deadlines were at stake, but also, I suspect, because the new film clings to the nagging thought that if the National Guard story *had* held firm the Presidential election—and thus recent history—might have followed a different path. Who can tell? The path of wishful thinking, though, leads awfully close to mush. ♦

BOOKS

SHOT IN THE HEART

When Yitzhak Rabin was killed, did the prospects for peace perish, too?

BY DEXTER FILKINS

A. ABBAS/MAGNUM

A portrait of Rabin at the November 12, 1995, memorial ceremonies in Tel Aviv.

Assassination is an unpredictable act. Historically speaking, high-profile political killings have been as likely to produce backlashes and unintended consequences as they have been to achieve the assassin's goal, if he had one. When Lee Harvey Oswald killed President Kennedy, the result was an outpouring of national soul-searching, which Lyndon Johnson took advantage of to push civil-rights and Great Society legislation through Congress. When Syrians conspired to murder Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese President, in 2005, the result was not continued Syrian domination of Lebanon but a national uprising followed by a humiliating evacuation of Assad's forces.

Yet the killing of Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister, in 1995, by Yigal Amir, an Israeli extremist, bids to be one of history's most effective political murders. Two years earlier, Rabin, setting aside a lifetime of enmity, appeared on the White House lawn with Yasir Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization and a former terrorist, to agree to a framework for limited Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories; the next year, somewhat less painfully, he returned to the White House, with Jordan's King Hussein, to officially end a forty-six-year state of war. Within months of Rabin's death, Benjamin Netanyahu was the new Prime Minister and the prospects for a wider-ranging peace in the Middle East, which had seemed in Rabin's grasp, were dead, too. Twenty years later, Netanyahu is into his fourth term, and the kind of peace that Rabin envisaged seems more distant than ever.

The story of Rabin's assassination, told in "Killing a King" (Norton), by the journalist Dan Ephron, inevitably raises the question of what might have been. At the time of his death, Rabin showed every intention of trying to forge a broader peace that would have included ceding most of the occupied territories to the Palestinians, and probably would have resulted in the establishment of an independent state.

Rabin, who was seventy-three when he died, spent most of his life fighting the Palestinians. Born in British-ruled Palestine, he was brought up by secular, socialist immigrants from Eastern Europe. His mother, Rosa, was one of the most important female Zionist leaders of her time; she was apparently so consumed with the cause that Rabin grew up feeling mostly alone. The experience, according to one of his biographers, Dan Kurzman, may have contributed to his intense self-containment, which often made him seem aloof. (Once, at the White House, Jimmy Carter asked him if he would like to listen to his daughter, Amy, play the piano. Rabin replied that he would not.)

When he was a teen-ager, Rabin joined the Palmach, a commando unit of the Haganah, the Zionist militia, and was twenty-five when, in 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine. The partition plan demarcated the boundaries of Jewish and Arab territories; the U.N. envisioned a two-state solution from the start. This led, in May, 1948, to the founding of Israel, which prompted a full-scale attack by the armies of the surrounding Arab states. In battle against the Arabs (and, before that, the British), Rabin proved himself to be a daring and courageous fighter. But he also took part in the expulsion of some fifty thousand Palestinian residents from the towns of Lydda and Ramle, situated between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Several hundred villagers were shot during that operation, part of a wider exodus of Palestinians from the new Jewish state. Rabin was also involved in a bloody, and eerily foreboding, incident that took place within weeks of independence, and involved the Irgun, an extremist guerrilla group that had broken off from the Haganah. When a cargo ship carrying weapons for the Irgun tried to dock, Rabin, then a commander in the newly formed Israeli Defense Forces, ordered the soldiers to open fire. Sixteen Irgun fighters were killed; the group's leader, Menachem Begin—later the Prime Minister—was carried ashore by his men.

After independence, Rabin focussed on building the I.D.F.; his animating vision—like that of many Israeli leaders

since—was that peace would be possible only when Israel achieved military superiority over any combination of Arab foes. As a commander, Rabin felt responsible for the lives of his soldiers; he was also physically repelled by the sight of blood. In the run-up to the Six-Day War, in 1967, as the Arab armies were gathering to attack Israel, Rabin, at that time the I.D.F. chief of staff, suffered a nervous collapse. He considered stepping down, but pulled himself together and oversaw Israel's sweeping victory. "I had to hold his balls," his deputy, Ezer Weizman, said. The Six-Day War made Rabin a national hero, and left Israel in possession of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, parts of Syria, and more than a million Palestinians.

Ephron's book doesn't speculate about the degree to which Rabin, in his early years, might have imagined the possibility of a broader peace. He and the Labor Party governments bear nearly as much responsibility as their Likud successors for expanding settlements in the West Bank. Nor does the younger Rabin appear to have considered the likelihood of a Palestinian state. In the late nineteen-eighties, when he was the Minister of Defense, he presided over the response to the first intifada—a full-scale Palestinian uprising—during which he was quoted as ordering the I.D.F. to "break the bones" of protesters. (Rabin denied saying this.) For most of his career, he regarded the P.L.O., which had carried out bus bombings and plane hijackings, as "liars and bastards." But the experience of the intifada seems to have convinced him that the status quo was unsustainable. "I've learned something in the past two and a half months," Rabin told a group of Labor Party colleagues in 1988. "Among other things, that you can't rule by force over one and a half million Palestinians."

The chance to break with the status quo didn't come until the early nineteen-nineties, when a semi-official group of Israelis, on the initiative of Norway's deputy foreign minister, reached a tentative understanding with P.L.O. representatives regarding what amounted to a plan for limited Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and part of the West Bank. (Rabin considered most of the settlers who began streaming into the West Bank shortly after the Six-Day War to be misguided, along with government programs designed to encourage them. He did think that some outposts were essential to Israeli security, and therefore important to hold on to.) Rabin, who had become Prime Minister for a second time in 1992, wasn't told of the Oslo talks until the preliminary teams had agreed to the rudiments of a deal.

Rabin went forward, despite his deep mistrust of Arafat. The Palestinian leader was living in Tunis, having been expelled from Jordan in 1970 and from Lebanon in 1982, following the Israeli invasion. Rabin deputized Shimon Peres, his Foreign Minister and longtime rival, to help bring the deal to fruition. Viewed in retrospect, the audacity of the agreements that came out of Oslo was breathtaking: Arafat and the P.L.O. would recognize Israel's right to exist, and Israel would withdraw from Gaza and seven cities of the West Bank, and also allow limited self-rule and the creation of an elected parliament—what we now know as the Palestinian Authority. A majority of Israelis supported the deal, but Rabin clearly had to rely on his reputation as a hawkish military man to reassure them. He was a kind of Israeli Nixon (the two men liked each other); at least in domestic political terms, he had far more leeway to bring about a comprehensive peace than some of his more dovish colleagues might have had. (Rabin may have favored giving the Palestinians their own state, but, if so, he never said so publicly.)

On September 13, 1993, the day of the agreement ceremony at the White House, there were detailed discussions about everything from Arafat's attire (no gun allowed) to what would happen if he tried to embrace his Israeli counterparts. (He didn't.) In a photograph from that day of Rabin and Arafat shaking hands in front of President Bill Clinton, Arafat, whom the White House regarded as a terrorist for most of his career, seems overjoyed. Rabin is practically grimacing. After the handshake, Rabin turned to Peres and said, "Your turn now."

It was a happy story—indeed, as it turned out, a little too happy. The Oslo Accords prompted an unprecedented wave of terrorist attacks by Palestinian groups like Hamas, which sought to inflame the Israeli public and scuttle the deal. But, rather more unexpectedly, the accords ignited a groundswell of animosity from right-wing Israelis, who feared that Rabin intended to give the Palestinians their own state and carry out widespread evacuations of settlements. (At the time that the Oslo Accords were signed, about a quarter of a million Israelis had moved into the West Bank and East Jerusalem.) While many of the deal's opponents invoked religious justifications for maintaining Israel's hold on the territories it acquired in the Six-Day War, a large number of the opponents were secular. What united the two groups was their rejection of the notion that any conquered territory should be turned over to the Palestinians, even in the interests of peace.

Yigal Amir was not a settler; he was a law student from the coastal city of Herzliya and the son of ultra-Orthodox Yemeni immigrants. As the Oslo process gathered steam, Amir became increasingly convinced that Rabin was selling out the Israelis and, in particular, the settlers; he organized rallies in the occupied territories to denounce the agreements and even tried to start his own militia. Drawing on tapes and transcripts of Amir's detailed and unabashed confession, Ephron carefully reconstructs the journey from disgruntled right-wing activist to murderous fanatic. The seed for the assassination was planted about a year before it was carried out, when Amir, quite unexpectedly, spotted Rabin at the wedding of a friend in Tel Aviv. He was stunned at how close he could get to the Prime Minister—and with a pistol "jammed in his belt." Amir vowed never to let the chance slip away again. "Someday I will be sorry if I do not kill him," he told himself.

The milieu of right-wing religious

nationalists that Amir inhabited will be familiar to anyone who follows the news in Israel today, but it's striking to see that it was so fully developed two decades ago. Though Amir discussed his plans only with his brother, Hagai, and a friend, he spoke openly and often about the need for Rabin to be killed, and many of his friends and fellow-students had heard him proclaim that he wanted to be the one to kill him. Israeli security forces, focussed on Palestinian terrorism, devoted scant resources to tracking Israeli extremists. Agents of the Shin Bet, the internal-security service, were aware of ominous chatter in extremist circles, but they were not prepared for the threat.

They should have been: little more than a year earlier, Baruch Goldstein, a resident of an isolated West Bank settlement called Kiryat Arba, walked into a mosque at the Cave of the Patriarchs, a contested holy site in the Palestinian city of Hebron, and killed twenty-nine worshippers and wounded a hundred and twenty-five before being beaten to death. Goldstein became a folk hero to many people in the settler community. After the massacre, Rabin considered dismantling a nearby settlement, Tel Rumeida. But settler leaders warned him that such an action could provoke an armed reaction, and a former chief Ashkenazi rabbi commanded Israeli Army soldiers to disobey an evacuation order. Rabin backed down.

The Shin Bet kept a file on Amir that contained no more than a few sentences. Much of the agency's information on extremist groups was provided by a paid informant, Avishai Raviv, who often joined rallies and told police that he had beaten Palestinian civilians and other backers of the peace process. In the months leading up to the assassination, Raviv heard Amir vow to kill Rabin several times, but apparently did not take him seriously. A former intelligence officer whose girlfriend travelled in the same circles as Amir learned that he was planning to kill Rabin, but didn't turn him in.

In the weeks leading up to Rabin's murder, three extremist rabbis from the West Bank issued a written opinion suggesting that it would be acceptable to kill Rabin, on the ground that he had betrayed the Jewish people. The rabbis based their justification on the concept of *din rodef*, a Hebrew term that describes a person who is stalking a defenseless man. ("*Rodef*" means "pursuer" in Hebrew.) Under certain interpretations of the Talmud, it is obligatory to kill a *rodef* in order to save the intended victim. Amir later told his interrogators that he had consulted several rabbis in search of an official sanction but could never find one. (His brother, Hagai, insisted that he had.) As Ephron points out, it apparently never occurred to Amir that he himself was a *rodef*.

As the Oslo Accords unfolded, and the terror attacks continued, Israeli public opinion began to shift from hope to fear. Rabin and Arafat now saw themselves as partners in a perilous endeavor. Whereas Rabin had once mistrusted Arafat, he now believed Arafat's claims, buttressed by the Israeli intelligence services, that he was unable to stop Hamas. (Rabin believed that if Arafat did not prevail Hamas would.) In Israel, the extreme wing of the anti-Oslo coalition capitalized on the rising insecurity to excoriate Rabin; some protesters began comparing him to Hitler. As Rabin and the Labor Party's fortunes sank, those of the Likud and its followers rose, and they stood by as Rabin was vilified. Ephron places Netanyahu at a rally, about a month before Rabin's murder, where crowds spent two hours chanting, "Death to Rabin." Netanyahu did nothing to discourage them.

On the day of his death, Rabin considered staying home from a peace rally, because he feared that he'd be embarrassed by a low turnout. The crowd, at Kings of Israel Square, in Tel Aviv, was enormous—about a hundred thousand people—dwarfing anything the anti-Oslo camp had put together. The main fear among the security services was a Palestinian suicide bomber; Rabin himself could not imagine that he would be killed by a Jew. Neither, apparently, could his bodyguards; when the moment came, Amir pushed through the crowd and shot Rabin twice in the back. Later that night, Amir asked the police for a glass of schnapps to toast the Prime Minister's death. Arafat, hearing of the assassination, wept.

The public revulsion at the news was overwhelming, but it did not translate into a victory for Rabin's

"So, you see, what you were really looking for was a deeper connection with your father, and not the dentist's office down the hall."

successor, Shimon Peres. Peres waited three months to call an election, figuring that he would first conclude a peace treaty with Syria. But a treaty never materialized, and Hamas kept attacking, while the Likud leader, Netanyahu, vowed to make Israelis safe. Under American pressure, Netanyahu paid lip service to Oslo during his first, three-year administration. But the peace process never really recovered.

It's jarring to contemplate the assassination of Rabin and then read Dennis Ross's "Doomed to Succeed" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), a detailed account of U.S.-Israeli relations since 1948. In four hundred-plus pages, there is almost no mention of the changes that have transformed the Israeli polity in the past six decades, and surprisingly little discussion of the steady growth in the settlement population, which now exceeds half a million. For Ross, who was the State Department's director of policy planning under President George H. W. Bush, the special Middle East coördinator under President Bill Clinton, and an adviser to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the settlements are evidently problematic only insofar as they present an obstacle to a smoothly functioning bilateral relationship. The United Nations and most foreign governments consider them illegal, but for him they are a political difficulty to be finessed. There is no talk of justice. Pressure on Israel—by Palestinians, by Europeans, by President Obama—appears to Ross bewildering and unreasonable.

Ross describes a situation, in 2010, when Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, refused to negotiate with Netanyahu unless he agreed to extend a moratorium on settlement construction, and the Obama Administration tried and failed to broker a compromise. His conclusion: Abbas "showed little flexibility and squandered the moratorium." And Ross criticizes President Obama for "putting the onus on Israel." This sort of analysis makes sense only if you regard the expansion of Israeli settlements and the Palestinian objections to them as morally equivalent.

Ross is as impatient with Palestinian efforts to gain a more sympathetic hearing at the United Nations and elsewhere as he is sensitive to the political needs of Israeli Prime Ministers. Yet he says almost nothing about the political realities that have shaped the situation, or how those realities might be changed. He evinces almost no sympathy for similar pressures on Abbas and others at the Palestinian Authority. Only near the end of the book does he bring himself to criticize Israel. Netanyahu's decision to accept an invitation from John Boehner to address the House of Representatives, thereby defying the White House and inserting himself in a domestic political debate, was, Ross says, "a mistake." He writes repeatedly that Israeli leaders will make concessions only when they feel secure. This may be true, but where does this leave American policy? And where does it leave Israel?

The highest compliment Ross seems able to pay an American President is to say that he is a "friend of Israel." But how can an American President help an ally steer away from a potentially disastrous course when that ally, by the nature of its own domestic politics, isn't able to do so by itself? Ross doesn't say.

It's tempting to speculate about whether Israel might have turned out differently had Rabin lived. Dan Ephron plainly thinks that it would have; he says that Rabin had made the fundamental decision to give up most of the occupied territories, even if he never explicitly said so. That meant, almost certainly, the creation of a Palestinian state, or something resembling one. Such a deal, Ephron says, would have "struck a blow for the pragmatists over the ideologues" and helped slow what he calls "the messianic drift" in Israeli society. "Had he lived," Ephron writes, "Rabin might plausibly have reshaped Israel broadly and permanently."

Ephron is probably right about Rabin making a deal, but he may be overstating the rest. For one thing, allowing for the creation of a Palestinian state, even in the late nineteen-nineties, would have been a politically explosive undertaking. There were some hundred and thirty thousand settlers in the West Bank then, and, even with the broad support of the Israeli public, the government would have had a very difficult time uprooting more than a handful of them. In 1994, after the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre, Rabin could not bring himself to order the removal of a single unauthorized enclave. In 2005, when the Israeli government, led by Ariel Sharon, the hard-bitten former general, ordered the evacuation of about eight thousand settlers from Gaza, their departure was accompanied by entrenched resistance and mass protests. With a broader peace deal, Rabin would have been in for a quite a fight.

And it's far from apparent how much even a comprehensive peace deal would have changed Israeli society. It might have helped open up Israel and the Palestinian areas to each other, but, at least in the short term, it would almost certainly not have brought peace. After all, the Oslo Accords brought more bloodshed, not less. It's not clear that even Rabin could have persevered.

More important, a deal with the Palestinians, even one that included substantial withdrawals from the occupied territories, would have done little to alter the demographic trends that have been reshaping Israeli politics and society; that is, the growth of the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox communities. In the twenty years since Rabin was killed, Israel has become more religious, more conservative, and, to borrow a word from Ephron, more "messianic." Rabin would have found himself increasingly among people to whom he had very little to say.

However slim the chances for a comprehensive peace agreement were in the nineteen-nineties, today they are effectively zero. Until recently, it was heretical to suggest that a two-state solution was implausible. Today, it seems nearly impossible to imagine one at all. What this portends for Israeli society may be disturbing—depending on which estimate you choose, the combined population of Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories will exceed the number of Jews there as soon as

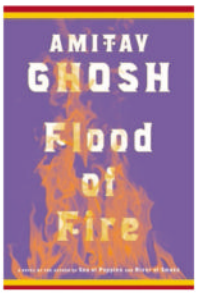
2020—but it doesn't make peace any more likely. There are now four hundred thousand settlers in the West Bank, and they are more powerful and more organized than they were when Rabin was killed. Since then, the Israeli center has moved steadily rightward; in 1996, when Yigal Amir was convicted, ten per cent of Israelis said that he should be released; in 2006, thirty per cent said so. (Amir's brother, Hagai, convicted for being an accomplice, is already out of prison and, as Ephron details, has slipped comfortably back into Israeli society.) Today, so-called price-tag attacks, which aim at punishing not only Palestinians but Israelis who try to impede settlement activity, have gained widespread acceptance in settler councils and are often protected by a popular refusal to coöperate with police. The extremists may still be a minority in the occupied territories, but no Israeli politician hoping to hold national office dares to confront them.

There isn't much reason to expect anyone in Washington to ride to the rescue. When Netanyahu, during his reëlection campaign earlier this year, declared that he would never allow a Palestinian state, he was scolded by the White House, and then reëlected to a fourth term. In September, President Obama, whom Netanyahu had humiliated in front of Congress only months before, invited him back to the White House.

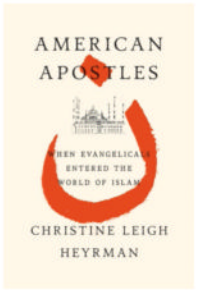
It's possible that the course of events in Israel and Palestine might be altered by some extraordinary act of leadership—by some Rabin we haven't met, or by some crisis we have not foreseen. But, for now, nothing like that seems remotely possible. Tolstoy posited that history is not made by individuals, that it is, rather, the continuously unfolding consequence of innumerable interconnected events. But, if the story of Yitzhak Rabin and Yigal Amir has anything to teach, it's that individuals matter. Rabin was the right man at the right time, and so, in his perverse way, was Yigal Amir. The opportunity that Rabin was trying to seize—however small—was there for a moment, and it may never come again. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

A MANUAL FOR CLEANING WOMEN, *by Lucia Berlin (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. Berlin died in 2004, in literary obscurity, but this new selection of short stories establishes her as a singular, remarkable writer worthy of a wide audience. Berlin led a hard life: she lived all over North and South America, bringing up four sons while working as a cleaning woman, an emergency-room nurse, and a high-school teacher. She also struggled with alcoholism, as do many of her literary creations. Her stories trace this life with precision and deadpan verve, as in "Tiger Bites," a stark, compassionate account of a journey to an illegal abortion clinic in Mexico, or "Strays," about a group of addicts bonding tentatively at a rehabilitation center until a pack of dogs stuck full of porcupine quills shows up.



FLOOD OF FIRE, *by Amitav Ghosh (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. The conclusion to Ghosh's Ibis Trilogy takes place in 1839, in the lead-up to the first Opium War. The plot follows the stories of several characters: a sepoy in the British East India Company; an Indian widow who seeks to retrieve the opium earnings owed to her husband; a cash-strapped American sailor who learns the opium trade while carrying on an affair with his boss's wife. Their paths converge aboard the Hind, a ship bound for China. Steeped in historical detail and peopled with vividly imagined characters, Ghosh's narrative dances between perspectives and charges toward an ending that takes place amid a haze of gunpowder.



AMERICAN APOSTLES, *by Christine Leigh Heyrman (Hill & Wang)*. Early in the nineteenth century, a band of New England Calvinists, certain that their religion was destined to conquer the globe, set off for the Muslim world. As this enthralling account shows, the evangelizing effort was a bust: believing that Islam thrived only through tyranny and ignorance, the Americans were shocked to discover a religion with as much heart, mind, and allure as their own. But the missionaries' impact was profound in the arena of public opinion, both American and Muslim. Heyrman traces their legacy to the present day, exploring a lingering rift within Evangelical Christianity, between those who came to have a respectful attitude toward Islam, and those who remained bent on its destruction.

WOMEN IN DARK TIMES, *by Jacqueline Rose (Bloomsbury)*. "We as women have been reasonable far too long," Rose writes toward the end of a provocative book that is divided into three sections: a biographical examination of the lives of three "suffering" women (Rosa Luxemburg, Charlotte Salomon, and Marilyn Monroe); an examination of honor killings and the limits of multiculturalism; and a celebration of three contemporary female artists whose creativity, Rose states, "simply emboldens me." With such wide-ranging contents, it's no surprise that the book feels disjointed. Nonetheless, it is a fierce call to action, as Rose challenges women to embrace a new feminism, one that "would have the courage of its contradictions."

BOOKS

HUMBOLDT'S GIFT

He was once the most celebrated naturalist in the world. What happened to him?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

Humboldt passed along his love for the natural world to his many admirers.

On September 14, 1869, the centenary of Alexander von Humboldt's birth was commemorated in New York—a city Humboldt had never visited—with a parade, a torchlight procession, a proclamation by the mayor, a formal banquet, and the unveiling of a bronze bust in Central Park. The following day, the *Times* devoted its entire front page to chronicling the festivities. The unveiling was scheduled for 2 P.M., but long before the appointed hour, the paper reported, "an immense throng of people had gathered," and when the statue was finally revealed "there were not less than 25,000 persons" in attendance. Flags waved from public buildings, military bands played, and homes were decorated with Humboldt's portrait. The whole city, according to the *Times*, "seemed to be in holiday dress."

In Boston, another city Humboldt had never set foot in, the centenary was marked with a two-hour address delivered by Louis Agassiz. This was attended by, among many others, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. After the address, the crowd retired to the Horticultural Hall, where a palm frond that had rested on Humboldt's coffin was displayed and, in the words of a *Times* correspondent, "an elegant collation was served." President Ulysses S. Grant attended the revelries in Pittsburgh, and former President Millard Fillmore presided over the ceremony in Buffalo. Similar commemorations were held in Albany, Chicago, Baltimore, Cleveland, Memphis, and San Francisco. Humboldt mania hit Melbourne and Moscow, not to mention Hamburg, Dresden, and Frankfurt. In Berlin—Humboldt's home town—eighty thousand people showed up to celebrate in the pouring rain.

What, exactly, was all the hoopla about? At a distance of almost a hundred and fifty years, it's hard to say, not just because Humboldt's individual triumphs have faded but because there were so many of them. In 1802, Humboldt climbed nineteen thousand four hundred feet up Chimborazo, in what's now Ecuador. At the time, the mountain was believed to be the tallest peak in the world, and nineteen thousand four hundred feet was the highest anyone had ever climbed. (In fact, Chimborazo is nowhere near the world's tallest mountain, although, owing to the globe's oblate spheroid shape, its peak is the farthest from the center of the earth.) Humboldt was, in this way, the Edmund Hillary of his generation. He was also a naturalist, an inventor, a prolific author, and a republican, in the French Revolutionary sense of the word. Several of his books became international best-sellers. Humboldt's writings on his adventures in South America inspired figures as diverse as Charles Darwin and Simón Bolívar, who called him the "discoverer of the New World." As one of his translators put it, "It would need another Humboldt to encompass such a life and its works."

But Humboldt was, by the time of his death, at the age of eighty-nine, already an anachronism—a generalist in a period of increasing specialization and a Romantic in the Victorian era. Those he influenced quickly went on to overshadow him. Just a few months after Humboldt's funeral, in May, 1859, "On the Origin of Species" came out. It upended the *Weltanschauung* that Humboldt had promoted, and his books began to fall out of print. (When I went to the nearest college library in search of some of his thirty-odd published works, all I found on the shelves was a desiccated edition from 1853.) By the time the bicentennial of his birth rolled around, in the English-speaking world, at least, Humboldt had been nearly forgotten.

As his sestercentennial approaches, a new biography has appeared—"The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World" (Knopf), by Andrea

ILLUSTRATION BY ATAK

Wulf, an author and design historian who lives in Britain. Wulf argues that Humboldt's long, eventful life deserves another look. Indeed, she maintains, the more damage that is done to the world he explored, the more relevant his ideas become.

Alexander von Humboldt was born to a wealthy family in the Prussia of Frederick the Great, and from an early age he chafed at the restrictions of upper-class life. Instead of applying himself to his lessons, like his dutiful older brother, Wilhelm, he roamed the woods, collecting herbs and insects; his parents nicknamed him, not altogether kindly, "the little apothecary." When Humboldt wrote letters from the family estate, Schloss Tegel, he sometimes used the tagline Schloss Langweil—"Castle of Boredom."

In his early twenties, Humboldt became friendly with Georg Forster, a German who had sailed to Tahiti with Captain Cook. Forster took Humboldt to London, where he introduced him to the naturalist Joseph Banks, who had also sailed with Cook, and who had assembled the world's largest collection of plant specimens. On the return trip, the pair stopped in Paris, where preparations were under way for the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille. Humboldt was hooked—on travel, on botany, on revolution—and he resolved to have his own Cook-like adventure. But Humboldt's mother—his father had died by then—had no interest in funding adventures. She wanted her son to become a bureaucrat. As a compromise, he agreed to study mining.

For the next half-decade, Humboldt worked as a mine inspector for the Prussian government. Dismayed by what he encountered, he used his own money to open a miners' school. He also invented a new kind of respirator, designed a better safety lamp, and published a book on subterranean flora. Meanwhile, he began to experiment, even on himself. Fascinated by the work of Luigi Galvani, who'd made animals' muscles jump by running a current through them, Humboldt cut open his back and stuck wires into the wounds. In the process of these gruesome probes—Humboldt wrote that he was starting to look like "a man who had been running the gauntlet"—he came close to creating the first electric battery. But he neglected to draw the crucial inferences from his own work, and the battery was instead invented, shortly afterward, by Alessandro Volta. According to Douglas Botting, the author of a 1973 biography, "Humboldt and the Cosmos," he "never forgave himself this failure."

The death of Humboldt's mother, in 1796, freed him from her disapproval and, at the same time, provided him with a fortune. He soon signed on to an around-the-world voyage being underwritten by the French government, but it was called off, when the government decided that it needed the money to fight the Austrians. Next, Humboldt set off for Madrid, where he managed to secure a meeting with the Spanish king Carlos IV. A well-known imbecile, Carlos seems to have imagined that sending a mining expert to the New World would yield new riches for the Crown. He gave Humboldt the go-ahead to travel anywhere he wanted in Spain's American colonies. Equipped with forty-two crates of scientific instruments, including a cyanometer, for measuring the blueness of the sky, Humboldt set sail. His goal, he wrote to a friend on the eve of the voyage, was to discover "the unity of nature."

This was either a very grand plan or no plan at all. Humboldt thought he was bound for Havana, but, because of a shipboard outbreak of typhoid, he ended up being deposited in Cumaná, in present-day Venezuela. Unfazed, he set off across the Llanos, the vast plain east of the Andes, where he was excited to encounter rivers filled with electric eels. Naturally, he decided to renew his experiments. "If by chance you get a shock before the fish is wounded, or exhausted by a long chase, the pain and numbness are so extreme that it is hard to describe the nature of the sensation," he observed.

From the Llanos, Humboldt travelled by canoe along the Rio Apure and the Orinoco. The heat was unbearable and the mosquitoes were worse. "People who have not navigated the great rivers of equinoctial America can scarcely conceive how, at every instant, without intermission, you may be tormented by insects flying in the air," Humboldt wrote. Nevertheless, he was enchanted. Jaguars, tapirs, and peccaries came down to the river to drink:

> They are not frightened of the canoes, so we see them skirting the river until they disappear into the jungle through a gap in the hedge. I confess that these often repeated scenes greatly appeal to me. The pleasure comes not solely from the curiosity a naturalist feels for the objects of his studies, but also from a feeling common to all men brought up in the customs of civilization. You find yourself in a new world, in a wild, untamed nature. . . . All kinds of animals appear, one after the other. "Es como en el paraíso" ("It is like paradise"), our old Indian pilot said.

A year and a half after leaving Europe, Humboldt finally made it to Havana. He was planning to sail from there to Mexico when, once again, chance intervened. Humboldt read in a newspaper that the French expedition he'd hoped to join had set off after all, and was on its way to Australia. He reasoned that the expedition would stop in Lima before crossing the Pacific, and decided to catch up with it there. This entailed sailing back to South America, to Cartagena, then trekking across the Andes, a journey of some twenty-five hundred miles. When Humboldt reached Quito, nine months later, he learned that the French expedition had travelled in the opposite direction, around the Cape of Good Hope. "Any other man would have despaired," Wulf notes. Humboldt's response was to climb Chimborazo.

He ended up spending five years in South America. Everywhere he went, he took measurements with his instruments, at least those which hadn't been lost on the Orinoco or smashed in the Andes. These led him to the concept of isotherms—lines connecting points on a map with the same average temperature—and to the discovery of the magnetic equator: the line along which earth's magnetic field is parallel to its surface. By the time the trip was over, he'd collected some sixty thousand plant specimens. He'd also become convinced of the sophistication of South America's pre-Columbian cultures and of the evils of slavery, which he felt obligated to publicize.

"It is for the traveler who has been an eyewitness of the degradation of human nature, to make the complaints of the unfortunate reach the ear of those by whom they can be relieved," he wrote. On his way back to Europe, Humboldt stopped in Washington, D.C., where he met with President Thomas Jefferson. Humboldt sometimes referred to himself as "half American," and was initially

a big admirer of the American experiment. But, as the decades wore on, he grew disenchanted. In the eighteen-fifties, he told the *Times'* correspondent in Germany, "I don't like the present position of your politics. The influence of slavery is increasing, I fear. So, too, is the mistaken view of Negro inferiority."

The trip to South America had cost Humboldt much of his fortune. Publishing his findings cost him the remainder. Settling in Paris, he wrote and wrote—about his personal experiences, about the landscape he had seen, about the plants he'd collected, about the people and politics of the Spanish colonies. (Humboldt was such a Francophile that he wrote in French rather than in his native German.) His books, much like his travels, were full of energy but, at the same time, unfocussed and digressive.

"You write endlessly," Humboldt's good friend and possible romantic interest, the astronomer François Arago, told him. "But what comes out of it is not a book, but a portrait without a frame." (Humboldt never married, and it's often speculated that he was gay, though how many—if any—of his intense relationships were sexual is unknown.) Humboldt hired a small army of artists and engravers to illustrate his works. As a consequence, they were phenomenally expensive; in the U.S., a complete edition cost two thousand dollars—something like thirty thousand dollars in today's money. According to Botting, "Not even Humboldt could afford to possess a set."

As he scribbled away, Humboldt continued to search for the elusive "unity of nature." He visited with the naturalists Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Georges Cuvier, at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris. He helped Joseph Louis Gay-Lussac with his pioneering studies of the behavior of gases. He assisted Arago with his experiments at the Paris Observatory. "Humboldt dashed from one meeting to another and from one dinner to the next," Wulf reports. Some evenings, he attended as many as five salons. He was known around Paris for his good looks, his breadth of knowledge, and his volubility. A pianist who was asked to perform for him at a party described the invitation as a highlight of his career. But as soon as he started to play, the pianist complained, Humboldt "began to hold forth" and did not shut up for the entire piece.

In 1827, after Humboldt had been living in Paris for more than two decades, the king of Prussia, now Frederick the Great's grandnephew, insisted that he return to Berlin. By this time, Humboldt depended on a stipend from the king to pay his expenses, so he had no choice but to agree. (It was an irony not unremarked upon by his contemporaries that the great champion of freedom was reduced to being a courtier.) Humboldt had been back in the city for only a few months when he decided to deliver a series of lectures on the theme of, well, everything. He expatiated on meteorology, geology, plant geography, and ocean currents, as well as on fossils, magnetism, astronomy, human migration, and poetry. The lectures, originally given at the University of Berlin, proved so popular that Humboldt delivered them all over again, in a concert hall. There was such a crush to get into the hall that, on the days when he spoke, traffic in the neighborhood practically ground to a halt. He was offered a big advance to publish the talks, but turned it down in order to rewrite them, a process that ended up taking him two decades. The first volume of the resulting work, "Kosmos," was a huge hit, the second even huger. Booksellers in Hamburg and Vienna pirated shipments to make sure their shelves were stocked. Humboldt delivered the fifth and final installment of "Kosmos" just a few days before he died.

Almost no one actually reads Humboldt anymore. Still, according to his admirers, he has never ceased to be relevant, though the reasons for this have varied over time. During the Weimar Republic, Humboldt was celebrated as a progressive thinker. Then, during the Third Reich, he became the explorer who established German claims in Latin America. In East Germany, he was the revolutionary who labored on behalf of ordinary miners. After reunification, he was recast as a global citizen.

The latest variation on this theme is the green Humboldt. As Nicolaas Rupke, a historian of science at Washington and Lee University, puts it in "Alexander von Humboldt: A Metabiography" (2008), "Humboldt-the-environmentalist" is now "part of the standard narrative."

This is what Andrea Wulf sees as Humboldt's claim on our attention. Long before the advent of chainsaws, she notes, he was warning about the dangers of deforestation. And, already in the early nineteenth century, he recognized a connection between forest health and hydrology; when trees were cut down, he observed, evaporation from the soil increased, and the area dried out. "As Humboldt described how humankind was changing the climate, he unwittingly became the father of the environmental movement," Wulf writes. In her view, he "invented the web of life, the concept of nature as we know it today."

Humboldt's love for and fascination with the natural world certainly were profound. And that love, which animated his writings, was passed on to his many devoted fans. When, for example, Thoreau climbed Mt. Wachusett, he claimed to be "with Humboldt" as he "measured the more modern Andes." (Mt. Wachusett, north of Worcester, has an elevation of two thousand and six feet.)

But Humboldt waxed poetic about many subjects, and the green Humboldt probably reflects our priorities at least as much as it does his. Among Humboldt's many gifts was that of self-knowledge. He recognized that he had spread himself too thin, that in all his travels and experiments and books and lectures there had been no single great insight or discovery that changed man's view of the cosmos. What he offered the world was his enthusiasm, which, if a frail basis for an intellectual history, is nonetheless a deeply appealing trait.

"In eight days of reading books, one couldn't learn as much as what he gives you in an hour," Goethe said of Humboldt, whom he counted as a good friend. When Darwin finished his own Humboldtian travelogue, "The Voyage of the Beagle," he nervously sent his hero a copy. "You have an excellent future ahead of you," the older man reassured him.

"My life has been useful to science less through the little I have contributed myself than through my efforts to let others profit of the advantages of my position," Humboldt wrote not long before his death. "I like to think that, while I was at fault to tackle from intellectual curiosity too great a variety of scientific interests, I have left on my route some trace of my passing." ♦

DELUSIONS OF CANDOR

How will we remember Gore Vidal?

BY LEO ROBSON

STEVE SCHAPIRO/CORBIS

"He needs to conquer, to shine, to dominate," Vidal's friend Anaïs Nin noted.

In October of 1975, dining in Rome, Gore Vidal told his new friend the novelist Michael Mewshaw that Françoise Sagan was "a magnum of pure ether." He didn't stop to clarify, but rigor was beside the point; the Vidalian bon mot was about the speaker, not about the subject. In the course of more than half a century, his quips, aphorisms, insults, and punch lines amounted to a self-portrait, airbrushed so as to highlight his favorite warts: Olympian detachment, patrician hauteur.

It was an act, a put-on—perhaps the most effective double bluff in the history of literary P.R. In 1977, after visiting Vidal at his cliff-perched villa on the Amalfi Coast, Martin Amis observed that "he has little of the paranoia worryingly frequent among well-known writers." Norman Mailer had been onto something, Amis concluded, when he said that "Vidal lacks the wound."

"My God," Vidal told Amis, "what a lucky life." The official story, as set down in Vidal's memoirs and essays, and in hundreds of reviews, profiles, and, finally, in his obituaries—he died in 2012—went like this: grandson of Thomas P. Gore, the blind senator from Oklahoma, son of Gene Vidal, a high-school football star whose exploits as an aviation pioneer landed him on the cover of *Time*, he was born in 1925, at West Point, grew up in Washington, D.C., and studied at Exeter. If asked about his mother, Nina Gore, who had swapped family life for a succession of boyfriends and husbands, Vidal would explain that her desertion—and her alcoholism, and her sexual confessions—hadn't really bothered him. (A reporter bold enough to press the subject would be silenced with a reference to Freudian quackery.)

At seventeen, Vidal would explain, he "quit schooling" for good and enlisted in the Navy, served as first mate on a supply ship in the Aleutian Islands, and then—almost by accident, virtually without sweat, and for the simple reason that he could—became a novelist ("Julian," "Myra Breckinridge," "Burr," "Creation"), essayist ("Homage to Daniel Shays," "The Hacks of Academe"), playwright ("Visit to a Small Planet," "The Best Man"), screenwriter ("Ben-Hur"), politician (valiant failed campaigns for Congress, in New York, and for the Senate, in California), actor ("Bob Roberts," "Gattaca," "Igby Goes Down"), steel-chinned prime-time brawler (points victories over Buckley in 1968 and Mailer in 1971), and friend to everyone worth knowing (Greta, Tennessee, Eleanor, Orson, Mick, Sting). Yet he remained immune to the seductions of celebrity and clear-eyed about the workings of power. Stepbrother of a sort to Jacqueline Bouvier, he had been a welcome guest at Hyannis Port and the White House until he grew bored with the whole thing and unmasked Bobby Kennedy (notable for his "vindictiveness" and "simple-mindedness about human motives") in his essay "The Best Man, 1968" and then the Kennedy courtiers in "The Holy Family" and "The Manchester Book." Later efforts in this truth-to-power vein had titles like "Shredding the Bill of Rights," "State of the Union, 1975" (it wasn't good), "State of the Union, 1980" (worse), and "State of the Union, 2004" (don't ask).

And while his contemporaries—as speared in his essay "American Plastic: The Matter of Fiction"—nervously tracked their positions on the New York literary stock exchange, Vidal lived in regal exile with his partner, Howard Austen, quite impervious to what anyone thought about his writing, his quoted comments, or his sexual proclivities. The one sign of human frailty was his insistence that the hordes of visiting photographers favor his "good" side, the left.

This was the figure known to most, but not to all. At the end of the war, Warrant Officer Vidal was stationed at Mitchel Field, on Long Island, and working part time for the publisher E. P. Dutton. He came into the city whenever he could. On a Sunday in November of 1945, he attended a lecture on love at the Ninety-second Street Y. It was here that he met Anaïs Nin.

Born in France to Cuban parents, Nin, who was forty-two, was writing fiction alongside a diary that she would one day publish. "He has great assurance in the world, talks easily, is a public figure, shines," Nin wrote, after Vidal paid a visit to her studio. "He can do

clever take-offs, imitate public figures." He is also "lonely," "hypersensitive," "insecure." When Vidal opened up to her—"He dropped his armor, his defenses"—it was not to talk about his grandfather the senator or his father the aviator but his mother the deserter. "Psychologically," Nin wrote, "he knows the meaning of his mother abandoning him when he was ten, to remarry and have other children."

At first, Vidal was thrilled by the connection. Returning from a trip to Washington, D.C., he told her, "You have cast a spell on me. What I once accepted, I now do not like. I found my grandfather, the senator, boring." But the spell soon wore off. In March of 1946, Vidal invited Nin to a dinner at the PEN Club. "Was shocked by the mediocrity of the talks," she wrote. "A 'literary' world so thoroughly political, intriguing, and commercial, but a world Gore intends to conquer." The next month, she writes, "Gore in the world is another Gore. He is insatiable for power. He needs to conquer, to shine, to dominate." In November, she notes that Vidal's letters—he had then retreated to write in a Guatemalan monastery that he had acquired for a pittance—"sound attenuated, diminished, dulled. Lack of faith, of responsiveness to surroundings and people. A blight." By December, she admits defeat: "Whatever Gore was with me, whatever side he showed me, was not the one he was to show in his life and in his work."

"The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Volume Four: 1944-1947" was published in 1971, and Nin's use of the past tense carries a hint of retrospect, as if she were taking account of later developments. In 1970, the composer Ned Rorem, another diarist friend, described the "cynical stance" that Vidal had perfected over the previous quarter century: "Those steely epigrams summing up all subjects resemble the bars of a cage through which he peers defensively. 'It's not that love's a farce—it doesn't exist.' . . . Rather than risk being called a softy, he affects a pose of weariness."

Jay Parini, in his authorized biography, "Empire of Self: A Life of Gore Vidal" (Doubleday), wants to give us the real Gore, but he keeps on falling for the pose. Although Parini exhibits some skepticism toward his subject, and notices that Vidal's claim of indifference to the world's opinion was at odds with the many framed magazine covers and threats of libel suits, he begins each chapter with an epigraph culled from Vidal's table talk and publicity spiel. When it comes to telling the story of the life, Parini proves content to deliver the strapping, self-assured, untouchable Vidal, the builder and overseer of a well-protected, many-colonied "empire of self"—a phrase repeated throughout the book, in a dizzying range of connections.

As Parini approaches Vidal's later years, his defensive instincts go into overdrive. He praises an essay on John Updike—ten thousand words of ill-argued bile—as "a kind of cultural service," and declares Vidal "more relevant than ever" in the years after 9/11, when he was in the habit of writing things like: "The unlovely Osama was chosen on aesthetic grounds to be the frightening logo for our long-contemplated invasion and conquest of Afghanistan."

Vidal is the book's leading witness, though not a reliable one; his testimony is undermined by what the novelist Adam Mars-Jones called "delusions of candour," and possibly by delusions of a different sort. Though Parini believes that Vidal gave more interviews than any writer "in the history of literature," his notes, which are far from comprehensive, contain thirty references to interviews conducted when his subject was in his eighties. Five of the conversations took place in 2010, the year that Vidal began to suffer the effects of Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, or "wet brain," which Parini calls "a stage in alcoholism when the drinker begins to lose touch with reality."

The underlying problem is a lack of distance. Parini met Vidal in the mid-nineteen-eighties, and the two became great friends. They spoke on the phone every week—"for periods on a daily basis"—and spent time together in a dozen cities. Parini cannot resist playing Boswell any more than he can resist making the Boswell comparison, and it has a damaging effect on his role as biographer. A sentence from a passage ostensibly dealing with the early days of Vidal's relationship with Austen, whom he met in 1950, begins, "A key memory of their relationship (for me) dates to the late eighties." It seems unlikely that Vidal would have become the subject of one of Parini's books—alongside Melville, Tolstoy, Faulkner, and Jesus—if not for the personal connection.

Yet it would be hard to imagine a less intimate biography. Parini loved spending time with the worldly, woundless Vidal, and he seems eager to perpetuate Vidal's myths about himself. In a letter from the late forties, Vidal wrote that psychoanalysis is "quite a frightening experience," and that "it's not a pleasant thing to see oneself." But when Vidal tells Parini that his experience of therapy failed because "I have no unconscious," the biographer doesn't pause to comment.

The book's use of Anaïs Nin is particularly disappointing. Parini quotes Nin's initial description of Vidal ("clear and bright" and "luminous and manly") but little else, and his account of their relationship reveals limited acquaintance with what she wrote. Parini says that Vidal tried to interest Dutton in Nin's fiction but failed, because Dutton—"a manly house"—"shied away from anyone like Nin, who exuded both femininity and exoticism." But any reader of Nin's diaries would know that, in December of 1945, Vidal offered her a thousand-dollar advance for her novels, and that Dutton published "Ladders to Fire" the following year.

Parini justifies his brisk treatment of Nin by saying that the published version of her diaries tells "only a bit of the story." This is no doubt true. But, given that Parini did not visit Nin's archive, he might have spent more time with them, not only because of their tender closeup portrait of Vidal in his early twenties but because they help to solve the central problem of any literary biography: how to connect the life and the work.

Considering Vidal's failure to become a poet, Parini accepts his subject's glib explanation: "The Muse passed over my doorstep." Nin offers another perspective. In her account, all Vidal's shortcomings were rooted in the refusal of feeling. After reading

"Williwaw," his first novel, about his Navy experiences, she wrote, "I am startled by the muted tone, the cool, detached words." In the following weeks, she was given reason to believe that Vidal shared her assessment. "I've never written this way, impulsively, directly, and without plan," he tells her about a play he is working on, and explains that he is, in Nin's recounting, "aware of the conventional mask of his first novel."

The culmination of this process should have been Vidal's third novel, "The City and the Pillar" (1948), about a homosexual relationship that ends in murder. At the time of its publication, the novel was both admired and disparaged for its frankness. Nin's response foreshadowed its later reputation as self-loathing. After reading the manuscript, she wrote him, "I am going to try and tell you what was destroyed by your novel." She called "The City and the Pillar" a "book without illusion, without feeling, and without poetry":

> Jim, in your story, kills Bob because Bob has not romanticized the sexual relationship they once had, has looked upon it flatly as a mere sexual incident of no importance. . . . So he kills him. Jim kills the legend in himself, but actually there was no legend, just Jim's need of idealizing reality.

She presented the book's shortcomings as human failures:

> Everything in your eyes is diminished and uglified. . . . You always focus on the faults, on what can be satirized. . . . To see only the ugliness, that is what people do when they do not love. . . . You are not aware that when you paint only cruelly, underlining only faults or weaknesses, you are the loser.

Vidal continued to write about his own experience: among his novels in the years after "The City and the Pillar" are "The Season of Comfort" (1949), in which a young man struggles with his alcoholic mother, and "The Judgment of Paris" (1952), about a young American on a makeshift Grand Tour. But these efforts were also considered shallow. Norman Mailer, in his essay "Evaluations—Quick and Expensive Comments on the Talent in the Room," written in 1959, argued that Vidal's "narcissistic explorations . . . do not go deep enough into himself, and so end as gestures and postures."

At the time of Mailer's essay, Vidal hadn't published a novel in five years. Strapped for cash, he spent much of the fifties writing for television and the movies: filling weekly slots on "General Electric Theater" and "Studio One," adapting Tennessee Williams's loopy play "Suddenly, Last Summer," sprinkling homoeroticism over "Ben-Hur." But in 1964, the year his play "The Best Man" became a film, with Henry Fonda as a Presidential candidate—Vidal said that an agent's suggestion that Ronald Reagan play the part had been laughingly rejected—Vidal published "Julian," a vast, fine-grained portrait of the apostate Roman emperor, which marked Vidal's first appearance at the top of the *Times* best-seller list. It also marked his long-awaited breakthrough.

The failed reckoning with painful feelings was over. Vidal had found a form that exploited the virtues he was comfortable displaying in public, notably, worldliness, erudition, and cynicism:

> The first official to greet me was Arbetio, who had been consul in the year I was made Caesar. He is a vigorous, hard-faced man of forty; born a peasant, he became a soldier, rising to commander of cavalry and the consulship. He wants my place, just as he wanted Constantius's place. Now there are two ways to handle such a man. One is to kill him. The other is to keep him near one, safely employed, always watched. I chose the latter for I have found that if someone is reasonably honest and well-meaning—though he has treated one badly—he should be forgiven. When men are honest in public life we must be on good terms with them, even though they have treated us badly in a private capacity; while if they are dishonest in public affairs, even though they are personally devoted to us, they must be dismissed.

This is not what Anaïs Nin meant by literature—it is not poetic or psychoanalytic or Lawrentian. But it suited Vidal. In trading halfhearted, gestural, posturing novels about love and pain for full-bodied novels about diplomacy and power, Vidal realized Mailer's professed hope that he would "turn the prides of his detachment into new perception."

In 1967, he followed "Julian" with "Washington, D.C.," the opening volume of a sequence of novels variously known as "American Chronicles" or "Narratives of Empire," which he pursued intermittently, and in strange order, over the next three decades. Then came "Myra Breckinridge," a comic splurge about a movie-besotted transsexual "whom no man will ever possess." It took a month to write—and

a month to sell two million paperbacks. Vidal henceforth divided his energies between historical "reflections" and satirical "inventions"; between Founding Fathers and violent sex fiends; between the worlds of Aaron Burr, the hero of the second (and juiciest) American Chronicle, and Raymond Burr, one of many pop-culture names dropped throughout the pages of "Duluth" (1983), a deranged fantasia in which life imitates bad television.

If the history novels, on the whole, work better than the satires, it is partly because Vidal gravitated toward historical subjects that came ready-laden with themes he wanted to explore, and partly because an amused-detached perspective is better suited to the Machiavellian than to the libertine. Even in a book as outwardly impulsive as "Myra Breckinridge" Vidal found opportunities for cool analysis:

> It is the wisdom of the male swinger to know what he is: a man who is socially and economically weak, as much put upon by women as by society. Accepting his situation, he is able to assert himself through a polymorphic sexual abandon in which the lines between the sexes dissolve, to the delight of all.

Parini admires Vidal's novels from the sixties and seventies, especially the historical ones, but he cannot decide how to praise them. At first, he says that the "radical subjectivity" of "Julian" "anticipates the postmodern turn in fiction" in its (very implicit) skepticism about the idea of history and truth. Later, we meet the writer who kept faith with "the so-called historical novel" (the novel that believed in history) at a time when "the postmodern novel" (the novel that didn't) had rendered it in many eyes a "déclassé genre."

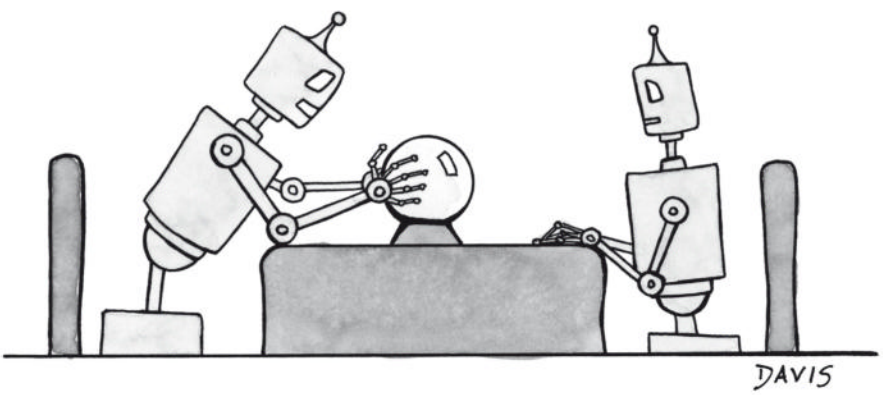
Both impulses were present. As a character puts it in "Washington, D.C.," "History is gossip, but the trick is determining which gossip is history"—a line that accommodates postmodern skepticism and traditional empiricism. The appeal of a novel like "Julian," which is presented as the Emperor's diary, is that its narration has the status of both personal testimony and official record. And his portrayal of historical figures throughout the American Chronicles shows a similar struggle between impious mischief and trembling reverence. "What balances him is the power to rebel against authority," Anaïs Nin wrote. "Emotional rebellions offset the power-loving side." The appeal of a novel like "Lincoln" (1984), in which the President contracts a venereal infection, derives from these mixed impulses. The old myths about Lincoln's piety and perfection come tumbling down, and yet he remains worthy of debunking.

Parini gives a better account of Vidal's nonfiction writing, which started "by chance," but soon became "a full-blown sub-career." As he worked on "Julian," Vidal also wrote most of the reviews, essays, and profiles that appeared in his first collection, "Rocking the Boat." ("Gore Vidal is now a critic, which means he is cremating people," Nin wrote.) Starting in 1963, Vidal was a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, which published about three of his review-essays every year, and rejected, as too boring or too contentious, some of his most substantial work in this form—"French Letters: Theories of the New Novel," "The Holy Family," about the Kennedys, and "Pink Triangle and Yellow Star," originally called "Some Gays and the Jews." (The beneficiaries were *Encounter*, *Esquire*, and *The Nation*, the magazine where much of Vidal's later political writing appeared.)

Parini nicely describes the "lofty intimacy" of Vidal's style, and makes a strong case for Vidal as one of the critics who helped to "enlarge and redefine" the book-review essay. But, in calling Vidal's book reviews "his very own Harvard," Parini misses both their strength and their weakness. Apart from a few exercises in self-education—such as "French Letters," "American Plastic," and a review of the *Times* best-seller list—Vidal tended to write on subjects in which he was already expert. The virtue of his best essays—the source of their fluent authority and zesty phrasing, along with the frequently heavy provision of gossip—is that he knew the subjects backward and forward, either as a reader ("Tarzan Revisited," "On Rereading the Oz Books," "The Golden Bowl of Henry James") or as an acquaintance ("Remembering Orson Welles"), or both, in the case of Christopher Isherwood, whose "I am a camera" conceit Vidal scrutinized in an essay from 1976:

> Because of those four words he has been written of (and sometimes written off) as a naturalistic writer, a recorder of surfaces, a film director *manqué*. Although it is true that, up to a point, Isherwood often appears to be recording perhaps too impartially the lights, the shadows, the lions that come within the area of his vision, he is never without surprises; in the course of what looks to be an undemanding narrative, the author will suddenly produce a Polaroid shot of the reader reading, an alarming effect achieved by the sly use of the second person pronoun. You never know quite where you stand in relation to an Isherwood work.

Like many before him, Parini says that Vidal is a better essayist than he is a novelist. It's a position that tends to emphasize the shortcomings of Vidal's fiction—all the things he didn't try to do—while overlooking the vices



"You will continue to perform the same repetitive tasks that you have always performed."

of his essays. Martin Amis, writing, as he later admitted, from scant familiarity with Vidal's fiction, said that Vidal was too clever to write novels but not too clever to write essays, because "you can't be too clever for them." But you can be too angry and too anxious, too cut off from the taproot of your own strong opinions.

Every essayist is a product of his own hobbyhorses, but few claim as vehemently as Vidal to be offering not a view but the Truth. If his novels turned his public persona into an aesthetic, his essays tried to turn his private anxieties into points of intellectual integrity. Sometimes he succeeded. In an exchange of letters in *The New York Review of Books*, he advised John Bayley that "The Golden Bowl" is about force, not about love, invoking a reading of Jamesian irony and making it work, just about. At other times, his arguments look merely like animus.

Parini says that Vidal worried that "being exclusively gay . . . interfered with" his theories about sexuality. But the reason Vidal came up with those pansexual theories was so that he could tell the world he was not exclusively gay. It may be true, as Vidal frequently maintained, that "gay and straight" are "nonexistent categories," but the point was to establish that although he lived with a man, and had sex only with men, he was not, and never could be, merely a "homosexual." (Vidal told Amis that he had been reading D. H. Lawrence: "Every page I think, Jesus, what a fag. Jesus, what a *faggot* this guy sounds.")

A general distaste for authority underpinned a number of Vidal's positions. For years, he slammed practical criticism for what he called its "slow killing of the work through a close textual analysis." Yet, in 1979, in an attack on another bugbear—the emphasis, beyond academe, on a writer's personality—he enlisted the New Critics to his cause, and regretted that "these paladins of the word have long since faded away." And his writing on America (the "national security state" at home, the empire abroad) was beholden to a dark, declinist view. In the age of the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, and the Iran-Contra affair, he looked canny. But when the facts changed he didn't change his mind, because his mind had not been formed by facts to begin with. Vidal's view of the world was the opposite of supple, and someone who says, "It always comes down to money," is bound to be wrong at least some of the time. Proof positive that Vidal's journalism was anything but a voyage of discovery came in 1971, when, at the request of the Los Angeles *Times*, he reviewed a new book that he had

known about for more than twenty years. "If there is one theme to Volume Four, it is Anaïs's formidable will to power," Vidal wrote, and though he referred in passing to Nin's inaccurate portrait of young "Lieutenant Vidal," he used the occasion to establish once again what he believed were their differences in philosophy, knocking her "contempt for intellect . . . her mystical belief in Love"—as if slamming an old friend's book in her hometown newspaper (Nin had lived in L.A. for years) did anything but show that love might be a useful thing to have around.

The Nin review was a classic instance of what Michael Mewshaw, in his recent memoir "Sympathy for the Devil: Four Decades of Friendship with Gore Vidal" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), calls "the chilly, uncaring misanthrope portrayed by the press." The man he knew was eager to please and sensitive to slights—and not always happy to show it. His late memoirs, "Palimpsest" (1995) and "Point to Point Navigation" (2006), Mewshaw writes, "contained strikingly little introspection, few truly intimate revelations . . . almost nothing about the people he mixed with on a daily basis"—and no hints that Vidal "was generous, hospitable, loyal to friends."

Reprising Nin's response to "The City and the Pillar" half a century earlier, Mewshaw spends a few pages scratching his head over "Palimpsest," an account of Vidal's first four decades. He grew bored by Vidal's presentation of himself as "the yoga master of world-weariness" and expressed bafflement as to "why so many of the emotions I had witnessed in him over the years had been deleted from this draft of his life." (Writing about "Point to Point Navigation," Parini admires the way Vidal "restrains his emotions.") Mewshaw recalls reading "Palimpsest" when he was living in London and Vidal was in town on a promotional tour, and noting the disparity between the book's announcement of personal happiness—"I am past all serious desire for anything. . . . The Buddha was right: To want is to suffer"—and "the man who just the night before at the Connaught had drunk himself to the brink of unconsciousness."

In the opening pages of "Sympathy for the Devil," Mewshaw expresses the hope that the noise around Vidal has died down enough to "allow for" an "alternative assessment." So far, the evidence seems mixed. In a five-hundred-word "lightning raid" that appeared on the *Vanity Fair* Web site, James Wolcott—the author of "The Gore Supremacy," a Kindle Single published after Vidal's death—objected to the offscreen, life-size figure in Mewshaw's book, especially his "glassy-eyed, falling-down senior moments." Vidal shouldn't be remembered that way, Wolcott said. He was suave and smooth. He amused without effort. He didn't care what people thought—and he didn't care who knew that he didn't care what people thought. Wolcott consoled himself with picking out the "hilarious aperçus and asides" recounted in the book, as when Vidal challenged Mewshaw to name the three saddest words in the English language, and supplied the answer: Joyce Carol Oates. This is the image of Vidal that seems destined to endure: cartoonish, two-dimensional, other than human. But, although Vidal made "harsh critical remarks" about Oates at every opportunity, Parini explains, he once caught him reading a volume of her essays, and—"he admitted"—enjoying them. ♦

POP MUSIC

PRECIOUS METTLE

Joanna Newsom's otherworldly, exacting music.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

A decade of work has made it harder to mistake Newsom's originality for cutesiness.

Joanna Newsom's e-mail address is unicorntears2000@yahoo.com. At least, it was in 2002, when she began handing out copies of "Walnut Whales," an eight-song homemade CD that had a photocopied drawing on the front cover and her contact information on the back. Newsom had ties to the Bay Area indie scene—she played keyboards in one of those stylized garage-rock bands that the era supplied and (to a lesser extent) demanded. But "Walnut Whales" sounded radically out of time: the work of a peculiar singer-songwriter who was also, even more peculiarly, a harpist. Over the next few years, Newsom attracted a throng of eager fans, some of whom paired their enthusiasm with condescension. She was sometimes celebrated as a naïve outsider artist, because she sang about dragons and bumblebees, in a squeaky voice that struck some listeners as girlish, while playing an instrument commonly associated with fairies and angels. By the time Newsom's 2004 début album, "The Milk-Eyed Mender," began finding fans, her reputation had already become fixed: she made music as precious—in both senses—as unicorn tears.

Nowadays, that old e-mail address seems like evidence of Newsom's sly sense of humor, and of her steely disinclination to edit herself for the sake of propriety. In the years since "Walnut Whales," it has grown much harder to mistake her ferocious originality for cutesiness. Her second album, "Ys," consisted of five songs, ranging from seven to nearly seventeen minutes in length, with orchestral arrangements by Van Dyke Parks; her third was a three-CD magnum opus called "Have One on Me," which arrived in 2010, and which might be, despite its length, the most approachable recording in her catalogue. She has stuck fast to her original indie label, Drag City, while shedding the various genre descriptors, including "freak folk," that once attached to her. It is easier to describe what she does than what she makes. She is, equally, a singer and an instrumentalist, a songwriter and a composer; within indie rock and far beyond it, there is virtually no one whose music doesn't seem a little casual, or careless, by comparison.

Even people who don't follow Newsom's music may know her from her glamorous appearances at Hollywood premières and awards shows, where she is invariably the only renowned harpist on the red carpet. (She is typically accompanied by Andy Samberg, the comic actor, whom she married in 2013.) Last year, she played the wry narrator in Paul Thomas Anderson's film version of "Inherent Vice," the Thomas Pynchon novel—hers was the first face viewers saw, and the first voice they heard, intoning the book's opening lines. Since 2012, she has been including in her concerts a few unfamiliar songs, alerting attentive fans that she was at work on her fourth album. This summer, she announced its title, "Divers," and released a video, directed by Anderson, for its first single, "Sapokanikan," a rollicking, piano-powered treatise on legacy and oblivion that doubles as an alternative history of New York City. Its title is the name of a Lenape Indian village that once existed on the bank of the Hudson River, in what is now the meatpacking district.

The ten songs that make up the rest of "Divers" present a similar mixture of narrative and thought experiment. This is Newsom's brainiest album, which is no small claim, but also her prettiest; the harp is joined by a fluctuating orchestra of instruments, including a Mellotron, a proto-synthesizer from the sixties, in which each key triggers a sound stored on its own miniature reel-to-reel tape. The melodies unfold in ways that are hard to predict but

PHOTOGRAPH BY BIRTHE PIONTEK

surprisingly easy to learn by heart, after a few days of repeated listening, and repeated listening is what "Divers" demands. Much contemporary music is versatile, slipping craftily into our busy lives. Newsom's is designed to take over a room, or to take over your thoughts, no matter how quietly you play it.

Many years ago, Newsom told an interviewer that her singing voice was "untrainable," a claim that she herself later disproved. By the time she recorded "The Milk-Eyed Mender," she was already a seasoned musician, a self-taught pianist and trained harpist who attended Mills College to study composition. But she had been singing for only about a year, and at times she hollered her lyrics, bolstered by the certainty that the sound she made could never be considered classically beautiful. "Ys" was more refined, embellished (possibly to a fault) by Parks, but it was also much wilder, building to a furiously sad song called "Cosmia," in which Newsom's voice strained and cracked as she eulogized a friend who had recently died. The subsequent tour, including some dates with a full orchestra, strengthened her voice while also damaging it. She developed nodes on her vocal cords, which she treated with a months-long vow of silence (she wore a button to tell strangers she couldn't talk), and then a diligent regimen of daily warmups, as prescribed by a singing coach recommended by Björk.

When the rehabilitation was complete, Newsom was relieved to find that she still sounded like herself, only a bit less squeaky, and she showed off her rebuilt voice on "Have One on Me," which bore a resemblance to an unpretentious modern musical form: the breakup album. One song addressed a modern incarnation of Bluebeard, the mythical tyrant who practiced a murderous version of serial monogamy; another evoked a pregnancy's end, in language that was impressionistic but nonetheless harrowing. (At the climax, the narrator skins a rabbit, or imagines she does: "held her there, kicking and mewling, upended, unspooling, unsung and blue.") And in "Soft as Chalk" Newsom described an enchanted forest—mourning doves, light "thick as molasses"—that gradually lost its enchantment, until all that remained was a plainspoken valediction:

> Sweetheart, in your clean, bright start—
> back there, behind a hill, and a dell,
> and a state line or two—
> I'll be thinking of you.

"Divers" isn't quite so emo—or at least its emotions are more artfully concealed. It begins with the sound of a cooing dove, and with an overture, "Anecdotes," which transforms the movements of nocturnal birds into military missions: the first words are "Sending the first scouts over / back from the place beyond the dawn." These lines establish the album's chief preoccupation, the passage of time, and call to mind the older, less familiar definition of "anecdotes": items kept secret, unrecorded, and possibly destined to be forgotten, like the village of Sapokanikan. Although Newsom lives in Los Angeles, many of these songs were written during a period she spent living in New York, a place she seems to appreciate best from afar. The warmest evocation of urban life comes in a beautiful and sparse song called "A Pin-Light Bent," which contains just voice and harp, and which pictures a city grid as "a honeycomb made of light." If this description sounds unusually euphoric, perhaps that is because the narrator is a passenger growing philosophical on a plunging airplane. "My life came and went," Newsom sings. "Short flight; free descent. / Poor flight attendant."

Newsom keeps her complicated lyrics lively by juxtaposing elevated descriptions of the physical world—all dawns and honeycombs—with homely and unexpected phrases like "Poor flight attendant." The thrill of these moments may be a big part of the reason she uses fancy language. The lyric booklet, which has careful punctuation to match her careful enunciation, includes a few well-worn phrases like "It don't make no difference" alongside words like "simulacreage," a coinage previously unknown to Google. And she has only grown better at creating subtle moments of musical drama: "A Pin-Light Bent," after alternating fretfully between A-minor and F-major chords, finally lifts and brightens as it shifts to C major, like an airplane pulling out of a deep dive. Newsom's voice sounds less untrainable than ever: her high notes are clear and unforced, cushioned by gentle vibrato. She still seems anomalous in the world of popular and semi-popular music, but so would just about any intensely unmumbly mezzo-soprano who saw no reason not to use the entirety of her range.

The miracle of "Divers" is that it doesn't seem overstuffed or miscellaneous. One song is based on a Scottish reel, and another finds Newsom playing her harp as if it were a koto, but overlapping musical and lyrical echoes slowly reveal themselves, hinting at a sturdy underlying structure. At times, all of this can make the album seem too meticulously composed—"Have One on Me" was a little looser and, perhaps consequently, a lot more intimate. But, for Newsom, careful composition is a means of exuberant self-expression. "Goose Eggs" tells of a friendship strained, and also allows Newsom to play with internal rhyme and shifting rhythm, giving the verse a subtle nudge toward hip-hop:

> Recently, a bottle of rye, and a friend, and
> me,
> on our five loose legs,
> had a ramble, and spoke
> of the scrambling of broken hopes, and
> goose eggs, and of a stranger, long ago.
> (Not you, honey! You, I know.)

In expecting listeners to pay attention, Newsom is staking a claim not just for herself but for her chosen form: she sees no reason that an hour-long album shouldn't be as engrossing, or as enriching, as an hour-long cable television show. The last track on the album is titled "Time, As a Symptom," but, in interviews, Newsom insists on calling it not the last song but the eleventh song. Listen carefully and you can tell why. After five minutes of slippery rhymes, swelling strings, and lyrics about the joy of life and of getting old (which is to say, the joy of dying), the eleventh song ends mid-word. Newsom seems about to sing "transcend," but we hear only "trans" before her voice falls away, replaced by familiar-sounding birdsong. The missing conclusion exists, but listeners who want to hear it will have to do what Newsom wants them to do, and what they may well want to do anyway: go back to the beginning and listen again. ♦

THE THEATRE

TALKING TRASH

Robert O'Hara's family satire.

BY HILTON ALS

Ties that bind: siblings are held together and divided by addiction in "Barbecue."

Robert O'Hara's new play, "Barbecue" (directed with vigor and understanding by Kent Gash, at the Public), is my idea of an American classic, or the kind of classic we need. Although its fecund imagination seems unlimited, the work wouldn't exist if it didn't have the junk of our times to feed on—and spit out. Set, for the most part, in a nameless public park in the middle of the country, "Barbecue" unfolds in a kind of electrified space, filled with leaf-curling light. There the characters gripe and argue as though their lives depended on it—and, ultimately, they do, at least from a financial point of view. The play opens with a thin, sour-faced, middle-aged white man, James T (Paul Niebanck), alone onstage, downing a beer and yakking loudly on his cell phone. He is surrounded by greenery, but the trees and leaves look fake, like an ugly wallpaper version of nature. James T is talking to one of his four sisters, the self-righteous but wrong-minded Lillie Anne (Becky Ann Baker):

> This is the thing that I don't seem to understand. *WHY*? On God's green earth. Do we still give a damn. . . . Now you gat me out here this morning at the ass crack of dawn to secure this place so I'm *here*. . . . We know that she gonna get up in here and act the plum fool. Of course she gonna be liquored up. Liquored up. Cracked up. Something upped. She will be upped on something.

The "she" James T is talking about is another sister, Barbara (Samantha Soule), otherwise known as Zippity Boom. (James T: "She gat two modes. *Zippity. Boom.* Ain't shit in between. . . . When she taste liquor she go *Zippity. Boom!* Period.") Lillie Anne wants to stage an intervention at a family barbecue they have planned for that day, but her reasons are muddy. James T doesn't buy it, for instance, when Lillie Anne argues that their mother, had she lived, would have wanted them to save Barbara; Mama, apparently, was no better at mothering than her kids are at being siblings. "We ain't no normal gatdamn family and we ain't never been no normal gatdamn family," he says. "But all of a sudden y'all read a book or see a TV show and y'all wanna *gather* up and act like we a normal gatdamn family." What James T says is true enough. The reality of his family is being superseded, in Lillie Anne's mind, by a reality-TV version of a family, in which conflicts are forgotten or resolved after the commercial break.

But James T and his other siblings aren't really interested in resolving anything. What would they have to talk about if they couldn't complain? The constant whining gives their visceral, miserable words something to coast on, like plastic debris floating on an oily bay. When James T's sisters Marie (Arden Myrin) and Adlean (Constance Shulman) turn up for the barbecue, they all go at it, finding fault not only with one another but with subsequent generations:

> LILLIE ANNE: Adlean, didn't I tell you not to come bringin' them gatdamn badass grandkids of yours? . . .
>
> ADLEAN: They stayin' in the car. Is that a problem for you or should I just bag them back into the street and have them play in traffic?
>
> JAMES T: You should have left them wherever the hell they woke up this gatdamn morning.
>
> LILLIE ANNE: This ain't no damn place for no gatdamn grandkids.
>
> MARIE: It's a gatdamn park ain't it? . . .
>
> ADLEAN (*yelling off*): BOOTY, IF YOU DON'T STOP BOPPIN YO' HEAD UP IN AND OUT OF MY GATDAMN SUNROOF I'M GONNA COME OVER THERE AND SLAP THE FUCK OUT OF YOU WITH A HAMMER TILL YOUR THROAT CLAP! . . . AND I MEANS THAT! I'LL BEAT YOU TILL I SEE THE WHITE MEAT. Stupid ass fool.

Families make their own realities; rarely do the dynamics change, and, if anyone does succeed in getting out, he's eyed with distrust or who-does-he-think-he-is contempt. But O'Hara, in two of his earlier plays—"Insurrection: Holding History" (1996) and "Etiquette of Vigilance" (2010)—was able to do something new with family satire: he turned it into fantasy. Like Jonathan Swift, he saw no reason not to indulge in a little time travel to imagined places while skewering contemporary mores. Although O'Hara's language was somewhat influenced, early on, by that of his fellow-playwrights Adrienne Kennedy and George C. Wolfe, his stories and his viewpoint are his own: he is a gay black man who is interested in the parochialism of the black American family, and in his status as an outsider within it.

At first, "Barbecue" appears to be a whiteface take on O'Hara's usual themes, but then, about fifteen minutes into the show, he flips the dramaturgical switch. As Lillie Anne, howling, tries to get everyone onto her intervention fantasy

ILLUSTRATION BY HEIDI CHISHOLM

train—it's one way to keep her siblings together—the lights go down. Before long, they come up again, and we are watching the same family dressed in the same way on the same set, but now they're black. (Marc Damon Johnson, Kim Wayans, Heather Alicia Simms, Benja Kay Thomas, and Tamberla Perry play these versions of James T, Lillie Anne, Marie, Adlean, and Barbara, respectively. They couldn't be more perfectly cast; Simms, as Marie, is especially exciting.) The new actors barely miss a beat as the conversation becomes even more fast-paced, insane, and comedically brilliant:

MARIE: You probably don't even remember waking up this morning with all them damn pills you poppin.

ADLEAN: Heifa, you wait till you get you a disease in *yo*' titty—

MARIE: I was the one who told you not to go eating no damn corn out no damn can. It's them damn canned goods that gave you that damn cancer.

LILLIE ANNE: Marie, shut the hell up.

MARIE: I'm telling the truth. They put that damn cancer in all these damn canned goods.

JAMES T: Who the hell put it in there, Marie?

MARIE: Them damn Middle Easterners. . . .

JAMES T: We don't get canned goods or CORN from no damn Middle Easterners.

Young Jean Lee, in her 2009 play, "The Shipment," showed how speech—especially in the theatre—has been racialized. A cast of black actors used street slang and "white," or "dicty," language while dramatizing various stereotypes of race. The implicit question was: How does the idiom change the way we see the action? O'Hara has a similar interest in how race is performed, or how it informs a performance. The first family in "Barbecue" is white trash, but what do we call the second family? Black trash? Or does the black family get a free pass when it comes to that designation, because they're acting out of "oppression"?

Other questions follow. O'Hara never specifies where his emotionally ragged, venal figures, with their Southern drawls—they're like the Beverly Hillbillies on crack—are. They could be a generation removed from the South—Ohioans, say, who've inherited some of their parents' ways, including a capacity for drink and a love of storytelling. Still, poor white people with Southern roots are liable to be looked on with pity or shame by the liberal white Northerners who make up much of "Barbecue"'s audience, and who may meanwhile assume that the black characters aren't pitiable—they're just "talking black."

O'Hara is too much of a showman to make any of this feel didactic. Plus, he's a satirist, in love with that crooked jokester otherwise known as life. In the play's scintillating second act, the laughs come less frequently and are overshadowed by deep character work and profound writing. We're in the park again, and White Barbara is alone onstage. She seems nervous; she's on her cell phone but ends the call when Black Movie Star Barbara (played with something akin to reckless genius by Perry) enters. With her hair loose and shoulder-length, Black Movie Star Barbara owes something to the late Whitney Houston—down to her white pants suit, reminiscent of the one Houston wore on the 2002 "Primetime" special, when she told Diane Sawyer she was too rich to smoke crack—but Perry takes it to another level. Black Movie Star Barbara behaves as if she were royalty taking a tour of a tacky public garden. Dipping, inexplicably, into and out of an English accent, she is rigid with false humility, paranoia, and self-regard.

She's here to meet White Barbara, who made it to rehab and has written a book describing her "journey" from Zippity Boom to enlightened presence. Black Movie Star Barbara, a Hollywood veteran, wants to play White Barbara in a movie—she knows that audiences are more likely to believe in a black crack ho than in a white one, and she wants to "get some Oscars up in here." O'Hara knows how crazy it is to be a woman, let alone a woman of color, in show business. Actors are paid to be other people, but what if you're paid a lot of money to lie about who you are?

As the two Barbaras talk, they increasingly resemble each other, except that Black Movie Star Barbara is shinier: she knows the art of the con, while White Barbara is still catching up. What unites them, in the end, is their addiction. Sitting on the ground in the park, where the barbecue never happens, the ladies fire up some crack. Then there's a blackout—both onstage and in the playwright's mind. O'Hara mars what could have been a perfect ending—the Barbaras sitting down to face and not face each other—with a cheap and easy conclusion that puts too much emphasis on all the points he's made before. We don't need O'Hara to tell us that life rewards its most terrible creations with glittering prizes, or to make the tragedy easier to take by closing on a "comedic" note. He's a much better artist than that, and compromise just looks silly on him, like a dunce cap on a monument. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2015 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCI, NO. 33, October 26, 2015. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 23 & March 2, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, August 10 & 17, and December 21 & 28) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Elizabeth Hughes, publisher, chief revenue officer; Beth Lusko, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Fabio Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, chief executive officer; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; Jill Bright, chief administrative officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. For advertising inquiries, please call Beth Lusko at (212) 286-4454. For submission guidelines, please refer to our Web site, www.newyorker.com. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For cover reprints, please call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, please call (212) 630-5656 or fax requests to (212) 630-5883. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. Visit us online at www.newyorker.com. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenet.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37684, Boone, IA 50037 0684 or call (800) 825-2510.

THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

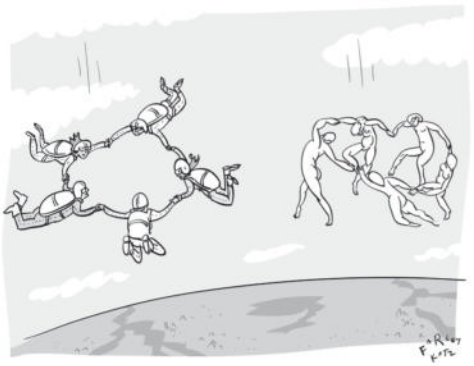
PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

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 Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, October 25th. The finalists in the October 12th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 9th 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 contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"Does he know why we invited him to the barbecue?"
Eric Behrens, Austin, Texas



THE FINALISTS

"I prefer his later jumps."
Chris Besant, Toronto, Ont.

"Derivative."
Rick Maher, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Matisse now; Pollock later."
Mark Laurent Asselin, Bethesda, Md.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

" "

PREVIEWS BEGIN OCTOBER 21

"AFTER SEEING THIS INTENSE AND ADVENTUROUS 'VIEW' FOR THE FIRST TIME, I DID SOMETHING I'VE NEVER DONE BEFORE. **I WALKED OUT OF THE AUDITORIUM AND UP TO THE BOX OFFICE TO BUY TICKETS TO SEE IT AGAIN.** ONE OF THE GREAT THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS OF THE DECADE. SEE IT!"

THE LONDON TIMES / DOMINIC MAXWELL

"THIS RADICAL REVIVAL OF ARTHUR MILLER'S MIGHTIEST DRAMA IS **A MUST-SEE, NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE.**"

MAIL ON SUNDAY / GEORGINA BROWN

OLIVIER AWARD WINNER

BEST REVIVAL
BEST ACTOR
BEST DIRECTOR

"IT ALMOST FEELS SILLY TO COMPARE THIS PURE, PRIMAL, COLOSSAL THING WITH ANYTHING ELSE **ON THE STAGE.**"

TIME OUT LONDON / ANDRZEJ LUKOWSKI

★★★★★ THE LONDON TIMES

★★★★★ THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

★★★★★ EVENING STANDARD

★★★★★ TIME OUT LONDON

★★★★★ THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★ THE INDEPENDENT

MARK STRONG / NICOLA WALKER / PHOEBE FOX / RUSSELL TOVEY
MICHAEL ZEGEN / MICHAEL GOULD / RICHARD HANSELL

THE YOUNG VIC PRODUCTION OF

ARTHUR MILLER'S A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

DIRECTED BY **IVO VAN HOVE**

ON BROADWAY FOR 17 WEEKS ONLY / OPENS NOVEMBER 12

LYCEUM THEATRE 149 WEST 45TH STREET AVIEWFROMTHEBRIDGEBROADWAY.COM 212-239-6200 TELECHARGE.COM

Introducing the all-new GLE. Where brains meet brawn.

The all-new GLE has been put through some of the most rigorous testing in the industry. It has the ability to brake by itself, park itself and help you steer. The Intelligent Drive system will warn you of danger from almost any angle, vehicles in your blind spot and stopped traffic up ahead. The GLE is more than a luxury SUV—it's one of the most intelligent SUVs we've ever made. Visit MBUSA.com/GLE

Mercedes-Benz
The best or nothing.

2016 GLE 350 4MATIC® shown in Palladium Silver metallic paint with optional equipment. Vehicle will not stop itself in every condition. Please refer to the operating manual for details on Brake Assist safety systems. Vehicle available late summer 2015. ©2015 Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC
For more information, call 1-800-FOR-MERCEDES, or visit MBUSA.com.