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THE NEW YORKER

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Cynthia Ozick (*Fiction, p. 56*) recently published a new edition of "Antiquities," which also includes four previously uncollected stories.

Barry Blitt (*Cover*) won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning. His latest book, "Blitt," is a collection of his illustrations.

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Amanda Petrusich (*Pop Music, p. 76*), a staff writer, is the author of "Do Not Sell at Any Price."

Osip Mandelstam (*Poem, p. 40*), one of Russia's most important modernist poets, was arrested for his criticism of the Soviet regime in 1934 and composed the body of work known as the Voronezh Notebooks while in exile. He died in a transit camp in 1938.

Beverly Gage (*Books, p. 70*), a professor of history at Yale University, will publish "G-Man" in November.

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DISPATCH
A network in Europe is helping Ukrainians flee—and fight—the Russian invasion, Ed Caesar writes.



CULTURAL COMMENT
Alex Ross on a famous Russian composer's ties to Putin and the impossibility of separating art from politics.

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LEFT: RAFAŁ MILACH / MAGNUM; RIGHT: SASHA MORDOVETS / GETTY

THE MAIL

FEMINISTS IN FILM

As a feminist film scholar and an associate professor at Rutgers University, I greatly appreciated Elif Batuman's Profile of the director Céline Sciamma ("Now You See Me," February 7th). Sciamma speaks about the strong impression that Jean Benoît-Lévy and Marie Epstein's film "La Maternelle" made on her grandmother. I felt similarly when I first saw the film, in 1977, at the urging of Epstein herself. Since then, I have devoted a significant part of my scholarship to Epstein's work, and to "La Maternelle" in particular.

The only complete print of the film is housed at the Cinémathèque Française, in Paris. A hard-to-find DVD contains a censored version of the film that circulated in the U.S. in 1935. Cuts were made to poetic passages that both exemplify the expressive montage sequences of silent cinema and reflect Epstein's artistry. Other cuts include scenes featuring seedy Parisian exteriors, marginalized communities, and images of children in the bathroom—a bizarre thing to censor in a film about a nursery school.

After I wrote a book about feminism in French cinema, I became acquainted with Benoît-Lévy's granddaughter. I came to realize that he had more feminist input in his films with Epstein than was previously believed. Because Epstein and Benoît-Lévy's roles in film history have become obscured, there is a need to create a Blu-ray of the complete version of "La Maternelle," augmented by contextual materials. Perhaps Sciamma might lead the effort to make this exquisite film available to a wider audience, thus contributing to the reinstatement of Epstein and Benoît-Lévy in the cinematic canon.

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis
Hoboken, N.J.

ALLEGORY OF THE SOUL

Anna Holmes, in her piece about the revolutionary children's-book author Margaret Wise Brown, writes that one of Brown's best-known books, "The Runaway Bunny," can be seen as tapping into "a universal childhood longing for independence, but it can also be read as a metaphor for a stormy romance" ("The Fairy-Tale War," February 7th). Another interpretation of the book was offered by Margaret Edson, in her Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "Wit." In the play, a literature professor reads "The Runaway Bunny" aloud to the dying protagonist. She describes the book as a "little allegory of the soul." Perhaps that helps to explain why the book is a perennial favorite.

Linda Dickey
New York City

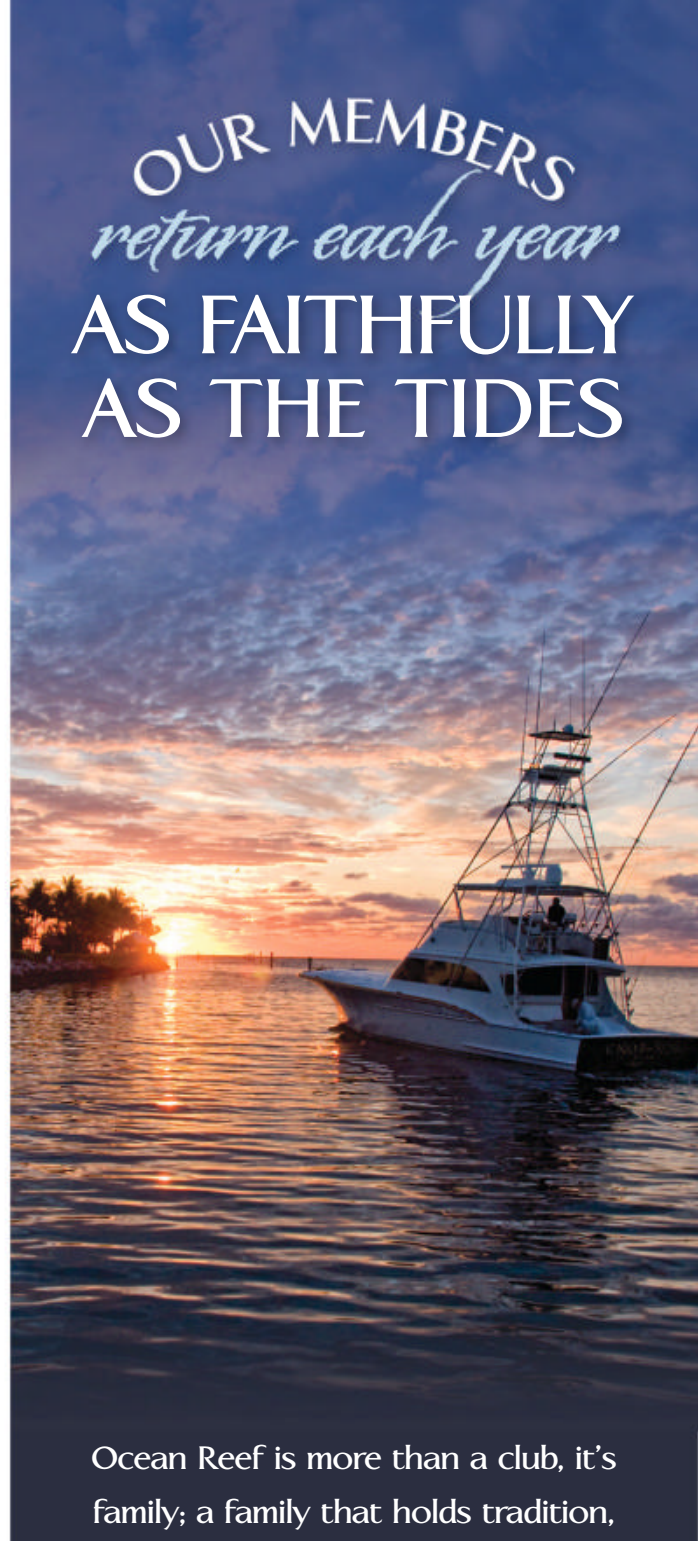
HOW TO TEACH ACTORS

I enjoyed Alexandra Schwartz's review of Isaac Butler's book about Method acting, which provided an engaging account of Lee Strasberg's interpretation of Konstantin Stanislavski's technique (Books, February 7th). Schwartz, in describing a cohort of young theatre professionals known as the Group, notes that its members included "Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner, who, together with Strasberg, became the trinity of major American acting teachers of the twentieth century." Yet her essay pays little attention to Meisner's career. He was on the faculty of the Neighborhood Playhouse, where he taught for decades and developed his own successful acting technique. One of his students was William Swinny, who became my high-school drama teacher in San Antonio, in the nineteen-fifties. He taught young actors to "really do what you're doing," both onstage and in life. I remain grateful for the lessons imparted by my teacher Bill, and by his teacher Meisner.

Jere Bob Bowden
Ferndale, Calif.

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



MARCH 9 – 15, 2022

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



"Frédéric Bruly Bouabré: World Unbound," which opens at MOMA on March 13, surveys the career of an Ivorian artist who dedicated his prodigious imagination to preserving the cultural heritage of his native people, the Bété. In one ambitious piece, Bouabré, who died in 2014, devised a written system for the Bété's spoken language, in hundreds of colorful drawings. The museum's new curator Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, who organized the exhibition, is pictured above with a selection of that sui-generis syllabary.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NATHAN BAJAR

As ever, it's advisable to confirm engagements in advance and to check the requirements for in-person attendance.

DANCE

Batsheva Dance Company

On the heels of "YAG: The Movie" (2020), Ohad Naharin's first film adaptation of one of his stage works, comes "Hora—The Movie," a film adaptation of a fifty-minute work from 2009, premièring online on March 11. Naharin's style—blunt, uninhibited, and dense with eccentric incident, drama, and high-definition detail—transfers exceptionally well to the screen. Here, the amazing dancers of Batsheva Dance Company appear in a black void as if in the light of a full moon, requiring no more elaborate mise en scene. Isao Tomita's electronic versions of classical warhorses ("Clair de Lune," "Ride of the Valkyries") give the dance a mock-heroic tone, but the cumulative effect is genuinely epic.—*Brian Seibert (Tickets can be purchased at batsheva.co.il/en/home; March 11-13.)*

"Sara Mearns: Piece of Work"

At New York City Ballet, Sara Mearns is the überballerina, reigning with cool splendor over the neoclassical repertory of George Balanchine. But Mearns is also an inveterate experimenter, led by a voracious curiosity about movement. She has collaborated with artists in the realms of modern dance and hip-hop, and, memorably, brought back to vibrant life the dances of Isadora Duncan. For the Joyce, she has put together a program of collaborations with a group of choreographers of her own choosing. Two, Beth Gill and Jodi Melnick, come from the experimental downtown scene. Vinson Fraley is from the company of Bill T. Jones, and Guillaume Côté is a dancer and choreographer based at the National Ballet of Canada. The evening ends with a compilation of Merce Cunningham dances staged for Mearns and a selection of dancers from New York City Ballet, Alvin Ailey, and elsewhere.—*Marina Harss (Joyce Theatre; March 8-13.)*

THE THEATRE

The Daughter-in-Law

"Children they are, these men," Mrs. Gascoyne (Sandra Shipley) says to her son Luther's wife, Minnie (Amy Blackman), during a moment of peace between the two women. Their conflict is one of the themes of this 1913 play by D. H. Lawrence, written around the time of the publication of "Sons and Lovers" but unproduced until the late nineteen-sixties, nearly forty years after Lawrence's death. It's set in a small mining community in England's East Midlands, and the town's labor strife serves as the backdrop to an elemental domestic drama—an unhappy marriage, infidelity, a pregnancy—with social, economic, and familial ramifications. This show, which marks a return to live presentation, after almost two years, for the invaluable Mint Theatre Company, was first produced by the company in 2003, and is a prime reflection of the Mint's mission to shine new light on formidable

ILLUSTRATION BY JOOHEE YOON



SPRING PREVIEW

Cross-Dressing Flamenco, Tap Stories

Of all the performances that were postponed at the start of the pandemic, among those I had been looking forward to most was **Manuel Liñán's** cross-dressing flamenco production "¡Viva!" Liñán is a well-regarded dancer, choreographer, and teacher; his "¡Viva!," in which male dancers (some of whom also sing) take on feminine personas, transcends neat categorization. Heartfelt, effusive, and bursting with color, the show oozes love for flamenco, channelling the celebratory atmosphere of a previous generation of flamenco artists. Liñán's dancers, irreverently waving aside the sober attire of contemporary flamenco, wear *batas de cola*—long dresses whose ruffled tails curl and swish—bright shawls, and flowers in their hair, like Spanish film stars of yore. When "¡Viva!" premièred in Madrid, in 2019, the audience couldn't stop cheering. The show finally arrives at New York City Center as part of this year's Flamenco Festival, which runs April 22-24.

In 1988, when the choreographer Mark Morris was invited to take up residence at the Brussels opera house Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, he was like a kid in a candy store. Finally, he had an orchestra, singers, and a big stage, all at his disposal. The result was "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato," set to Handel's choral work of the same name. The piece for twenty-four dancers, an orchestra, a choir, and soloist singers—inspired by the poems of Milton and framed by the luminous designs of Adrianne Lobel—encapsulates Morris's wit and musicality, ultimately revealing an underlying sincerity that pours out from the stage to the audience. "L'Allegro" will be performed by the **Mark Morris Dance Group** at BAM, March 24-27. A few days later, BAM hosts the Rio de Janeiro-based troupe **Cia Suave** (March 29-April 2), led by the Brazilian choreographer **Alice Ripoll.** The company, made up of ten diverse dancers of various gender identities, will perform "Cria," a work that traverses the vast array of styles found in Rio's fertile urban dance culture.

Tap is dance and tap is percussion, but tap can also be a vessel for stories, as artists such as Gregory Hines, Savion Glover, and Ayodele Casel have shown. At the Joyce, **Michela Marino Lerman** adds to the genre of danced storytelling with "Once Upon a Time Called Now" (March 29-April 3), a tale of self-discovery, narrated by Anna Deavere Smith, set within the context of Mardi Gras celebrations. The show features live jazz, performed onstage by a band of eight; the hoofing is by Lerman and four members of her ensemble, Love Movement.

—*Marina Harss*

SPRING PREVIEW

A Queer Hall of Mirrors, a Talented Executioner

Michael R. Jackson's salty, Pulitzer Prize-winning musical, **"A Strange Loop,"** which had an acclaimed run at Playwrights Horizons, in 2019, is a theatrical hall of mirrors: the protagonist, like Jackson, is a queer Black musical-theatre composer who is writing a musical about a queer Black musical-theatre composer. The show is a sardonic, soul-baring inquiry into the pursuit of love and creative fulfillment—with plenty to say about gay sex and Tyler Perry. Stephen Brackett's production, featuring Jaquel Spivey, begins a Broadway run on April 6, at the Lyceum.

It joins a busy Broadway season, including a rash of star-studded revivals. Beanie Feldstein plays Fanny Brice in **"Funny Girl"** (previews start March 26, at the August Wilson), the show's first Broadway outing since it premièred, in 1964, now directed by Michael Mayer, with a revised book by Harvey Fierstein. Daniel Craig and Ruth Negga star in **"Macbeth"** (March 29, Longacre), staged by Sam Gold. **"American Buffalo,"** David Mamet's portrait of three men in a junk shop, from 1975, returns, with Laurence Fishburne, Sam Rockwell, and Darren Criss, directed by the Mamet veteran Neil Pepe (March 22, Circle in the Square). Camille A. Brown directs and choreographs **"for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf"** (April 1, Booth), Ntozake Shange's pioneering "choreopoem" from 1976. And Paula Vogel's **"How I Learned to Drive"** (March 29, Samuel J. Friedman), which follows the queasy affair between a girl and her aunt's husband, is revived with its original stars from 1997, Mary-Louise Parker and David Morse; Mark Brokaw directs for Manhattan Theatre Club.

Other Broadway offerings include **"Hangmen"** (April 8, Golden), a dark comedy—what else?—by Martin McDonagh. Set in a British pub in 1965, on the day that hanging is abolished in the U.K., it centers on a talented executioner fresh out of work; among the cast is Alfie Allen, of "Game of Thrones." Debra Messing stars in **"Birthday Candles"** (March 18, American Airlines), Noah Haidle's time-hopping portrait of a woman aging from seventeen to a hundred and seven. Speaking of time-hopping, Lincoln Center Theatre revives Thornton Wilder's classic **"The Skin of Our Teeth"** (April 1, Vivian Beaumont), which follows a New Jersey family from prehistoric times through the apocalypse; Lileana Blain-Cruz directs.

Off Broadway, the Public stages **"Suffs"** (starting March 13), Shaina Taub's musical about the suffragist movement, featuring Phillipa Soo and Nikki M. James. At the Shed, Taibi Magar directs **"Help"** (March 15), the poet Claudia Rankine's dissection of ways in which her conversations with white people have gone right, wrong, and sideways. At BAM, James McAvoy plays the title role in a new version of **"Cyrano de Bergerac"** that incorporates rap, poetry, and spoken word, directed by Jamie Lloyd (April 5). And the Atlantic Theatre Company débuts **"The Bedwetter"** (April 30), a musical based on Sarah Silverman's 2010 memoir. It bears both pee and poignancy: during the show's two-year pandemic delay, its composer, Fountains of Wayne's Adam Schlesinger, lost his life to COVID.

—Michael Schulman



ILLUSTRATION BY JOOHEE YOON

theatre works—meaty, challenging, intelligent, well crafted—that have fallen into the shadows. At the final curtain, despite being somewhat at odds with the traditional values that the playwright seemingly wanted to promote, the director, Martin Platt, manages to keep some feminist plates spinning.—*Ken Marks (New York City Center Stage II; through March 20.)*

Made by God

The story of Ann Lovett galvanized the abortion debate in Ireland in 1984. In this excellent one-act, in a world première in the small downstairs space at the Irish Rep, the playwright Ciara Ní Chuirc has taken Lovett's story as an imaginative jumping-off point for a moving examination of love, faith, guilt, remembrance, and regret. With sensitive direction by Olivia Songer and strong performances by a cast of five, Ní Chuirc's dialogue finds the perfect tone in a series of scenes that shift both in style and in time: a dreamy romance involving the teenage lovers Ann (McKenna Quigley Harrington) and Mikey (Daniel Marconi); a podcast conducted by a Mexican American interviewer, Eva (Erica Hernandez), and the adult Mikey, who now goes by Michael (Ciaran Byrne); and a conversation between Eva and the Virgin Mary (Briana Gibson Reeves). There is humor and anger and sadness as the characters pursue a kind of mystery—and a climax that, although not entirely unexpected, achieves a harrowing power.—*K.M. (Irish Rep; through March 20.)*

MJ

Directed and choreographed by Christopher Wheeldon, with a book by Lynn Nottage and music (mostly) by, well, M.J. himself, this new musical swims with obvious labor against the current of its protagonist's troubled biography. A thirty-three-year-old Michael Jackson (played by the energetic and vulnerable Myles Frost) is preparing for a global tour following the success of his album "Dangerous." The most harried victims of Michael's demands are his concert director, Rob (Quentin Earl Darrington, who, in flashbacks, also plays Michael's father), and his stage manager, Nick (Antoine L. Smith). Frost kicks and spins, wiggles his legs and pops his shoulders almost identically to Jackson; the depiction doesn't quite add anything to our understanding of the real Jackson, but the fact of its rote excellence is a reminder of the freakish nature of Jackson's fame. Interviews with two documentarians send Michael on a series of reveries, from the beginnings of the Jackson Five and his father's bouts of rage to his inevitable fracture with his brothers. Jackson's estate participated in the production of "MJ," and the musical is set in 1992, the year before the first allegation of child sexual abuse against the singer became public. But discernible under the show's surface is a softly subversive, inevitably thwarted desire to tell his story plainly.—*Vinson Cunningham (Reviewed in our issue of 2/14 & 21/22.) (Neil Simon; open run.)*

Out of Time

The five monologues that make up this production—a collaboration between the Public Theatre and the National Asian American Theatre Company, conceived and directed by Les Waters—are linked more by conceit than by theme: each is written by an Asian American playwright and performed by an Asian American actor over sixty. In "My Documentary," by Anna Ouyang Moench, the show's richest segment, a celebrated and emotionally well-defended documentarian (Page Leong) considers her career and marriage while navigating the rough terrain of grief; Naomi Iizuka's "Japanese Folk Song," which reincarnates the playwright's late father (Glenn Kubota), is itself a tender mourning ritual. As the pandemic and other contemporary disasters loom large, big questions of identity linger as subtext. In Mia Chung's fragmented "Ball in the Air," a woman (Mia Katigbak) reels from the end of a friendship and the 2016 election; a sardonic writer (Natsuko Ohama) in Sam Chanse's "Disturbance Specialist" contends with cancel culture, the speaker (Rita Wolf) of Jaclyn Backhaus's "Black Market Caviar" with cancer. The performances are all excellent, but the texts, alas, are not equally worthy of their talents; too often, the writers neglect the complex demands of character in favor of vague stylistic flash.—*Alexandra Schwartz (Public Theatre; through March 13.)*

sandblasted

The first moments of Charly Evon Simpson's play (directed by Summer L. Williams, in a co-production by the Vineyard and WP Theatre) astound and delight: from behind an umbrella on an apparently empty beach, a leg kicks up out of the sand, followed by the woman it belongs to. Then a second woman emerges from her own patch of sand—and her arm falls off. In the Beckett-inflected, surrealist world of this show (the set, by Matt Saunders, is like something out of a dream), a disease that causes body parts to drop off at random is a metaphor for the Black female condition; while everybody else, Black men included, remain obliviously intact, cheerful Angela (Brittany Bellizeare) and skeptical Odessa (Marinda Anderson) are at risk of literally falling apart at the seams. The two women team up to track down a life-style guru, Adah (Rolonda Watts, going full Oprah), who may have a cure for what ails them—or may just be peddling snake oil under the guise of "wellness." Despite its sharp premise, the show eventually falls apart under the weight of confusing chronology, repetitive scenes, and a general sleepy sense of inertia; maybe, given the play's interest in rest as self-care, the snooze is the point. With Andy Lucien in a bright comic turn as Angela's loving but bewildered brother.—*A.S. (Vineyard; through March 13.)*

MUSIC

Aminé

HIP-HOP The Portland rapper Aminé has relished his outsider status since popping up, with the viral hit single "Caroline," in 2016. His carefree music was out of step with the more gloomy rap of the time, but his happy-go-lucky energy cut through the darkness like a lighthouse beacon, despite his being situated in one of the unlikeliest hip-hop markets. Now a handful of projects into his career, Aminé has refined his sound without allowing success to constrict him. Following "Limbo," a coming-of-age album, from 2020, his latest songs experiment with the cartoonishness of hyperpop, making continued use of his casual, singsong nature and quirky production, which beams like a carnival attraction. Aminé brings that childlike wonder to two sets, with the versatile London rapper AJ Tracey opening.—*Sheldon Pearce (Terminal 5; March 10-11.)*

Animal Collective

INDIE ROCK The psychedelicists of Animal Collective have been shape-shifting through indie rock and pop for more than two decades, and the group's considerable influence is still coming into focus. One recent exemplar is the Brooklyn avant-rock collagist Taja Cheek, a.k.a. L'Rain, who has cited the disorientation of Animal Collective's early records as a formative inspiration for her band. Sharing that sense of adventure, the loops and fragmentation of her 2021 album, "Fatigue," reflect a process-based sound that also incorporates soul and spiritual jazz. With the recent release of Animal Collective's "Time Skiffs," these two bands, representative of a lineage of New York pop experimentalism, join forces to tour their shared penchant for bewilderment.—*Jenn Pelly (Brooklyn Steel; March 12.)*

Iceage

PUNK A decade ago, the teen-agers of the rock band Iceage emerged from the Copenhagen underground as a forbidding coterie of gloomy street punks. But their music blazed, then as now, with a searching romanticism, cracking open a cold dourness to the dimension of dreams, and to some legendarily unblinking humor. ("I'm positively God's favorite one," the unforgettable 2014 cowpunk single "The Lord's Favorite" goes.) On audacious recent albums, Iceage has reached for sky-bent grandeur, evoking Nick Cave and the panoramic sweep of Oasis. The actorly front man Elias Bender Rønnenfelt spins out lyrics about a "dizzy-headed banshee" and "love like an open lemon squeezed into the eye" over brassy arrangements that, on "Seek Shelter," from 2021, include a gospel choir. At the first of two nights at Bowery Ballroom, the Danes are preceded onstage by Mary Jane Dunphe, a New York punk musician and poet who has done miraculous work in CC Dust, Pinocchio, and Vexx.—*J.P. (Bowery Ballroom; March 9-10.)*

Maria Schneider Orchestra

JAZZ "Data Lords," Maria Schneider's musical meditation on the quietude of nature—as opposed to the din of the digital world—was a bona-fide event release of 2020, a double disk brimming with Schneider's ingenious compositions and arrangements, and with sterling contributions from such soloists as the saxophonists Scott Robinson and Donny McCaslin, the guitarist Ben Monder, and the gifted pianist Frank Kimbrough, who passed away just months after the album's release. Schneider's live performances have been as momentous as her recordings, her enthusiasm and focus as a conductor matched only by the brio of her loyal bandmates.—*Steve Futterman (Birdland; March 9-12.)*

Charles McPherson

JAZZ Plenty seasoned but still ready to take on all challengers, the alto saxophonist Charles McPherson is old enough to have come up under the spell of Charlie Parker, and flexible enough to have absorbed the new jazz messages



SPRING PREVIEW

Bad Bunny, Mitski, Jazmine Sullivan

Following a winter COVID surge that forced many concert postponements across the city, this spring's contemporary-music slate is jam-packed with worthwhile shows and eager performers.

Two generational R. & B. talents let loose their captivating voices: on the heels of her excellent album "Heaux Tales," **Jazmine Sullivan** plays Kings Theatre (March 17), and the singer **Maxwell** exposes the warm neo-soul of his catalogue to Barclays Center (March 30). Stadiums are also primed for the reëmergence of international stars. On March 19, at Barclays, the singer **Bad Bunny** brings his vibrant *urbano* sound to the stage. At Madison Square Garden, the Afro-pop sensation **Burna Boy** unleashes fun polyrhythmic music that is socially and politically aware (April 28). Elsewhere, formidable rap acts dominate smaller spaces: **Azealia Banks** at Brooklyn Steel (March 26), **Sampa the Great** at Bowery Ballroom (March 31), and **Maxo Kream** at Irving Plaza (April 1).

At Radio City Music Hall, indie and pop converge: the vet **Mitski** introduces her latest album, "Laurel Hell" (March 24); **Lorde,** a star in repose, ventures out on her "Solar Power" tour (April 18); and the Disney Channel transplant **Olivia Rodrigo** sets out to reaffirm her newfound star status (April 26). Webster Hall hosts longtime noise artists who continue to evolve—the former Sonic Youth anchor **Kim Gordon** (March 18) and the slowcore duo **Low** (March 31). A few specialty shows serve as nostalgic throwbacks. At the jazz club Blue Note, audiences are in for an interesting, albeit unusual, treat: the Wu-Tang Clan rapper **GZA** is joined by a live band for an intimate evening of smooth renditions from Wu lore (March 30). And, for a mini-tour recognizing the twentieth anniversary of "Yankee Hotel Foxtrot," the alt-rock band **Wilco** performs the classic album, in its entirety, in a slew of shows at the United Palace (April 15-20).

Experimentalists abound. The longtime collaborators **Nick Cave** and **Warren Ellis** introduce "Carnage," their first album as a duo, to Kings Theatre audiences on March 25. At Webster Hall, the British jazz group **Sons of Kemet** unveils its adventurous 2021 album, "Black to the Future" (March 29). In a show at Brooklyn Steel, **Car Seat Headrest** splits the bill with the indie radical **Bartees Strange** (March 30). Singer-songwriters reclaim the spotlight, too: on April 7, at Kings Theatre, Lindsey Jordan, who performs as **Snail Mail,** débuts her album "Valentine," and on April 15 **Aimee Mann** brings her years of experience to City Winery, leading with "Queens of the Summer Hotel," folk songs written for a stage adaptation of Susanna Kaysen's 1993 memoir, "Girl, Interrupted."

The art-rock star Mike Hadreas, who performs as **Perfume Genius,** finally gets to show off the gorgeous songs on his 2020 album, "Set My Heart on Fire Immediately," at Beacon Theatre, on April 7. And, in an April 22 performance at Hammerstein Ballroom, the similarly inspired pop avant-gardist **Charli XCX** does the same with her quarantine record, "How I'm Feeling Now," and the upcoming LP "Crash."

—Sheldon Pearce

ILLUSTRATION BY JOOHEE YOON

imparted by Charles Mingus, his erstwhile boss. Bebop may still form the marrow of his style, but McPherson is no archival figure. With a hearty tone and a penchant for brisk tempos, the eighty-two-year-old terror taunts age through his horn.—*S.F. (Dizzy's Club; March 10-13.)*

Doc Scott

ELECTRONIC The London d.j. and producer Doc Scott is a crucial figure in drum and bass—he helped usher the style away from an early-nineties incarnation of piano-driven rave anthems and into a darker techstep style, typified by cantankerous rhythms, synth strings, and bass lines that evoke, as the critic Peter Shapiro put it, "gruesome spaceship hums." On March 11, Scott's on the decks at 269 Norman Ave., in Brooklyn, with that hard, menacing mien as his calling card. Even when his selections glint with proverbial sunlight, a swarming low end covered in aural muck is never far behind.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Kingsland; March 11.)*

Kate Soper: "The Understanding of All Things"

CLASSICAL There is more speaking than singing on Kate Soper's new album, "The Understanding of All Things," which takes the form of philosophical soliloquies and dialogues about the nature of truth, existence, and perception. Soper, a composer and soprano, adapts texts by Parmenides, Franz Kafka, George Berkeley, and Fred Lerdahl and poems by W. B. Yeats and Robert Frost; her collaborator, Sam Pluta, an electronics performer and improviser, mixes the sound into a mechanical vortex. Despite the heady nature of the project, Soper has a gift for clarity. She sets Yeats's "For Anne Gregory" as a gentle, traditional ballad, but there are flashes of broken harmonies that reveal wit and melancholy. On the album's final track, "So Dawn Chromatically Descends to Day," Soper deploys Lerdahl to explore the formal principles that give music its impact—how certain chords or phrases elicit an emotional reaction—but she has already proved that she knows how to use them.—*Oussama Zahr (Streaming on select platforms.)*

ART

"Faith Ringgold: American People"

Ringgold, now ninety-one years old, is sorely overdue for canonical status after a protracted defiance of art-world fashion. First came her stubborn fidelity to figuration in times favoring abstraction, and then her eschewal of Pop and postmodernist irony—as opposed to humor, a wellspring of her creativity. (Those tendencies toward representation and sincerity happen to triumph, retroactively, in the penchant of many younger contemporary artists today.) An intermittently active participation in feminist and identity politics has also caused the Black artist to be embraced in some circles and discounted in others. Both estimations obscure the truth of Ringgold's artistic originality, which registers powerfully in this six-decade survey of more than a hundred works at the New Museum, with effects that can be deeply moving and feel

SPRING PREVIEW

An A.I. Opera, "Hamlet," Bach

It may be a cliché to say, but New York's classical scene feels reborn this spring, after a tentative start in the fall and a spate of Omicron-related delays and cancellations in the winter.

Contemporary opera and music theatre burst forth with three U.S. premières. **"Book of Mountains & Seas,"** a collection of Chinese creation myths, composed by Huang Ruo and designed by the master puppeteer Basil Twist, plays at St. Ann's Warehouse (March 15-20). Michel van der Aa's **"Upload,"** an opera about A.I. and the price of immortality, arrives at the Park Avenue Armory (March 22-30). Even the Metropolitan Opera, a standard-bearer for the classics, rounds out its season with Brett Dean's "**Hamlet**" (May 13-June 9), its third production since September of an opera written in the past five years.

Highlights in experimental chamber music include Du Yun's **"A Cockroach's Tarantella,"** at N.Y.U.'s Skirball Center (April 29-30), and Andy Akiho's rhythmically complex **"Seven Pillars,"** at Baryshnikov Arts Center (April 7-8). Death of Classical employs video projections to visualize Sarah Kirkland Snider's **"Mass for the Endangered,"** a beautiful reimagining of the Latin Mass as an homage to nature, at Green-Wood Cemetery, in Brooklyn (June 14-16), and the **New York Philharmonic** unveils Snider's "Forward Into Light," at Carnegie Hall (June 10).

Coming off a light fall schedule, Carnegie fills its calendar with regulars such as **Andras Schiff** (March 31), **Yuja Wang** (April 12), and **Yefim Bronfman** (April 18), and with notable débuts by **Jeanine De Bique** (April 2) and **Karim Sulayman** (May 19). The immersive-theatre specialists at **On Site Opera** likewise return to form, staging Puccini's comedy about a family of gold-diggers, "Gianni Schicchi," amid the Beaux-Arts splendor of the Prince George Ballroom (April 7-10).

It's not an anniversary year for J. S. Bach, but you'd be forgiven for thinking so. **Trinity Church Wall Street** and the **Orchestra of St. Luke's** each presents his mammoth St. Matthew Passion (March 29-31 and April 7, respectively). **Simone Dinnerstein** curates a Bach series for Miller Theatre that includes her own traversal of the Goldberg Variations (March 31). And Orchestra of St. Luke's and the **92nd Street Y** mount overlapping Bach festivals in June.

Also at 92Y, the inquisitive soprano **Dawn Upshaw** considers the legend of Dido, the queen of Carthage, in a wide-ranging program (April 3). The pianist **Anthony de Mare** does much the same with the late Stephen Sondheim, playing through inventive transcriptions of the musical-theatre titan's songs, at Kaufman Music Center (March 26).

—*Oussama Zahr*

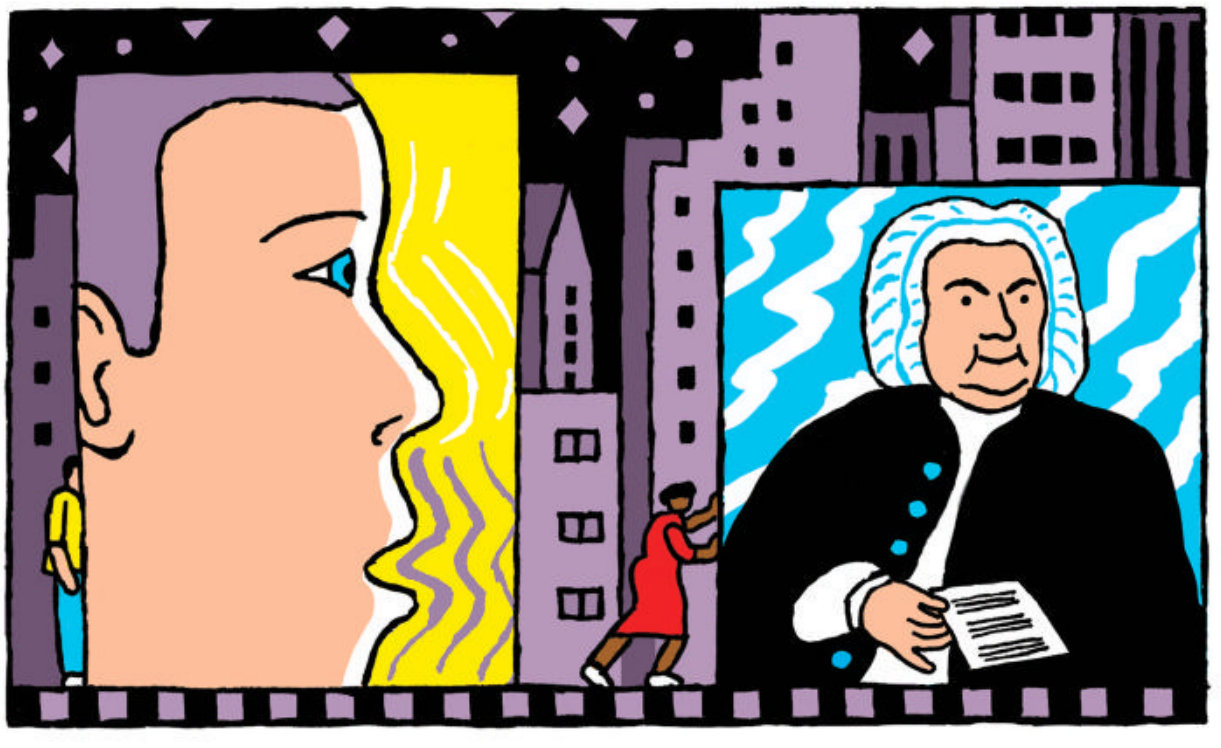


ILLUSTRATION BY JOOHEE YOON



SPRING PREVIEW

The Biennial, Matisse's Studio, Winslow Homer

The **"Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept"** is the eightieth edition of the museum's influential and inevitably divisive take on the current state of American art. The exhibition's co-curators, David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards, began envisioning the show before the pandemic shutdown, which delayed their efforts by a year. The plans they've announced reflect the exceedingly fractious and polarized national mood but also promise a semblance of sanctuary. The Biennial will be concentrated on two floors of the museum, one conceived as a dark maze, the other open and bright; certain walls will be intermittently reconfigured, in keeping with our unpredictable times. Expect a mix of poetry and politics in the works on view, from an intergenerational group of sixty-three artists and collectives. (Opens April 6.)

The Brooklyn-born Jamel Shabazz, one of the first to document the hip-hop scene in New York City, is often described as a proto-street-style photographer. But Shabazz's pictures convey more than his subjects' flair for fashion; his four-decade œuvre is an incisive portrait of outer-borough joy and resilience. Until the photo world caught up to Shabazz (who won a Gordon Parks Foundation Award in 2018), the Black artist supported himself for twenty years as a corrections officer on Rikers Island, an experience that honed his empathetic sensibility. The Bronx Museum surveys his career in **"Jamel Shabazz: Eye on the Street."** (Opens April 6.)

Before Winslow Homer joined the pantheon of great American painters, he was embedded on the front lines of the Civil War, working as an artist-correspondent for *Harper's*. **"Winslow Homer: Crosscurrents,"** at the Met, proposes that the history-altering conflict he witnessed on the battlefield informed his approach to every subject thereafter. Homer eventually settled in Maine, where he became a master of maritime scenes. His crowning achievement, "The Gulf Stream," from 1899—in which a lone Black man is adrift in a storm-tossed boat menaced by sharks—is the epic centerpiece of this show of some ninety works. (Opens April 11.)

The legendary sculptor **Louise Bourgeois** was studying painting in Paris, in the nineteen-thirties, when one of her teachers, the Cubist maestro Fernand Léger, predicted that her gifts would lend themselves to three dimensions. But Bourgeois didn't turn to sculpture until the late forties, a decade or so after she moved to Manhattan, where she lived until her death, at the age of ninety-eight, in 2010. The Met presents the first comprehensive show of the canvases that Bourgeois painted between 1938 and 1945. (Opens April 12.)

Forget those empty spectacles which bring famous paintings to digital life and mark your calendar for the real thing: **"Henri Matisse: The Red Studio,"** at MOMA. The unprecedented loan exhibition unites a crown jewel of the museum's collection, made in 1911—a vibrant scene of Matisse's atelier, filled with eleven of his paintings and sculptures—with the ten extant works that it depicts. (Opens May 1.)

—Andrea K. Scott

ILLUSTRATION BY JOOHEE YOON

as fresh as this morning. A profound personal essay in the show's catalogue by Michele Wallace, an important critic and one of Ringgold's two daughters, expertly tracks her mother's mergers of racial content and art history, both African and European. These culminate in such pictorial epics as "We Came to America: The American Collection #1" (1997). Black survivors of a distant, burning slave ship swim in seething waters toward a Black Statue of Liberty who is cradling a Black child. Victimhood is rarely at issue in Ringgold's work, however awful the circumstances; irrepressible vitality always is.—*Peter Schjeldahl (New Museum; through June 5.)*

Elizabeth Glaessner

A biographical detail about this Brooklyn-born artist sheds light on both the mythological anatomies and the amniotic quality of her bewitching new paintings: Glaessner was born with a protruding tailbone. In her current show, "Phantom Tail," supernatural creatures—a deliquescent sphinx, a spidery humanoid in a turquoise pool—occupy worlds that are alternately smoldering and coolly luminescent. One memorable scene is a natal mise en abyme in which a giantess in a flowering meadow gives birth to a smaller version of her laboring self, and so on. Glaessner's vaporous figuration and dreamy backgrounds can recall such symbolists as Edvard Munch and Odilon Redon, but her color is bolder. She deploys a singular alchemy of high-key stains and pours, overlaid with rich oil paint, to achieve a hazy deep space and smoothly modelled volumes. Conventional notions of gender, sexuality, reproduction, and species are deliriously suspended in the lush amphibious drama.—*Johanna Fateman (P.P.O.W.; through March 19.)*

"Woody Guthrie: People Are the Song"

There is only one guitar in this sprawling exhibition dedicated to the radical American folksinger, and it's inscribed with Guthrie's famous Second World War-era adage: "This Machine Kills Fascists." The words are scratched into the back of the instrument—a private incantation rather than a political slogan, in keeping with the tone of the show, which reveals an introspective side to the legend. In this thoughtful selection of lyrics, personal effects, correspondence, drawings, and even a painting, Guthrie comes across as a restlessly creative person, slowed only by the onset of Huntington's disease. (A faded standard-issue T-shirt from Greystone Park State Hospital, in New Jersey, where Guthrie was an inpatient from 1956 to 1961, poignantly commemorates his illness.) There is much reading to do here; the pro-labor output of the Dust Bowl socialist demands historical context. Without it, such songs as his enduring 1940 protest anthem "This Land Is Your Land" might come across as anodyne. The song's legacy is a particular focus here—various renditions play continually, floating through the galleries—but there is space for criticism, too. A statement by the Cherokee Nation, headquartered in Guthrie's home state of Oklahoma, notes that "the lyrics omit mention of the U.S. government's policies that dispossessed tribes . . . of their original homelands."—*J.F. (Morgan Library & Museum; through May 22.)*

MOVIES

Drive My Car

Patience is richly rewarded in the three-hour span of Ryûsuke Hamaguchi's theatre-centered tale, adapted from a story by Haruki Murakami. The first forty minutes are a long setup involving the strange collaboration of a Tokyo couple—an actor named Yûsuke (Hidetoshi Nishijima) and a screenwriter named Oto (Reika Kirishima). Then, after Oto's sudden death, from a cerebral hemorrhage, Yûsuke accepts a job directing a production of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" at an arts festival in Hiroshima; his method involves listening, in his car, to a cassette tape of the play recorded by Oto. The drama involves Yûsuke's friendship with his driver, a young woman named Misaki (Tôko Miura), whose bitter past gets sublimated behind the wheel, and his complex relationships with his cast—an international group, all of whom act in their own first languages (including Korean Sign Language). Hamaguchi ingeniously and movingly weaves Chekhov's dialogue into the lives of Yûsuke and his associates; the film's essence is the continuity of art and life, and the climactic performance of the play, in Yûsuke's staging, raises the film to a quietly ecstatic emotional pitch.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on HBO Max.)*

Lone Star

This fine and fraught movie, from 1996, by the writer-director John Sayles, boasts a knotted narrative style, a pressing melancholy, and a keen sense of place. The setting is Frontera, a small Texas town on the Mexican border, once policed by Sheriff Buddy Deeds (Matthew McConaughey) and now overseen by his son, Sam (Chris Cooper). Sayles shifts between the two eras with gracious ease, linking them with an old crime—the unsolved and unmourned killing of Buddy's predecessor, Charley Wade (Kris Kristofferson), who held sway through bigotry and corruption. Thanks to Kristofferson's scary and unyielding performance, the murder mystery becomes the core of the film. Elsewhere you can sense the strain as Sayles works away at the generation gaps, introducing an Army colonel (Joe Morton) and a local schoolteacher (Elizabeth Peña) who are both bowed down by family problems. By the end, you're grateful for the movie's weight and substance; you feel that you've been put through something serious.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 7/8/96.) (Streaming on Prime Video, iTunes, and other services.)*

Lucy and Desi

Amy Poehler's biographical documentary about the lives and careers of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz is aptly focussed on the pair's creation of "I Love Lucy" and the strain that success placed on their already fragile marriage. Its information is largely a footnote to "Being the Ricardos," but Poehler, with access to previously unreleased audio tapes of Ball and Arnaz, vividly and poignantly evokes their offscreen personalities. Ball describes the artistic education she got as a Hollywood contract player and her fascinating theories about comedy, and her methods are outlined in archival interviews with the writers of "I Love Lucy" and new interviews with others connected to the show (including the couple's daughter, Lucie Arnaz Luckinbill). For his part, Arnaz calls his work at their TV studio, Desilu, arduous and unpleasant; he considered it a job, whereas for Ball it was a calling. Despite the rushed montage of family photos and home movies with historical stock footage, the film keenly reveals the personal side of show business, as in an interview with Carol Burnett, who discusses Ball as a friend and a mentor.—*R.B. (Streaming on Prime Video.)*

Scarred Hearts

This fanatically detailed, intellectually furious 2016 drama, set in 1937, in a Romanian seaside clinic, depicts a young Jewish writer in the jaws of two pathologies, tuberculosis and Fascism. Based on the autobiographical writings of Max Blecher, it shows Emanuel (Lucian Teodor Rus), a poet, enduring Pott's disease, which is rotting his spine. The director, Radu Jude, unfolds his horrific treatments—long needles, tight wraps, and a full-body cast—with an unflinching specificity that contrasts with the theatrical tableaux of life in the lavish facility. The medical regimen is the backdrop for a slow-motion whirl of intellectuals, politicians, and socialites who turn the hospital into a microcosm of European sicknesses of the soul. Nighttime parties for youths with prostheses and crutches devolve into roars of militaristic and anti-Semitic chants. Sex is rampant and calamitous; literary ambitions and romantic dreams seep away along with physical vitality. The doctors' devoted efforts and the patients' florid brilliance are as useless against disease as they are against Hitler and his followers. In Romanian.—*R.B. (Streaming on the Criterion Channel.)*

Vertigo

Alfred Hitchcock's audaciously intricate melodrama, from 1958, concerns an acrophobic detective (James Stewart) who spurns the affection of a fashion illustrator (Barbara Bel Geddes) to pursue his frustrated passion for a chilly, suicidal platinum-blond woman of mystery (Kim Novak). It's a wonder of suspense, a catalogue of the director's themes, and an allegory for his own art of enticement—and for the erotic pitfalls of his métier. Novak's famous transformations, Stewart's haunted fabrications, and Bel Geddes's unrequited longing are all tethered to the whim of another master plotter, the detective's long-lost friend (Tom Helmore), whose marital suspicions are the MacGuffin with which Hitchcock unfurls his own obsessions: the tragic difference between friendship and love, the seductive power of style and disguise, the proximity of lust and madness, and the inseparability of sex from danger and death. Hitchcock's alluring visual extravagance—his baroque swirl of caustic greens, voluptuous purples, acidic yellows, and fiery reds, amid the indecent glare of daylight—conjures a torrent of unconscious desires beyond the realm of storytelling; his happy ending, of health restored and crime punished, resembles an aridly monastic renunciation.—*R.B. (Streaming on Peacock, YouTube,and other services.)*

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SPRING PREVIEW

Real Lives, Fantasies, Festival Favorites

The season's roster of releases teems with stories about real people and real animals. **"The Duke"** (April 22), the last dramatic feature directed by the late Roger Michell, is based on the true story of a theft, in 1961, of a Goya painting from the National Gallery in London; Jim Broadbent plays Kempton Bunton, a cabdriver convicted of the crime; Helen Mirren co-stars as Bunton's wife, Dorothy. **"The Torch"** (March 18), directed by Jim Farrell, is a documentary portrait of the great Chicago-based blues singer and guitarist Buddy Guy, who discusses what he learned in his work, decades ago, with such musicians as Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, and is shown mentoring the young guitarist Quinn Sullivan. **"Aline"** (April 8), a drama about the rise of a singer from a small Quebec town to international fame, is a fictionalized version of the life story of Céline Dion; Valérie Lemercier directed, co-wrote the script (with Brigitte Buc), and stars as the singer. **"Cow"** (April 8), which follows a dairy cow named Luma and her calves for four years on a farm, is the first documentary by Andrea Arnold, the director of such acclaimed dramas as "Fish Tank" and "American Honey."

Nonetheless, tales of myth and fantasy make up a prime part of the calendar, including many far from the realms of franchises and superheroes. Mariama Diallo's first feature, **"Master"** (March 18), is a horror film starring Regina Hall as a dean at a New England college where ingrained racism is connected to the school's haunted history; it co-stars Zoe Renee as a student and Amber Gray as a professor. Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert wrote and directed the science-fiction comedy **"Everything Everywhere All at Once"** (March 25), in which Michelle Yeoh plays a woman who, while trying to file her taxes, falls into multiple universes, where she's pursued by an I.R.S. agent (Jamie Lee Curtis). Judd Apatow's comedy **"The Bubble"** (April 1, aptly) is about a group of actors trying to make a film while locked down in a hotel during the pandemic; the cast features Karen Gillan, Fred Armisen, Maria Bakalova, David Duchovny, Keegan-Michael Key, Leslie Mann, and Pedro Pascal. Robert Eggers's latest drama, **"The Northman"** (April 22), set in tenth-century Iceland, stars Alexander Skarsgård as a Viking prince with a Hamlet-like quest for revenge against his uncle (Claes Bang) for the killing of his father.

Some of the most notable spring releases are international films that premièred at festivals last year, including three from the New York Film Festival. The title of Nadav Lapid's drama **"Ahed's Knee"** (March 18) refers to a real-life Palestinian woman who resisted the Israeli Army, about whom a fictional Israeli Jewish director called Y (Avshalom Pollak) plans to make a film; the reflexive and pugnacious drama is centered on Y's crisis of conscience while presenting a movie of his in a desert town. Panah Panahi, the son of the Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, makes his directorial début with the drama **"Hit the Road"** (April 22), about a young man who is on a tense road trip with his family to Iran's border so that he can be smuggled out of the country. Céline Sciamma's new film, **"Petite Maman"** (April 22), is a dramatic fantasy about a girl who, at the home of her late grandmother, encounters her own mother as a child; the girls are played by the identical twins Joséphine and Gabrielle Sanz.

—Richard Brody



ILLUSTRATION BY JOOHEE YOON





TABLES FOR TWO

Ci Siamo

440 W. 33rd St.

The Italian phrase *ci siamo* translates to "here we are," a Godot-like statement that hints at the ethos of this new Hudson Yards-adjacent restaurant from the hospitality guru Danny Meyer: Here we are! But where is here? As with much of Hudson Yards, at Ci Siamo it feels like here could be any city in the vague middle U.S.—Denver, Houston, Cincinnati.

The disorientation begins as, on your way, you pass through Manhattan West Plaza, whose features include an N.H.L. store, a Peloton Studios, and Citrovia, a garish faux garden of nineteen-foot steel-and-fibreglass lemon trees and shrubs with fabric snowcaps, which reads as a misbegotten vodka ad but is meant to be a "tourist attraction," according to Google. Once you have finally located Ci Siamo—it's so hard to find that the restaurant sends a chipper text with directions—the entryway's warm hues and scent of woodsmoke put you at ease.

From the welcoming staff, who not only enhance but create ambience with their willingness to please (how do they stay so happy?), to the glamorous décor—handsome leather, velvet, Craftsman-modern tilework, all accented by scores of eclectic light fixtures—Meyer certainly knows how to attract the well-groomed professional class. But what pulls it all together is, of course, the food, and Meyer's culminating move was to enlist Hillary Sterling as chef. In the past two decades, Sterling has worked in the kitchens of Bobby Flay—whose interplay of citrus and fruity spice shows up in a seafood salad—and Missy Robbins—whose influence is evident in Sterling's exemplary fresh pastas; most recently, she was the chef of Vic's, in NoHo, which she steered to its status as worthy neighborhood standby.

Sterling excels at zhuzhing up dishes we've seen before, and the menu at Ci Siamo is so stocked with crowd-pleasers that it can be difficult to choose. Begin with focaccia, an eight-inch round with the correct ratio of exterior crunch to interior fluff. It comes with a knife for cutting—an unwieldy task, but worth it—and a bright chili-flecked tomato spread that it doesn't need. You are basically required to order the now famous Caramelized Onion Torta, described lovingly by a server, one evening, as "French onion soup in a tart." It, too, is a personal-sized round, redolent of Uno's pan pizzas in the best way, with a gorgeously flaky crust, piled with melty balsamic onions and Pecorino-infused cream. For your health, there's the chilled Insalata di Mare, in which a few wan mussels don't stand a chance next to succulent, nearly raw scallops, hunks of tender swordfish, and nuggets of poached lobster, dressed with Castelvetrano olives, parsley, and Aleppo-pepper-spiked lemon and orange juice.

Among the decadent fresh pastas, a hefty rigatoni is a hedonist's delight, studded with guanciale batons fried to a crunch, the fat coating each ridged tube. Rapini agnolotti—paper-thin pasta envelopes of ricotta and greens finished with a lemony butter sauce and bread crumbs—was deemed, by one diner, "fettuccine Alfredo with broccoli"; heaven, if you like that kind of thing.

The wood-burning oven turns out a lovely whole trout, deboned (of course) and stuffed with mustard greens, fried bread, and golden raisins for sweetness. Even better is a smoky mix of hen-of-the-woods, oyster, and trumpet mushrooms roasted with thyme, as well as a flavorful half chicken, marinated in mustard, garlic oil, and oregano, charred to juicy perfection.

When dessert is made by pastry royalty—in this case, Claudia Fleming, formerly of Gramercy Tavern—there is no possible reason to abstain. Good luck deciding between a rich chocolate budino, flower-shaped pull-apart bomboloni with dipping chocolate, a super-tart lemon torta, and a dense cheesecake with preserved cherries. One night, a server whose gelato recommendation went unheeded gleefully delivered a gratis bowl of rich, creamy hazelnut. When he swung by later to see how we liked it, he beamed at the answer. *(Pastas and entrées $21–$43.)*

—Shauna Lyon

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARIA BE FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

At the most consequential hour in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as a vengeful and erratic autocrat invades Ukraine alluding darkly to the scale of his nuclear arsenal, a comedian has assumed the role of Winston Churchill. Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine, has relied largely on his voice to inspire his country's resilience. The greater part of a dispirited and fractured world has also responded to his call.

Vladimir Putin's attempt to conquer Ukraine, to depose its democratically elected government and absorb the state into his imperial, mystical conception of a Russky Mir, a Russian World, is in its early stages. The assault has already resulted in thousands of deaths and a colossal refugee crisis. Yet the first days of the onslaught exposed weaknesses in the Russian military. Some accounts may prove inaccurate, but it is clear that Ukrainian soldiers and armed civilians have shot down Russian helicopters, destroyed Russian tanks, and generally slowed Putin's effort to overwhelm the main cities in a few days.

Zelensky has galvanized his people through the clarity of his language. Churchill, in his essay "The Scaffolding of Rhetoric," wrote, "Of all the talents bestowed upon men, none is so precious as the gift of oratory. He who enjoys it wields a power more durable than that of a great king." Churchill employed the wireless, using blank-verse cadences to rally the will of his fellow-Britons and his foreign allies. Zelensky employs a smartphone and the simplest rhetoric to assert his presence on the front line. "*Ya tut*," he told his fellow-Ukrainians as he stood on the street in Kyiv. I am here. From his bunker in the capital, he described a Russian missile strike and civilian casualties to members of the European Parliament with such ringing force that even the English-language interpreter could not contain his emotion.

Zelensky is an unlikely tribune. He grew up in Kryvyi Rih, a rough steel city in the southeast where thousands of Ukrainians, particularly Jews, were killed during the Nazi occupation. A mediocre student, he led a comedy troupe called Kvartal 95, and, in 2015, helped develop a sitcom called "Servant of the People." And here is where the postmodernism kicks in: Zelensky played the role of Vasyl Holoborodko, a high-school teacher whose life changes when he goes on a tirade about corrupt politicians. A student films him and the video goes viral. His plaintive honesty strikes a chord in the Ukrainian people and . . . he is elected President.



"Servant of the People" was an unabashedly broad comedy, more Benny Hill than Noël Coward, and it was a hit. After a few seasons, it occurred to Zelensky that fiction might be realized as fact, that the character he was playing on television just might be what his country required. "I started out making fun of politicians, parodying them, and, in so doing, showing what kind of Ukraine I would like to see," Zelensky told Joshua Yaffa, in *The New Yorker*.

In 2019, Zelensky got a great deal more attention than he ever wanted when Donald Trump, with all the finesse of a Mafia don, called to ask for a "favor": Dig up dirt on Hunter Biden's business dealings in the Ukrainian energy business or the U.S. would hold back hundreds of millions of dollars in military assistance. It was hard not to recall that thuggish request, a pivotal piece of evidence in Trump's first impeachment hearings, when the former President declared, last week, that Putin's invasion of Ukraine was "genius."

Prior to the war, Zelensky's popularity had declined. Oligarchs continued to exert influence on Ukraine, not least in media. Just before the invasion, he seemed at odds with President Biden, who insisted on making public the intelligence estimates about the imminence of an attack. Zelensky preferred to minimize the prospect of war. But, when the tanks rolled, Zelensky began delivering his message to his people: he would never

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

abandon Ukraine. "He has a performer's sixth sense of what people want—he feels their approval or disapproval," Igor Novikov, a former adviser, said from his home in Kyiv. "In a time of crisis, he is a lens that channels the energies of the people into a single beam of light."

There should be no illusions. Even the most penetrating rhetoric is not an anti-missile defense system. Kharkiv, Mariupol, and other cities are under bombardment. Russian troops have attacked nuclear power plants. What mercy is Putin likely to extend to Kyiv? Precedent is no comfort. Twenty-two years ago, he annihilated Grozny; thousands of civilians were killed. And he has never seemed as inflamed as he does now.

In contrast to Zelensky, Putin is increasingly disconnected and delusional. His high approval ratings are inflated by incessant propaganda, coercion, and the projection of national stability through bare-chested strength. Having taken note of the world's tepid reaction to his military adventures in Georgia, in 2008, and in Crimea and the Donbas region, in 2014, Putin carried out this operation with seemingly serene confidence. He clearly believed that he could rely on the modernization of his armed forces and on distraction, weakness, and division in his enemies. He was mistaken.

The complex of economic sanctions thrown at Russia are hardly symbolic. The ruble has dropped sharply. To forestall a colossal sell-off, the Russian stock market was closed all of last week. Swiss banks froze many Russian accounts. Germany abandoned its cautious post-war posture, increasing its defense spending and moving to reduce its dependence on Russian energy. The International Olympic Committee, the various soccer bureaucracies, and countless corporations—entities rarely known for their moral bravery—have coöperated in sanctioning Russia.

Thousands of Russians, particularly among the urban élite, anticipate the end of a tolerable existence and are leaving for Georgia, Armenia, Turkey, and beyond. Those who remain in Russia—the vast majority—are likely to find themselves living in an isolated and profoundly more authoritarian country, perhaps under martial law. "The state is falling apart right before your eyes," Misha Fishman, one of the lead broadcasters for TV Rain, Russia's last independent television station, said.

The only person capable of putting an end to the invasion is the man who instigated it. An optimist would point out that, with at least a small number of energy executives and oligarchs voicing displeasure, Putin may be vulnerable to a revolt. But, in the short run, he will do everything he can to suppress dissent on the streets and among his cronies and satraps. Zelensky knows this only too well. His is a voice not only of inspiration but of stark realism. "It's not a movie," he said. Spoken like a man who knows that he may not live to celebrate the liberation of the country he has sworn to defend.

—David Remnick

KYIV DISPATCH

BOMB SHELTER



Late in the afternoon of March 1st, a gray, damp day in Kyiv, I heard—or, rather, felt—a chest-thumping burst from outside the window of my hotel. A spiral of black smoke floated upward, past office buildings and apartment blocks. Russia had targeted the city's television tower, a thousand-foot landmark of the Soviet era that rises above the western edge of the city's skyline.

The explosion left much of the surrounding area charred, including grounds on the edge of a complex dedicated to the thirty thousand Jews who, in 1941, were murdered by the Nazis at a site known as Babyn Yar. The irony was impossible to miss: a military campaign that Vladimir Putin had declared, in a grim and rambling televised address, was aimed at the "de-Nazification" of Ukraine came perilously close to bombing a Holocaust memorial. What made the destruction utterly tragic was that five people who were walking below the tower died instantly; four of them were effectively incinerated.

By the following morning, the United Nations put the number of confirmed civilian deaths at two hundred and twenty-seven, noting that the true count is "considerably higher." (On Facebook, Ukraine's State Emergency Service had said that more than two thousand civilians have been killed, but it later removed the number from the post.) Many of those deaths came from air strikes, whether from artillery shelling or missiles. As a result, across the country, especially in the cities where Russia's onslaught has been particularly intense, underground spaces—cellars, parking garages, bomb shelters left over from the Cold War—have become precious. Every night in Kyiv, metro stations fill with as many as fifteen thousand civilians, from young families with inflatable mattresses to babushkas who remember wartime stories from their parents many decades ago.

With word spreading of the possibility of further Russian air strikes, I decided to pay a visit to Kristina Berdynskykh, one of the country's most accomplished political journalists, who has spent every night of the war in her local metro station. Along with her sixty-seven-year-old mother, Galina, and seventeen-year-old niece, Nastya, she had secured a place inside a train car, which tends to be a few degrees warmer than the concrete platform. On every surface, several dozen people lay in various angles of awkward recline, surrounded by rolling suitcases and plastic shopping bags.

Berdynskykh is thirty-eight, with shoulder-length brown hair and a demeanor that is both reassuringly competent and disarmingly self-deprecating. She had spent the day at her mother's apartment, organizing provisions, calling relatives elsewhere in Ukraine, taking a shower, swapping clothes, and weighing whether to leave town. Many of her colleagues from *Novoye Vremya*, the magazine where she is the chief political correspondent, have relocated to western Ukraine. Two staffers joined Kyiv's Territorial Defense Forces, the volunteer paramilitary brigades that have popped up around the country. Part of Berdynskykh's urge to stay in the capital is journalistic; she managed to write one column the previous week—a description of her evenings

spent in the metro—while hidden away in a hallway closet.

"I can't stop imagining the following scenario," she told me. "Kyiv holds out, and then I emerge from the metro and am one of the only journalists covering victory day." She acknowledged that this may be an unlikely fantasy, but, then again, it felt no more possible to imagine a Russian takeover of the Ukrainian state. "The first days of resistance give me confidence that won't happen," she said. "What I'm less sure about is how much blood could be spilled in the process."

We set up a picnic—alfresco, as we joked—on a blanket laid out on the platform. Galina produced what, in my famished state, looked like a Ukrainian bounty: boiled potatoes, sour pickles, slick pork fat. Berdynskykh and her family are from Kherson, a city in the south, where the Dnieper River empties into the Black Sea, not far from Crimea. It is largely Russian-speaking, with cultural and historical ties to its larger neighbor that stretch back for centuries. The next day, Kherson would become the first Ukrainian city to fall to Russian forces, having been blanketed by heavy shelling in the process.

I asked Galina, who was keeping warm with a heavy black coat and a wool knit hat, about her attitude toward Russia. She was a Soviet child, raised on stories of the Second World War, and was an enthusiastic member of the Komsomol, the Communist youth organization. "I didn't think of Kyiv as my capital, but Moscow," she said. "We were part of the same whole—it didn't even cross our minds to separate ourselves." Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Galina's feelings for Russia were essentially warm. Not anymore. "They are my enemies," she told me. "It's terrible—we were so close, but after this I don't know how it could ever be any different."

After a week of nights spent in the metro, Berdynskykh has come to recognize a cast of recurring characters. There is the wife of a metro employee who, along with the couple's five-month-old child, has effectively moved into the station, making rounds to hand out tea and marshmallows. A thirty-year-old trumpet player named Danil Kolotun, from a renowned national folk orchestra, has taken to playing the Ukrainian national anthem in the evenings. "You can see that people are down, pressured, scared," he said. "I'm a musician—that's what I can do well—so I figured I'd make that my contribution." It's also a way to lower his own stress: "I don't want to panic—but I am angry."

As the city's curfew hour, eight o'clock, drew closer, more people filtered into the station. There's a toilet, previously reserved for metro personnel, fifty feet or so down the tunnel in one direction. A single power strip is plugged in by the ticket window, for people to take turns charging their phones. People are generous, sharing food and bits of news about the Russian advance, but also suspicious. Kyiv is consumed by talk of *diversanty*, pro-Russian agents set on carrying out



Kristina Berdynskykh

provocations and acts of sabotage. At another metro station, police claimed to have stopped a group of *diversanty* who tried to smuggle explosives and ammunition inside of a children's toy—though, like so many stories in Kyiv these days, there was no way to know whether this was legend or fact.

As we sat on the platform, overhead televisions played the evening news: "Russian soldiers taken prisoner. Missiles in Kharkiv," the chyron read. Earlier that day, carpet bombing of residential buildings in Kharkiv had killed at least eleven people, with some struck down in the street while holding grocery bags in their hands. A missile strike had hit the central square, throwing up a wall of fire. The city is less than thirty miles from the Russian border and had long harbored a pro-Russian strain in its politics—a sentiment that faded after 2014, and has all but disappeared over the past week. The indiscriminate bombing of Kharkiv "looks like revenge," Berdynskykh said. "Putin says he wants to protect Russian speakers, but it turns out Russian speakers don't want this protection."

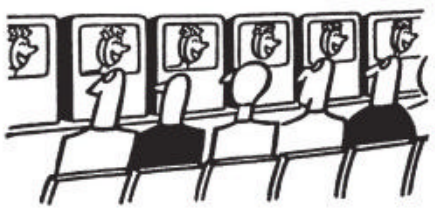
Nastya, a first-year university student in Kyiv, had booked a train ticket home to Kherson for early March. Now that the city is under Russian occupation, it's unclear if she can return. Her parents had moved to a house on the outskirts of town, and told her that a column of Russian tanks and armor had rumbled past. A neighbor at their apartment building, in the center of Kherson, said that the courtyard was full of Russian soldiers. Residents pass stories of how some of these troops have taken to stealing food from local shops. Galina has heard from a few old friends in Kherson, too, but, as she said, "There's not much to say. They sit all day at home, terrified." She relayed how, during a recent conversation, she thought that she'd heard loud explosions on the other end of the line. "Oh, did you hear, something went bang over there," she told her friend. "No," the friend answered. "That's back in Kyiv."

After ten, the lights in the station dimmed. People packed up their food and rolled out sleeping bags, the white glow of phone screens casting flickering shadows on the walls of the train car. I crawled into my folded-up blanket, and felt the cold floor beneath me. The muffled rumble of nearby snores felt almost reassuring, a reminder of all the humanity gathered so tightly together. A woman offered me a pillow.

The next morning, as we stretched our stiff backs, I asked Berdynskykh how long she thought she'd keep coming back to the metro station. It was, in a way, a silly question: that's not for her to decide. "In one scenario, Putin realizes that his blitzkrieg failed—Ukraine is putting up too much resistance—so he'll back off," she said. But, knowing Putin, Berdynskykh imagined that the costs for Ukraine, even in this most optimistic version of events, could be ugly and severe. "He'll make us pay one way or another," she said. "As for the other option, well, I'd prefer not to even think about it."

—Joshua Yaffa

MOSCOW DISPATCH
MANUFACTURED REALITY



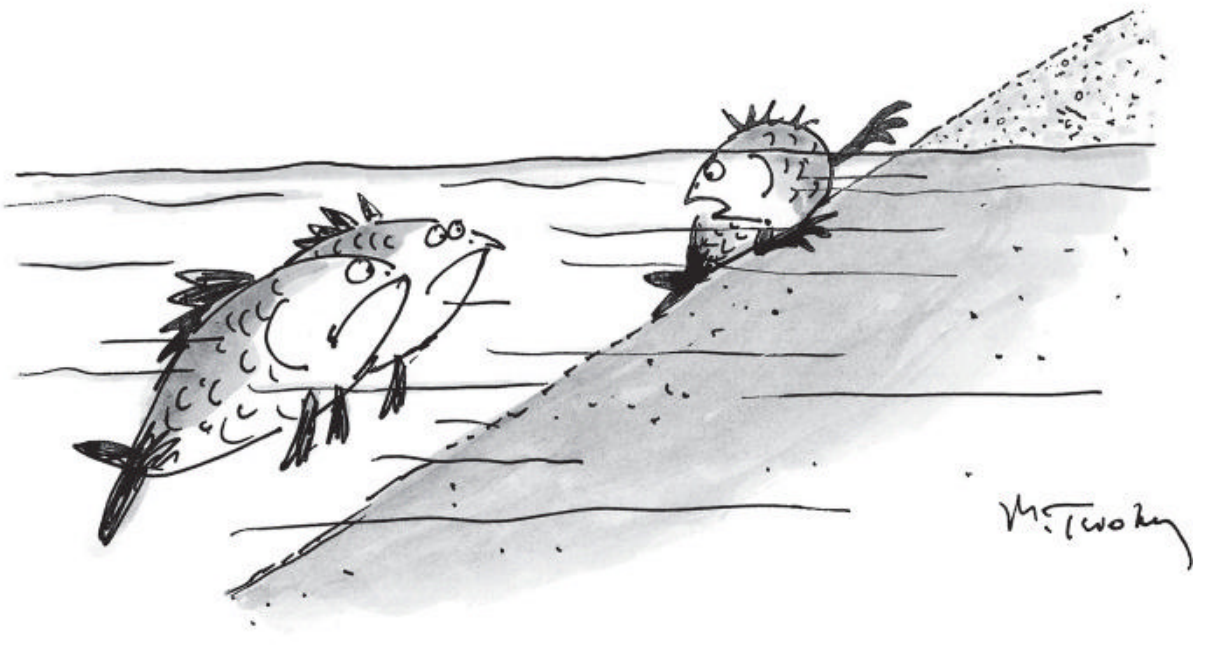
Pushkin Square, in the center of Moscow, is a traditional site of protest. Since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, on February 24th, most of the square has been cordoned off, with police in riot gear and National Guard soldiers in full combat gear stationed around its perimeter most of the day. On the first day of the war, police made hundreds of arrests in Pushkin Square; on most nights since, they have netted only a handful of people, often as soon as the protesters got off the subway. At about seven-thirty on Wednesday evening, three policemen in riot gear were dragging a young woman with a braid onto a police bus; a few paces behind them, three more officers dragged another young woman.

Meanwhile, pedestrian traffic around the square flowed smoothly and speedily. People went in and out of the Metro and a three-story H&M store. They did not stop and stare at the mute scenes of arrest. They did not seem to notice, and the not-noticing did not appear effortful. It seemed, rather, that the Muscovites going about their business and the young women being arrested inhabited different realities. The protesters lived in a world where Russia was waging a brutal, inexplicable war in Ukraine, where it was bombing residential neighborhoods in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. The rest of the people in the square lived in a world where this war did not exist.

A majority of Russians get their news from broadcast television, which is fully controlled by the state. "This is largely a country of older people and poor people," Lev Gudkov told me. Gudkov is the director of the Levada Center, which was once Russia's leading public-opinion-research organization and which the state has now branded a "foreign agent." There are more Russians over the age of forty-five than there are between the ages of fifteen and forty-four. Even those who get their news online are still unlikely to encounter a narrative that differs from what broadcast television offers. The state continues to ratchet up pressure on the few surviving independent media outlets, blocking access to their Web sites, requiring them to preface their content with a disclaimer that it was created by a "foreign agent," and, ultimately, forcing them to close. On Thursday, the radio station Echo of Moscow and the Web-based television channel TV Rain, both of which had had their sites blocked earlier in the week, decided to stop operations. What the vast majority of Russians see, Gudkov said, are "lies and hatred on a fantastical scale."

State television varies little, aesthetically and narratively, from channel to channel. Aside from President Vladimir Putin interrupting regular programming in the early hours of February 24th to announce a "special military operation" in Ukraine, the picture has changed little since before the war. There is no ongoing live coverage, no acknowledgment that what's happening is extraordinary, even as Russian bombs fall on Ukraine's residential areas and the Russian economy enters a tailspin. The news lineup, too, changes little day to day. On Thursday, the 7 A.M. newscast on Channel One lasted six minutes and contained six stories: a new round of Russian-Ukrainian peace talks in which Russia was eager to seek "common ground"; the "shelling of the Donetsk People's Republic by the Ukrainian armed forces," from which "twenty-five civilians have died." A segue: "And now let's look at footage from the Chernigov region, an area that is now controlled by the Russian armed forces. . . . Civilians continue driving around on their regular business." (There were no civilians in the footage shown, only an endless sequence of armored vehicles.) Then: "Russia has prepared more than ten and a half thousand tons of humanitarian aid for the people of Ukraine"; "The West is pumping Ukraine full of offensive weapons"; "Aeroflot is organizing charter flights to return Russian citizens stranded in Europe." Then the young male host announced, "The next scheduled program is 'Good Morning.'" There was no mention of Kharkiv or Kyiv, which had been bombed the day before. Most remarkably, there was no mention of Russian military casualties, even though on Wednesday the defense ministry had acknowledged four hundred and ninety-eight deaths. (Ukraine has put Russian military losses at more than ten times that number.)

Gudkov summed up the world view shaped by Russian television: "Russia is a victim, as it has been ever since the Second World War. The West aims to establish world domination. Its ultimate goal is to humiliate Russia and take possession of its natural resources. Russia is forced to defend itself." Days before the full-scale invasion began, the Levada Center asked Russians who they thought was responsible for the mounting tensions in Ukraine. Three per cent blamed Russia, fourteen per cent blamed Ukraine, and sixty per cent blamed the United States.



"I hate you and I hate water!"

The government has banned the use of the words "war," "aggression," and "invasion" to describe its "special military operation" in Ukraine. Media outlets that violate these bans face fines and closure. On Friday, the upper chamber of parliament passed a bill making the dissemination of "false information" about the conflict punishable by up to fifteen years in prison. The bill was responsible for TV Rain deciding to stop broadcasting on YouTube: the risks of calling things what they are have become too high—and the cost of trying to walk a fine line, as TV Rain had been doing, was morally unsustainable. *Novaya Gazeta*, the newspaper edited by Dmitry Muratov, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, took a vote among people it calls its "co-conspirators"—those who support the paper through private donations. Sixty-four hundred and twenty people have voted; about ninety-four per cent of them asked the paper to submit to the censorship requirements and continue publishing.

Most of Russia's propaganda language is plainly Orwellian. After a few days, newscasts were consistently referring to the war as an "operation to restore peace." On Tuesday night, when the TV Rain Web site was blocked, the channel was broadcasting a story about how the government, working through ad agencies, was offering to pay bloggers and TikTokers to post talking points about the war. "All posts should be accompanied by #LetsGoPeace and #DontAbandonOurOwn," the offer began. Among the talking points: "We are calling for peace, and it's unfortunate that these are the means we must use to achieve it."

On March 1st, schools around the country held special social-studies classes on the war in Ukraine. The online publication Mediazona, another independent news organization that has been branded a "foreign agent," obtained a script sent out by the education ministry. Its F.A.Q. section begins, "Question: Are we at war with Ukraine? Could this have been avoided? Answer: We are not at war. We are conducting a special peacekeeping mission, the goal of which is to contain the nationalists who are oppressing the Russian-speaking population."

In "The Language of the Third Reich," the German Jewish writer Victor Klemperer described the effect of propaganda as "blurring" reality. When the Russian narrative of the war in Ukraine is not Orwellian, it is Klempererian. The state's twenty-four-hour news channel, Rossiya 24, drones on about villages and towns that have been "liberated," but they name small towns that are unfamiliar to most viewers. The pictures onscreen often contradict the words spoken over them. On Thursday morning, a reporter on Rossiya 24 told of directly observing an unexploded Ukrainian rocket wedged in the floor of "an apartment on Lenin Street." The accompanying image was that of an empty street in an unidentifiable village. "It's not just the arguments—it's the uninterrupted flow" of propaganda, Gudkov said. "Viewers are just caught in this flow."

Although there is supposed to be no war, there is a sense of constant threat and aggrievement. In 2014, when Russia first invaded Ukraine, an army of propagandists struggled to find the right framing. Finally, they unleashed the war language that Russians know best: that of the Second World War. They called Ukrainians fascists—"UkroNazis"—and accused them of genocide. In this story, the 2014 revolution in Ukraine was carried out by Nazis who want to exterminate the country's Russian-speaking population, beginning with the eastern region of the Donbass. A slide presentation for students in grades six through eight, also obtained by Mediazona, ends with a sequence of questions: "How do you interpret the word 'genocide'? Why is it applicable to the situation in the Donbass? . . . Think about history. Russia has always guaranteed Ukraine's security and independence. Can this situation be described as a senior partner helping a junior one?"

On an episode of a political talk show that has aired several times since the war began, a group of six pundits discussed plans for the "de-Nazification" of Ukraine after it is "liberated." Their consensus seemed to be that most Ukrainians were not bad people, just stupid and brainwashed by NATO, fascists, and imperialist forces who want to return Russia to the status of "a colony exploited by the West." Speaking on Rossiya 24, on Thursday morning, Eduard Basurin, the deputy head of



Vladimir Putin

the Donetsk People's Republic Militia, spoke about Mariupol, a Ukrainian city that was then surrounded by Russian troops. "Mariupol has become a concentration camp," he said. He claimed that Ukrainian troops had herded civilians into the city's steelworks, which had been planted with explosives: "If the city's defenses are breached, they will blow the factory up and then use the video footage to say that the Russian artillery is killing civilians. Can you imagine the cynicism?" The next story: "The Russian Defense Ministry's convoy delivers critically needed humanitarian cargo to residents of the Kharkiv region." The one after that lamented the West's ongoing attack on free speech, citing the United Kingdom's newly announced ban on the Russian state-run English-language channel RT. (By Friday, Russia had blocked Facebook, the BBC, Radio Liberty, and the Russian-language news organization Meduza.)

The nice thing about a war that's not a war is that it's easy to look away—without looking away from the television. The airwaves fill with reassurances: Russian banks don't need SWIFT; Europe's sanctions only mean that fuel prices will go up in the West; the Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich is selling Chelsea Football Club not because he might soon face sanctions but because the club kept losing money; the foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, has promised that "our Western partners will get over themselves." Peace and prosperity are just around the corner.

—Masha Gessen

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

FAR FROM THE TREE

Did George Washington have an enslaved son?

BY JILL ABRAMSON



In Fairfax County, Virginia, two landmarks of early American history share an uneasy but inextricable bond. George Washington's majestic Mount Vernon estate is one of the most popular historic homes in the country, visited by roughly a million people a year. Gum Springs, a small community about three miles north, is one of the oldest surviving freedmen's villages, most of which were established during Reconstruction. The community was founded in 1833 by West Ford, who lived and worked at Mount Vernon for nearly sixty years, first as an enslaved teen-ager and continuing after he was freed. Following Washington's death, in 1799, Ford helped manage the estate, and he maintained an unusually warm relationship with the extended Washington family.

Awareness of West Ford had faded both in Gum Springs and at Mount Vernon, but in recent years his story has been at the center of a bitter controversy between the two sites. His descendants have demanded that Mount Vernon recognize Ford for his contributions to the estate, which was near collapse during the decades after Washington's death. They also argue—citing oral histories from two branches of the family—that Ford was Washington's unacknowledged son, a claim that Mount Vernon officials have consistently denied. As that debate continues, Black civic organizations in Gum Springs are engaged in related battles to save their endangered community. They have resisted, with some success, Virginia's planned expansion of Richmond Highway, which would encroach on the town, and they have embarked on the process of getting Gum Springs named a national historic site.

In the spring of 2021, a friend and I decided to take a drive through Virginia to explore the state's complicated racial history. While researching the trip, I came across some articles about Ford and the patrimony debate. I wanted to learn more about him and the community he had started. Our first stop was Gum Springs, which today is home to some three thousand people. We visited Bethlehem Baptist Church, founded, in 1863, by a freedom seeker named Samuel K. Taylor, who served as its pastor for thirty years. We hoped to go inside, but a sign was taped to the door: "Space Is Uninhabitable." The Gum Springs Historical Society and Museum was closed for the day. We found only one citation of West Ford, at a housing project on Fordson Road that was named for him. The historical marker for the town had been destroyed by drivers who, while speeding off the highway, had run into it. Replaced a few months later, it reads "Gum Springs, an African-American community, originated here on a 214-acre farm bought in 1833 by West Ford (ca. 1785-1863). A freed man, skilled carpenter, and manager of the Mount Vernon estate. . . . Gum Springs has remained a vigorous black community."

Six days later, we completed our trip near its starting place, at Mount Vernon, set on an expansive lawn overlooking the Potomac River. The house, gardens, and outbuildings have been impeccably restored, and the estate includes a lavish library, along with a large museum and an education center. A guide escorted us and half a dozen other visitors on a "slavery tour." We saw the slave quarters and the slave cemetery, where between ninety and a hundred and twenty people are believed to be buried in unmarked graves. A stone marker, laid in 1929, reads "In memory of the many faithful colored servants of the Washington family." We stopped at

West Ford founded Gum Springs, a freedmen's community, near Mount Vernon.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN P. DESSEREAU

the nearby Slave Memorial, opened in 1983—a striking truncated granite column, encircled by boxwood hedges and by a low stone wall.

When the guide asked for questions, I said, "What about West Ford?" She paused, then stammered, "We don't talk about him."

Last November, I returned to Gum Springs and sought out Ronald Chase, the seventy-year-old founding director of the town's historical society and the museum. A round man with a gray beard and a sonorous baritone, he told me about West Ford and the community he founded. Chase's ancestors were Jaspers, once enslaved at Mount Vernon and later among the first families to settle in Gum Springs. His great-uncle was the grandson of Ford's daughter Jane. Ada Singletary, who is a hundred and one years old, used to walk back and forth to Mount Vernon to play, and considered it a second home. Singletary is a Jasper, too, and Chase's second cousin. "Got that?" he asked with a smile.

Discussing West Ford's achievements, Chase said, "A Black man buying property in 1833—that in and of itself is a miracle. And, for that community to stay in continuum, that's also a miracle." By 1888, thirteen Black families, including Ford's children, had settled in Gum Springs, and in 1890 seven men started a land-buying collective called the Joint Stock Club, which sold parcels to newcomers at cost, for thirty dollars an acre. The early population consisted mostly of Black subsistence farmers. According to a 1990 monograph by John Terry Chase, a Fairfax County historian, the town's most prosperous period was between 1900 and 1945, when people continued to move in, opening restaurants and other small businesses. Since then, Ronald Chase said, the affluent Fairfax County has protected the interests of wealthy white homeowners and has disproportionately used Gum Springs as space for public housing. (A spokesman for the county, conceding that Fairfax had not done enough to help Gum Springs, said that it was now trying to do more.)

Chase took me around the tiny museum, which contains two sketches of West Ford. One, made around 1805, to commemorate his freedom, shows a light-skinned twenty-one-year-old in formal dress. The other, from 1858, portrays him with long curls and darker skin. The rest of the exhibition consists of dozens of photographs of early residents, including Pastor Taylor and Annie M. Smith, the town's first Black schoolteacher, who was married to Ford's grandson.

At one time, there were more than a hundred freedmen's villages in the United States, but few of them survived the Jim Crow years, segregation, and the rapid industrialization of the United States after the Second World War. "The dream of the black town as an agricultural service center, growing in population and filling with small stores and manufacturing plants hiring local labor, ran counter to the economic realities of the time," the historian Norman L. Crockett wrote in 1979. Racism was embedded in those realities. In Gum Springs, as refrigerated trucks obviated the need for fresh crops, farmers' incomes plummeted, and businesses began to close. Residents couldn't get bank loans, and jobs were scarce.

Mildred Cox, who is eighty-nine, moved with her parents to Gum Springs from South Carolina in the nineteen-forties. I met her at her two-story house on Douglas Street, which, she told me, was the first to have an indoor bathroom: "The kids used to wait outside the door to use it." Residents valued a community where they knew and counted on one another, but by the nineteen-fifties the town had grown desperately poor. Drainage was bad, and the low-lying land frequently flooded. Dorothy Hall-Smith, also eighty-nine, spoke with me by phone. Recalling the unpaved, muddy streets, she said, "We rose above the water and learned to walk on boards." One family lived in a boxcar, and in some houses the rooms were separated by nothing but tarpaper. In the early nineteen-sixties, Fairfax County condemned and demolished more than two hundred homes. These were replaced by public housing, and the construction of private developments brought an influx of middle-class white families. Today, Gum Springs is majority white. Chase says that, when he was growing up,



Bethlehem Baptist was a tight-knit, multigenerational congregation. Today, it's a "commuter church."

Still, the most politically active members of Gum Springs are Black, and they are dedicated to preserving their town. Chase is a member of the New Gum Springs Civic Association, which is run by Queenie Cox, Mildred's sixty-nine-year-old daughter. Chase and Cox, along with two dozen other residents, have been protesting the state-highway "improvement" plan, which initially called for more than doubling the number of lanes where the road crossed Gum Springs, from six to thirteen. And, in seeking historic designation for Gum Springs, they are trying to prevent it from being "improved" out of existence.



Certain facts about West Ford's life have been documented. He was born in 1784 or 1785 to Venus, a maid enslaved to Hannah Washington, the widow of George Washington's brother John Augustine. Hannah lived at Bushfield, her family's plantation, ninety miles from Mount Vernon. In her will, signed in 1801, she stated, "It is my most earnest wish and desire this lad West may be as soon as possible inoculated for the small pox, after which to be bound to a good tradesmen until the age of twenty one years, after which he is to be free the rest of his life." It wasn't uncommon for slaveholders, on their death, to manumit their slaves, but Hannah had inherited thirty-five enslaved people from her father, and Ford was the only one she singled out.

George and Martha Washington had no children together, and the former President bequeathed Mount Vernon to his nephew Bushrod, Hannah and John's son. (Washington, in his will, wrote that after Martha's death his hundred and twenty-three slaves should be freed. Martha, who died in 1802, had about a hundred and fifty "dowager slaves" from her first marriage, who were bequeathed to her grandchildren.) Bushrod moved with his wife, Julia Anne, to Mount Vernon, where West Ford managed their enslaved workforce. In keeping with his mother's will, Bushrod freed Ford around 1805, when Ford was twenty-one; at some point, he was taught to read and write. Bushrod, on his death, in 1829, left Ford an uncommonly generous gift: a hundred and sixty acres, which Ford sold in 1833 to buy the two-hundred-and-fourteen-acre property that became Gum Springs. It was named for a tree, and for a spring where George Washington was said to have watered his horses.

Ford married a free woman, Priscilla Rose Bell. They grew corn, oats, and potatoes, and Ford became the second-wealthiest Black man in Fairfax County. According to Fairfax tax records, he owned horses, mules, and "pleasure carriages." He eventually divided his property among his four children, who handed down the land to their children and grandchildren.

Even after establishing Gum Springs, Ford lived at Mount Vernon, where he worked for Bushrod Washington's two successors, John Augustine II and John Augustine III. Ford greeted visitors, guarded the First Couple's tomb, and managed dozens of people who were still enslaved by the Washington family. In 1858, Ford was interviewed by Benson Lossing, from *Harper's*, who made a drawing to accompany his article. Ford, dressed in a satin vest and a silk cravat, his hair neatly coiffed, told the author, "The artists make colored people look bad enough anyhow." In another article, the following year, Lossing wrote, of Ford, "He has never left the estate, but remains a resident there, where he is regarded as a patriarch. I saw him when I last visited Mount Vernon, the autumn of 1858, and received from his lips many interesting reminiscences of the place and its surroundings."

The current controversy centers on West Ford's patrilineage. Linda Allen Hollis, Ford's seventy-year-old great-great-great-granddaughter, is the current custodian of the family's oral history. A writer and a former pharmaceutical representative, she told me that Venus, when pressed by Hannah Washington to name her child's father, "identified the old general." Ronald Chase said that West's "mother told him who his daddy was. People from Gum Springs know the history." According to Mary Thompson, a staff historian at Mount Vernon, there is no written evidence to back up this assertion, or even to indicate that George Washington ever met Venus. Mount Vernon has almost daily records of Washington's travels in the years between his return from fighting the Revolutionary War, in 1783, and his assumption of the Presidency, in 1789. Those records show that he was nowhere near Bushfield when Ford was likely conceived. Douglas Bradburn, the president and C.E.O. of Mount Vernon, said, "George Washington wasn't anyone's father."

The Washington family fortune dwindled over the decades, and by the eighteen-fifties Mount Vernon was in disrepair. A ship's mast propped up the piazza roof of the mansion, and most of the furniture had either been sold or given to relatives. In 1853, Ann Pamela Cunningham, the heiress to a South Carolina cotton plantation, seized on the idea of restoring Mount Vernon, after her mother described seeing the decaying mansion from the deck of a steamboat and urged her to rally the women of the country to rescue it. Cunningham began raising money, using the nom de plume the Southern Matron in her solicitations. By 1862, she had raised two hundred thousand dollars for the purchase of Mount Vernon (the equivalent of around five and a half million dollars today) and organized the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, which included thirteen women from across the country. The association, now overseen by a board of twenty-four women from twenty-three states and Washington, D.C., still owns and operates the estate. The C.E.O. reports to the board, which is mostly wealthy, conservative, and white.

The Ladies' Association set out to meticulously re-create Mount Vernon as it was when George and Martha Washington lived there. When the project began, West Ford was one of the few people who had a detailed memory of the mansion's furnishings and collections. According to his family's oral history, he advised the restoration team on the original colors of the walls, including the vibrant verdigris of the dining room. As

the story goes, Washington chose it because it was less likely to fade than ordinary paint was. The association began the process of locating and reclaiming ownership of the Washingtons' possessions, including the bed that George Washington died in, which had gone to Martha's grandson George Washington Parke Custis. The key to the Bastille prison, a gift from the Marquis de Lafayette, which now hangs in the central hall, was one of the only original items still in the mansion when Cunningham moved to Mount Vernon. In 1860, the estate began to receive visitors.

Since then, no expense has been spared. Mount Vernon has a yearly budget of fifty-five million dollars. Roughly seventy per cent of the revenue comes from ticket sales (twenty-eight dollars for adults) and retail, the rest from philanthropists. An easement granted in the nineteen-fifties by Congress, the National Park Service, and Maryland landowners guarantees that the mansion's spectacular river view will remain unobstructed.

During the Civil War, Cunningham returned to South Carolina, where she managed Rosemont, her family's plantation, and continued to monitor Mount Vernon from afar. In 1863, Ford's health rapidly declined, and, that June, Sarah Tracy, the secretary of the association, wrote to Cunningham to say that she had visited Ford and found him "very feeble." She took him to the mansion, where he could be better cared for: "I feel as if it was our duty to see that he should want for nothing in his old age." Ford died in July, and Mount Vernon officials believe he may be buried in the slave cemetery, not far from George and Martha Washington's tomb. The Alexandria *Gazette*, which did not typically publish obituaries for Black residents of the county, noted, "West Ford, an aged colored man, who has lived on the Mount Vernon estate, the greater portion of his life, died yesterday afternoon." It concluded, "He was, we hear, in the 79th year of his age. He was well known to most of our older citizens."

The Ladies' Association, formed during the most volatile period of American history, has always attempted to avoid political acrimony. When the Civil War broke out, in the spring of 1861, Cunningham successfully lobbied Congress to declare Mount Vernon neutral ground. Visiting soldiers from the Confederate and Union Armies were asked to leave their weapons outside, and when they took the tour the association provided them with shawls to cover their uniforms. But the Ladies, as they call themselves, have not been able to avoid the subject of slavery.

For more than a century, the slave cemetery at Mount Vernon was left untended; bushes and weeds obscured the 1929 marker. Outraged by the neglect, Dorothy Gilliam, a Black columnist for the Washington *Post*, wrote, in 1982, "This absence of proper recognition is an atrocity that adds insult to the already deep moral injury of slavery." Fairfax County, under pressure from the local chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., threatened to deny an application to extend Mount Vernon's tax-exempt status to two restaurants on the grounds. The Ladies' Association hastily commissioned architecture students at Howard University to design the slave memorial near the cemetery. Its inscription reads "In memory of the Afro Americans who served as slaves at Mount Vernon. This monument marking their burial ground dedicated September 21, 1983. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association."

In 2014, as part of a national effort to find and restore Black cemeteries, Mount Vernon employed a group of archeologists to excavate the slave cemetery. The project is still under way, with the help of volunteers. Eighty-six likely burial sites have been identified and outlined in string. The Ladies' Association points to this work as an example of how Mount Vernon has come to honor the people who were enslaved there. Still, through the nineteen-eighties, tour guides used the euphemism "servants" to describe slaves, a practice that was discontinued after a letter-writing campaign by, among others, members of the Quander family, one of the oldest documented families taken in chains from Africa to America. George Washington enslaved Nancy Carter Quander. One of her descendants,

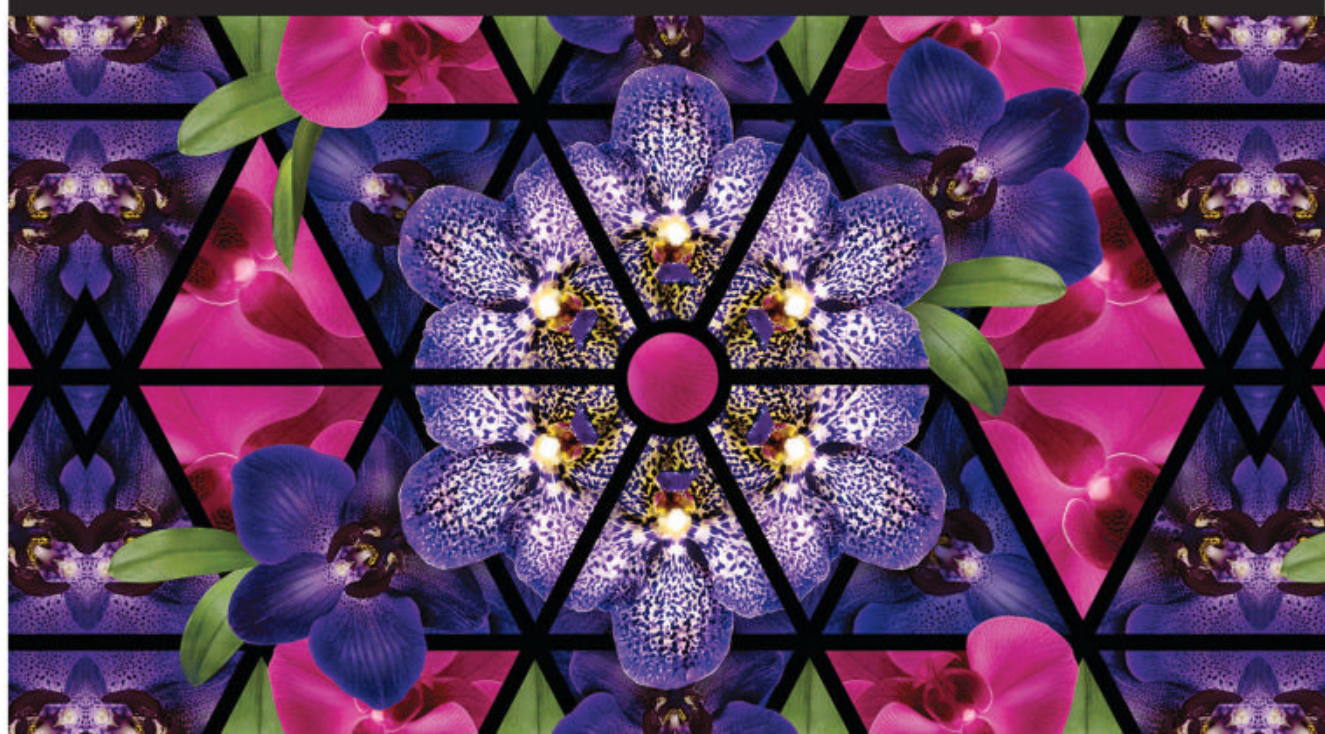
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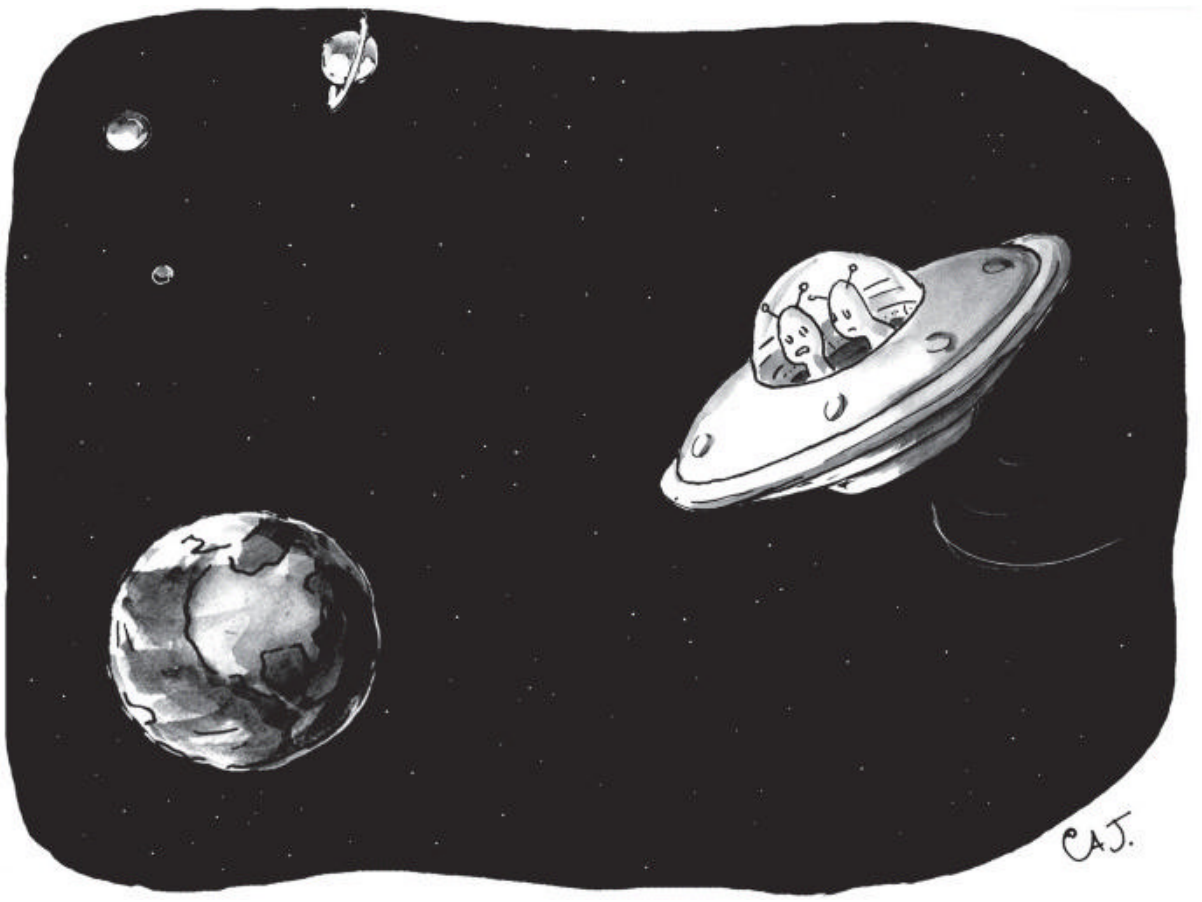
THE ORCHID SHOW:
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"Forget it—all the truly authentic diners and coffee shops are gone."

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Gladys Quander Tancil, initially worked part time as a maid at Mount Vernon when the association held its events, and became a tour guide in 1975. The only Black guide for the greater part of twenty years, she was instructed not to discuss slavery unless tourists specifically asked about it.

In 1995, Tancil initiated the estate's slavery tour. Dennis Pogue, an archeologist who now teaches at the University of Maryland, worked at Mount Vernon from 1987 to 2012. Among other projects, he told me, he reconstructed the slave quarters to make them "less pretty and more historically accurate." He described the Ladies' Association as initially "defensive" and "fearful of engaging on the topic of slavery," but said that, with time, "they became open to the idea of learning more about the enslaved community."

Mount Vernon is now confronting other racially charged challenges. In 2020, two dozen people from across the capital region formed a group that came to be called the League of Enslaved Descendants. They are pushing for one of the gift shops, which sits on former slave quarters, to be converted into a permanent space for exhibitions related to Mount Vernon's enslaved people.

In January, Brenda Parker, the coördinator of African American Interpretation at the estate, abruptly resigned. Her job included dressing in costume to portray Caroline Branham, an enslaved housemaid, when greeting tourists on the grounds. She told me that she was sometimes pawed as she posed for photographs, and that on one occasion a child ordered her around, as if she were truly enslaved. Parker complained to her manager, but nothing was done, and, she said, Mount Vernon officials "trotted me out at meetings where they needed a Black face." K. Allison Wickens, Mount Vernon's director of education, said that character interpreters will now be accompanied by a staff member, to prevent harassment. Matt Briney, the communications director, insisted that Parker was not used as a token. The seven members of the senior staff are now all white, and Briney said that Mount Vernon was trying to hire more people of color.

Other Presidential estates have had their own difficulties with the subject of slavery. With two notable exceptions—John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams—at least twelve early Presidents were slaveholders at some point in their life. Annette Gordon-Reed, the Carl M. Loeb University Professor at Harvard, prompted a national reckoning when, in 1997, she published "Thomas Jefferson & Sally Hemings." She followed it up, in 2008, with "The Hemingses of Monticello." Her work argued that Jefferson was the father of Hemings's children. Jefferson scholars who had long dismissed this theory stopped questioning Gordon-Reed's findings only after DNA blood tests of male descendants in the Hemings and Jefferson families showed that she was right. Today, Monticello guides feature the Hemingses prominently in the main tour; Sally Hemings's small room is on display. Visitors are also encouraged to take its slavery tour.

Gordon-Reed told me that she was not surprised by the anger that her books provoked. "We draw circles around our own families," she said. "It's a natural reaction. It goes to your sense of identity. So there's the urge to resist." Clint Smith, who last year published the best-selling "How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America," said that, during his research at Monticello, he was stunned by how many white tourists expressed disbelief at the guides' descriptions of slavery at Monticello, and at Jefferson's thirty-eight-year relationship with Hemings.

Last year, at Montpelier, James Madison's home, representatives for descendants of people Madison enslaved were granted equal Black representation on the governing board. James French, the founding chair of a descendants' committee, formed in 2019, told the Orange County *Review*, "Historically, not just at Montpelier, but at the vast majority of sites, descendant engagement has been uneven, compartmentalized and tokenized."

Fifteen years ago, the Ladies' Association of Mount Vernon invited its first Black vice-regent to join the board: Alpha Blackburn, then the C.E.O. of her husband's Indianapolis architecture firm. (There have since been two other Black vice-regents, both from Washington, D.C.) Blackburn and the Mount Vernon senior staff argued that an exhibition on the Washingtons' enslaved population was long overdue.

The vice-regents worked with the staff historian Mary Thompson, the author of a 2019 book about George Washington and slavery, "The Only Unavoidable Subject of Regret," and they hired several Black historians as consultants, including Rohulamin Quander, a retired administrative-law judge. The exhibition, "Lives Bound Together," which opened in 2016 and closed last summer, filled all seven galleries of the museum.

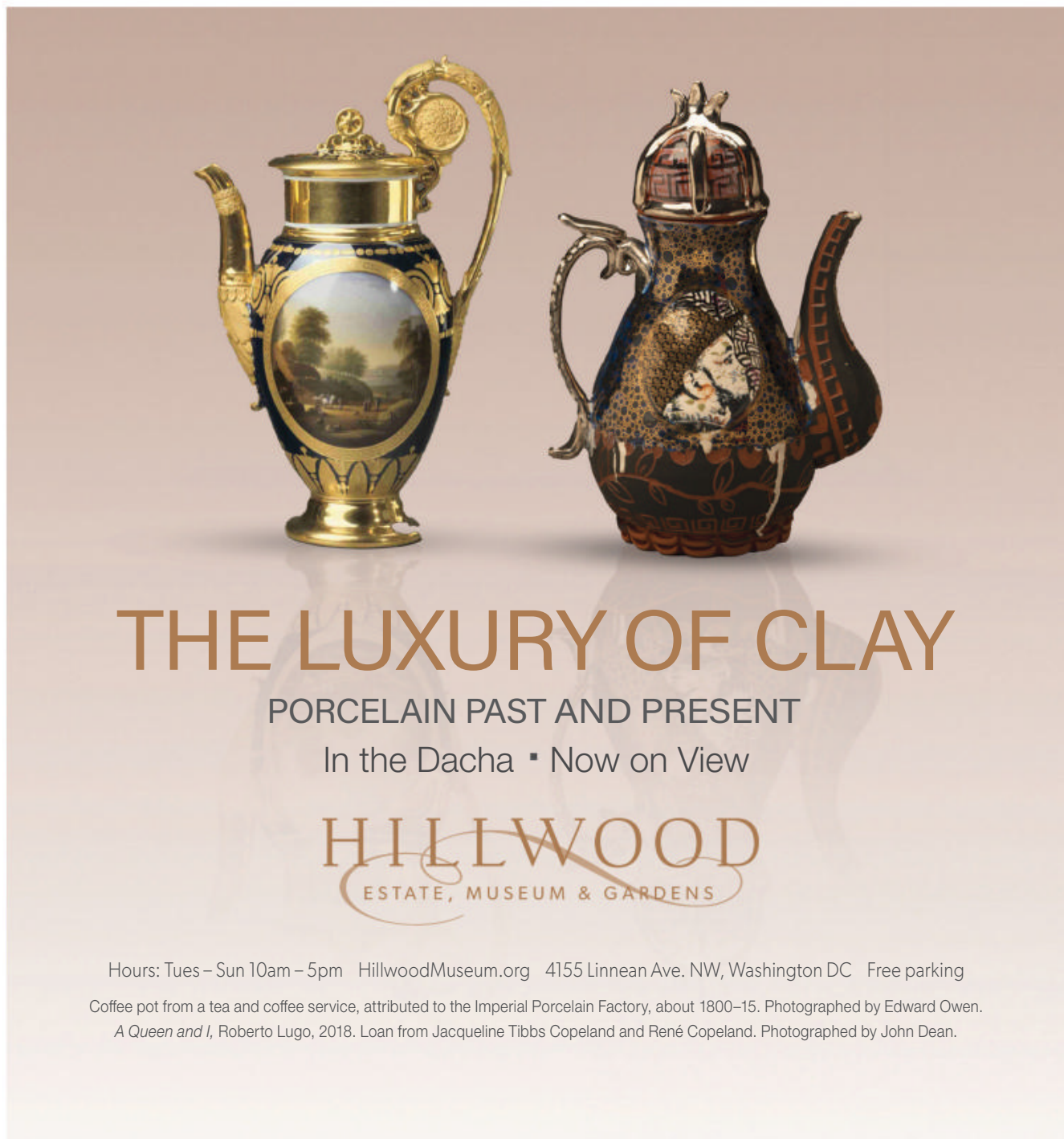
Smithsonian called it "groundbreaking," and an article in the Washington *Post* said that it did "a wonderful job reconstructing the experiences of people who left little by way of written records." Shown only in silhouettes and identified by their first names, the enslaved came to life through artifacts: the dishes and the tools they used, a chamber pot found in the slave quarters. "Lives Bound Together" focussed on nineteen enslaved people, including Ona Judge, one of Martha Washington's maids, who escaped from the Washingtons' home in Philadelphia and made her way to New Hampshire. Next to the silhouette of Judge was a May 24, 1796, advertisement from the Philadelphia *Gazette*, offering ten dollars for her return. The only reference to West Ford was a placard with the 1805 sketch at the bottom of a display cabinet, mentioning his founding of Gum Springs.

Ford's descendants often point out the specificity of their oral histories: members of the extended family talked about George Washington taking Ford riding and attending church with him, and about Ford's children being educated alongside children in the Washington family. In 1986, Judith Saunders Burton, who lived in Gum Springs and was studying at Vanderbilt University, wrote her doctoral thesis on Ford, and she talked to reporters from the *Times*, PBS's "Frontline," and other outlets about her conclusion that George Washington was Ford's father. In 1994, the *National Enquirer* published a story quoting Saunders Burton's claim that Ford was "Gen. George Washington's love child." When Linda Allen Hollis, who had grown up in Illinois and was living in Colorado, read the story, she contacted Saunders Burton. They discovered that they were each descended from a grandson of West Ford, and that, when they were young, they had been told the same family stories.

Beginning in 1997, Saunders Burton and Allen Hollis met with Mount Vernon's staff periodically, showing them published accounts and other material that they believe provide enough evidence about Ford's patrimony to spur further investigation. According to a 1937 article in the *Illinois State Register*, one of Ford's grandsons, George Ford, remembered West Ford as a "picturesque old fellow" who "frequently went when a lad, as a personal attendant, with General Washington when he attended church in the more immediate neighborhood of Mount Vernon, Pohick Church."

Scholars disagree about how much stock to place in the oral narratives of enslaved people, though these are sometimes the only records that a family has. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard and an executive producer and the host of the popular PBS program "Finding Your Roots," told me, "Oral histories are not definitive on their own, and many could be verified only with DNA or other confirming evidence." He added, "Many Black people who have white ancestry have been told, at some point, 'You are descended from the finest blood in the South.' Or that George Washington or another Founder or even Jefferson Davis is their great-great granddaddy." Gordon-Reed said that the Fords' oral history, handed down independently through two family lines, should be accorded respect, but agreed that the Ford descendants need tangible corroboration.

Henry Wiencek, the author of "An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America," from 2003, researched the claim that Washington was Ford's father. He came across a record indicating that Hannah Washington visited Mount Vernon in 1784, when George Washington was likely at home. Wiencek wrote that Hannah might have been accompanied by



Venus, and that this could have been when West Ford was conceived.

But, he concluded, "the stories that George Washington took West Ford riding and to church are plausible, but only if Ford was *not* his son." He pointed out that "Washington would not have paraded evidence of an indiscretion around the county," arguing that, if any Washington fathered West Ford, the "evidence points to the sons of John Augustine or to John Augustine himself." Ron Chernow, who published a biography of Washington in 2010, wrote that it was "highly doubtful" that George Washington was West Ford's father, noting that Washington was likely sterile, and that he guarded his reputation zealously.

DNA testing would not definitively settle the issue of Ford's paternity. There are locks of Washington's hair at the Smithsonian and at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, and Mount Vernon has about sixty samples, including strands in a gold-and-glass locket. Ford's descendants have repeatedly asked the Ladies' Association to allow DNA testing on the hair, but the association has refused. The current technology would be able to prove only that West Ford was descended from the male line of the Washingtons, not whether George Washington was his father.

I interviewed Allen Hollis several times over Zoom. She was at her home, in Riverside, California, where she keeps a bust of George Washington behind her desk. (Saunders Burton died in 2017.) Allen Hollis sent me copies of newspaper articles, letters, and books she has collected to bolster her family's story, and I read her self-published novel about West Ford and his descendants, "I Cannot Tell a Lie." I came away fascinated by the Washington family's preferential treatment of Ford, but, as Wiencek wrote, there was nothing in her documents to prove the family claim.

Allen Hollis met with Mount Vernon officials in early October, 2021, to ask that a plaque honoring West Ford be placed at the slave cemetery, and that an exhibit, including a bust of him, be mounted in the mansion. She also wanted to speak to the Ladies' Association about Ford, and to volunteer in the excavation of the slave cemetery. Margaret Hartman Nichols, the regent of the Ladies' Association, told me that it has not discussed these requests, saying, "I believe that West Ford's greatest legacy is the formation of Gum Springs."

In Gum Springs, the emphasis is mostly on preserving what is left of the historic Black section of town. When I returned in the fall, Queenie Cox, a tall woman with oversized glasses, talked to me about the rapidly expanding wealth and population of Fairfax County: "Development was supposed to benefit Gum Springs, but it didn't." She was angry when eleven homeowners in an upscale development, Holland Court, formed a separate community group within the boundaries of West Ford's original land. "Everything has been a fight," she said. "There has been a steady chip-chipping away at the history of this community."

The New Gum Springs Civic Association scored a victory following a demonstration last September. Dozens of residents and officials, carrying picket signs that read "No to 13 Lanes," and marching behind a casket borrowed from the local funeral home, met at the intersection of Richmond Highway and Sherwood Hall Lane. They rolled the casket onto the highway. Chase, as head of the town's historical association, gave a speech. He said that, as a teen-ager, he had participated in a similar demonstration, sparked by a spate of pedestrian deaths along the highway. "This is where we live," he told the crowd. "And, if you don't think it's important, we surely do." State Senator Scott Surovell, a white legislator whose district includes Gum Springs, assured the demonstrators that the state's Department of Transportation was revising the plan: "This progress is happening because of the noise you folks are making."

Cox and Chase are also working to prevent further development without input from the community, and they recently persuaded Fairfax County to abandon a planned home for low-income seniors. But landmark protection is needed to stop major building projects. Eventually, all the aging West Ford public-housing units will be demolished, and the civic association intends to contribute to the decision about what should be built in their place. There is disagreement among association members about the type of historic designation they will request. At a contentious meeting in December, Fairfax County officials said that, once the community decides on a historic-preservation plan, it should expect the request to take two years to be resolved.

Last October, Chase was asked to speak at Mount Vernon, at an annual commemoration that he and Saunders Burton had initiated after the slave memorial was erected. The event was co-hosted by Black Women United for Action, a Virginia nonprofit that works closely with Mount Vernon. The ceremony began with members of the women's group reading aloud the first names and the ages of the enslaved people listed on George Washington's inventory in the year of his death. Bradburn, Mount Vernon's C.E.O., delivered the opening remarks: "We follow the truth here at Mount Vernon, we walk humbly in that, and we follow it wherever it may lead." Later, everyone joined a choir in the singing of hymns. Chase, in his speech, stressed that Gum Springs "showcased the fortitude and determination of its founder," claiming, "Research connects him directly with the Washington family."

Allen Hollis, who had asked to speak, was even more pointed: "West Ford and other African Americans that once belonged to George Washington have a shared story, a shared family portrait from Mount Vernon. I, for one, am looking forward to this estate giving more visibility to West Ford and renovating and beautifying the slave cemetery for those visitors who may wish to sit a spell and contemplate on the lives of those buried here." She said, "It can also be stated that West Ford is of Washington lineage, and we Fords are confident on who his father is. However, that determination will be settled by future DNA analysis."

Afterward, she wrote to me, in an e-mail, "Gum Springs should be a national heritage landmark. I plan on working with the groups there to make it so." She added that she would personally pay to have a plaque put up where West Ford's house once stood and to have a statue of him erected. She added that she has asked Mount Vernon to get involved in the preservation of Gum Springs, saying, "My goal is not to let it disappear." ♦



REËNTRY TALKING POINTS

BY HENRY ALFORD

What I Said: It's weird being back at parties, huh?
What They Heard: Do your anxieties ever lead to internal screaming?

What I Said: Oh, wow—hors d'œuvres on tiny plates. Every meal I've eaten in the past twenty-four months has been toast served on a paper napkin.
What They Heard: My two abiding passions in life are Shelley Duvall and anti-embolism stockings.

What I Said: Doesn't anyone wear a mask around here?
What They Heard: I could be persuaded to adopt China's policy of anal swabbing.

What I Said: I'm almost sixty. All celebrity gossip sounds to me like "Riri and A#ap Busy took their baby bump Lil Jeenyus to Pete Davidson's chill zone!"
What They Heard: I enjoy the early silent films of Mary Pickford and Una Merkel.

What I Said: Can I get you a slice of birthday cake?
What They Heard: I occasionally gin up an act of thoughtfulness, lest people think I've gone feral.

What I Said: Is this party 'grammable? Isn't that the word that you people under forty use for things that will look good on Instagram?
What They Heard: Would you mind slowly and expressionlessly backing away from me while I talk, like you're a movie camera dollying out on its last, hideous reveal?

What I Said: Did you read that there's a party in New York called Pheromone, for armpit fetishists who don't wear deodorant?
What They Heard: In what ways have *you* tried to hurt your mother recently?

What I Said: Remember the experience of falling into conversation with the slightly crazy-looking person sitting next to you on a bus or a plane? I miss that. Once, on a bus into the city, I sat next to an academic who'd translated an obscure nineteenth-century text about space travel, and he spoke Martian to me! Now I'll forever associate the Interplanetary Meepzdor Flogba Proclamation with the Mosholu Parkway.
What They Heard: I keep all my savings in Central Park, under a rock I call Mr. Banky. There is a village of tiny fishermen living inside my dishwasher.

What I Said: All of literary New York is here. I saw Colson Whitehead in the stairwell and Jennifer Egan on the roof. The critics Christian Lorentzen and Lauren Christensen just arrived—if they got married, they'd be Lauren and Christian Christensen-Lorentzen.
What They Heard: It's weird how "lonely" has an "e" in it but "only" doesn't.

What I Said: I miss acquaintanceship. It seems like these past two years have found us spending more time than ever with our families and our inner circles, but no time whatsoever with people who are on the acquaintance level. Too much psychic insularity, no? And, in practical terms, don't most job referrals and dating fix-ups come through acquaintances rather than through friends? We've been missing a rich source of social nutrients.
What They Heard: I'm self-publishing a handbook called "In Search of the Male Yoni."

What I Said: Why is no one else bothered by how loud the music is? I'm worried that Alex's upstairs neighbor is going to call the cops!
What They Heard: When I got my booster, I asked the pharmacist to give me the shot in my ass, just for the attention.

What I Said: I think I'll head home now. I've really enjoyed myself, but it's weird—I can't shake the feeling that there's a kind of force field between me and everyone I've encountered here tonight. It's as if our conversation has been in speech bubbles, with each statement in a different font. I think I need to go home and practice talking in front of a mirror. I hope all my armchair philosophizing didn't freak you out.
What They Heard: Hug? Anal swab? ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

THE CONTROL OF NATURE

THRILL OF THE HUNT

How wild antlers launched a multibillion-dollar industry.

BY ABE STREEP



Every spring, shed hunters from across the country descend on Jackson, Wyoming.

In Jackson Hole, Wyoming, some antlers are easy to find. A large arch of intertwined elk antlers greets passengers as they arrive at the local airport, and, in town, antler chandeliers hang from tall ceilings at a high-end furniture store. Jackson's trademark is a town square with four archways; each arch was made from some fourteen thousand pounds of antler. Most of the antlers come from the National Elk Refuge, an expanse of hills and meadows on the outskirts of Jackson where roughly eight thousand elk spend the winter. The animals eat government-funded alfalfa pellets, living in a carefully managed symbiosis with a town that presents itself as a frontier outpost, and which has a median home price of three million dollars.

Unlike horns, which are permanently attached to an animal's head, antlers regenerate annually. Adult male elk, or bulls, grow their antlers between April and August. During this period, the antlers are soft, cartilaginous, and covered in fine hair—known as "velvet"—and they contain reproducing stem cells. At the end of the summer, the antlers ossify, and elk scrape the velvet off on trees. The velvet is filled with blood vessels, so the process leaves a gory mess; blood stains the hard antlers, and sap, dirt, and tree bark color them further.

Around September, mating season begins, and bulls use their antlers to spar with one another when vying for breeding rights with cows. "There's a relation between antler size and sperm counts," Matthew Metz, a wildlife biologist and research associate with the Yellowstone Wolf Project, told me. "It's an honest advertisement." When bulls are done breeding, their testosterone levels fall, and so do their antlers. In the spring, the bones are cast off, leaving behind bloody pedicles. The wounds heal, regrowth begins, and people start searching for the antlers that have been shed. The bones are valuable: last summer, top-grade elk antler sold for sixteen dollars a pound. (A large shed antler might weigh ten pounds.) Collectors are known to pay upward of fifteen hundred dollars for a particularly desirable pair of antlers, and tens of thousands of dollars for deadheads—skulls with the antlers still attached.

On the National Elk Refuge, only the staff and local Boy Scouts are permitted to collect antlers, which are sold in an annual auction. But though the elk may eat the refuge's alfalfa, they don't have much use for arbitrary jurisdictional boundaries, so they frequently wander onto adjacent public lands, which are managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Each year, on the first of May, those lands open to shed hunters. "You get to put your hands on something no one else has ever touched," a shed hunter from Minnesota told me. "And then you get to take it home!"

The May hunt is feverish, and occasionally dangerous. It used to begin at midnight, but in 2015 a shed hunter on horseback tried to cross a river and was swept away. The man survived, but the horse drowned. The derby's start has since been amended to 6 A.M.

On April 30, 2021, shed hunters began arriving in southwest Jackson, at the Teton County Fairgrounds, a designated waiting area twenty-five minutes from where the hunt would take place. They drove trucks with window stickers that said "RISE AND SHED" and "SHED LIFE"; some hauled horse trailers. Many of them were locals, while others had come from Utah and Idaho, New York and Wisconsin. Nearly all of them were men, a good number of whom were dressed in cam-

ILLUSTRATION BY LILY QIAN

ouflage—an unnecessary choice, given that antlers don't run. But many shed hunters are also proud hunters, and the physical demands of the two sports are similar: both can require endurance in rough, mountainous terrain. Amid thick deadfall in the high country, every root and bleached cow femur can resemble an antler. Some shed hunters use trained dogs; others rely on expensive optics. That afternoon, workers from a cheese-processing plant in Utah played with a spotting scope—a device that can detect sheds from hundreds of yards away. Nearby, a coed group from Kansas was huddled around a pickup truck, where a twenty-seven-year-old Pfizer employee was holding court. He told his friends that he had run more than seven hundred miles in the past nine months to prepare for antler season.

As night approached, people drank beer and prepared to sleep in their cars. Early the next morning, police officers began escorting vehicles to the east end of town, where the road turned to dirt. The cars sped off, dust and headlights creating eerie weather. A man led his horse, yelling, "He's gonna go like a son of a bitch!" Many of the hunters headed for Flat Creek, a stream running through hills. They raced across the water and ascended into tawny meadows. One rider was bucked off his horse and injured himself. A teen-ager from Montana alleged that someone stole an antler he had spotted first. One of the shed hunters from Kansas saw a bull elk running full tilt, its tongue lolling. "I felt bad for him," she said later. "You could tell that he'd been pushed by all these people."

Back on the road, more vehicles kept arriving until the parking line was half a mile long. A few riders returned from the hills, their horses hauling dozens of antlers. Near a red pickup truck with Wyoming plates, a young man was standing by the head of a dead bull. The man, who said that his name was McKay, had found the bull's carcass in the creek and decapitated it with a knife. "I got lucky," he said. The bull's antlers were crooked, or nontypical, which potentially made them more valuable than a normal set—they could be worth several thousand dollars. But he couldn't leave his trophy unguarded, meaning that his day was essentially finished. "It's over already," he said, glumly. "It's too bad."

There are more than a million wild elk in North America, mostly clustered throughout the western United States and Canada. Bulls that live in forests of cedar and fir, like those in northwest Montana or in the Canadian Rockies, often color their antlers with deeper shades than those in, say, the deserts of southern Nevada. Elk wandering through old burns can rub against char-covered trees until their antlers are nearly black. Roosevelt elk and tule elk, subspecies found in Oregon and California, respectively, have shorter antlers than Rocky Mountain elk. Nontypical antlers can result from genetics or trauma; an injury to a right rear leg can result in a warped left antler, a discovery that has mystified biologists. "They're like snowflakes," Kevin Monteith, a wildlife biologist at the University of Wyoming, said of antlers. "Every one is unique."

The U.S. and Canada used to have ten million elk, which roamed across the continent, including in northeastern states like Pennsylvania. By 1880, settlers had hunted the Eastern elk to extinction. Western herds nearly met the same fate; military officers had begun promoting the hunting of bison, in an attempt to subjugate Indigenous societies, and settlers showed little restraint with other species. In Wyoming, Yellowstone National Park offered a degree of protection, but poaching was still rampant, and enforcement was rare. Many elk were killed simply for their teeth. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the New York-based fraternal organization whose members included President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Babe Ruth, had adopted an elk tooth—an ivory—as an emblem, and members coveted the teeth for cufflinks. According to reports, these ivories sold for thirty dollars a pair by the early twentieth century, or the equivalent of a thousand dollars today.

Poaching slowed once the federal government, under pressure from conservationists, passed legislation prohibiting interstate wildlife trafficking. Wyoming enforced stricter punishments for those who killed animals for their teeth, and the Elks, having proved themselves to be neither benevolent nor protective, dropped the emblem. But there was another problem: Western expansion had begun to disrupt elk migration patterns. The Jackson herd had a wide range, travelling as far as Yellowstone, fifty miles north, and perhaps as far south as the Green River Basin, two hundred miles away. Homesteaders built towns and barbed-wire fences in the middle of these migration routes, and in Jackson Hole opportunistic elk found sustenance in the form of ranchers' hay. The winter of 1909 was especially severe, and starving elk stormed the town of Jackson, looking for food. A large number of elk perished; it was said that you could walk for two miles over carcasses. In response, settlers began feeding the elk hay in the winter, and Congress soon appropriated money for the creation of feed grounds. With the frontier declared closed and Indigenous tribes living on reservations, the federal government saw Wyoming elk as a matter of national interest. In 1910, game managers across the West started importing elk from the Jackson herd to revitalize flagging populations in other states.

Two years later, Congress created the National Elk Refuge, which eventually expanded its acreage by acquiring property from John D. Rockefeller and other wealthy landowners. Natural challenges soon arose. One year, there was too little snow, which meant not enough grass for hay the following summer; another year, there was too much snow, which led to winterkill within the herd. Then there were the antlers, lurking beneath the snow—an algorithmically multiplying threat to tires and to the mechanical equipment used by refuge employees. In 1953, the Rotary Club of Jackson Hole addressed the problem by building an arch on the town square with sheds collected from the refuge. A few years later, the Rotary Club enlisted the help of local Boy Scouts to retrieve more sheds. "Shortly, three more elk horn arches rose on the Town Square," the Jackson Hole *Guide* reported, "but there are more antlers each year."

In 1968, town officials planned an auction to sell five thousand pounds of antlers, hoping to attract makers of gun racks and cribbage boards. On the day

of the event, nearly all the antlers were bought by two men, both of whom represented firms in Hong Kong. Neither produced cribbage boards. One of the buyers said that his company used antlers for "novelties." The other declared that his purchases would supply the international medicinal market.

In traditional Chinese medicine, antler is often sliced into rounds and served with ginseng, or crushed into powder. Hard antler is purported to have anti-inflammatory qualities, and in Korea velvet antler is served to children as a growth tonic. Chunyi Li, the director of the Institute of Antler Science and Product Technology, at China's Changchun University of Science and Technology, studies antler stem cells in an effort to create regenerative therapies. Li recently ran an experiment with mice in which he chopped off their legs and tried to regrow them with antler stem cells. "If you cut off the leg, it cannot regenerate," he explained. But he noted that, when the wound heals, "it exactly resembles the initial antler regeneration." Li told me that researchers have used techniques from molecular biology to better understand an antler's medicinal properties and have identified numerous bioactive compounds. And yet "nobody has been able to link them back to antler efficacy," he said.

After the success of the 1968 auction, Jackson made it an annual event. One of the top buyers was Jung (Johnny) Wang, who operated a company in San Francisco that sent antlers to Asian countries. He is often credited with launching the international export of antlers from the United States. "Johnny Wang was the godfather," Don Schaufler, a Montana-based buyer who worked with Wang, and who is now one of the nation's largest antler brokers, told me. In the nineteen-seventies, Wang claimed to move more than a hundred tons of antler annually, most of it coming from international farms.

Chinese farmers have been raising sika deer for their velvet for hundreds of years. Some spas in Russia, which is home to Eurasian elk and reindeer, offer a treatment in which customers bathe in water mixed with velvet and blood from the harvest. Deer and elk are not native to New Zealand, but European settlers imported deer, and then in 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt gifted the country twenty elk from Yellowstone. New Zealand now runs a fifty-three-million-dollar antler industry, exporting velvet to Asia and funding biomedical research into antlers' potential pharmaceutical uses.

To harvest an animal's velvet, its antlers need to be removed while they're still growing. New Zealand mandates that a veterinarian supervise velvet producers. Elsewhere, the process is less controlled; poachers in Siberia have been documented intercepting reindeer that are swimming across rivers in order to saw off their antlers. Collecting shed antlers, on the other hand, does not require a blade, or contact with animals at all. Owing to the density of the Jackson herd, Wyoming quickly emerged as an abundant and renewable source of affordable antlers. For some collectors, Jackson antlers also hold a specific allure; many of the nation's elk have genetic roots in the area. Peter Peck, a Rhode Island resident who regularly attends the Jackson auction to buy antlers, told me, "It's just the place. It has to be here."

The Jackson auction became a theatre where the realities of a globalized economy met with commercialized nostalgia for the Old West. (Some buyers dressed as mountain men.) It also prompted a surge in frontier-like activity. Shed hunting is prohibited in national parks, but people began sneaking in to look for sheds. Rangers, hoping to track down black-market sellers, planted antlers marked with invisible ink.

According to Joe Fowler, a former Yellowstone ranger, some shed hunters looking to thin out the competition resorted to snitching on other poachers. "It got to be, among the horn hunters, sort of a blood sport," he said. "We would occasionally get telephone calls anonymously saying, 'So-and-So is going to be picked up with a bunch of horns at the Yellowstone River Bridge at eight o'clock tonight.'" In 1982, a man was found drowned in the river. Nearby was a raft towing two hundred and fifty pounds of antlers.

By the mid-nineties, the U.S. was exporting nearly three million dollars' worth of antler products, and in the areas surrounding Jackson shed hunting had become a high-profile ac-



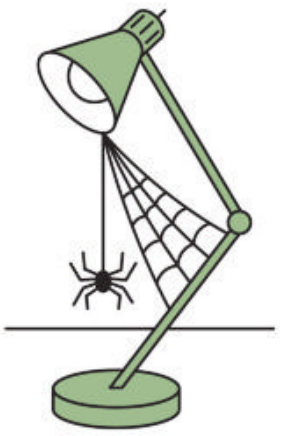
"Looks like Broadway's back."

tivity. Meanwhile, shed hunters in rural communities throughout the American West collected antlers in relatively blissful obscurity. In Montana, on the Flathead Indian Reservation, which is home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, some residents sold antlers on the side. Others did not, instead using sheds to make art or giving the bones away as gifts. "It's all in how you were raised and what you see," Rich Janssen, Jr. (Q'lispé), the head of the tribes' Department of Natural Resources, said. In northern New Mexico, a hunting guide, George Rael, collected antlers and hung some of them from the limbs of a blue spruce. "Leave them for the gods," he said.

In 2004, a man named Michael Thomas helped change the antler industry for good. Thomas, who runs a wholesale pet-supply company in Texas, was watching a Dallas Cowboys game at a friend's house when he noticed his friend's dog gnawing on a white-tailed-deer antler. "I sat and watched that dog chew on that thing for two hours straight with reckless abandon," Thomas said. He decided to start marketing antler to dog owners. At the time, he said, "there was a trend in the pet business for unusual and long-lasting chews. That was when bully sticks were taking off. Nobody understood that they were made out of stretched cow penis."

Thomas reached out to white-tailed-deer farms, which abound in Texas and breed bucks for large hunting ranches. (A vial of semen from a buck with a nontypical rack can cost thousands of dollars.) The ranches kept piles of old antlers, but Thomas did not seek the type that you would proudly display in your home. Antlers are graded by quality. The top grade is fresh, or brown. The next grade is composed of hard whites, which are often a year old, and smooth and unbroken. Then come C-grade antlers, which are sun-bleached and dried out. Last is crumbling bone, or chalk. "We concentrated on the C," Thomas said. "We weren't interested in appearances." He bought them for cheap, then sliced them with a band saw and sold them to retail pet shops, advertising their mineral content. They ended up on shelves for as much as twelve dollars apiece. "We were making ridiculous margins," he said.

Antler's specific utility for dogs is as mysterious as it is for humans. R. Terry Bowyer, a senior research scientist at the Institute of Arctic Biology, said, "It's just a chew toy," adding, "There's almost nothing there but calcium and phosphorous." But in the woods antlers draw interest from rodents, which gnaw on them voraciously. As Janssen told me, "Dogs like that stuff. But all animals like it." Monteith, of the University of Wyoming, said it's possible that sheds add essential minerals to natural environments: "Could antlers themselves have some level of ecosystem influence in that way? Maybe. Not for certain. No idea." (He also said, "I ain't giving antlers to my dog.")



Petco and PetSmart started carrying antler chews, and brokers, including Schaufler, began selling their product to dog owners. As competition increased, antlers grew more expensive, cutting into Thomas's profits. "The antler business has been commodified, and the prices have done nothing but go up," he told me. (He has since sought new turf, importing water-buffalo horn, a by-product of slaughterhouses in India, to make chews.) Nowadays, most of the antlers at the Jackson auction stay in the country, and a lot of them are destined to end up in a dog's mouth. "The dog-chew companies have priced the exports out," Linda Rumsey, an antler broker in Idaho and Wyoming, said.

In recent years, the domestic antler business has been fuelled by another invention: YouTube. In 2006, Eric Chesser, then a twenty-three-year-old former bodybuilder in Utah, began producing videos in which he walked into the woods carrying a camera and discovered an antler. In real life, finding an antler is a small miracle, like stumbling onto a mountain spring. Watching someone find an antler online is about as exciting as buying a bottle of Poland Spring. But Chesser accumulated a following for his content: big bulls, antlers, and muscles. Some of his videos contain advertisements, including one starring Sylvester Stallone's younger brother promoting a velvet spray that purportedly boosts one's strength. Chesser now sells autographed antlers to fans and runs a dog-chew company, called RakSnaks. Other YouTubers have followed suit, attempting to garner fame by uploading hunting and shed-hunting videos.

In Utah, those who wish to collect antlers during the early shed season are required to take an ethics course. In 2010, ten thousand people took the course; by 2020, that figure had more than doubled. State and tribal governments are still adjusting to this new wave of interest in antlers, introducing restrictions intended to protect wildlife; Nevada has limited shed hunting in six counties, and Wyoming has created a shed season in previously unrestricted parts of the state. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have instituted a seasonal closure in order to protect a sensitive elk calving ground. "We're not taught to look at the resource as having monetary value," Janssen said of antlers. "We gotta battle with the dominant society."

The confluence of the dog-chew phenomenon and social media has created a uniquely American boom. If the international antler business is built on faith in ancient remedies and the promise of futuristic ones, then the domestic antler business is centered on an illusion of economic freedom derived from the land, and a reality in which performative masculinity caters to the whims of a flourishing pet-wellness industry. Lori Rael, who operates a New Mexico hunting lodge, told me that the sport "used to be way more preserved." She added, "I'm not a guy, but you know how guys are. They want to be, like, 'Oh, mine's bigger.'"

Last May, Chesser and Ben Dettamanti, a fellow shed influencer, woke up in the beds of their trucks, where they had spent the night parked near a mountain range in southern Nevada. Dettamanti turned a handheld camera toward himself and started recording: "Plan to be out here for at least three or four days, get some good videos for you guys, get back on this shed-hunting life!"

Dettamanti, who is thirty-seven, is

more than six feet tall, with an unruly red beard, and weighs two hundred and sixty-four pounds. "I like to say that I'm the biggest shed hunter," he told me. On Instagram, where his username is Shedcrazy and he has sixty-three thousand followers, Dettamanti uploads videos that are casual and jokey; he often shed-hunts in an old minivan and likes to make fun of people who wear Patagonia gear. "I want people to share my philosophy, which is not to take the outdoors so seriously," he said.

Six years ago, Dettamanti was a high-school custodian, shed hunting on the side in order to supplement his income. (Before that, he carved headstones.) He could make twenty thousand dollars a year selling antlers—a good amount, but not enough for him and his wife and children to live on. Dettamanti started producing videos, and Chesser reached out, encouraging him to continue. He realized that, if he couldn't make a living selling antlers, he might be able to provide for his family by selling the dream of the pursuit. Dettamanti told Chesser that he was considering quitting his job. Chesser suggested that he film himself leaving work for the final time. Dettamanti took his advice, and the video went viral. "The response was just insane," he said.

The first year after leaving his job, Dettamanti earned around thirty thousand dollars, through ads and sponsorship deals. He has since quadrupled that. "This was always my goal—to earn enough to be able to support my family," he said. "But then when you get there you're just, like, 'Well, maybe I could double it. Maybe we could do a bit more. Maybe I could be rich.' Eric's good about keeping me grounded. He reminds me, 'Four years ago, you were freaking cleaning toilets.'"

For all his irreverence, Dettamanti turns serious when it comes to the politics of shed hunting, often using his platform to advocate for less regulation of the sport. Some shed hunters are worried that states might try to end the practice altogether; last year, Dettamanti posted a satirical video predicting a future in which shed hunters are allowed just one antler per year. His role as an activist is precarious: many people in the shed-hunting community blame the new rules on social-media personalities like him, who, by publicizing the sport, have opened it up to more scrutiny. Chesser, for his part, avoids political confrontation. ("Likability is a big thing," he told me.) He has more than twice as many Instagram followers as Dettamanti.

Before setting up camp, Dettamanti and Chesser discussed the area where they'd be hunting, a series of sagebrush flats and rolling hills studded with piñon and juniper trees. Back when Dettamanti was a custodian, the region was full of antlers for the taking. Now, he predicted, the area will have been "picked over" already by shed hunters. "You just have to blame the damn YouTubers," he quipped.

On the day of the hunt, Chesser and Dettamanti walked into the morning and separated. (Shed hunting is not much of a collaborative exercise; people follow their impulses and often end up alone.) Near the top of a ridge, Dettamanti saw a forked object: an elk antler. It was grade-A bone, freshly dropped this season. Its main beam appeared thin and rangy, and its color was light; it weighed a little more than seven pounds. He approached the antler and filmed it from all angles. "Fricking sweet," he said. "So stoked." Later, back at camp, Chesser measured the antler, calculating that it would produce nearly four hundred dollars' worth of dog chews. In the evening, the men spoke



about the future: they were both concerned that YouTube had tightened restrictions on sponsored videos, requiring users to label branded content as advertisements. Dettamanti said, "Who knows? It could all just fricking go away."

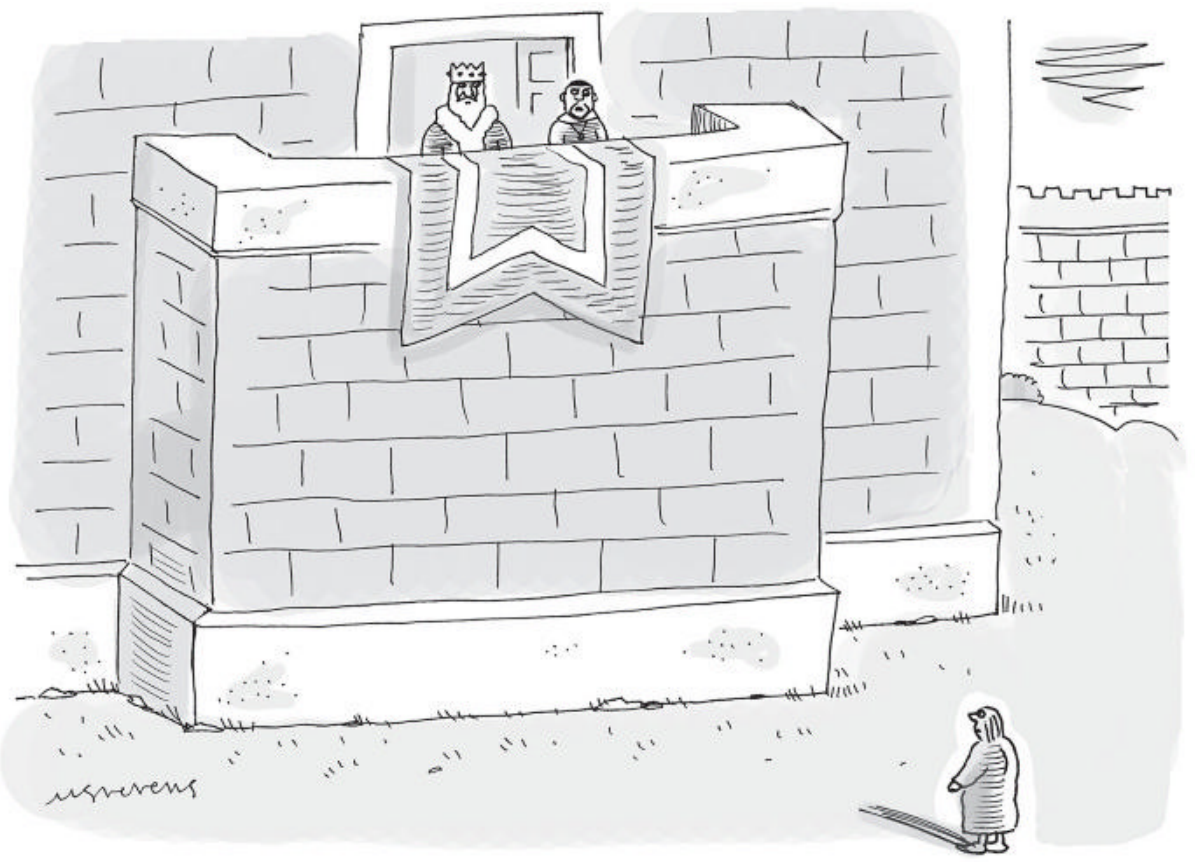
That summer, antler brokers on the side of rural highways in New Mexico and Wyoming were paying sixteen dollars per pound, and there were rumors that the Jackson auction might bring record prices. The event, which is normally held near the arches in Jackson's town square, had been moved online in 2020, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. But Cliff Kirkpatrick, who has helped oversee the auction for the past three decades, was preparing for a spirited in-person return in the fall of 2021. A gray-haired carpenter with woolly eyebrows, Kirkpatrick was the district committee chairman for the Jackson Boy Scouts, who receive a quarter of the auction's proceeds. (The rest goes to the National Elk Refuge, which uses the funds to maintain equipment, such as irrigation lines.) Each year, Kirkpatrick has spent hundreds of volunteer hours organizing the event. Does he have a particular interest in antler? "It's really about the Scout involvement," he told me. "It's been an effective fund-raiser."

The past few auctions have taken in two hundred thousand dollars on average, with much of that money coming from Rumsey, the broker in Idaho and Wyoming. She entered the industry shortly after her brother, who had been buying for Schaufler, died, in 1989. (She worked briefly with Schaufler before venturing out on her own. "It's kind of a dog-eat-dog business," Schaufler told me.) Rumsey and her husband own a furniture store called Wild West Designs, which has outlets in Jackson and Idaho Falls. The shop is known for its chandeliers made from interwoven antlers; Rumsey sells them for thousands of dollars. But she also exports antlers and sells to a dog-chew distributor. In September, when I asked Rumsey what sort of antler she'd look for at the auction, she replied, "All of it."

But, with the Delta variant spreading, Kirkpatrick received word that he would have to move the auction online again. The timing—just weeks before the auction—was inopportune; by the time Kirkpatrick circulated the final details, a few buyers had already left their homes on cross-country drives. "I'm overwhelmed and exhausted," he told me a week before the event. From an office in his home, he uploaded photos and wrote descriptions of pallets. "It's just lot after lot after lot, and they're all antler," he said. "You start describ-

ing every one as unique and beautiful, and pretty soon they're all unique or beautiful." When I asked why he continued running the auction as an unpaid volunteer, he said, "I can't find someone to replace me." He despaired of the decadence in Jackson and noted, "People would rather write a check than volunteer."

On the day of the event, prices rose to previously unseen heights: online buyers offered more than thirty dollars per pound. A bidding war broke out over a deadhead that had antlers resembling a caribou's. A heating specialist from Rhode Island won the item, outbidding a heating specialist from Utah. Schaufler placed bids from Montana; Rumsey bid from her Jackson home while a repairman worked on her hot tub. She won the largest lots. Schaufler later grumbled about the exorbitant prices. "I don't need 'em that bad," he said. Rumsey had committed $126,827. Later that day, she arrived at the National Elk Refuge, where great piles of antlers lay taped together. She walked over to a folding table and asked the Boy Scouts' district treasurer, who was sitting there, "Would somebody like a check?"



"You might give him a little wave, sire. He's your biggest fan."

• •

In the spring of 2021, a group of shed hunters in New Mexico, driving in a truck with a plastic antler hanging from the rearview window, discussed the recent changes to their beloved sport. "The Internet's ruined everything," Stuart Church, a thirty-four-year-old hunting guide, said. "The golden years are over for everything."

Most of the people in the truck, who had grown up together in the small town of Questa, had spent the previous night at a campsite deep in the Carson National Forest. But one of them, a thirty-two-year-old plumber named Zeke Tapia, had been up since 3 A.M., driving more than a hundred miles from Albuquerque to meet up with his friends. He did not appear tired, and he was more optimistic than Church. "If you have respect for something you love, it's going to respect you back," he'd said a moment earlier. He looked out the window; there was snow all around. "They're in there," he said of the sheds. "They'll be glowing, boys. They'll be glowing!"

The shed hunters passed a place that they recognized. "This is where we dropped off Josh and didn't see him until day three," Church said, referring to a friend who had chased the antler mirage too far during a snowstorm, and had ended up seeking shelter in an outhouse. At 10:30 A.M., the group pulled over on a snowy roadside and arranged to meet back at the truck at 2 P.M. Each one carried a radio. Tapia, who wore a backpack and had binoculars strapped to his chest, moved quickly. He used walking poles to steady himself, trudging up a hillside where the snow was thigh-deep. He thought that he saw antlers, but they were sticks. Then, in a meadow, a couple of curved tines pointed through the snow; nearby were a few more. He pulled one from the snow, thinking it was a small antler, but it kept coming until it revealed eight points. He grabbed another tine, like a sword in a stone, and yanked. It, too, was an antler with eight points.

Tapia's voice quavered: "Eight by eight, dude!" He went on, "That is the set of a lifetime." He bound the antlers together with electrical tape, strapped them to his pack, and kept going. The sun rose, softening the snow. Tapia looked at a map on his phone: there was another meadow ahead where he was sure that he'd find more antlers. He dropped his pack and the sheds under a tree and hiked to the meadow, but found nothing. It was 2:07 P.M.—he was late to the rendezvous. He consulted his map, and identified yet another meadow that looked promising. "I don't want to turn around and have it in the back of my head, like, 'What was in that one?'" he explained.

The meadow appeared to be half a mile away. "So close," he said. But, in the deep snow, half a mile might take forty minutes to cover. He felt certain that there would be antlers. He deliberated with himself. Then he thought of his friend who'd ended up in the outhouse. "Dang it," Tapia said. He'd made up his mind. He turned back and retrieved his belongings. Burdened by the sheds, he plunged to his waist in the soft snow. He crouched down, sliding on his knees. Eventually, he came to a fallen aspen tree and considered using its bark to make snowshoes. Instead, he crawled on all fours. At a rocky outcropping, he stared at the land and said, "Sometimes you think, like, you must be crazy to do this. You know?" ♦

ANNALS OF EDUCATION

THE ACCESS TRAP

What happens when a legendary public high school abandons selective admissions?

BY NATHAN HELLER

Rebecca Johnson, a teacher for more than twenty years, approached the first day of class at Lowell High School last fall with unusual anxiety. "I am used to having my plans and procedures mostly ready to go, and I am just excited to meet a new crop of kids," she explained before the term began. "While I am still experiencing much of that excitement, I am also feeling some trepidation, and I am not sure exactly why." On the first morning of school, she dressed the way she always does: an untucked button-down shirt, this one with flowers; gray slacks; and extraordinarily sensible black shoes. On arriving, she prepared herself, as usual, a mug of milky tea. Lowell is in western San Francisco, near the ocean, and a thick, low fog was sweeping through the eucalyptus and cypress trees as students arrived for the first time since the start of the pandemic, eighteen months earlier. Shortly after 8 A.M., Johnson began walking the lower hallways, then the upper, while a tide of students lapped onto the campus as if from twenty-seven hundred different continents, all keen to see their futures made.

Upstairs, Johnson stood against the wall to guide the rush. She is both commanding and approachable, with snowy hair just past her shoulders and a big camp-counsellor voice, and people tend to come to her with their confusions. The school's campus is a sprawl of irregular buildings, semi-connected; sophomores had attended only remotely, so half the student body was a little lost. "I don't know where 270 is!" a boy cried, clawing at his hair and sprinting toward oblivion. "Can you feel the terror?" Johnson said.

Lowell, founded in 1856, is the oldest public high school in the West and a long-admired jewel of public education. A big seal on the building's façade proclaims its status as a National Blue Ribbon School. In the front entrance, glass-framed boards display smiling head shots of illustrious alumni: Stephen Breyer, Alexander Calder, Jennifer Egan, Dian Fossey, Rube Goldberg, William Hewlett—the lists go on in every field. For decades, Lowell has been one of two public high schools in San Francisco to use selective admissions, with a grade- and test-score cutoff for most applicants. "They call us nerds, and I can't refute that," Catherine Hung, a junior, told me. "Lowell students will skip class to study for their *next* class."

As the foot traffic intensified, Johnson pushed through a narrowing in the hallway—the Gates of Hell, she calls it, owing to the hourly bottlenecks it creates—and headed to Room 255, where desks were arranged in a double horseshoe. At 9 A.M., seniors in A.P. Economics started streaming in. "Good morning! Wow, that was weird," Johnson said. "And by 'that' I mean the last eighteen months."

In 2020, when the pandemic made universal standardized testing impossible, Lowell temporarily suspended its admissions standards in favor of a randomized, lottery-like system. This seemed a relatively minor change amid the major weirdness of conducting school online. On February 9, 2021, however, the San Francisco Board of Education voted to make the lottery admissions system permanent, and responses suggested someone with a pinkie in a pencil sharpener. Parents cried out. Alumni threatened and launched lawsuits, and a few current students protested. Lowell, once a meritocratic beacon, had become something else: a bellwether for the uncertain future of selective public education.

"I always knew Lowell had a target on its back because of the demographics of its student body," Terence Abad, a 1976 Lowell graduate who is the director of the Alumni Association and the speech-and-debate coach, told me. What he meant was that, compared with the district of San Francisco as a whole, Lowell's student body has long had disproportionately high white and Asian American representation, and low representation for Latinx, Black, and other groups. In the school board's view, some hidden bias was being amplified by its supposedly meritocratic admissions. "The school culture, alumni base, and support is strong enough to continue to carry its legacy," Faauuga Moliga, formerly the board's vice-president, told me.

Defenders of selective admissions conceded that there were inequities in the pipeline, but argued that letting people in randomly means admitting students who might not be able to handle the work, diluting the culture of achievement that lifts up underserved but brilliant students. Where's the equity in that?

Last November, a lawsuit filed by the Lowell Alumni Association and others managed to invalidate the school board's vote, on a procedural matter. Yet the judge stressed that the board was free to restore its change, and in December the superintendent of schools put through a resolution that the lottery would continue at least until next year. At a moment when many magnet schools are eying similar changes—New York City debated getting rid of the admissions test for its own selective schools three years ago; the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, in Virginia, altered its admissions criteria to accept a greater range of students; Boston Latin will make use of Zip Code allocations and G.P.A. scores—the future of admissions at Lowell is charged with uncertainty. Meanwhile, the first class of lottery freshmen arrived on campus like the setup for an odd experiment: What happens when you take one of the nation's



Rebecca Johnson's ninth-grade World History students belong to a new class at Lowell that was admitted by lottery.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEVIN OKTAR YALKIN

proudest, most selective schools, and suddenly let anybody in?

That morning, the seniors in Johnson's A.P. Economics studied her syllabus the way a roomful of orthopedists might examine X-rays. She returned to the classroom to teach World History to freshmen, who entered slowly, looking tentative and scared. Johnson took out her seating chart and went around the room, calling out names. "You're going to get out a piece of paper and something to write with," she said. "You're going to take some notes."



A boy named Brandon, with a mop of black curls, looked around desperately for a sheet of paper. A boy named Arin, lean-built, bent over his page.

"This class is going to be hard," Johnson went on. "You didn't luck out and get the easy teacher. It's going to probably take more time, especially at the beginning, than you like. The readings are not easy.

"But you are going to get *through* this hard class with all these difficult readings," she said. "I'm going to give you the tools you need to do well in my class and at this school."

As the period ended, she watched Lowell's first lottery class dispersing back into the maelstrom of the hall.

"We're going to get through this together," she called after them. "It's going to be O.K."

Before the eighteen-twenties, white American boys and girls (but mostly boys) were educated through a mixture of homeschooling, tuition schooling, church schooling, and tutors. Life was largely agricultural; book learning hardly mattered. That changed during the early nineteenth century, when booming industrialism called for new specialists, and inequalities intensified across explosive growth. In 1848, Horace Mann, an early architect of the public-education system, wrote, "If one class possesses all the wealth and the education, while the residue of society is ignorant and poor, it matters not by what name the relation between them may be called; the latter, in fact and in truth, will be the servile dependents and subjects." Level the playing field of education, he thought, and a more equal society could emerge.

Lowell was established in Mann's era and remains a lodestar for his cause. "I treated my Lowell admission like, Did I get into Harvard?" Juwairya Shaikh, who graduated last year, told me. Most students begin taking college-credit classes as sophomores, and the catalogue runs deep. A physics whiz can knock off calculus and A.P. Physics 2 as a junior, while working for the school newspaper (a habitual winner of national awards), joining the debate club (ditto), or marching in the drum corps (same). An ebullient senior named Derek Duncan told me that his "proudest moment" was leading the Lowell Robotics Team to victory in the international FIRST Robotics Competition. "Whenever I'm feeling down, I listen to a recording of the announcer saying, 'These are your achievements,'" he told me.

Duncan, who, when I met him, was given to Keatsian turns about the beauty of the fog on the school fields, had lived in a long series of foster homes as a child. He came to Lowell from a magnet elementary school, and his dream is to enroll at Boston University. In that sense, he epitomizes the opportunity-equalizing work that Mann imagined, and he's not alone. Sairy Velasquez, a freshman in Johnson's World History class, is the youngest of five children and lives with her mother. (Her father is in El Salvador.) She was student-body president at her public middle school and, far from feeling helped by Lowell's lottery, had worried that it might keep her from a spot that was otherwise assured. "I was always going to get in, because my grades were good," she told me. From Lowell, she plans to go to college, while saving up to spend time in France.

According to this idea of meritocracy, an important role of education is to identify people with talent and motivation and cultivate their potential. It's good for society—you won't have to worry about the universe in which Mozart never got piano lessons—and it's good for students, providing a lift no matter where they're coming from. The lift is social and financial, but acculturative, too. "I wouldn't be honest if I said students here weren't motivated by their grades and the pedigree of the school, but they're also *excited* about learning," Cy Prothro, an A.P. Physics teacher who surfs before work, wears Hawaiian shirts, and explains acceleration curves with a pointer made to look like a prehistoric spear, told me. Previously, he'd taught at inner-city schools in Boston and Los Angeles, where classroom management was a struggle. At Lowell, which has a ninety-nine-per-cent graduation rate and mean SAT scores over thirteen hundred, his own talents for teaching could flourish. "I'm sure that there were students in my classes in L.A. who could have gotten the material as quickly, but there was so much else happening that they didn't have my undivided attention," he said, glancing toward project posters from a Lowell program that places students in biomedical labs at U.C.S.F.—special access granted on the premise that Lowell kids are pre-selected for smarts and bushy-tailedness.

The problem is that special access is the opposite of what public school is supposed to be about. This puzzle has been worked at like a Rubik's Cube for years. In 1961, during the so-called Battle of Lowell, the superintendent sought to make Lowell—then the only high school in the United States to have produced two Nobel laureates—mostly a neighborhood school, arguing that its citywide application process was bad for equality because it made other schools de-facto second rate. Opponents argued that assigning schools by neighborhood was unfair—also bad for equality—since different neighborhoods were privileged in different ways. In 2014, the school district eliminated honors tracking, teacher discretion about who can enroll in advanced courses, and middle-school Algebra 1 offerings; people were concerned that these things, too, worked against equality. Not everyone agreed.

"Forcing students to double up on math classes"—to catch up to peers who came from algebra-teaching private middle schools—"is, in my view, child abuse!" Mark Wenning, a biology teacher at Lowell, told me one day. Wenning, a high-strung man with clipped silvery hair and a stark blue-eyed gaze, has taught at Lowell for more than twenty-five years; he is known for run-

ning his classes by Socratic interrogation, cold-calling on startled freshmen like a professor at Harvard Law. He has protested efforts to "dumb down" the district's curriculum—a trick, he thinks, to conceal the distance between the performance floor and ceiling by forcing the ceiling down. "They're giving up on fixing the achievement gap for students who need help, and as a result they're making it hard for all the other students to succeed in life and in college," he told me.

Yet Wenning doesn't deny that help is needed. He started to tell me about some anti-racist workshops that Lowell teachers attended, and abruptly began to weep. "It was amazing and inspiring to see so many of my colleagues who I didn't know well speak so passionately about these issues—I couldn't *believe* it!" he said. The sentiment was unsurprising, as was the agitation. When Americans talk about "the achievement gap," they're speaking euphemistically of the same worries broached in 1961, when the board proposed different schools for different neighborhoods. They are talking about race.

"As we walk, notice the kids, and who's sitting together," Adee Horn, who leads Lowell's Peer Resources program, told me as we crossed between buildings at lunch. Asian American kids were gathered mostly with other Asian American kids; white students with other white students. "Lowell is a very diverse school, but there's a lot of segregation within that diversity." When Horn arrived at Lowell, in 2007, to head Peer Resources, which trains students in tutoring and counselling one another, she found what seemed to her a pattern.

"A lot of the issues that students were getting in arguments about, or their reasons for needing mentoring or tutoring, were connected to societal oppressions, be it racism or heterosexism or sexism," she said. Peer Resources became the front guard of Lowell's equity project. In 2019, after it grew clear that families from certain lower-income neighborhoods had trouble commuting to school, Peer Resources kids got the city's transportation agency to consider improvements to a crucial bus line. Horn herself helped organize workshops on bias and micro-aggressions. Last winter, one of these initiatives unexpectedly exploded. After screening a video about the problems with the slogan "All Lives Matter," organizers gathered responses to it on an online platform, which was soon vandalized with slurs—the N-word, the K-word—and pornography.

Lowell at that point was less than two per cent Black and twelve per cent Latinx, compared with eight and thirty-two per cent, respectively, in the district. "In most of my classes I'm the only Black student," Gabrielle Grice, a junior and the current president of the school's Black Student Union, told me. This made the vandalism seem very pointed.

The principal sent a letter to the school community denouncing the act, but some students, finding the letter insufficient, e-mailed a letter of their own to the mayor and others, condemning the "rampant, unchecked racism at Lowell." Several members of the school board shared the concern. "Why are these issues occurring at the school?" Moliga, the former vice-president, wondered. "Is it because of the diversity makeup? Does the admissions policy play into that?"

Before the lottery, Asian Americans made up half of Lowell's freshman class. The western side of San Francisco has long been a transpacific node, a place where it is easy to find a proper *phở gân bò* or the latest Taiwanese snacks, and one of Lowell's functions has been to serve as a diasporic merging lane. Asian immigration has been growing in the U.S. for half a century, and, since 2009, Asians have been the largest group of new arrivals yearly, so some see it as natural that the demographic should be well represented at the access-and-assimilation gates. At Lowell, though, Asian American preëminence has been perennially insecure. In 1983, selective enrollment of any "racial /ethnic" group was capped at forty per cent, ultimately raising the admissions bar only for Chinese Americans; in 1999, the practice was invalidated in a settlement agreement. Some see the lottery as the latest effort to suppress Asian American enrollment, which fell eight per cent in this year's freshman class, and at a moment of particular concern. Two Fridays ago, the judge in a federal case struck down the recent admissions changes at Virginia's Thomas Jefferson High School, where the representation of Asian American students this school year fell by nineteen percentage points, citing an uneven playing field that disadvantaged them.

In San Francisco, mistrust only intensified when, after the board's five-to-two vote to make Lowell's lottery permanent, public attention landed on a series of five-year-old tweets by its vice-president, Alison Collins, saying



"Believe me, nobody's going to care you had facial hair a hundred million years from today."



"Come look, hon! We just got a new cactus!"

• •

that Asian Americans "use white supremacist thinking to assimilate and 'get ahead.'" Collins was stripped of her committee assignments and Moliga became vice-president for a while.

"I'm *for* affirmative action," Oliver Chin, an author of popular children's books, told me one afternoon. Chin, who is Chinese American, has two boys: his older son graduated from Lowell; his younger son ended up as a freshman elsewhere. Chin sees the need for greater diversity, but thinks that "the lottery is a case of the cure being worse than the disease."

Lowell is one of the more middle class of the large San Francisco public high schools: thirty-three per cent of its students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, compared with sixty per cent at Balboa High School and sixty-two per cent at Galileo. It also has, by some measures, big coffers. Public schools are awarded six hundred dollars for each A.P. test taken, and Lowell offers thirty-one A.P. courses. The cash is supposed to pay for extra prep time for A.P. teachers, but what's left over supports other staffing: Peer Resources, tutoring, arts faculty, and a rich catalogue of language instruction. This produces an upward spiral. Kids who applied because Lowell had a lot to offer take the A.P. courses, and the tests bring funding to make Lowell a school with a lot to offer. To the extent that the spiral makes Lowell competitive with private prep schools, it provides appealing access both for underprivileged families and for the middle class.

"People need something to shoot for," Chin told me, and produced a matrix of notes on which he'd circled the term "white flight." Enrollment in the school district dropped by thirty-five hundred kids during the pandemic, with the largest losses among white and Filipino students. Many see the shift as evidence of middle-class fickleness: parents fed up with online learning or poor access going elsewhere. And, because the school district is subsidized by enrollment numbers, the drop helped create a hundred-and-twenty-five-million-dollar budget deficit. (According to the U.S. Census, San Francisco has the fourth-highest per-student funding among large school systems, but that figure plummets when you factor out funds unavailable for operational use.) In order to keep the students and the money coming, Chin thought, the district needed a great school like Lowell. And keeping Lowell selective, surely, was the way to keep it great.

"Remember, what can we say about the level of easiness on this reading?" Johnson asked one Friday early in the semester. She doesn't love the required world-history textbook, and adds her own reading—today, an article by the scholar Lynda Shaffer that had appeared in the *Journal of World History*, in 1994. A tall blond boy raised his hand.

"Uh—it's graduate level?" he said.

"Yeah," Johnson said. "And not graduate-from-eighth-grade level. It's hard. So—should you feel all stupid and loser-y if you don't understand everything?"

"*No*," the class replied in unison.

"Can you feel a little confused and frustrated?" Johnson went on. "Yeah. But then you just move on. What is your goal in reading this?"

"Just extract information," Sairy Velasquez proposed.

"That's it," Johnson said. "How do you know what information to extract? I'm going to *tell* you what we're looking for."

Johnson divided the students into groups to begin a seven-page section of the article, passing around a worksheet with fact-oriented questions. She walked from group to group, reviewing the students' work—an approach modelled on the now popular "flipped classroom" method, which holds that class time is for teachers to tutor students as they actively engage with material, not give lectures on what they could study at home.

"What does 'contemporary' mean again?" a girl asked as Johnson came around.

A boy inquired, "Is this going to be graded?"

Johnson noticed that Brandon, the curly-haired boy, and Arin had become friends. In some ways, they were different: Brandon's parents had come from Mexico, and worked at a restaurant in the Mission. Arin lived in the Inner Richmond, and his parents worked in tech. He had applied to Lowell along with a couple of parochial schools.

The boys had got to know each other the first week, when Johnson gave her class a "name quiz," to make sure they knew their peers. The formality of the exercise had puzzled Brandon, who simply leaned over and asked Arin, "Hey, bro, what's your name again?," and wrote it down. Arin thought that was hilarious. They discovered that they shared a lunch period, and began eating together. Brandon was shy with grownups but had a warm, joshing swagger with his peers, reliably bugging the girls around

him for paper and pens (his binder was kept *à la bohème*), and bantering along the way. "I just talk to people," he told me. After school, he liked to go with a group past the Waymo car lot to the Stonestown mall, prancing forth in the checkered flannel pajama pants that are the cool look now. Arin was more mannerly with grownups—on our first meeting, he shook my hand three separate times—and kept a tight schedule to balance academics with basketball. ("I talked with several high-school students before coming, and they're all, like, 'Time management, time management, time management!'" he told me; his father helped him budget out his homework schedule in advance.) But the boys already had the private language of close buddies, murmuring half phrases to each other and cracking up. "He helps me," Arin said. "And I help him."

Johnson looked at Brandon's blank worksheet. "You got distracted?" she suggested. Brandon nodded and, under her gaze, slowly began to work. She moved on to study his neighbor's progress. "You've got a lot of words, my friend," she said.

It wasn't praise. Johnson doesn't let freshmen take notes in full sentences, honing a distillation skill that, she thinks, trains them to sort the important from the dross. Gradually, the bullets become paragraph responses. "I have kids writing college-level work by the end of their freshman year—I'll stand by that," she told me. "They're often not my strongest kids to begin with, but we just keep working it."

Before coming to Lowell, fourteen years ago, Johnson had taught social studies, science, and math at Wallenberg, a much smaller public high school across town. She loved it—she was also a badminton coach—and had a distaste for Lowell. "I couldn't say the name Lowell without, you know, 'I hate' in front of it," she recalled. Wallenberg kids didn't test as impressively as Lowell kids, but the school was small enough that teachers could build a rapport with students, and she saw them thrive. At a certain point, Johnson became restless at Wallenberg—there was a new administration she didn't like—and eventually applied for an opening at Lowell. But she remained deeply skeptical of the place for months.

"I just felt that everybody was breaking their arms off trying to pat themselves on the back," Johnson said. She'd been accustomed to taking kids with middling test scores and graduating them as capable students. At Lowell, students entered in the ninety-seventh percentile and *left* in the ninety-seventh percentile. The heavy lifting seemed to be done not in the classroom but in admissions.

Like Prothro, though, she found it hard not to enjoy teaching kids who started class with pencils poised and could be arrantly themselves. Some made a point of boning up on current events, like little senators. The My Little Pony Club was among the most vibrant there. In time, Johnson became another devoted Lowell teacher. Yet her belief in education as a funicular, boarding everyone and lifting them together, remained.

After class that Friday, Johnson told me that more kids than usual were struggling: "There are a couple of students I really worry about—because of the comprehension, but also because they give up." On Wednesday, she convened the seven other World History teachers to compare notes. They gathered in Room 255; outside, the drum corps was practicing, and the eerie music-box tinkle of a glockenspiel came through the windows as they spoke.

"I thought this would be a good meeting to talk about the number of reluctant learners," Johnson said. She was requiring each freshman to schedule a "binder check," to make one-on-one contact. The meetings were illuminating. One freshman who she'd thought was slacking off turned out to have a third-grade reading level: he wasn't truculent, just petrified. Slipping so far through the cracks was a new problem at Lowell, but she'd alerted the boy's homeroom teacher and got him connected to tutoring.

"I feel as if this year we're getting kids at a very early curve," one of her colleagues said.

"I had one kid put a 'Kick Me' sign on someone," Johnson said. "It's, like, come on, guys, this is high school!"

They wondered whether this was an effect of the pandemic's disruption, and agreed on the importance of "scaffolding"—building skills alongside the material. Later, when I spoke with freshmen, I found that they'd noticed the support. "World History is definitely a hard class, but Ms. Johnson is pushing for us to get there," a student named Calliope told me. Still, the funicular theory of education makes some people uncomfortable; it suggests that what's called "excellence" is just a term for getting the right breaks.

Early one rainy morning, before school began, I met an academic named Debbie Lee a short walk from campus. Lee graduated from Lowell in 1988. Her parents were immigrants from mainland China who spoke little English; her mom was a seamstress, and her dad was a cook. "There was definitely pressure from my parents to, you know, become a lawyer or a doctor, go to Berkeley or Stanford," she told me. "Those were the things they heard from their friends."

At Lowell, Lee enrolled in honors classes. "Then I hit a wall, and I didn't know where to find help," she said. When she struggled in math, she felt she had less recourse on account of being Chinese American. A substitute teacher told her, "You've completely ruined my stereotype of what an Asian female should be." Lee never took the SAT, because nobody at Lowell told her that she should, or how to sign up.

Instead, she went to community college, transferring to Berkeley and then to San Francisco State University, where she earned two degrees. Last year, in an op-ed that appeared in the San Francisco *Chronicle*, she wrote that Lowell's vaunted achievement culture was "toxic," a course of uneven hurdles. Lee made her career as a teacher of mathematics at the Foothill community college, where she chaired two departments and became a dean. To the extent that Lowell steered her away from math and academia, the fields in which she thrives, it had failed to give her helpful access.

Many of Lee's Lowell classmates who came from immigrant families *did* take the SAT, of course. But they seemed to her to have parents who were more educated, with more professional jobs, and, even back in China, they had come from different strata. Her experience shows the differences concealed by broad demographic categories—a notorious problem in private education. Between 1959

VERSES ON THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

This air, its long-range gunning heart,
May it bear witness, and in the dugouts
The windowless ocean of ardor, all-doing,
Omnivorous—substance and matter.

These stars, slanderous stool pigeons!
Snooping around, looking—for what?
In the judgment of judge and witness,
Windowless ocean, matter and mass.

Rain, that cold-shouldered sower—
Its nameless manna—remembers how
Wooden crosses, like scaffolds, like forests,
Marked the ocean or wedge of battalions.

Feeble and freezing, the people to come
Will murder, will freeze, and will starve,
And rightfully the soldier must go
Unknown to his famous grave.

Teach me, feeble-winged swallow, tell me—
You who have forgotten all of flight—
How, without rudder or wing, to steer,
To get hold of this floating grave.

I'll retort with a strict accounting
For what you did against Lermontov, M.—
The way the grave instructs the stooping one,
And the floating ditch draws him in.

These worlds—these trembling globes
Of shivering grapes—they threaten us,
And constellations of golden oils,
Their canopies elastic, expanding,

Hang suspended like stolen cities,
Dangle like broken promises,
Golden slanders, slips of the tongue,
And berries of poisonous cold.

The decimal light of speeds ground to a ray
Begins the count as it moves through ether,
Transparentized by countless zeros,
Their hungry moths and radiating pain.

And from beyond the field of fields, a new field
In flight, like a crane's triangular wedge,
In a fresh coat of dustlight, the news hurtles in,
With yesterday's battle still lighting the way.

In a fresh coat of dustlight, the news hurtles in:
"I'm neither a Leipzig, nor a Waterloo,
Nor a Battle of Nations, I'm new,
And I'm coming to light up the light."

A mash, a hash, this Arabian muddle,
The light of speeds ground down to a ray,
And with the crooked soles of its feet
The ray stands tall on my retina.

Millions fallen for a halfpenny
Blazed a path through open emptiness—
We of the earthen forts wish them well:
Good night! Sleep soundly and happy trails!

In the dark, with my lips I race in pursuit
And in flight from the totality of you—
Sky of trenches that can't be bought off,
Sky of deaths, large-scale, wholesale—

and this past fall, Black representation among admitted Harvard students increased from less than two per cent to sixteen per cent. But a *Harvard Crimson* survey of more than half of this year's freshmen found that more than forty per cent of Black respondents came from the top quarter of U.S. income distribution, a measure far beyond the Black population as a whole: these were pretty fancy people before they got to Harvard Yard. The stakes for public education are even higher, because public education is the first and often the last resort.

Joanna Lam, a senior in Johnson's A.P. Economics class, is the president of Lowell's student body, and one of two students in the city elected to be a school-board representative. Lam's parents are Cambodian immigrants, and for college she was drawn to an élite degree program run between Berkeley and Sciences Po. She could be a poster child for the promises of selective admissions, yet she supports the lottery.

"You can't have a merit-based system and say it's fair because, 'Oh, it's a public school, you don't have to pay to get in,' when you have students who are paying for tutoring, or who have grown up in environments where it's safe to go to school," she said. Lam was capable but, in her own view, lucky, too. And, if you had to be both things to ascend through Lowell, then surely the luck was most fairly delivered through a lottery.

Debbie Lee saw a hidden sorting mechanism at Lowell. "It's a school that assumed people knew how to navigate the educational system already," she told me, as the rain outside abated. The school flew the flag of élite access for first-generation students, but within that group it was set up to reward those at the socioeconomic top.

October is the April of San Francisco, fickle and cruel. The days are the warmest and sunniest they'll ever be, though each one brings a fresh chance of wildfire. At Lowell, the first round of grades had been filed for the freshmen, and teachers saw a big change from previous years.

"I have three times as many students as usual failing—instead of one or two, I have three to six," Wenning, the biol-

Past the shell holes, the mounds, and the scree
Where he lagged, loitered, lurked, and gloomed:
Oppressed, overcast, pockmarked,
The genius of mutilated tombs.

How well the infantry goes to its death,
How well the night singers sing
Above Private Švejk's smushed-down grin,
Above the birdlike forefoot of a knight,
Above Quixote's birdlike lance.

Here men are chums with the maimed—
And they'll all find plenty of work.
A funny bunch of wooden crutches
Knocking around the century's outskirts:
Hey, brotherhood, comrades, the world over!

Is it for this that a skull must evolve—
Temple to temple, to the forehead's top—
So that armies can do nothing but course
Into the cherished orbits of its eyes?

From life itself the skull evolves,
Temple to temple, to the forehead's top.
It teases itself with its perfect seams,
Brightens to clarity as a knowing dome,
In dreams of itself, foaming with thought—
Fatherland for fatherland, this cup of cups,
A skullcap sewn with starry fringe,
This cap of good fortune—Shakespeare's sire.

Clarity of ash, keen vision of the sycamore—
It rushes homeward, just a bit reddish,
As if it would with swooning stockpile
Both skies, their dim fires glowing.

Only excess unites us in union.
That's not a pitfall ahead, it's mismeasure.
What's the glory in boasting to others
That we scrap for the air to scrape by.

Meanwhile, stocking my consciousness
With real life, half-aware, half-alive,
Is it by choice that I drink this brew
And eat my own head under fire?

Is this vessel—bewitching, beguiling—
Prepared in that empty expanse
So the stars, white, turning backward,
A bit reddish, rush to their homes?

Stepmother of the stars' encampment, do you hear
The night coming on, now, and after?

Sounding through the lines of rank and file—
Aortas filling with blood—there's a whisper:
"I was born in the year ninety-four,
In the year ninety-two I was born . . ."
With the threadbare year of my birth in my fist,
In step with the throng and the herd,
I barely whisper through a bloodless mouth:
"On the night of the second to the third
Of January ninety-one or another
Duplicitous year, I was born,"
And centuries surround me with fire.

—Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938)

(Translated, from the Russian,
by John High and Matvei Yankelevich.)

ogy teacher, told me. "I have some students who have done no work the whole first grading period."

Wenning had contacted students, parents, and counsellors. He'd offered extra-credit points if kids came to see him for tutoring; when they showed up, he'd let them elect to retake one test. He tried to help organize study groups (only one student signed up) and circulated a list of Web sites, podcasts of his own creation, and other resources.

"I'm at the end of my rope in what I can offer," he told me. "I don't think some of these students would be doing well at *any* high school, which makes me wonder why they wanted to come to Lowell."

Johnson thought that the pandemic, rather than the lottery, might explain much of the change. "I have to keep reminding myself that these guys were halfway through seventh grade when they left school," she told me. "I notice a difference in my seniors, too."

In San Francisco, parents grew irate at the decision to keep secondary education remote for nearly three semesters. Last February, the city filed a lawsuit against its own district in an effort to force reopenings. In June, the chair of the board's parent-advisory committee stepped down and protested what she described as its indifference to "learning loss." Similar debates were escalating nationally—last year, Attorney General Merrick Garland ordered the F.B.I. to investigate threats against school-board members and staff—but the mood in San Francisco was unusually sharp. In October, the city authorized a recall election for Collins, Moliga, and the board's president, Gabriela López, with some eighty thousand signatures for each. The *Chronicle*, in an editorial, endorsed the recall, and last month all three were removed by public votes of more than seventy per cent.

Joe Ryan Dominguez, who was hired as Lowell's principal after the upheavals of last spring, acknowledged weaker performance in the lottery class. "The students who are struggling the most in this first grading period are our ninth-grade students," he said. About ten per cent had a D or lower in at least one subject; the average freshman G.P.A.s

that autumn fell ten per cent from what they had been before the pandemic.

Dominguez, a slender man in his mid-thirties who wears bow ties and roams campus with a walkie-talkie, was a math teacher before he became an administrator. He grew up in Arizona, with a single mother who did not finish high school. In middle school, he began struggling in math class, and she couldn't help. "I remember seeing the desperation in her face—she took me to the school and asked my teachers whether they could take care of me, and they did," he said.

When he accepted the principal job at Lowell, Dominguez assumed that the school board had a vision for the school's transformation. But, since starting, he'd had just one meeting with the board's president, and only after sending multiple e-mails. He booked a meeting with Moliga, the vice-president, who never showed up. (Moliga says that he has no recollection of any meeting being scheduled.) The hands-off approach confused Dominguez. Back in Tempe, Arizona, "we'd have a school-board member on campus every couple of months, just to see how the kids are doing," he told me. He supported the lottery—"I had hesitations about being at a school that was selective"—but worried that, if freshman performance continued to be a concern, he'd have full accountability and no support.

Johnson had become desperate. "I've had a lot of feelings of inadequacy and failure," she told me in mid-autumn. "Usually by now I'm getting more content or process questions—'why' or 'how'—but I'm still getting a lot of questions about what words mean."

Because nearly all Lowell freshmen take World History, there are structures of support outside the classroom. One day, I went to visit an AVID class, part of a nonprofit partner program to help students from low-access backgrounds. (The acronym stands for "advancement via individual determination.") Freshmen broke into groups and took turns presenting material. Near the windows, a girl was at work on algebra. Near the door, a boy in World History analyzed the human effects of industrialization.

"So the good things were more trade, and they created textiles and clothing and stuff like that faster," he was saying. "The bad stuff was that there were lesser jobs for the people, because machines were doing all the work."

AVID is meant to augment classroom lessons. In Johnson's course, industrialization arose at a crucial point in the curriculum, when she would begin to shape students' understanding of the modern world.

"Landed gentry," she began one afternoon. "Anyone know what that means?"

A boy's hand shot up: "Isn't that one of those guys that have no testicles?"

"No," Johnson replied. On the board, she drew two triangles resembling the food pyramid. One depicted a climb from peasants through merchants, landed gentry, and aristocrats. The other depicted an ascent from factory workers through shopkeepers, an ownership class, and a shrinking aristocracy. The layers of the old model were highly unequal, she explained, but its people shared towns and relationships of symbiotic accountability. After industrialization, the old gentry tended to marry the ownership class and disengage from feudal bonds. "These people"—she pointed to the factory workers—"don't even *know* people in the gentry."

Johnson's goal was to explain such narratives while reaching past them—a challenge for a class still struggling to ask those "why" questions. Her students had read a passage from their textbook outlining various reasons that industrialization began in Britain: rivers and canals, iron and coal, banks and so forth.



"But this was also happening in China," she told the class. "Also in the Islamic Empire." Modern banking began in Italy; much of Europe had coal and iron deposits. "Your textbook is making it sound like Britain is the only one with iron ore, the only one that has skilled craftsmen, the only one with banks and rivers and canals. What I would try to get you to notice is that there are other places that had these things as well. So therefore—what *is* the thing that makes Britain different? Dare to be wrong."

"Capitalism?" a boy suggested.

"You're right, at the beginning, but capitalism comes out of industrialism—it's about who owns the machines," Johnson said. "How about this: Do you remember what industry starts the Industrial Revolution? Talk with your neighbor. Ten seconds."

There was chattering among the students, then growing silence, as a realization crept across the classroom like a bristle up the spine.

"*Cotton*," someone said, very softly.

A few students leaned forward at their desks. Brandon looked up.

"Cotton," Johnson said. "Where is Britain getting its cheap cotton from? And who is growing that?"

The hands of the clock sped forward as the class glided from there. By a logical process of elimination, Johnson had overturned a standing narrative about industrialization and all it wrought, but she had also challenged certain habits of mind. History wasn't just a list of causes and effects, credits and debts; it was a flow of intersecting domino rows running around the globe. Everybody's past was implicated.

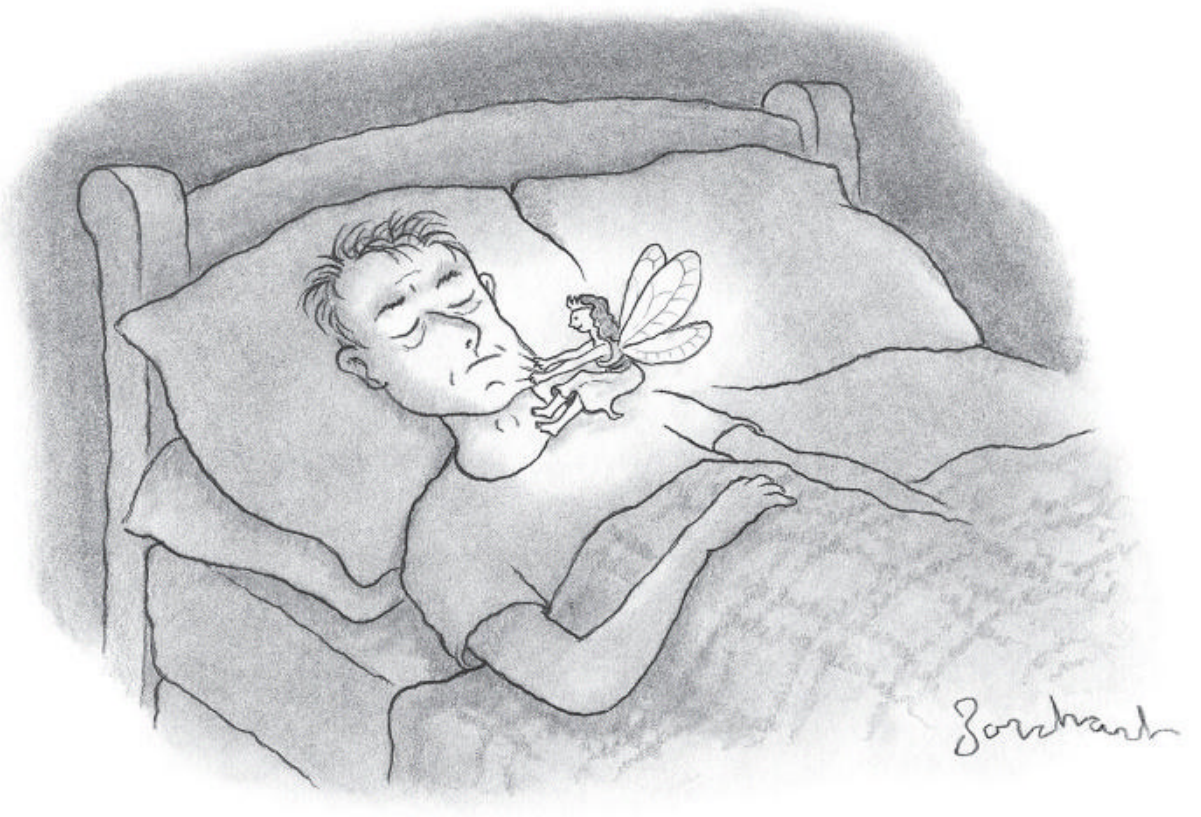
As the fall progressed, both Arin and Brandon felt their positions to be precarious. Arin was doing well in his classes, but he worried that the success wouldn't last—a common concern among Lowell students, many of whom had schedules packed like heavy suitcases and lived in fear of the zippers splitting. In December, a sleep survey conducted by the school newspaper found that fifty per cent of students had fallen asleep in class. ("Ironically, I got the least amount of sleep when we were working on that," Rae Wymer, the paper's co-editor-in-chief, told me.)

Brandon's fears were more about baseline performance. "To be honest, last unit I was just wandering off—I wasn't doing my work or nothing," he said. "Now I'm actually determined. My biology teacher told me that if I keep doing this bad I'm going to have to redo her class next year." Brandon hadn't previously been a stellar student, and had come to Lowell at his mother's urging. But it wasn't only her dream. Brandon

wanted to go to college, even though it wasn't something his family had done in the past. His aspiration was to be a chef; his father had trained as one, but had to abandon the pursuit when he left Mexico. "I'm trying to follow in his footsteps," Brandon said.

Despite the stress, the friendship between Arin and Brandon flourished. They ate together. They met up on a weekend to play soccer in the Mission. Johnson noticed that, not long after she started seating the boys next to each other, Brandon began turning in his homework reliably for the first time. It was as if a rope now joined him and Arin in a lead climb, one setting the bolts while the other belayed, and both of them, feeling uncertain on their own, were moving up the cliff together.

For Johnson, this came as a small revelation, and it helped her find her confidence in her work again. She'd been trying every teaching technique she knew, but it turned out that one of the best tools available was just what made the freshman class the freshman class: the mixture of students and the bonds that developed among them. Pedagogy is full of big ideas, but its unofficial golden rule is that, whenever something really works, you keep doing it. Even as Johnson changed her seating chart around, she tried to keep the boys together, silently cheering them on.



If one model of expanding access is to let more people through the door, another relies on curricular design: what happens once students show up inside the building. "We don't know what these kids are carrying—they need support," Nicole Henares, a freshman-English teacher, told me in the courtyard one afternoon. "The curriculum has to be culturally responsive." In her freshman classes, students study, alongside "A Midsummer Night's Dream," Angie Thomas's "The Hate U Give" and works by the Bay Area poet Asha Sudra. Henares's assignments encourage students to develop their own voices. (One prompt invites them to "assume the identity of the character that most stands out to you and write a monologue.")

There is, however, a third model, which is that education is essentially relational. Access isn't determined only by which students get past the gate, or by where they come from, but by how they make their way in relation to their teachers and their peers. That kind of access is hard to track; the reason Brandon started doing his homework can't be captured in numbers. Yet, the more I talked with students, the more I found that relational access was the kind that mattered most to them, and the kind they found most unreliable at Lowell.

"In our slavery unit, the teacher let us know that images are going to be disturbing—and she just looked at me and told me, in front of the whole class, if I would like to step out I can, because this will affect 'your kind of people,'" a junior named Aliyah Hunter, the events coördinator of the Black Student Union, said. Her schoolmates in the B.S.U. told me that teachers unsure how to treat period passages containing offensive racial terms would sometimes ask Black students to read them aloud. Other Lowell students described feeling trapped by stereotypes at play among their peers. Jacqueline Juarez, a junior who identifies as Latinx, told me about struggling with math in her freshman year, and getting the cold shoulder when she sought help from classmates. When she asked the teacher, she was told that she should be learning from her peers. Desperate, Jacqueline called her sister, in college, who offered to tutor her.

"Suddenly, I knew more than the other students, and they would approach *me* for help. I'm, like, No." She'd realized she'd been left off the group chats that students used for studying, an exclusion that she believed rose from stereotypes about Latinx people and math. This past fall, she began tutoring a freshman who was experiencing the same cold-shouldering, and was thinking of leaving Lowell. Jacqueline sat him down and told him how things were. "I was able to convince him to stay," she said. "For now."

The relational vision of education means that performance should be thought of less as a measure of fixed aptitude and more as a quantum path: one outcome among many possible ones. It means that a school like Lowell isn't in the excellence-sorting game but in the path-making game. And it means that, in shaping equal access, you can't think only of one individual or group; you have to study how they interact.

Imagine you're the kind of student often called underprivileged. Your parents struggle with bills, unemployment, prejudice, addiction, mental illness, or all of the above. Through effort and luck, you perform well in school, advance to a good

college, and get a first-rate job. You earn, let's say, a six-figure salary. At thirty or so, you realize that you've made it to what's often called the middle class. Sure, you might run into difficulty from here, but you're resourceful, informed, and, as a result of your path, well connected. When people speak of educational access for the underprivileged, this is the outcome they hope for.

Perhaps you land in a prospering city, such as San Francisco or New York. You have kids. Now you notice that, somewhere along the way, the economies of things changed. The costs you confront—a home, child care, education—make your head hurt. Somehow, you are still living on the edge.

Much has been made of working-class Americans who feel cast out of the garden. We hear less about another group with similar anxieties. Call them the pinched middle: supposedly accomplished professionals who now feel that they're barely holding on. By scrambling onto the middle-class raft, you thought you had reserved a place there for your kids as well. But you've done the math, and, though you might have been able to afford private school twenty years ago, when tuition could be below twenty thousand dollars, now tuition is more than fifty thousand (per year! per child!), and the good schools offer slim odds of entry.

For most people, that leaves the public system. Looking at schools in your city, you have visions of being thrown back toward the upbringing you thought you had escaped. And no one is interested in giving you a leg up now: you are the middle class.

Those who speak about Lowell often frame their concerns in terms of access for underprivileged kids, and with good reason. What becomes clear, though, is that, in order to secure that access, access must also be insured for the pinched middle class. If no middle-class stability waits at the top of the ladder, then your climb has been for naught (and heaven forbid you pick up school debt on the way). The access has become a trap.

Middle-class parents told me how stuck they felt. "Private school was never an option for us," an Oxbridge graduate who runs an events business said. His daughter had been a middle-school valedictorian and aspired to go to Lowell, but didn't make it past the lottery. He and his wife, both of whom worked full time, couldn't afford private school: applying cost a hundred dollars per application, and that was just the start. "It's basically a rich person's game," he said.

It is telling that students have begun to feel the middle-class pinch, too. "I used to ask, 'How many of you want to get a 4.0 because you want to buy your parents a home?,' and everybody would raise their hands," Nicole Henares, the English teacher, told me. "Now they don't, because they know they're not going to be able to." Lowell shows that underprivileged access and middle-class access are increasingly twinned. Fulfilling any promises that public education makes depends on genuinely opening the doors to underprivileged students while carrying the striving middle class through, too. This year, for all its trials, Lowell seemed the rare school on its way to getting there.



"The Realtor swore it was dormant."

Winter break drew near. Johnson played "Last Christmas" and "Ocho Kandelikas" as her students worked together in groups. Wenning had holiday lights strung above his whiteboards. In A.P. Economics, a senior with a calculator wondered whether to drop one of his low scores, as Johnson allowed. "Currently, 17.6 per cent of my grade is the final, but if I drop a quiz it becomes 18.4 per cent," he told a classmate. He decided to hedge.

Yet things were looking up. Several of Wenning's struggling freshmen were doing better. In World History, Johnson was leading her students toward the big picture. What were the two I-words? she asked. "Industrialism" and "imperialism." Hadn't we seen how they were linked—how industrial activity accelerated imperial activity? Could we compare the populations living under industrialism with those living under imperial rule? Yes: both made important migrations starting in the nineteenth century, but they were coming from different places, and with different prospects. Maybe that would end up being important later on.

Outside the classroom, Arin and Brandon were having trouble finding time for each other. As basketball ramped up, Arin started spending lunch in the library, desperate not to fall behind. Brandon, when he sat down to work, found himself getting distracted by his phone. Both boys seemed less propulsive, as if bouncing on a seesaw alone.

Johnson spent her break reflecting on her classroom strategies. When she returned, in January, she divided the class into new work groups and spent time with the students who had been struggling the most. Then she reshuffled the groups again and had the students present to their teammates what they'd learned. Some of those who had been falling behind were now teaching their peers.

"The trick is that the kid has to rec-

ognize that they've made a step and that it's solid footing for them, so then, when they step back, they know that it's not their ability limiting them," she said. For Brandon, the gains carried. Johnson wouldn't tell me about specific students' performances, but she said that kids who had started the semester doing F work, or none at all, were now turning in writing assignments in the B range. One of the most foot-dragging freshmen had shyly asked whether she thought he should enroll in an A.P. history class next year. Yes, she told him, working to hide her excitement.

"In the past, we would ask, you know, Are these kids 'Lowell'?" She paused in what looked to me like awe. "They *are* Lowell. These are Lowell students. And, to me, that says that anybody can be a Lowell student." It just required good support and attentive work from clever teachers. And time.

On January 26th, Johnson and her colleagues attended a meeting with the heads of their union, the United Educators of San Francisco, which was under new leadership. They had recently heard details about a contract extension that was being submitted to the school district, and there was good news: a bunch of money held in escrow for teachers was finally being disbursed, helping to fund two two-thousand-dollar bonuses. But there was also ominous news: the contract would forfeit the extra A.P. funding, the six hundred dollars per test, to help with a budget crisis. Lowell teachers remember this being framed in terms of equity, since low-performing schools had fewer A.P. tests. (A union representative disputed this characterization.) The A.P. cuts were set to expire in a year, but Cassondra Curiel, the head of the union, acknowledges that the district will probably want to extend them. "It is reasonable to prepare for the fact that the district will bring the cuts forward," she told me. The money would then have to be brought back, if at all, by way of the negotiating table.

Johnson's stomach dropped when she learned about the cuts. She shakily made some back-of-the-envelope calculations, and, when the question-and-answer period opened, was one of the first to speak. Had the union heads realized what the A.P. money funded? she asked. Lowell got more than two million dollars a year from the funding and used most of it for salaries. With the money forfeited, it would lose—she checked her calculations—about twenty-five full-time teachers.

There was a long silence. At Lowell, the spillover from A.P. funding supports programs such as arts and robotics, as well as those, such as Peer Resources and AVID, that help underrepresented students find their way: the very offerings that made Lowell both appealing to middle-class families and viable for students arriving from all backgrounds. Johnson saw a school district at risk of collapsing on itself: the best schools stripped of their competitive extras; the middle class slowly pulling away; enrollment, and thus funding, continuing to fall; underprivileged kids being chased up an achievement path to nowhere—all while the prosperous further enriched and sealed off their caste through private access.

Union voting on the contract ended on February 7th. It was ratified, fifty-seven to forty-three. Soon after President Biden finished his State of the Union address last Tuesday, the school board prepared to vote on acceptance. Joanna Lam, via Zoom, pressed the district's representatives for details of the contract's effects: "Will there be a loss of either A.P. or elective courses as a result of this tentative agreement passing?"

"At this time, we do not anticipate there will be a reduction in courses," the assistant superintendent of high schools answered.

When I spoke with Dominguez, he was raking over the budgets, figuring out what could be rescued. Between system-wide cuts and the forfeited A.P. funds, he told me, Lowell would lose $3.6 million, dropping its per-pupil funding to the bottom of the district. It would lose between twenty-one and twenty-eight educators, about twenty per cent of its faculty; between one and three teachers would likely be pink-slipped, and the district would scatter the rest to other institutions. Dominguez thought he'd eked out a way to hold on to AVID—for one more year, at least—but he hadn't figured out how to keep Peer Resources as it currently existed, or Lowell's arts and languages programs: with so much money gone, it was impossible to fund what once made Lowell unique.

During a call-in period at the board meeting, Aliyah Hunter joined other B.S.U. members in pleading against the contract. "Please listen to students," she said. A junior named Cal Kinoshita, who is one of the leaders of Lowell's parliamentary debate team, followed. "You hear all these students get on here, some of them borderline crying, Black and brown students," he said, accusing the board of "stripping the comfort away from marginalized students—it's not humane."

The grownups on the school board considered the matter. "I think it's been well known for a long, long time that this extra prep period for A.P. has been an inequitable practice," Matt Alexander, a non-recalled board member, said.

"This funding model basically means that schools that have students that are more likely to take tests get more money," Collins, voting while waiting out her replacement, said.

"Again, we are met with the opportunity to correct a decades-long issue around this funding inequity," López, also waiting out her recall replacement, said. In the end, only Lam, the student, voted against the contract.

I visited Johnson at school not long before the final meeting. She hadn't cooked or exercised in days. "I walked into my office after the union vote," she said, "and I worried, *You're* not going to be here next year, *you're* not going to be here next year, and *you're* not going to be here next year. Then I went to my class and tried to teach without crying."

She had organized a working group and helped assemble a picket. Here, she thought, was a cause worth fighting for. Johnson and her colleagues had spent months in the trenches of the equity project, trying to transform Lowell into a stellar urban school that anyone in town could gain access to. And they had started to succeed. Now, instead of sharing the good, there had been a cursory equalizing of numbers, a dismantling of structures that had brought about real equity. "If you don't have leaders willing to look beyond the gray area, beyond the outward number of 'fair,'" she told me, glancing at the classroom around her, "you're going to end up hurting the people that you're trying to help." ♦

LETTER FROM ECUADOR

CITY OF THE DEAD

Enduring one of the world's most lethal outbreaks of COVID-19.

BY DANIEL ALARCÓN

The problem with any story, big or small, is that you're always starting in the middle. All beginnings are constructions we use to make sense of what is mostly incomprehensible. Of course, there are facts. For example: during one particularly violent twenty-four-hour period in January, eighteen people were murdered in Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city and its commercial and industrial capital. That week, there were thirty murders altogether. For the dead, those murders marked the end of their stories. For the city, which just two years ago was battered by one of the world's most virulent outbreaks of COVID-19, the murders were something else: a plot twist in an ongoing narrative of disaster. Guayaquil has a history of violence that stretches back to the days of its founding, in the sixteenth century, but what is happening now is new: January, 2022, ended with seventy-nine murders, nearly three times the number in the same month in 2020, just before the pandemic began.

Last October, I went to Guayaquil to report on the aftereffects of the pandemic, not on the violence there, though I was warned about it, again and again—before travelling, then when I arrived, late on a Sunday, and the following morning, as I walked out the door of my hotel to go to an interview. One day, I spoke with a retired nurse, who told me about friends and colleagues who'd worked through the first, nightmarish wave of COVID-19. One had quit nursing. Another had left the country. A third had lost her mind. The neighborhood had changed, too, she told me. Initially, everyone was afraid of contagion; now everyone was afraid of the violence. We were still talking when her sister arrived home, and, in an instant, the conversation turned. As the nurse served me coffee, her sister told me about her son, an inmate at a local prison, Guayas 1. She'd been living in Italy for years, and had flown home in the hope of getting him out. They hadn't seen each other in three years, but they spoke all the time, had spoken, in fact, just before she boarded the plane. But overnight, while she travelled across the sea, an armed gang overran a section of the prison, killing more than a hundred inmates, including her son. He was stabbed multiple times in the chest and back. Soon after landing, she'd learned that he was dead. "Sometimes I think he wanted his freedom so badly," she told me, shaking her head, "that in the end he flew away."

Here's another beginning. In late December, 2019, Dr. Paola Vélez got a phone call from a friend, asking if she'd been following the news from Wuhan, China. Vélez was on a holiday break at the time, at a beach a couple of hours from Guayaquil, where she lived and practiced as an infectious-disease specialist at a relatively new public hospital called Guasmo Sur. She hadn't been following the news, she told her friend, but promised to look into it. What Vélez read during the next few days was so alarming that, when she returned to the city, she began drafting a contingency plan for her hospital, based on two logical assumptions: that the novel coronavirus was airborne and that it would eventually make it to Ecuador.

On January 11th, she presented her plan to the hospital's medical director. A week later, she received the go-ahead to implement it, and began converting a large room at the hospital into a twenty-seven-bed infectious-disease treatment and containment area. She was given no budget, but was offered staff. She trained a group of doctors and nurses in the proper use of P.P.E. and in the protocols for entering and



"One day, there were no patients," Dr. Esteban



Ortiz said of the COVID outbreak in Guayaquil. "The next, there were five thousand looking for beds in intensive-care units."

ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER



"I can practice a different song."

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exiting the quarantine area, so as to avoid infection and contamination. When it opened, on January 31, 2020, Dr. Vélez's unit at Guasmo Sur was perhaps the first public hospital space specifically designed to safely receive and treat COVID patients in Latin America, and certainly the first in Ecuador. "My mistake," Vélez told me, "was assuming that everyone was preparing just as I was."

Vélez is in her late thirties, with black hair, a broad, friendly smile, and sharp eyes. She and her mother moved to Guayaquil in the nineties, after an earthquake destroyed their home, in the province of Manabí. Everything they owned fit in two suitcases. Now the first thing you see when you enter the two-bedroom apartment that Vélez shares with her mother is a hand-painted Wonder Woman logo adorning the wall that faces the door. Vélez is more than a casual fan. For Halloween in 2020, she dressed up as the superhero, and earlier that year, during the height of the pandemic, she tweeted at Gal Gadot, who played Wonder Woman in the most recent movie, asking that she remember health-care workers. Up a flight of stairs, on the building's terrace, Vélez keeps a punching bag (to relieve stress, she told me), beside a mountain bike, which she takes out for a ride at dawn every Sunday. Even before the pandemic, she worked long, punishing hours, and was known as a leader at Guasmo Sur. All of which is to say that, by character and by disposition, Vélez was primed for the kind of heroism that the approaching crisis would require.

Ecuador's first suspected case was reported on January 26th, a few days before Vélez's COVID unit was finished: a forty-nine-year-old Chinese national with flu-like symptoms who had arrived in Quito, the capital, five days earlier. A mucus sample was taken to be tested at Guayaquil's National Institute of Public Health Research, known as INSPI. The technical director, Alfredo Bruno, a microbiologist who also coördinates Ecuador's National Influenza Center, had been receiving worrying updates from the World Health Organization about the situation developing in China. The new virus's genome had been sequenced by early January, and Bruno had ordered reactivating agents from the Pan American Health Organization as soon as they were available, enough to perform a thousand tests or so. To everyone's great relief, this first sample tested negative, a result that was confirmed by a separate test conducted at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (The patient would later die of complications from hepatitis B and pneumonia.)

In mid-February, there was a new suspected case: an Ecuadorian woman in her seventies who was living in Madrid and had come to Guayaquil to see her family. Her visit, before she fell seriously ill, had been a whirlwind of family gatherings, festivals, and celebrations; as many as eighty close contacts had potentially been exposed. At the time, Bruno and his lab colleagues were the only four people in the country able to conduct a test for the novel coronavirus. The woman's symptoms, and the fact that the Spanish capital was already suffering through its first wave of infections, put the medical authorities on edge. "We placed the sample in the machine and basically made the sign of the cross," Bruno told me. As he and his team waited for the results, his cell phone rang. It was the Minister of Health, Catalina Andramuño. He should tell no one of the results except her, she said. An hour later, he called her back with the news they had all been dreading: the test was positive. Andramuño made the official announcement on February 29, 2020. (Brazil had announced its first case three days before.) By then, there were at least twenty-four other people in Ecuador with COVID-19 symptoms; within days, there were twenty confirmed cases.

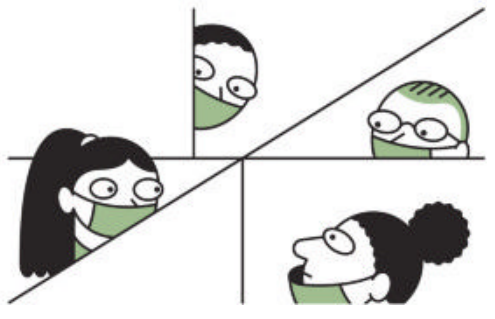
January and February are vacation and travel season on Ecuador's Pacific coast: schools are out, and the weather is humid and oppressively hot. It's the time of year for graduation parties and family trips to the beach, foreign travel for those who can afford it, and homecomings for the large Ecuadorian diaspora, scattered across Europe and the United States. Guayaquil, the country's economic engine, is at the center of it all, as it has been for much of the nation's history. During the cacao boom of the late nineteenth century, when Ecuador exported more than twenty per cent of the world's processed cacao, nearly all of it left via the port of Guayaquil. The city grew as most Latin American cities have grown: in fits and starts, with little regard for the natural world, through pe-

riods of prosperity interrupted by the occasional calamity. In the case of Guayaquil, the most common disasters were pirate attacks and fires; in 1896, a fire wiped out nearly a third of the houses in the city, leaving more than half the residents homeless. Guayaquil sits at sea level, on the largest estuary ecosystem on the Pacific coast of South America, a concatenation of wetlands, saltwater marshes, creeks, and islands, less than fifty miles from where the enormous, muddy Guayas River flows into the sea. In the aftermath of the worst fires, the local government drained wetlands to build neighborhoods (which were later susceptible to flooding), redrew maps, and straightened roads, preparing for the next stage of the city's growth. Today, Guayaquil is a sprawling metropolis of more than three million residents. The port handles ninety per cent of Ecuador's imports and half of its exports, and the airport is the country's second busiest, after Quito's. The wealthy live in a satellite city called Samborondón, a lush enclave of shopping malls and gated communities with names like Rio Sol Towers, Ibiza, and Camino del Rio. Rafael Correa, a Socialist President, who was in office from 2007 to 2017, often referred to élites like these as "*pelucones*," a mocking reference to the wigs, or *pelucas*, that the European aristocracy once wore.

More than one and a half million Ecuadorians live abroad, mostly in the U.S., Italy, and Spain, and many, like the first COVID-19 patient, returned to visit family just as the virus was taking hold in Europe. More than two hundred thousand people arrived at Guayaquil's airport between January 1st and March 16th, the day the government closed its borders to international arrivals. Dozens of clusters were likely seeded in those first months of 2020—at parties and weddings and gatherings throughout the region. In early March, after some confusing back-and-forth among different government entities, the Minister of Government, María Paula Romo, announced the authorization of mass gatherings, including a soccer match between Barcelona, Guayaquil's most popular team, and its rival from outside of Quito, Independiente del Valle. Pedro Pablo Duart, who was then the governor of the state of Guayas, encouraged the public to attend, tweeting, "The most dangerous virus is fear." Some twenty thousand people showed up. ("That was crude. It was a mistake," he told me, while denying that anyone had been infected at the game.) A week later, even after the outbreak had begun to spread and social-distancing and quarantine rules were in effect, lavish parties were still taking place in Samborondón. According to Duart, police shut down more than fifteen illegal gatherings there during the weekend of March 14th.

The first patient was being treated at a private clinic when she tested positive, but she was soon transferred to Paola Vélez's unit at Guasmo Sur. Vélez didn't tell her mother for almost a week—she didn't want to worry her—but in fact, Vélez admitted, it was exciting. She showed me photos from those heady early days: she and her colleagues in P.P.E. In some pictures, the masks have been removed, and they're beaming. "From a professional standpoint, you feel that this is your moment, that you have to show that this is what you've trained for," she told me. "Afterward, I was sorry and asked God for forgiveness for being so selfish. I had no idea what was coming."

In truth, no one did. If there was one thing that characterized the outbreak in Guayaquil, it was the velocity



with which the contagion spread across the city, whose public-health and funerary infrastructure was woefully unprepared. Although there were several relatively new hospitals in Guayaquil, most of them were understaffed even before the pandemic decimated the medical ranks. Some hadn't been finished in time. I toured one, Monte Sinaí, with a young doctor named Heinert Gonzabay Campos, who proudly showed me a new modern intensive-care unit. When I asked him to describe what it had looked like at the height of the 2020 COVID surge, he admitted that it hadn't been in use then, and took me to a makeshift emergency area on a lower floor, where he explained how the beds had been crammed in, and the bodies had lain, and a wall had been hastily constructed, in an attempt to contain the spread of the disease. "Many people showed a lot of courage, a powerful desire to save lives," he said. "But that wore off over time. The mothers and fathers of hospital employees died in our arms." Gonzabay Campos's father died of COVID on the other side of the country.

In a forthcoming study, Dr. Esteban Ortiz, at Quito's Universidad de las Américas, concludes that Guayaquil likely had the world's most lethal outbreak of COVID-19 per capita. "One day, there were no patients," he told me. "The next, there were five thousand looking for beds in intensive-care units." Ortiz estimates that about sixty-five per cent of the city's residents were infected during March and April of 2020, and, judging by the number of excess deaths, by the end of April the death rate was nine times what it would normally be. Within a few weeks of the first confirmed case, Guayaquil's hospitals were on a wartime footing, in an exhausting and relentless state of triage that would last for the better part of a month. The twenty-seven beds that Vélez had prepared were soon filled, so she added another room. Eventually, she had four rooms, and they weren't nearly enough.

Vélez hardly left Guasmo Sur, and she describes those weeks as the worst of her professional life. Hospital morgues, designed for only a few cadavers, were overwhelmed almost immediately, with corpses piling up in spare rooms and even on the sidewalks in front of the hospitals. Hundreds of people died in their homes, and with mortuary services paralyzed—funerary workers were scared of getting infected—many grieving families were forced to live for days with the decaying bodies of their loved ones. Duart, who spent those weeks visiting hospitals and coördinating food deliveries in Guayaquil, told me that the scenes were horrifying. "You'd see a woman standing in line just fall over—*pum!*—and

die." Ecuador's emergency phone service was so inundated with calls that it collapsed, not just in Guayaquil but nationwide. In the midst of this crisis, hundreds of bodies were lost, misplaced, or buried without proper identification. One family was mourning a dead aunt when she suddenly called, having awoken from a three-week coma. Somehow, in the confusion of the teeming hospital, she'd been mistaken for someone else. It was unclear whose ashes the family had been given, or how to return them.



The shock of what took place in Guayaquil helped alert Ecuador and the entire region to the potential severity of the illness. "We took steps that the rest of the world took later," Otto Sonnenholzner, Ecuador's Vice-President at the time, told me. "And this worked in twenty-three of our twenty-four provinces."

Before the pandemic, Roberto Farías worked as an unlicensed cabdriver, seven days a week, taking home about fifteen dollars on a good day. He lived with his niece, Madeline, a graphic designer, and his mother, Norma, in a modest three-bedroom home in a working-class district of Guayaquil known as El Suburbio. When I met him, last fall, he was still struggling to understand what had happened to him and his family.

Though Ecuador's first confirmed case was announced at the end of February, 2020, the danger felt remote at that point. Roberto drove his taxi, just as he normally would, until Sunday, March 15th, the day before President Lenín Moreno issued a nationwide stay-at-home order. Roberto wasn't feeling particularly well, and though his sister, who'd moved to Madrid more than a decade earlier, was worried that it might be COVID, he wasn't too concerned. He called a friend who worked at a hospital and described what he was experiencing—high fever and chills—and to his relief was told that it was most likely dengue fever, whose symptoms are easily mistaken for COVID. (An outbreak of dengue in 2019 was one of the worst in Ecuador's history, and stretched into the early months of the New Year.) At the time, despite the rising number of positive COVID cases, authorities were assuring residents that there was no community spread. Still, Roberto stayed in his room, taking the medicine he'd been prescribed for dengue and urging his mother and niece to keep their distance, just to be safe. He didn't improve. Roberto didn't know that one of the symptoms of the novel coronavirus was a loss of taste or smell, and he playfully chided his mother for forgetting to salt the food, or to add sugar to the milkshakes she made for him.

On March 18th, the day before his sixty-seventh birthday, President Moreno released a video urging all Ecuadorians to stay home, while assuring them that he was working from his office. In one shot, he chats with his Finance Minister on Zoom. In another, Moreno, who was paralyzed in a 1998 robbery attempt, sits in his wheelchair on the balcony of the Presidential Palace, looking out over Quito's deserted central square. "The streets are empty," he says, before adding confidently, "In a few days, we'll see this plaza buzzing again."

Meanwhile, many Ecuadorians were wondering who exactly was in charge. The day Moreno's video was released, Cynthia Viteri, the mayor of Guayaquil, ordered municipal vehicles to be parked on the airport runway, to prevent the landing of two humanitarian flights from Europe, which had been authorized by the Ministry of Transportation and Public Works. Though the planes brought only crew members into the country, and had come to repatriate Europeans stranded by the pandemic, Viteri said the move was justified because, according to the emergency regulations, no one was allowed into or out of Guayaquil. That evening, the Attorney General's office announced that Viteri's actions would be investigated. The next day, the Mayor posted on Twitter an emotional video of her own, revealing that she had contracted the virus. Viteri told her five children that she loved them and held up a handwritten sign asking them not to visit her. Two days later, Catalina Andramuño abruptly resigned. "Confronting a public-health crisis without resources is complicated," she declared. (A government source claims that she was forced out; Andramuño declined to comment on this.) By that point, there were five hundred confirmed COVID cases in Ecuador, the international borders were mostly closed, and the country was in lockdown. The scale of the emergency was just coming into focus.

In El Suburbio, despite Roberto's precautions, his mother and his niece had become infected; Madeline, in her late twenties, had relatively mild symptoms, but Norma, in her late sixties and suffering from diabetes and hypertension, was having trouble breathing. On March 30th, the three of them left home in search of a hospital bed for her. What they found was a desolate city of empty streets and shuttered businesses, Guayaquil as they'd never seen it before. The only centers of activity, it seemed, were the hospitals, where hundreds of sick Guayaquileños and their loved ones had congregated, clamoring to be admitted, to receive oxygen, or to get an I.C.U. bed. Roberto, Madeline, and Norma went from one public hospital to another, and to private clinics as well, encountering the same terrible scenes everywhere. Hospital after hospital, all in a state of crisis, with crowds gathered outside, the sick collapsing in the parking lots as they waited to be seen. Norma was becoming weaker by the moment. After several hours, having been turned away at nearly every hospital in the city, they arrived at the Efren Jurado Hospital, where Roberto's mother, so ill she could barely walk, was finally admitted. Here, a doctor told Roberto and Madeline that Norma could be intubated, but it would add only a few hours to her life. They declined the treatment, and Norma died that evening, around ten.

On the day she passed, the official death toll from COVID in Ecuador stood at sixty-two, a number that accounted only for the people who'd died after receiving a positive test result. Among these was the first confirmed case, whom Paola Vélez had treated at Guasmo Sur. By this point, Alfredo Bruno, INSPI's technical director, had

travelled to other Ecuadorian cities to train colleagues in how to test for COVID; soon afterward, he had fallen ill. His wife, Domenica de Mora, also a microbiologist working at the lab, got sick as well, as did her father. The couple were forced to quarantine and work from home just as the demand for testing ramped up. At INSPI, the technicians were working non-stop, stretched to their limits. Bruno told me, "We'd have fifty or a hundred people outside the lab, yelling, 'We have samples! We have samples!'" At the peak of the crisis, the lab was performing more than two thousand tests per day. Eventually, the staff grew from five to nearly eighty. On the worst day, the positivity rate was above eighty per cent, though, of course, there were thousands of other cases going undiagnosed. Tests were now available at private clinics, but at exorbitant prices—up to a hundred and twenty dollars, about a quarter of Guayaquil's average monthly wage at the time.

Some public hospitals had run out of P.P.E. and masks; there were no free ventilators. Later, it was revealed that crucial supplies had been diverted and medicines had been sold on the black market by corrupt hospital administrators. Among those implicated was former President Abdalá Bucaram, at whose home authorities found five thousand masks and two thousand tests, among other medical supplies that had been hard to come by during the worst weeks of the emergency. (Bucaram's attorneys deny all of the allegations. His case is currently under appeal.) "Half of these people shouldn't have died," Vélez told me, "but there was no oxygen." To make matters worse, some sixty per cent of health-care workers weren't coming to work, leaving those who remained struggling to keep pace with the crush of patients arriving every hour. Vélez would pass dozens of bodies on her walk from the parking lot of Guasmo Sur to the intensive-care unit. "I have a respect for the dead now," she told me. "Not a respect for death, but for the dead. For the lifeless body. Because I saw so many on the floor, and it didn't matter if they were mothers or fathers, professionals or indigents. In that moment, in a black body bag, they're all the same."

In the evenings, she'd return home, but wouldn't cross the threshold of the apartment before making sure that her mother, Loli, was in her own room, with the door closed. Their bedrooms shared a wall, with a small rectangular vent near the ceiling, which Vélez covered with a piece of pink construction paper. Late at night, they'd talk through this hole in the wall, recounting their days; Loli could hear the exhaustion in her daughter's voice. She was concerned, confined to the apartment, and eager to know what was really happening out there. How many patients came in, how many died, Loli would ask every night. Lots, Vélez would answer, always vague, trying not to worry her mother. After all, what good would it do to admit that she'd seen fifty people die that day?

Every city, in normal times, has its protocols for death and dying, rules governing what can and cannot be done to a body, who can move it and where. If a person dies at home, a medical examiner must confirm the cause of death before the funeral home can take the body. Dying in a hospital is different, but, again, there is a system in place, with paperwork and phone calls and bureaucracies—mechanisms to insure that the bodies are not misplaced and are prepared for burial before they begin to decay. Most of us are blissfully unaware of these procedures until we are forced to confront them, on the day a loved one dies, but they're there, waiting for all of us.

In Guayaquil, on any given day before the pandemic, there might have been thirty to fifty people whose deaths had to be accounted for, whose bodies had to be embalmed, moved to a grave site, mourned, and buried. During that hellish stretch from late March to mid-April of 2020, hundreds were dying each day. For more than a week in early April, the number was around seven hundred. No system in the world could have absorbed this many excess deaths,



every day for weeks, without collapsing. Social media was awash with macabre images of bodies on sidewalks. The whole city had become a cemetery, a spectacle for all the world to see.

Jorge Wated was serving as the president of BanEcuador, a public-development bank, when President Moreno charged him with solving the problem of the bodies in Guayaquil. Wated had held a number of positions with two previous administrations, but, before working in government, he ran the family business, a home-goods chain with several stores in the city, which had been around for more than four decades. He is a gruff, serious man, with a heavy beard and black hair, diminutive and intense. "I lost three family members in the pandemic," he told me as we sat in his windowless office, in central Guayaquil. "I buried them myself. One in a body bag, another in a cardboard box, and the other in a plywood box. The most prestigious cemetery in the city, and it was just a field of bodies. There was no capacity. If seven hundred people die each day, there is nothing you can do."

Wated was working in Quito until late March, when he moved into an apartment in downtown Guayaquil, where he ended up staying for the next three months, apart from his family. By this time, there were already three hundred and fifty bodies waiting to be buried, among them that of Roberto Farías's mother, Norma; the ordinary bureaucratic protocols of dying had become hopelessly backlogged. Roberto and Madeline were in the throes of this particular aspect of the city's collective nightmare. In a sense, they'd been lucky: unlike most families, they'd been with Norma until the moment she passed. All three were infected, and, amid the confusion at the hospital, they'd been able to accompany her inside and hold her hand until she lost consciousness. But getting Norma's body to the cemetery, where they owned a burial plot, was another matter. Madeline spent two frustrating days going from office to office, gathering the necessary paperwork, while Roberto scoured the city for a coffin. The task felt byzantine. When they finally had all the required documents, they returned to the hospital where Norma had died, only to be told that her body had been moved to another, the Teodoro Maldonado Hospital, several miles away. There, freezer containers had been set up outside to handle the overflow of corpses arriving from around the city, but family members had to identify the bodies before they could be placed in a container. There were hundreds of dead in body bags, lying on the sidewalk in front of the hospital. The stench was intolerable. "The doctors told me start here and end there," Roberto said, his voice cracking. "It was two blocks of bodies, so I started looking." He opened dozens of body bags, but never found Norma.

Body bags were being zipped and unzipped, causing the temperature to fluctuate in the tropical heat; name tags came unstuck and were lost. And every day there were hundreds more dead. Security guards at some hospitals were reportedly demanding hundreds of dollars from desperate family members for the right to look for their loved ones in the supposedly sealed freezer containers. Later, when containers were moved to Pascuales, a cemetery at the edge of the city, terrified local residents complained that they were leaking blood and fluids onto the streets.

This was the problem that President Moreno had charged Wated with resolving. Wated had no budget to address the issue, which was already making international headlines, but, with the authority of a newly created Emergency Operations Committee behind him, he began clearing the backlog of bodies by having death certificates delivered around the city on motorcycles. Wated requisitioned postal-service trucks and put together teams of four to drive around the city to pick up the dead. He created a WhatsApp number that people could call or text to indicate where the dead were—which cross streets, which addresses. He worked with Guayas 1, the notorious local prison, where inmates helped by building coffins. He persuaded two cemeteries to clear space for the hundreds of dead awaiting burial. He put on P.P.E. and rode around the empty city with soldiers and police, entering homes where families had lived alongside their dead for days. He watched his workers break down, weeping. When I asked Wated if he'd cried, too, he told me that he hadn't, then paused for a moment. "A little," he admitted, but, tears or not, he assured me, those days had left their mark. "I go to a funeral now, and, for me, the feeling is gone."

Meanwhile, Roberto Farías had managed something nearly impossible in those days: he'd secured a coffin. A friend of his cousin lived near Barcelona's stadium, where people were selling simple pressboard coffins for five hundred dollars. They were just unadorned boxes that, in normal times, would sell for a hundred dollars apiece, but these were not normal times. Roberto brought the coffin home, where it stayed, leaning against the living-room wall, for three days. Every morning, as he steeled himself for another day of searching for Norma, he'd see the empty coffin. "I felt like I was going crazy," he told me, the sight of it taunting him, mocking the guilt he felt at having passed the virus on to his mother. Still, he and Madeline persisted, visiting every cemetery in the city, looking for his mother's body, day after day, until he began to suspect that he was never going to find her. When he couldn't bear to look at the coffin any longer, he packed it into the back of his car and returned to the hospital where he'd held his mother's hand as she died. The scenes were the same as the ones he'd encountered a week earlier—crowds of anguished Guayaquileños, begging for care. He parked in front, and within minutes was besieged by people just like him, clamoring to buy the coffin he could not use. Roberto sold it for three hundred and fifty dollars, less than he'd paid, but since he couldn't work, every little bit helped. Then he fell into a deep depression and didn't emerge from his house for weeks.

Officially, more than thirty-five thousand Ecuadorians died of COVID-19 in the past two years, but the total excess deaths for 2020 and 2021 number more than eighty thousand. Five hundred and forty-five Ecuadorian doctors died of COVID-19, along with hundreds of other health-care workers and medical professionals. Washington Alemán, the doctor who helped treat the first COVID patient before she was transferred to Guasmo

Sur, and later successfully treated Mayor Viteri and her husband, told me that he had lost more than a hundred and twenty colleagues and friends. "Friends," he said, when he saw the look on my face. "Not acquaintances. Friends." He paused. "And my father."

I stammered my condolences, but he hardly acknowledged them.

On the other side of the office door, his waiting room was full. "I don't think there's anyone in Guayaquil who doesn't have a close friend or family member who died of COVID," he said.

Vélez told me she remembered the exact day and time when she broke down, could pinpoint it with such clarity because it had happened only once: April 9, 2020, eight-thirty in the evening. That morning, ten of her patients had died in just fifteen minutes: "I was seeing the patient in bed two, and the patient in bed one died. While I was seeing the patient in bed three, bed two died." Just like that, one after the other. When it was over, the city's cataclysm in miniature, she fell to her knees and closed her eyes, opening them in time to see a patient staring at her. He was on oxygen. "I saw it in his face," Vélez told me. "If the doctor gives up, we're all dead." She stood, composed herself, and worked her entire shift, not allowing herself to cry until that evening, when she was alone in her car. She drove home across the empty city crying, took a shower crying, and then gave herself permission to do something she hadn't done for a month: she put on a mask and went into her mother's room, where she curled up at the foot of Loli's bed and wept some more.

What is most surprising, perhaps, is that after the first dramatic spike in excess deaths and another, much smaller spike after the holidays the number of deaths in Guayaquil stayed within touching distance of normal. "We spent the rest of the pandemic dancing," Esteban Ortiz told me. "We achieved what Sweden was attempting." Still, in his view, Guayaquil's herd immunity was not a public-health accomplishment but an indicator of just how catastrophic the first wave had been: "You don't have to call the fire department if your house has already burned to the ground."



Paola Vélez in a Guasmo Sur hospital room that she designed for COVID patients.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FABIOLA CEDILLO FOR THE NEW YORKER

And yet, even after trauma on this scale, in Guayaquil, when I arrived in October, 2021, the pandemic hardly seemed central anymore. To be sure, there were colorful murals dedicated to frontline workers on billboards and walls, masks were still ubiquitous, and stickers affixed to taxi windows declared "This driver has been fully vaccinated," but, in many other ways, life was stumbling tentatively toward normal. There were people in the streets, in the restaurants, families walking along the boardwalk that overlooked the river. I reached out to Mayor Viteri several times to discuss the city's recovery, but she never responded. In a speech commemorating the two-hundred-and-first anniversary of Guayaquil's independence, on October 9th, she said that Guayaquileños were a people who "build paths where there is only desolation and ruins, who are reborn every morning, though every night they must die." Apart from indirect references like these, Viteri hardly mentioned the pandemic. Instead, she ran through a list of public-works projects that were under way or soon to begin—new roads and bridges, overpasses, even a wave pool in El Suburbio, just a few miles from Roberto and Madeline's home.

The accounting of the dead was mostly done; there were now only about fifty bodies missing, among them that of Roberto Farías's mother. In a final and staggering gesture of bureaucratic cruelty, Ecuadorian social security had refused to pay Norma's pension benefit because there was no corpse. The state

that had lost Norma's body wouldn't acknowledge that she was dead. Roberto and Madeline presumed that her remains were in Pascuales, buried in one of the cemeteries that Jorge Wated had hastily arranged, but where among the more than two thousand dead there, the grave markers lined up in uncomfortably tight rows? Wated assured me that it was not a mass grave, but when I saw it with my own eyes I wasn't certain what else to call it. "I at least want to be able to take her a rose," Madeline told me, "and say that her body rests here."

If the pandemic wasn't discussed much publicly anymore, in private, behind closed doors, things were different. In interview after interview, people broke down, had to gather themselves, and it was often the most innocuous questions that set them off, or sometimes no question at all. I met with a community organizer in his late fifties named César Cárdenas, who during the emergency had worked with local leaders to deliver food to neighborhoods where people were going hungry. A city the size of Guayaquil requires hundreds of truckloads of supplies each day. During the darkest days of the pandemic, there were fewer than fifty supply trucks a day. The danger of starvation, particularly in neighborhoods on the city's periphery, was real. After my interview with Cárdenas had ended and I'd put away my recorder, I looked up and saw that he was crying. It caught me totally by surprise. He's a small man, and he seemed even smaller in that moment, his clothes hanging off him, in his empty office, with saggy furniture, worn-out tiles, and peeling paint. "Sometimes I just feel so sad," he said, wiping away tears with the back of his hand. "We were abandoned."

This was a sentiment I heard again and again: that the state had failed, the hospitals had failed, the systems had failed, and, given the scale of the trauma, it's hard to argue that this wasn't the case. In March of 2020, as the city descended into chaos and frontline workers were heading into the breach without P.P.E., Moreno's government announced that it would pay its foreign bondholders more than three hundred and twenty-five million dollars and began talks to renegotiate its debt, ultimately agreeing to pay on terms that some economists criticized. "It was as if the pandemic didn't exist," the economist Katiuska King told me. "They didn't understand the dimensions of what was happening." Otto Sonnenholzner told me that the government had little choice, and pointed to the bleak economic situation: in April, 2020, tax receipts dropped by more than a third, leaving the administration unable to pay some public-sector employees. The price of oil, Ecuador's primary export, collapsed. To make matters worse, the country's three pipelines stopped functioning. The accumulation of dire news, one catastrophe after another, was cruel to the point of absurdity. "To tell you the truth," Sonnenholzner said, some days "it felt like a joke." Wated told me that there were days when the treasury had only eight million dollars in reserves.

The first shipment of eight thousand COVID vaccines arrived in Quito in January, 2021, and was met on the tarmac by President Moreno. His goal was to vaccinate two million Ecuadorians by the end of his term, in May. But things did not go as planned. Within a month, the Health Minister, Juan Carlos Zevallos, who had replaced Andramuño, had resigned amid reports of preferential access to the vaccine for those close to the government, and allegations of corruption, which he denied. In a visit to a hospital in Guayaquil that March, Moreno admitted that there was no national vaccine plan, or perhaps there had been "but surely it only existed in the mind of the minister." In the last three months of his Presidency, Moreno had four different Health Ministers. When his term ended, his approval rating was less than ten per cent. "Any way you look at it, it's understandable that people will blame someone. If it's the President, it's the President. If it's me, it's me," Jorge Wated said when we spoke. "People who suffer are going to hold someone responsible."



"What do I want to do? I want to do what you want to do and then resent you for being controlling."

Amid this chaos, there were people who made monumental sacrifices, under extreme conditions, who did the best they could in a crisis that felt like a vision of the end of the world, but it did not appear to have made much difference. It's certainly possible that Guayaquil could have done better—with more effective public-health systems, with less corruption, with more preparation and planning, less wishful thinking. With an economy that wasn't on the edge of recession. Every story begins in the middle, and it's just as possible that many cities, faced with a storm as brutal as the one that hit in March, 2020, would have done worse.

Endings, then, are as arbitrary as beginnings. A few days after I met Vélez at a local mall, thieves robbed a shopper at the entrance, and a shoot-out ensued. A few hours after I did an interview in Barrio Centenario, a boy of eleven was killed at a neighborhood restaurant in a shoot-out between a would-be robber and an off-duty police officer. Guayas 1, the prison that, during the pandemic, had built coffins for the dead, was sixty per cent over capacity, housing more than eight thousand inmates. The woman who'd flown from Italy to save her son told me that one of his friends inside had warned her there was certain to be another massacre. Sure enough, a few weeks later, in November, sixty-eight inmates were killed. It was the sixth mass-murder event at the prison in 2021. Among those killed, on this occasion, was Victor Chele, a former administrator at Guasmo Sur, who had been sentenced to five years for the illegal resale of medicine during the pandemic.

The official government line was that the violence in the prisons and in the streets was all a consequence of a burgeoning drug trade, and the growing influence of foreign—specifically, Mexican—cartels. Earlier this year, bodies were hung from a pedestrian bridge in Durán, an industrial city just across the river from Guayaquil—a kind of violent spectacle that was new to Ecuador. To be sure, Guayaquil, a port city, had become a transportation hub for cocaine heading north to American consumers, but many people I spoke to were skeptical of this explanation. Karol Noroña, of the local magazine *GK*, told me that the blood in the streets was a result of an internal battle for control of the drug business, Ecuadorian gangs fighting among themselves, rather than something directed by foreign cartels. Most coverage of street crime used the macabre phrase *ajuste de cuentas*, or "settling of accounts," as a way to signal to the middle class that the violence had nothing to do with them, that the victims were guilty of something, but, Noroña told me, the escalation in recent months had rendered these implicit reassurances meaningless. For her, the violence was a symptom of a profound social crisis. "There are neighborhoods with no running water, no basic services, but which have organized networks dedicated to violence," she said. As she spoke, I recalled a conversation with a woman in Monte Sinaí, a few minutes' drive up the hill from the hospital. She and some neighbors had helped feed local children during the pandemic, going house to house, delivering meals. Across the street, she told me, there'd been a vacant lot where the kids liked to play. One morning in April, 2020, it was fenced off. Now it was a cemetery.



In mid-October, in response to the violence, President Guillermo Lasso, who had been in office only five months, declared a state of emergency and sent the Army into the streets of Guayaquil, in a show of force that had a negligible impact on the crime rate. The first waves of the pandemic had slowed crime, but the Omicron spike had no such effect. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been lost. Young people have been out of school for the better part of two years, with almost unfathomable consequences for the well-being of an entire generation: a dearth of legitimate opportunities, scores of youths with nothing to do, who are fighting just to survive. Local drug consumption has increased, too, and there are more varieties of cocaine than ever before. The number of young people drawn to crime and violence in order to get by has grown, and with it the holdups, the robberies, the shootings, the stray bullets, the deaths. There are rules that Guayaquileños have internalized: You don't carry your phone when you don't have to. You take cash, just enough for what you have to do. "If someone on a motorcycle gets too close, you're on guard that he's going to rob you," Vélez told me. "Before you get in your car, you look to your left and to your right. At the door of your house, you do the same." She added, "Everything is driven by fear of crime. Everything." Roberto Farías told me that there were neighborhoods he wouldn't go to anymore. But there was a limit to his caution: "If you don't pick up passengers, you don't eat. The only choice we have is to go out, with faith, and pray to God that He'll bring us home safe."

I spoke with Esteban Ortiz again in January, on a day when Ecuador's confirmed COVID-19 infections topped those of any day in the pandemic. There was a note of resignation in his voice. Yes, the case count was growing once more, but the numbers, which were on the surface quite alarming, no longer registered as a crisis, at least not on the same scale as before. In any case, the front pages of the papers were all about the violence. "We're not scared of COVID anymore," Ortiz told me. Hospitals weren't overflowing, deaths remained low, just a few dozen a day, and Ecuador had one of the highest vaccination rates in the region—more than seventy-four per cent of the population is fully vaccinated—far higher than that of the United States. At the peak of its vaccination campaign, Ecuador had managed the highest per-capita daily vaccination rate of any country in the world. In December, it became the first country to require the COVID vaccine for children as young as five. Ortiz grudgingly credited Lasso's government for having overseen this success.

But the pandemic had made clear the limits of what one could expect from the state, a stark lesson that informed the reaction to this new explosion of violence. "If we haven't died," Ortiz told me, "it's because we're made of rubber." ♦

The Biographer's Hat

Cynthia Ozick

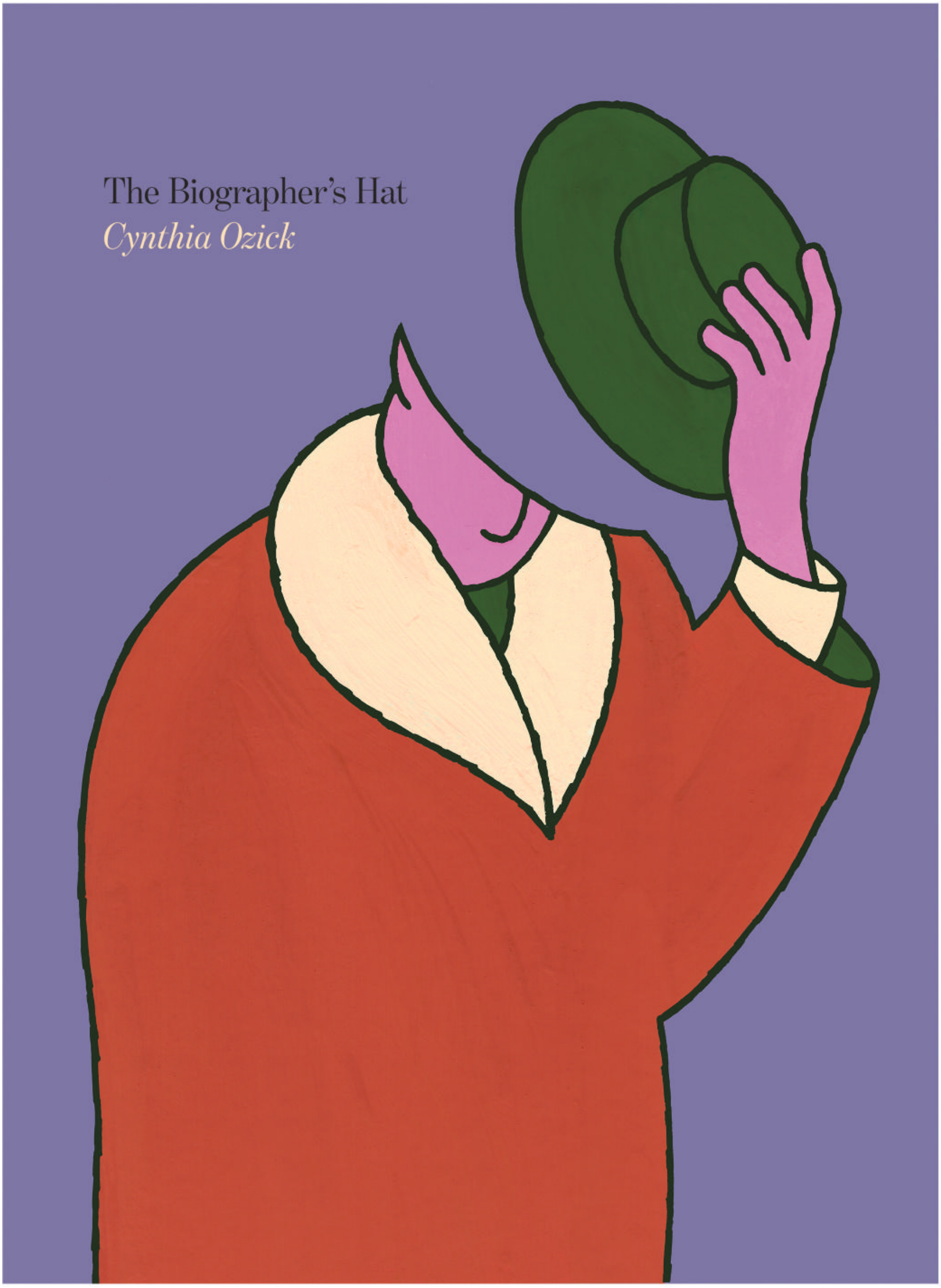


ILLUSTRATION BY MIGUEL PORLAN

When the biographer of Emanuel Teller came to see me, he left behind his hat. It was the kind of hat a gaucho would wear, flat on top, wide-brimmed, but without the strings that tie under the chin. It was a very dark green, soft and fuzzy to the touch. It seemed familiar. I thought I knew that hat. As the biographer trotted down the stairs to the waiting taxi, I called out, "Hey! You forgot your hat!"

He didn't hear me; the driver was leaning on his horn.

I picked up the hat. It looked exactly like Emanuel Teller's hat in his photos.

Two weeks earlier, the biographer had informed me in an e-mail (it was easy to track me down online, he said) that he was coming from California to look up the remaining members of Emanuel Teller's old New York circle. He meant to settle in for some months to be near his quarry. They were much diminished by now, he supposed, and all of them elderly. They were dying off. Half of them were likely too sick to talk to him. He had already put down cash for a rented room on the Upper West Side and would soon be moving in. His idea was to be close to Emanuel Teller's old neighborhood, for the atmosphere. He gave the impression that he intended to keep on badgering these decrepit golden-agers.

"I'm a dead end, you're chasing air," I wrote back. "I once took a class he taught, that's all. Besides, that was long ago."

"No stone unturned. You're one of the very few who could fill me in on those elusive Early Years." The last two words were capitalized, as if they were already fixed in print, like a chapter heading.

So when the biographer turned up at my door I was more than skeptical, I was wary. If it was all right for him to pry into Emanuel Teller's life, he had no license to pry into mine. I didn't care to be depended on for posterity's sake.

His breath was a wintry cloud (February was still fierce), and there were fresh snowflakes on the fur collar of his coat. A coat with a fur collar! It made him look outmoded, like a Russian count. And then that gaucho's hat, and an ordinary briefcase. He told me he was on leave without pay from teaching at Berkeley—something to do with the farthest edge of the humanities, "where," he said, "free will meets Tao." By now Chinese philosophy had worn out its welcome. He intended to put all his energy into Emanuel Teller. He wasn't a tyro, he had already published a biography of Otto Blaustein, the man who invented the insight chamber. The book was a flop. It sold an embarrassing two hundred copies, and no wonder—who remembers Otto Blaustein? Even the insight chamber was ancient history. It was this device and its repute that had led him to Emanuel Teller. More than anything else, it was the insight chamber that had engendered Emanuel Teller's rise.

I took the biographer's wet coat and hung it over the shower rail in the bathroom. The fur collar squirted droplets, like a living animal shaking itself. When I reached for his hat, he backed away.

"You have to be careful with a hat like this," he said. "Especially if it got a bit soaked. Don't pat it dry, just leave it be." His voice, with its deep-bass vowels, signalled authority. I watched him search all around. His eyes were small and the lids were worn and sparsely lashed. His long earlobes drooped. Finally, he set the hat on a chair. "I'll just let it rest here. It's his, the real thing. His wife gave it to me."

"I thought his wife was dead," I said.

"She wasn't when I met her. You realize," he said, "that mine is the authorized biography. She trusted me right away, she was with me up to the hilt. That's why she let me have his hat. I didn't ask for it, she gave it to me."

"To wear," I said, "or to worship?"

"Don't mock it. Everything has hints. Nobody knows what a man who does himself in is thinking. Not even a wife. He had his secrets, and a life won't sell if it doesn't have secrets—I know that now. Blaustein was an open book. Say," he broke in, "would you have something hot to drink? I feel a cold coming on."

In the kitchen, the kettle was boiling, the teacups were ready, together with a plate of muffins. I had provided for a visit that seemed pointless. He was rushing me, distracting me. He wanted to know who I was and what I remembered. There are always these hints, he said, they come out of nowhere. He intended to pick my brain.

I protested that I was a proofreader for the *Village Sentinel*, a local newssheet, and could tell him nothing that touched on his subject. The *Sentinel* mostly had movie listings, and ads for restaurants and bars. It also had personal ads: fevered seekers of sex of every variety, sellers of used furniture, so-called researchers looking to hire an assistant for whatever purpose, families in need of a nanny. The wholesome and the raunchy—the *Sentinel* was far from fastidious. It was read all over New York and beyond. Tourists picked it up for the gossip.

"The *Sentinel*? You see, you see? Hints everywhere." The biographer gave out what could pass for a happy bleat. "I've hit the jackpot. They used to run pieces on the insight chamber, you didn't know that, did you? Before your time. In fact, it was the *Sentinel* that named Emanuel Teller a latter-day Mark Twain, did you know that? And he was the first to have one of those boxes. He used to sit in it for at least an hour a day. He believed in it. That's why I got one for myself, to feel how it worked. To see what it did for him. These things, you can't find them anymore, not even on eBay, so I built my own. In the end, I got nothing out of it and gave it away. You can always come up with another believer."

It was a long while since I had heard anyone speak of that forgotten old fad, three generations back. They were relics, sacral voodoo constructions. As far as I could tell, an insight chamber was nothing more than an oversized wooden box lined with alternating strips of goatskin and aluminum, and put together with brass screws. And where had he found the goatskin?

By now the plate of muffins was all crumbs. His eye scouted the pantry. He was hoping for more, even a full dinner. He was hungry, and I was dispirited. My own life, a relic in itself: a début role in a Surrealist play that featured a giant red radish front center stage. The venue was a thirty-seat theatre in a church basement; and nothing since. Flailing and failing, and, finally, waste. Why should I be made to dance to the song of Emanuel Teller's resurrection?

From his briefcase he fished out a

fountain pen and a yellow legal pad. "Well, let's get going."

There was iron in his demand. He looked over to the hat on its chair as if it confirmed his will. As if the hat, and the fur-collared coat over the shower rail, and even the fountain pen, would keep him rooted until he had what he wanted. As if he meant to egg me on until I surrendered. The only way I might get rid of him was to acquiesce.

I was nineteen, I told him, when I enrolled in a helter-skelter seminar at the New School, on Twelfth Street, presided over by a middle-aged man dressed like a hobo wearing a hat. The class was listed as Victorian Prose and Verse. He explained that he was a pretender, a fake. At heart, he said, he was a bard, a minstrel, a reciter who had been selling himself for the money, mainly at high schools and women's lunch clubs, wherever they would have him. The New School was a lucky upgrade. He admitted that he had nothing like a fancy degree. The name of the course was a ruse. His Victorians were skewed toward make-believe, Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll and Beatrix Potter and Oscar Wilde, with plenty of doctored fairy tales thrown in. Even "The Arabian Nights," the unexpurgated edition. Right away, he was letting us know that he wasn't serious. And, except for theatre, neither was I.

At the end, he promised to send a refund.

I could hear the reluctance in my prattle. Why must I yield to this invader? Why was I driven to go on—was it the force of the biographer's obstinacy, or of the hat? Its surface was sending out a faint autumnal fume, like faraway burning leaves.

The real lure was the Village, I said. I wasn't interested in Victorian anything. I was drawn to the lingering breaths of the old bohemia. Edna St. Vincent Millay had lived in the Village, and Hart Crane, and E. E. Cummings. And Eugene O'Neill! If you looked out a certain window in Emanuel Teller's second-floor classroom you could sometimes spot, in a window opposite, Wystan Auden's ghost walking around in carpet slippers. Meanwhile, I imagined myself in the little playhouse on nearby Bleecker Street—some day, and soon, I was going to be Lavinia in "Mourning Becomes Electra." I was well prepared. What was I if not an ardent disciple of Stanislavski—emotion recollected in turmoil?

The fountain pen was tracking speedily across the yellow sheet. I followed the movement of the biographer's wide flat palm, the bulging knuckles, the knobby fingers.

"Is that his?" I asked. "The pen? Did his wife give you that, too?"

He ignored this. "Listen here," he said finally, and I saw him glancing yet again at the hat on the chair. "The man's dead, but he's alive in his things, what he held, what he wore. There's more tragedy in this pen than what you'd get out of a dozen operas, and God only knows what went on in that box—"

It was a brief but earnest speech, clearly rehearsed. It was plain that he was meaning to use it for all his interviews.

He urged me on. "Was he ever down in the dumps, did you ever see anything like that? There had to be inklings, you were on the spot, you could catch on to such things, suicides don't come out of the blue—"

"He wasn't *the* Emanuel Teller then," I said.

"He must've showed up with something of his own, one of his own riffs. With him, it was modernism be damned, and people still take him for nothing but a standup. My God, the man was an original, an *artist*—"

An artist? The biographer was deluded. A generation had grown old since the New School sacked Emanuel Teller. His one semester was denuded of its course credit. He had confessed outright that he was a fraud. He was no more than a showman and a scavenger; he fetched up, piecemeal, this and that shard from bawdy old legends and jokes. He had made his mark with the story of the two battling

CARDIAC FLICKER

Tomorrow will be eight weeks since I lost you (slightly longer
than I knew you). I threw out my underwear. Tucked

the Polaroid-style ultrasounds in a drawer,
with the self-help books and a harvest of cards. I threw out

two pairs of pajama pants. You dotted one with blood; the other
I wore to the E.R., leaving it like molted skin

on the linoleum. That first Sunday, I drove to Walgreens,
came home, and peed on three sticks. I lined them up

like baby dolls. I checked on them. Their double lines
were quiet highways. Cradling the phone, standing mud-deep

in the driveway, I called my mother; she told me to wait to tell
my sister. I told my sister. I photographed the tests,

texted them to my dearest friend. There are moments when I am
convinced I am entirely alone, and need to announce

my private empirical acts. The doctor said you were older than
I knew you were. We made you on day seventeen, or maybe

nineteen. I opened you several times, like an Advent calendar square,
and then stuck you closed again. When the doctor first drew my blood,

my only wish was not to lose you before Christmas. But then
I got greedy. Before the New Year. Numbers, which are nonsensical

and inscrutable and indispensable, doubled and tripled and doubled
and stopped doubling. But still, you were: it was January, and I

kept willing you to grow as large as a pearl, or at least
as a small, knotty opal, beautiful and milky and dense,

but you kept being younger than I knew you were, you kept
being smaller than they thought you were, and I wonder now

why people think the miraculous and the quotidian
are contradictory, when every clap of thunder is

a surprise, a collaboration made of air. Every day,
someone rubs two sticks together, and there is,

inconceivably, laughably, wonderfully: smoke. And then: fire.
We made you, heard your heartbeat. Hearing

is a metaphor. They call it a cardiac flicker. We couldn't quite see it,
even with their granular, futuristic machine, even with the wand

they moved inside of me, but I saw the waves, the ripples within
the innermost part of a flame, the part we study, when we are sad,

or children, or drunk, or full of wonder, and cannot take our eyes
away from fire.

—Emily Leithauser

towns, Alef and Zed, one inhabited by sages, the other by dunces. He had filched it from the Norse. Out of rusting folklore he swiped tricksters and wedding jesters, and from these rags of foolery he made newer absurdities. He carried his insight chamber to late-night TV shows with their audience of millions, and popular platforms everywhere, revealing, he said, the visions and messages it delivered, all the while flaunting an amber flask of what he called his "elixir." He was, in fact, a run-of-the-mill ventriloquist in a cowboy hat. The insight chamber was his Charlie McCarthy.

To the biographer I said, "I've told you everything I know."

"You've done me not an ounce of good, and I took two buses to get here. And, by the way, with the weather out there, can you help me out with a cab? I might not have enough cash."

He demanded his coat, shook out the fur (I was certain no animal had been sacrificed), and bounded down the stairs.

For the next few days I left the hat where he had placed it, on that chair, and stepped around it with a certain caution, as if it were important to stay out of its way. I saw no reason to remove it, and where would I keep it? He would miss it soon enough, though it was impossible to predict when he might retrieve it: better to have it ready to hand. It was an annoyance. I was learning not to be distracted by it, and I had no need of the chair it occupied; I rarely had visitors, and, besides, there were other chairs.

But after several weeks the biographer had not returned, and there was only the inescapable presence of the hat. Passing it one evening, I happened to notice a perceptible wilting—a shallow well was forming in the crown. It had sunk only slightly; after all this time, it was still not fully dry. Apparently, the moisture had begun to affect it. Dust lay along the brim like a gray salt. It had taken on the shape of a tongueless mouth, but when I sidled by some days afterward it seemed rather to resemble an eye: a dead eye lacking a pupil. This was alarming: it was the biographer's hat, but wasn't it also Emanuel Teller's hat, and hadn't I, entirely by chance, become its custodian? I was almost willing to believe that it had been deliberately abandoned. Still, why would the biographer not be eager to recover it? He had, after all, spoken of it as a kind of talisman. I was beginning to dislike the hat, even to resent it. A dead man's property, an intruder. I decided to banish it. Why must it draw my reluctant attention, day after day? Often, seeing how, little by little, it went on collapsing, the crown growing more and more sunken, the misshapen brim leering, I wanted to crush it. Yet I could not rid myself of it; it wasn't mine to dispose of.

And I knew what I must do. I wrapped the hat in a plastic bag from the grocery, and then in two or three more plastic bags, and found a place for it at the back of a closet, among old shoes I no longer wore but was unready to discard, and an ironing board that the rise of polyester had defeated, and also a discolored canvas cot the previous tenant had abandoned. The hat was well imprisoned.

The chair, though, was not as it had been. The hat had seeped a damp round stain into the fabric seat.

With spring closing in—it was coming on toward April—the *Sentinel's* ads were increasing. I was at work in my office cubicle until late into the night, inserting commas and apostrophes in ten-point type for sadomasochistic trysts and lightly worn children's pajamas. My eyes were smarting. Longing for sleep, I climbed the stairs to my apartment.

The biographer was leaning against the door.

"Where were you? I've been waiting for the past two hours."

"You've come for the hat," I said.

"Well, not *for* it exactly. About it."

"You never got in touch."

"Why would I? I got all I could out of you."

"Well, come back another time if



"Bill, when you're done here, tell the alien symbiote that has consumed your body and reconstituted its cells into a grotesque simulacrum of your corporeal form to come into the break room—we're having a little party for Joanne."

• • •

you want it. Right now it's packed away."

Though the night was warm, he was again wearing the coat with the fur collar. It hung open, revealing a grimy pink shirt.

"I don't want it. That's the whole point, you have to keep it. Someone's got to keep it. It's got to be kept. Preserved."

"If you don't want it, then why are you here?"

I put the key in the lock. He shouldered himself past me and stood on the other side of the door.

"The interviews were a bust. I ran into two cases of Alzheimer's, and the rest on my list are kaput. You're the only one left. And I'm out of a job, got an e-mail from the provost, they're redirecting the department, I knew it was coming—look, can you put me up for a couple of nights?"

The provost? Out of a job? It came to me with a jab of conviction that his credentials, too, were likely sham. He had never taught Tao at Berkeley.

I said, "You're renting somewhere, aren't you, and I'm on my way to bed—"

"She threw me out. She was always complaining that I was late with the rent. As of now, I owe for the past two months, but she can't come after me. I gave her a made-up name and an address in California that doesn't exist."

This unnerved me. "I don't want you here," I told him. "You should leave now."

"I've got an idea. I've figured things out. Emanuel Teller's secret. Even his wife, especially his wife, didn't know it, so it should interest you. There's money in it. When I finish this bio, I'll give you a cut. You'll deserve it. It's all for the sake of the hat," he insisted. "A physical memento. And, listen, I don't mind sleeping on the floor. Unless you've got something better. How about this sofa?"

I saw that he was immovable. Something in his importuning made me unafraid. He was harmless. He was only a noisy blowhard who had bilked his landlady. I went to the closet where the hat lay, suffocating in its plastic, and dragged out the cot. It had taken on the hat's odor of distant soot.

In the morning he slept late, helped himself from the refrigerator, and explained that he was heading for the public library to do some deeper research. He had spent a night or two dozing in the waiting room of Grand Central, and some bastard had stolen his laptop. He wasn't taking his coat, he told me. It was too hot for spring and the fur collar was too much. I understood that the coat stood as a hostage and a warning: he had no intention of leaving.

But when I got home that evening it turned out that he had, after all, not gone out.

"Anyhow," he said, "the library's too crowded, you can't get near their computers. I've been moseying around to find where you keep yours, and I see that you've got a really good printer, the cheap ones always get jammed. How about if I stick around and get on with my idea? It's the chapter where you come in. A nice window in there, lots of light."

"Where I come in? You said you got nothing from me."

"But now that it's all worked out I'll get plenty, and you can fill in the gaps. By the way, I hope you've brought in some takeout. Your larder is too damn bare, and I could eat a horse."

I scrambled two eggs and made some toast, along with anything else I could find. He had already finished off two forgotten cans of sauerkraut.

"This coffee isn't so bad," he said. "You know how I got the idea? Believe it or not, it's from you. When you were going on about the Village, I mean in its heyday, all those old stories. Aline Bernstein and Eda Lou Walton, does anyone nowadays even recognize these names?"

I knew them. They were Village history: lovers and muses who protected, succored, rescued, housed, and fed the luminaries of the future. They were each a Pietà with a divinity in her lap.

"You could be the next one," he said. His reddened eyelids seemed on fire. His breath ran fast. "What Eda Lou Walton was to Henry Roth. She *made* him. What Aline Bernstein was to Thomas Wolfe. His desire was her desire until they broke up. You could be the one for Emanuel Teller. It isn't as if you don't have the proof of it. The actual proof—who else would be keeping his hat?"

I was suspicious of this excitement. I saw through it; I took it all in. It was a scenario, a deceit, a scheme he was de-

termined to bring off—a whirlwind of lies, and he meant to sweep me into it.

"And those were older women," he pushed on. "The age difference is all to the good. Men like younger women, and young women are flattered to be loved by struggling gods-to-be. And then the young woman tires of her god, or feels betrayed, and breaks the god's heart. That's what you did to Emanuel Teller. You broke his heart and he did himself in."

I might have ridiculed him. I might have laughed. I might have been angered; I might have evicted him outright. He was a fool and a braggart and an interloper. But it was true: I had the hat. The hat was mine.

"It's just sensationalism. It isn't someone's real life, you're making it up—"

"That's just the point, it'll sell, there's drama in it. And scandal. It accounts for the suicide, nothing could be more plausible. And it's watertight. All his old cronies are dead or on the way out."

I said weakly, "You can't just change history."

"Why not? It's only a matter of perspective, of what's been overlooked. Even Shakespeare pulled that little trick. Is Ophelia for real? Who would deny her? All the world's a stage—"

He was shrewd; he knew how to thread an argument. He knew how to tempt. His power was in his why-not. Somehow he scented my shattered lust for the marquee. He was proposing a way out of the ignominy of the radish made of papier-mâché; he was offering me a stage and a role. A role! The hat immured in the closet was to be my theatre, why not?

He was scrambling in his pockets, scratching and plucking, then he tossed a wrinkled envelope on the kitchen table. His plate was clean. He had eaten every scrap.

"Here," he said. His rasp smacked of victory. "Keep them, I have plenty more."

The envelope held a collection of fading newspaper clippings, all with photos of Emanuel Teller. Most were obituaries, but some showed him in the insight chamber, half in and half out, and wearing a hat. He was seriously graying, and well past how I recalled him. Publicity pictures, posed. In one or two, he was with a woman. The loyal widow who had given the biographer the cherished hat? Or an earlier lover, my rival? But no; the biographer assured me that I had no rival. I was Emanuel Teller's only infatuation. And it was I alone who had succored and rescued and housed and fed him in his darkening years. I was the young comforter of his old age.

And why not? All the men and women are merely players, they have their exits and their entrances, so why not?

He stayed on for more than a month. My grocery bill expanded mightily. He sat greedily at my computer every evening, greedy for more and more invention, greedy for the notice to come, and I at his side, making things up. The whirlwind had consumed me—I succumbed, I felt, I saw, as if in the certainty of memory, the shape of Emanuel Teller's eyes, the tragic turn of his lips. My skin remembered the silk of his caresses, his confidences, his kisses. He called me his pet, his nepenthe, his anodyne. I was transfigured, I was Lavinia at last; the name flew into my bloodstream as if born there. I knew how liaisons decay into bitterness. How May and December are enemies by nature. How love can kill. How impersonation can transmute into reality.

I had become the biographer's collaborator.

"When you get to the breakup," he pressed, "make it explosive. Volcanic.



Tears, even." He wanted melodrama. He coveted the wiles of Lady Macbeth. He wanted over-the-top.

Before he left, I gave the biographer five hundred dollars, a good portion of my monthly earnings, and he handed me a copy of his manuscript. "I printed out one extra. Hang on to it, the original," he said. "It'll be worth something at auction."

He told me he had to get back to California. The New York houses were too snooty, they had no imagination, they were looking for footnotes, citations, verification. His previous publisher hadn't been troubled by such nitpickings, and had anyhow gone out of business. He was planning to submit to a freewheeling press in Los Angeles, one that would surely seize the opportunity to draw renewed attention to Emanuel Teller, whose reputation, he conceded, the passage of years had begun to erode.

"They'll grab a good story," he persisted. "And don't be surprised when the journalists start coming at you like locusts. Show them the hat, how you treasure it, how you grieve. They'll run profiles in the magazines. People will want to get a good look at the woman who seduced Emanuel Teller and got him to kill himself."

He pointed a zealous finger at the manuscript. "You're right there in the Acknowledgments, and we'll split the royalties. I'll keep you posted, I'll be in touch. The title alone's a blockbuster."

I waited more than a year for him to make the sale, and another year or so for the reviews to come in, but "Emanuel Teller's Hidden Love" never turned up. The locusts failed to swarm. The biographer was silent. I tried once or twice to e-mail him; his account had been cancelled.

On a night when the personals seeking hookups were especially explicit, and when I was again kept late at the *Sentinel*, I opened my door to an uncommon smell. I remembered it: the faint familiar wisps of a smoldering, a smokiness, a burning nearly smothered—but magnified, urgent. It was the hat in the closet. I took it out and unwound its wrappings and set it on the chair where it had left its mark and looked at it.

It was flattened, as if thrashed. The living leer had gone out of it. The hat was useless as witness and proof. Emanuel Teller's secret was never to be known; it was, as they say, safe. My last chance to tread the boards had fizzled, the footlights shut down, and why not? We players, after all, have our exits and entrances, don't we? ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Cynthia Ozick on con men and converts.



THE CURRENT CINEMA

NIGHTHOOD

"The Batman" and "Ultrasound."

BY ANTHONY LANE

I'm gonna wash Batman right outa my hair. That was my plan, at any rate, after watching as much of "Zack Snyder's Justice League" (2021) as I could take; even the most loyal fans of the Caped Crusader must have wondered, over the decades, if the crusading would ever end. Is there not a lingering suspicion that this most enigmatic of superheroes might merely, in fact, be the dullest? How much dramatic juice remains to be squeezed from Bruce Wayne, the chumless billionaire, brooding over his man cave and his gaggle of gizmos? The catalogue of squeezers runs from Adam West to Ben Affleck, taking in actors as skilled as Michael Keaton, George Clooney, and Christian Bale. Now Robert Pattinson joins the list.

The film in question, directed by Matt Reeves, is called "The Batman," the big news being that the principal character has acquired not only a new car, a new motorbike, and a new butler but also—holy grammarians!—a definite article. This guy isn't just any old Batman; he is *the* Batman, and you should be wary of cheap imitations. (Any word, you may ask, from the Robin? Nothing. Not a tweet.) In another unusual development, this Batman has developed bruise-like circles around his eyes, which, when combined with his gnomic mottoes, such as "I'm vengeance," and his preference for unarmed combat over lethal weapons, give the distinct, though surely unintended, impression that we are watching the latest adventures of Kung Fu Panda.

And the plot? Same as it ever was. Rich kid, orphaned in his youth, vows to clean up the dirty metropolis—a mission that he shares, incidentally, with Travis Bickle, in "Taxi Driver" (1976), the difference being that Travis is not too proud to crack a smile. Notice that the cleaning is never literal; although the streets of Gotham, in "The Batman," are squalid and strewn with trash, not once is it proposed that Bruce might care to divert the Wayne family wealth into sanitation or garbage collection. "It's a big city," he says, a little plaintively. "I can't be everywhere." No, but what is solved by confronting a lone band of subway muggers and giving them a thoroughly good hiding, as our hero does in an early scene? Even if he sends them off to bed without their supper, how much safer will Gotham really be? One could argue that the hard work of everyday governance makes for stale viewing (though admirers of "Parks and Recreation" would disagree), yet there are times in "The Batman" when a short disquisition on, say, steam-based graffiti removal would come as a relief.

If the job of the Bat is to round up the rats, then the director needs to supply high-quality vermin. Hence the baddies who thronged Christopher Nolan's "Dark Knight" trilogy, and hence, likewise, the cast that has been convened by Reeves. We have John Turturro as a mob boss; Peter Sarsgaard, at his most sleepy-sleazy, as the local D.A.; Colin Farrell, larded with prosthetics, as the Penguin; and Paul Dano as the Riddler, a villain so mystifying that he leaves a question mark in the froth atop his cappuccino. The opposing team includes Jeffrey Wright as James Gordon, a rare incorruptible cop, and, hovering in the middle, Zoë Kravitz as Selina Kyle—jewel thief, part-time Catwoman, and, fitfully, the movie's voice of social conscience. She derides the sins of "white privileged assholes" and, in the closing stretch, suggests that she and the Batman "knock off some C.E.O. hedge-fund types." She adds, "It's going to be fun."

Leaving aside the question of whether Bruce Wayne, who is chalk white and super-privileged, has himself invested in hedge funds, and how they may have bankrolled his sterling defense of the law, one has to ask: what is this "fun" of which Selina speaks? It's certainly not a concept that "The Batman," dropsical with self-importance, and setting a bold new standard in joylessness, has much use for. Reeves bows down to the atmospheric laws that now govern American gothic—namely, that the darker and wetter a film becomes, and the growlier the vocal pitch of its characters, the more seriously we must take it. Thus, the highlight of the action, a car chase, has to be set at night and soaked in rain. To be fair, I did enjoy the sight of one vehicle emerging from a fireball in pursuit of another, yet somehow, thanks to the frenzied editing and the hammer blows of the musical score, I saw it coming. For an altogether more surprising combustion of the senses, check out "Mad Max: Fury Road" (2015). That has *great* balls of fire.

Having once sat through a Dutch film of Virginia Woolf's "The Waves," and survived, I consider myself no stranger to cinematic fatigue. Clocking in at nearly three hours, however, "The Batman" is designed to try the patience of the toughest fan. What's weird, despite the narrative expanse, is how much

ABOVE: LIANA JEGERS



In Matt Reeves's film, Robert Pattinson becomes the latest in a long line of actors to play the storied superhero.

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of the story feels rushed. When Anne Hathaway played Selina Kyle, in "The Dark Knight Rises" (2012), her thievery was a pleasure, whereas almost the only thing stolen by the new Selina is a passport; similarly, when the Riddler leaves a cypher at a crime scene, the solution is arrived at in haste, with minimal thrills—far fewer than David Fincher provided in "Zodiac" (2007), a puzzle-stuffed movie that took full advantage of its running time. You begin to wonder what the point of "The Batman" is, beyond the sustaining of its gloomy mood.

For most Batmaniacs, I guess, the point will be a simple one: a chance to fix their gaze on Robert Pattinson—on *his* gaze, that is, smoldering under his mask. Now and then, he doffs it, showing his naked despondency and allowing his hair to fall artfully across his brow, as if he once failed an audition for a boy band and never got over the disappointment. Such is the media's obsession with Pattinson, since he left the "Twilight" zone, that this new role is naturally seen as crowning his career; for an actor who has worked with David Cronenberg, the Safdie brothers, and Claire Denis, though, portraying the Batman is not a coronation. It's a comedown.

Pattinson's allure, before which I am as helpless as anyone else, springs from the fact that, in keeping with his godlike exterior, he is a light knight as well as a dark one; what he brought to Nolan's "Tenet," in 2020, was not just fine tailoring but a casual comic élan. ("Don't be so *dramatic*," he said, when planning a plane crash.) "The Batman," to its shame, and to the deep detriment of its leading man, turns out the light. It demands that the hero be nothing but dramatic, all the time. "They think I am hiding in the shadows," he declares. "I am the shadows." Hogwash. What the Batman cannot admit is that, were a nice day ever to dawn in Gotham, he would be revealed for what he is: a fantasist, too old for his teen-age doominess, with zero social life, a suit of armor that makes it impossible to go to the bathroom, and not enough to do.

More nocturnal trouble, and more rain. Under stormy conditions, at the start of Rob Schroeder's "Ultrasound," a motorist named Glen (Vincent Kartheiser) gets a flat tire. He seeks aid at the nearest dwelling—the home of Art (Bob Stephenson) and his young wife, Cyndi (Chelsea Lopez), who kindly offer Glen a bed. To be precise: Art, who claims to have failed as a husband, offers his own bed to Glen, with Cyndi in it. Art will sleep elsewhere.

As you watch the opening of the film, plus the scene in which Art shows up at Glen's apartment to announce that Cyndi is pregnant, you get a pretty firm idea of this sad-sack tale. Just one of those domestic downers, right? Wrong. There is so much more here, wriggling around in the sack. Who, for example, is the red-headed woman who, with neither warning nor introduction, rehearses a passage of dialogue that we then hear on the lips of Cyndi? An actress, perhaps? Could this be a meta-theatrical fable of some sort? Wrong again. The redhead is Shannon (Breeda Wool), and she's employed in an experimental laboratory. There she observes Cyndi, who wears a cap covered in electrodes, and Glen, who for some reason is now in a wheelchair. "It'll all make sense as we go along, I promise," Shannon says. Wrong and wronger.

"Ultrasound" is adapted by Conor Stechschulte from his own four-volume graphic novel, and it's the kind of brain bender that, like "The Shining" (1980) and "Barton Fink" (1991), persuades you that a hotel corridor is the most worrying place in the world. Set beside "The Batman," Schroeder's film offers an alternative path for modern gothic: not heavy underfoot but twisty and looping, with no hint of a moral quest. The electronic score, by Zak Engel, deceives rather than bombards the ear, using chirrups, clicks, and skirls. As in Gotham, you detect the hand of fate, but who is dealing that hand is another matter. My money is on Art, who, in a scarily gauged performance from Stephenson, begins as a cuckold, overweight and under-happy, and winds up as a grinning magician with a frilled shirt and a talent for extreme hypnosis. He happens to resemble the Wizard of Oz, but here's the thing: Art is really a very good wizard. He's just a very bad man. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

IN ORBIT

The men and women who circled around Marcel Duchamp.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Beatrice Wood on a trip to Coney Island in 1917.

The word "salon," for a starry convocation of creative types, intelligentsia, and patrons, has never firmly penetrated English. It retains a pair of transatlantic wet feet from the phenomenon's storied annals, chiefly in France, since the eighteenth century. So it was that the all-time most glamorous and consequential American instance, thriving in New York between 1915 and 1920, centered on Europeans in temporary flight from the miseries of the First World War. Their hosts were Walter Arensberg, a Pittsburgh steel heir, and his wife, Louise Stevens, an even wealthier Massachusetts textile-industry legatee. The couple had been thunderstruck by the 1913 Armory Show of international contemporary art, which exposed Americans to Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and, in particular, Marcel Duchamp. Made the previous year, his painting "Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)," a cunning mashup of Cubism and Futurism, with its title handlettered along the bottom, was the event's prime sensation: at once insinuating indecency and making it hard to perceive, what with the image's scalloped planes, which a *Times* critic jovially likened to "an explosion in a shingle factory."

The Arensbergs' salon, which convened nightly at their spacious apartment on West Sixty-seventh Street, was supercharged in June, 1915, by the twenty-seven-year-old Duchamp's arrival in New York, where, to his astonishment, he was greeted at the dock by a horde of journalists alert to his notoriety and to the public's appetite for news of exotic foreigners. His charisma concentrated and accelerated a ferment in sophisticated American knowledge, creativity, and taste. How would the modernizing New York art world have evolved had the Arensbergs not existed—or if Duchamp hadn't made his way to their door? Differently, for sure, and with considerably less social synergy. One participant, the rich and flamboyant mondaine Louise Norton (who was soon to be a sometime lover of Duchamp's), proposed a collective credo as "Beauty for the eye, satire for the mind, depravity for the senses!" Attendance was nonexclusive; friends of friends were welcomed.

The Arensbergs nourished local modernist talents (not least with free food and drink) like Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, Charles Sheeler, John Covert, and, fatefully, Man Ray, who became a boon friend and lifelong ally of Duchamp's on both sides of the Atlantic. Other frequenters included the writer, photographer, and promoter of the Harlem Renaissance Carl Van Vechten; the poets William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens; and a remarkable roster of such formidable women as the dance artist Isadora Duncan; the ardent promoter of modern art Katherine S. Dreier; the multitalented British-born radical Mina Loy; the wealthy faux-naïf painter and intentional spinster Florine Stettheimer, along with her two likewise chaste and endearing sisters; the all-around outrageous German proto-performance artist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven; and the rebellious daughter of straitlaced New York socialites named Beatrice Wood.

Wood, while by any canonical measure a lesser figure on the scene, is effectively the protagonist and certainly the most appealing subject of "Spellbound by Marcel: Duchamp, Love, and Art," a gossipy account of the period by the cultural historian and novelist Ruth Brandon. What is left for a writer to explore about the Arensberg group, which has been anatomized by critics, curators, biographers, and memoirists, especially during recent decades in which Duchamp

rose to touchstone status in the legacy of modern art, rivalling Picasso? His cachet has ebbed a bit lately, as new artists, critics, and the art market go big for resurgent painting and sculpture, but there's no shaking off his inception of what amounted to a Copernican revolution in art, from a secure set of disciplines to an unmoored category of anything an artist might say it is.

Brandon's recourse is sex, substantiated by relatively unmined archives of diaries, journals, and letters linking mostly French males to mostly American women. The emphasis may add little to art history, but it contributes a fair amount to what the milieu was like for a shifting cast of characters who, as a self-aware constituency of what we now call influencers, focussed and intensified a transformative Zeitgeist. Glimpses into their romantic entanglements provide a flickering, you-are-there perspective that is more entertaining, at least, than academic analyses of their artistic bents and ramifications.

Wood met Duchamp by chance in 1916, in New York, while on a visit to the hospital room of the French avant-garde composer Edgard Varèse, who was recuperating from a broken foot. (Varèse later married Louise Norton.) Wood had been invited along by a journalist, Alissa Franc, whom, naïvely as it would turn out, she regarded as a loyal friend. Wood was twenty-three and, after two years of studying acting and art in prewar Paris, desperate for a life in the arts, or perhaps for any life not reliant on her hovering parents. Her élan is legendary. James Cameron has said that he based Rose, the heroine of his movie "Titanic," partly on her. Wood's age, social class, and attitude all fitted the character, although she travelled on more fortunate liners. When I imagine her in a peopled room, she is in Technicolor, and the others, Duchamp included, run to tones of gray.

There is something allegorical as well as touching about Wood's self-willed activities as regards certain haps and mishaps of an American élite that strove to become cosmopolitan by welcoming foreign avant-garde sensibilities to these arguably benighted shores. But her story is more than simply illustrative. Hell-bent on breaking free of the expectations of her upbringing, Wood seems to me a singular, wild-card creative personality of the twentieth century.

Duchamp was enchanted but without romantic intent. He introduced Wood to the Arensberg group, where she was an immediate hit. He gave her the use of his studio, which the Arensbergs had rented to him on a promise of first dibs on future works of his. There she made deft, witty drawings undisturbed by the relentless hysterics of her mother, who counted on proper upper-crust matrimony, loathed bohemians, and was only further alarmed by Duchamp's disarming suavity when Wood brought him home for dinner. Poor mom. Whatever she urged upon her daughter, Wood predictably did the opposite. Falling into bed with Duchamp, she later recalled their first encounter, cited in "Duchamp: A Biography," by Calvin Tomkins, as having come about "in the most natural way. . . . He was gentle in that as he was in everything else." But, for the Arensberg chronicle, the cardinal point is their friendship—the French magus and the gamier avatar of Henry James's Daisy Miller.

Wood posed a problem for Duchamp by falling deeply in love with him. She was hardly alone in this among the women he met throughout his life, but the relationship was complicated by his particular and even avuncular fondness for her and by his shyness of commitments. He successfully engineered a transferal of her affections to a French writer friend who was also in New York, Henri-Pierre Roché, whom Brandon succinctly describes as an "artistic hanger-on and compulsive womanizer" with a recurring interest in the wives and mistresses of other men. Roché and Wood kept daily diaries, yielding abundant grist for Brandon. Duchamp, idolized by both of them, registers as the fulcrum of their affair, exemplifying his impact on the lives and, to varying degrees, the art of the many people whom he amazed.



". . . and, for what felt like the millionth time, she opened her phone for the diminishing dopamine hit that never satisfied."

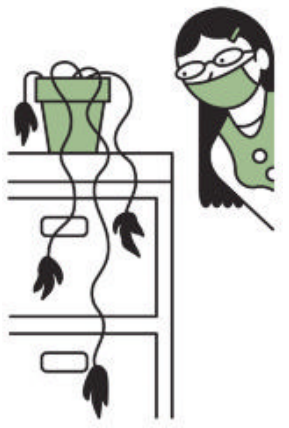
In New York, Duchamp emerged as the Olympian antihero of modernism whom we salute today. Still, he haunts rather than advances Brandon's narrative, as an unfailingly charming, fun-loving presence, but not as a man so much as a shadowy affect. He grew up in a richly cultured family. Two older brothers became prominent artists: the painter Jacques Villon and the extraordinary sculptor, who died too young, Raymond Duchamp-Villon. A younger

sister whom he adored, Suzanne Duchamp-Crotti, also took up art, as a Dadaist in several mediums. Ever cerebral—his strongest subject at school was math, and he delighted in games, puzzles, and ribald humor—Duchamp was educated in art but, after tentative stabs at painting, took no interest in rivalling his brothers. "Nude Descending," instantly an icon of modernist chic, was one of his last canvases. Renouncing painting as a tired medium that was trivially "retinal," he embarked on startling mind games, notably by presenting common objects as art—"readymades," he dubbed them.

The most famous of those is "Fountain," an inverted store-bought urinal, crudely signed "R. Mutt 1917," that Duchamp submitted to a show at the Society of Independent Artists. Recent scholarship indicates that he may have got the idea from von Freytag-Loringhoven, who had emigrated from Germany in 1910 and acquired her title from her third marriage. (Later a collaborator and lover of Djuna Barnes, the Baroness had many outré, mostly exhibitionist impulses, such as being filmed by Duchamp and Man Ray shaving her pubic hair.) The "Fountain" that you see at the Museum of Modern Art is not the original, if that designation for an infinitely repeatable jape even counts for anything. Duchamp took no pains to preserve the first iteration. He enjoyed and encouraged the furor that resulted, but said that he expected it to be fleeting, destined for oblivion. He may have been as slow as others were to realize that he had lit a long fuse for concatenating detonations in future artistic and intellectual culture.

"Fountain" was turned down by the show's organizers despite a stated policy of accepting submissions from anyone, for a fee of six dollars. Among the blackballers was Katherine Dreier, who rued the decision when she learned of the work's author. In 1920, Dreier collaborated with Duchamp and Man Ray in the formation, in New York, of a modernism-evangelizing organization, dubbed the Société Anonyme. Duchamp supported himself, when necessary, by giving French lessons and serving as a private art dealer, primarily in sculptures by Constantin Brancusi that became costly catnip for daring collectors. A growing demand for the far-out and, in Brancusi's case, the transcendently beautiful, capitalized inventory. But the Arensbergs served as Duchamp's default sponsors.

The rejection of "Fountain" confirmed Duchamp's already temperamental disdain for artists' groups. He parodied them, in league with his bosom crony the Cuban French painter Francis Picabia (given to "fast cars, opium, and drink," Brandon writes), by initiating a facetious movement—New York Dada, alluding to the artistic insurrection that had erupted in Zurich in 1916. Never conspicuously serious, Duchamp cultivated a novel tone for art: call it seriously unserious. He had been inspired by the methodical nonsense of the French literary renegade Raymond Roussel, who built lengthy novels and plays around arbitrary puns. Duchamp's modus operandi was to be recognized without being understood—impenetrably deadpan. He required an audience, positing that art works, hazarded by artists, are completed in the perception of viewers. Americans supplied him with something like a focus group for that premise.



Brandon dutifully hits familiar high points of the Arensberg saga. Walter, a likable eccentric, spent his life endeavoring to prove, by way of cryptic codes, that Francis Bacon had written the works of Shakespeare. Louise, musically talented and given to entertaining her guests at the piano but averse to performing in public, was the perfect doyenne for spirited conversation and inevitable dalliances. Duchamp's arcane intellect enthralled Walter. Having bid just too late to acquire "Nude Descending," he bought it years later from the San Francisco lawyer who had beaten him to the punch. And he didn't miss much of the artist's sporadic later works, as Duchamp almost kept his famous pledge to give up on art altogether in favor of chess (at which he came to rate as a master, short of grandmaster status).

The Arensberg collection was eventually donated to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The museum also holds the laborious project that preoccupied Duchamp throughout his New York years, "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even"—a large, fearsomely recondite standing array of gnomic images in various materials, mainly lead wire between panes of glass. Picabia's wife, the writer Gabrièle Buffet-Picabia, described it as a work in which, without touching one another, "machine organisms have extremely human adventures." Subsequent efforts to interpret the piece, consulting a wealth of enigmatic notes and diagrams that Duchamp made while conceiving it, have roiled scholars ever since. In my experience, it is more to be gawked at than quite relished, but it remains epically unusual.

Beatrice Wood, who was bilingual and a willing diplomat, actively collaborated in New York Dada. In Brandon's book, she glows from a gem of a photograph, sporting a broad-brimmed hat, with Duchamp and Picabia on an outing to Coney Island in 1917. That year, she was listed as an editor, along with Louise Norton and Duchamp, of little magazines advancing the conceit, *The Blind Man* and *Rongwrong*, which were supported by the major photographer, sage art dealer, and champion of all things modern, Alfred Stieglitz. In the second issue of *Blind Man*, Wood defended "Fountain" by penning—or perhaps translating from Duchamp—an immortal witticism: "As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are plumbing and her bridges." Also in 1917, Duchamp enhanced a drawing by Wood, of a woman bathing, by gluing a bar of soap atop the crotch. Shown publicly, the work precipitated a flurry of satisfying indignation. Outraging or, at least, tantalizing American art folk was like shooting fish in a barrel.

I am not a Marcel Duchamp enthusiast, though I'm forever in awe of his cast of mind and, oh my, his cleverness. His sparse production can't contain him. Ad-hoc ideas that for him were amusing, sneakily hostile, and attended by a stubborn indifference to their meaning, if any, aren't fungible. They evoke a hobby more than a vocation. The practically

scientific detachment that was his second nature became a posture for subsequent artists who kept—and still keep—taking cues from him, the most profoundly comprehending of whom has been the protean painter, sculptor, and printmaker Jasper Johns. Others, termed conceptualists, have drawn on his authority for varieties of art that are more or less used up in thinking about them, whatever their material trappings.

I am partial to the retinal. Duchamp's disdain for painting came to be weaponized by university-trained artists and theorists who took being as blind as bats to be a good thing. But give me anything by Matisse—or by Johns, who never subordinates the visual beauty of things to the ideas that inform them—in favor of any readymade, even the most beguiling, such as a dangling snow shovel entitled "In Advance of the Broken Arm" (1915), which Duchamp created during his first winter in New York. Pairing banal objects with poetic captions, he activated polar extremes of objectivity and subjectivity with nothing in the middle. The trope became a standing test case of what is required to qualify anything as "art," which turns out to be no more or less than its acceptance as such by one or another institutional agency—a designated burr under the saddle of traditional connoisseurship.

Members of the Arensberg circle found Duchamp's subversive jeux d'esprit a capital diversion. Their affection for him shines in a jolly painting by Florine Stettheimer, reproduced in Brandon's book, that memorializes a picnic for his thirtieth birthday, in 1917. Everybody is on hand—except Wood. Perhaps still bruised from the humiliating end, the previous year, of her affair with Roché and touchy about the group's knowledge of it, she spent the day at the country home of other friends. Duchamp arrived late, in a red roadster driven by Picabia. He stands alone in the picture, the tall and taciturn cynosure of the occasion.

Duchamp's love life, gamely traced by Brandon before, during, and after the Arensberg days, was low key, bracketed by an unrequited passion for Buffet-Picabia early on and, four decades later, by a consuming affair with Maria Martins, a sculptor and the wife of the Brazilian Ambassador to the United States. That ardor also came to naught, despite his pleas. In between, declaring himself "antimarriage but not antiwomen," he radiated an air of gallant reserve in romance as in art. For a spell, in New York, he came to prefer the company of the Stettheimer sisters and other undemanding older women. His favorite, Ettie Stettheimer, detected loneliness beneath his aplomb: "poor little floating atom," she characterized him, tenderly.

As reported by Brandon in an epilogue to her book, Duchamp married an unprepossessing rich woman in 1927, in Paris, with Picabia as best man. The union reads cynically, as a financial stopgap. It lasted six months. For part of his time in New York, he inhabited an apartment on Fourteenth Street furnished with little more than a chair and a chessboard. His final years were enriched by a mutually happy marriage with Alexina (Teeny) Matisse, the smart, vivacious ex-wife of Henri Matisse's youngest son. Duchamp had taken U.S. citizenship. He and Teeny lived on West Twelfth Street, bordering Greenwich Village. He was hospitable though scarcely informative—a courteous sphinx—to inquisitive callers.

When Duchamp died, in 1968, while visiting a second home in France, he left behind as a parting shot a final magnum opus, on which he had worked in secret for twenty years: "Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas."



This piece is also in Philadelphia now. You peer through a set of peepholes in a decrepit brick-framed door at a realistically sculpted, legs-spread naked woman without pubic hair, her face not visible, holding a lighted gas lamp aloft as a motorized artificial waterfall pours forth in the background. The work eludes pornography with characteristic sang-froid, evoking sex in a vein that is more forensic than lubricious.

As with his earlier cross-dressings as a female alter ego, Rrose Sélavy—sumptuously photographed by Man Ray—Duchamp's own sexuality could seem as much a readymade for him as any material object. I don't know that this penchant quite comes through in his pair of would-be masterworks, "Bride" and "Given." They are so strange in so many ways as to paralyze exegesis. Duchamp's popular prestige resides in the bare thought of him, known for being unknowable. His life and his art chase each other around a mulberry bush of bestirred, never satiated curiosity. His reticence inconveniences Brandon's soap-operatic preoccupation with romantic and sexual matters.

We learn more from Brandon than we might like of Henri-Pierre Roché, whose one claim to fame is the novel "Jules et Jim" (1953), about two friends in love with an impulsive woman who, liking them both, resolves the imbroglio by killing herself along with one of the pair. François Truffaut adapted the book for his ravishing film, in 1962. Brandon debunks an apparently frequent speculation that Roché based the tale on his relations with Wood and Duchamp (which he did set out to recast in a novel, "Victor," that was left incomplete upon his death, in 1959). In truth, "Jules et Jim" drew on another erotic triangle that involved a German poet friend and, off and on for thirteen years until 1933, the poet's wife. Brandon opines that in each case the prevailing love—if not sexual—interest for Roché was the man.

Roché's liaison with Wood was torrid but short-lived, lasting about two months in 1916. It was corrupted by Roché's regular betrayals with Louise Arensberg, who took license from Walter's concurrent peccadilloes, and with Wood's journalist intimate Alissa Franc, who seems to have harbored a festering envy of her more magnetic friend. Franc dropped hints of the situation to Wood, but it isn't clear how Wood finally wised up. Brandon's documentation of the goings on is so replete, and she is so eager to show it off, that the brief episode dominates "Spellbound by Marcel." Still, Roché was an avid tourist, and he and Wood made a wondrous toy of the city with such outings as a round trip on the Staten Island

Ferry. Dates and places of their assignations cascade.

In 1919, Wood married a Belgian theatre manager in Montreal. She had gone there in pursuit of an acting career that then fizzled. She performed, she said, strictly for money to escape dependence on her parents. The groom turned out to be a bigamist, with a wife and child in Brussels, who repeatedly borrowed from the ever-obliging Arensbergs, behind Wood's back, with lies about an incipient business windfall that concealed his disastrous gambles on the New York Stock Exchange. The already tepid marriage, having been undertaken at least partly because Wood's mother deplored it, was annulled.

Did Wood have snakebit taste in men? Evidently, but in a way that was consistent with her homing instinct for the improbable in all of her life-changing decisions, which ultimately enhanced rather than vitiated her fate. Wood was a vegetarian and neither drank nor smoked. She never had a child. To live freely and yet remain at once autarkic and socially viable was no cinch for a single woman at the time. For Wood, there was the way of the world and then there was her way.

With the war's end, the European expatriates dispersed. After travels that included a nine-month sojourn in Buenos Aires, Duchamp resettled in Paris in 1919. The Arensbergs moved to Hollywood, abandoning an increasingly crowded, commercialized, and, for them, tame New York art world. One of Brandon's epilogues is crowned by Wood's late-life triumph as a celebrated ceramicist. After living for seven years with an English actor named Reginald Pole, who then threw her over for a younger woman, Wood decamped to California in 1928. She was lured there by a zeal for the spiritual doctrines of the Indian-born seer Krishnamurti, who was headquartered in the bohemian haven of Ojai.

In 1933, still casting about for a rewarding occupation, Wood took an adult-education class in ceramics at Hollywood High School. The training blossomed into a substantial career. She perfected a technique of lustrous glazing: forcing salts to the surface by starving kilns of oxygen. She had a solo show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1940. Typical vessels of hers, employing various patinas, include vase forms with ascending multiple swellings, each with its own set of handles. The present market for them, though active, is less than robust, judging by prices—in the mere thousands—that I have found cited online. This signals a lingering, blinkered bias of art collectors against craft mediums. Those things are terrific.

Wood stayed friendly with the others in the Arensberg orbit—even Roché, to whom she sent food packets in Paris during the Second World War and later hosted, with his companion at the time, in California. It was like her not to let emotional wounds, which she absorbed as stinging but salutary life lessons, foster grudges. Invincibly openhearted, she continued to regard the Arensbergs as a second family. A photograph, taken by Wood in 1936, shows Duchamp and the Arensbergs, all at ease in one another's company.

I recall from somewhere an anecdote, unmentioned by Brandon, of a busybody who, after seeing work by Wood, warned a friend of Wood's that she risked an early death from her use of toxic chemicals. Having produced, at the urging of friends, an insouciantly unreliable autobiography, "I Shock Myself," in 1985, Wood expired thirteen years later, at the age of a hundred and five. She attributed her longevity, she once said, to "young men and chocolate." She never ceased to look girlish. After two gratifying trips to India, she took to turning out in saris, with her long hair plaited. Friends and students flocked to her.

Wood entrances me as the Arensberg circle's most outstanding echt American, other than Man Ray. Her untrammelled appetite for experience complemented Duchamp's strategic hermeticism, to their mutual pleasure. Setting her apart from others in the group was an idiosyncratic rather than a vicarious motive for rising to the bait of a bedazzling newness. Her involvement personalizes developments that are otherwise divided in collective memory between arid art history and fatuous mythologizing. Sometimes the marginal witness to an epoch defines it more vividly than its supposed leading lights. I like thinking about Beatrice Wood. ♦



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BOOKS

THE ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT

What Harry S. Truman made of his moment.

BY BEVERLY GAGE



Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson, an architect of Cold War policy.

Americans today seem to believe that we live in especially exhausting political times. But the rhythms of our moment—pandemic, protest, pandemic, election, insurrection, pandemic, invasion of Ukraine—have nothing on the Truman era. Between April, 1945, when Franklin D. Roosevelt's death thrust Harry S. Truman into office, and January, 1953, when Truman handed the Presidency to Dwight D. Eisenhower, the war in Europe ended, Hitler killed himself, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan, the Cold War began, the state of Israel came into being, the Soviet Union developed its own nuclear weapons, China underwent a Communist revolution, the West created NATO, the world created the United Nations, and the Korean War began. One could go on.

How much Truman shaped these events, and how much he was buffeted by them, is the puzzle at the heart of Jeffrey Frank's new book, "The Trials of Harry S. Truman: The Extraordinary Presidency of an Ordinary Man, 1945-1953" (Simon & Schuster). Truman was the ultimate accidental President, a pipsqueak senator from Independence, Missouri, who had been Vice-President for less than three months when Roosevelt died. Once Truman assumed office, global events seemed to proceed according to their own logic and momentum. Truman inherited daunting challenges, and he borrowed other men's visions in order to meet them. His own accomplishments occurred somewhere in between.

Truman acknowledged that he didn't have much choice about whether to drop the bombs. "As a practical matter," Frank notes, the decision "had been made for him." Truman's greatest foreign-policy triumph, the European Recovery Program, is credited to the military giant and Secretary of State George Marshall; we don't call it the Truman Plan. As President, Truman was accused of "losing" China, but China was, of course, never really his to lose. And it was Senator Joseph McCarthy, more than Truman, who defined the political tenor of the era.

Perhaps Truman's most significant act as President was his decision to enter and then stick with the war in Korea. Although that conflict was never the political disaster that Vietnam turned out to be, it killed millions, often with shocking brutality. The South was effectively recaptured in the first few months; the long, blood-drenched impasse that ensued accomplished little. On the home front, Truman's dream of achieving universal health care languished as well. After a bruising battle with the American Medical Association and the Republican Party, he ended up more or less where he started.

So why write a big new book on Truman? And what to do with him as the protagonist? Frank depicts Truman as a limited talent who was promoted above his pay grade. "It's hell to be President of the Greatest Most Powerful Nation on Earth," Truman complained in his diary. All the same, Truman did the best he could—an "ordinary man," in Frank's formulation, who ended up with an "extraordinary presidency." Whether he made history or just endured it, Truman was, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson later put it, "present at the creation" of many of the key institutions that still shape both American and global politics.

A former *New Yorker* editor and the author of three novels set in Washington, Frank is drawn to the human side of this story: the backroom sniping, the jockeying for position, the personality clashes, and the diplomatic pageantry that produced the postwar world order. Famous statesmen abound, most of them more confident, if not more lovable, than Truman. The great and grave George Marshall ordered

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colleagues to "avoid trivia," while Truman loved nothing more than chitchat, poker, and fried chicken with pals. Acheson intoned about ancient Athens and Sparta and Rome, while Truman, a self-proclaimed plain-talking Midwesterner, was apt to compare Stalin to Tom Pendergast, the Democratic boss of Kansas City. General Douglas MacArthur, the hero of the Pacific theatre and the American potentate of Japanese reconstruction, exuded far more gravitas than the President—and everyone knew it. "MacArthur is brilliant, theatrical, stern, eloquent, usually unapproachable," a *Herald Tribune* reporter wrote in 1950. "The President is plodding, stubborn, undramatic, shrewd and earthy." When Truman journeyed all the way to Wake Island for a brief meeting with MacArthur, an observer likened the President to "an insurance salesman who has at last signed up an important prospect."

Frank mostly wants us to side with Truman, whose Everyman pragmatism often put him at odds with men who thought that they were better than he was and who sought to give him advice. If there was ever a time when the so-called liberal establishment had real force, it was in the nineteen-forties, as a fast-expanding executive branch brought thousands of credentialled know-it-alls to Washington. Sometimes to his detriment, often to his credit, Truman did not fit in. Frank writes, "He was, inescapably, someone who'd stepped out of the nation's rural past and found himself in a dizzying mid-twentieth-century world, like a character from a Mark Twain fable: *A Missouri Farmer in FDR's Court*." Frank's Truman is a populist in the best sense of the word: not a demagogue but a true man of the people.

Unlike many current aspirants, Truman came by that label honestly. He grew up in a small town, and didn't graduate from college. He worked as a farmer and then struggled as a haberdasher, not exactly the tried-and-true power track. Perhaps his proudest achievement, before entering politics, was persuading Elizabeth Virginia Wallace, his Sunday-school classmate from a well-off family, to accept his offer of marriage. Bess Truman, as she came to be known, plays a major role in "The Trials of Harry S. Truman," though largely by way of absence. As President, Truman spent a surprising amount of time moping around the White House and writing winsome, reflective letters to his wife, who sensibly preferred Missouri to Washington.

The best-known portrait of Truman as man, husband, and father is still David McCullough's 1992 biography, "Truman." In that book, McCullough rescued Truman from the sneers of prior generations. Like much of the mid-century establishment, early Presidential historians tended to dismiss Truman as a second-rater, beholden to heartland America's small minds and small visions. McCullough turned that Midwestern pluck into a virtue—just what was needed to cut through the moral and political complexities of an epically confusing historical moment. Ivy League types, he maintained, had nothing on good old common sense.

Frank adopts a similar, if more nuanced, view. Near the end of "The Trials of Harry S. Truman," he pays homage to McCullough's "masterful" book. At the same time, he acknowledges that Truman's unschooled, salt-of-the-earth pose was not always what the moment called for. From the bully pulpit, Truman could occasionally reach great heights of rhetoric. At least as frequently, he put his foot in his mouth. "I need not tell you that Harry Truman is not an orator," a Senate colleague once noted, upon introducing a Truman speech. "He can demonstrate that for himself."

Frank's book describes press conferences in which Truman managed to say precisely the wrong thing at the wrong time. In 1946, for instance, he nearly turned the Cold War hot by championing Winston Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech—which was delivered in Fulton, Missouri—without thinking through the implications. Stalin interpreted Churchill's words as "a call to war with the Soviet Union." Truman had to scramble to explain that this was not, in fact, what the United States wanted.

The wise men around Truman got tripped up less often—though, to be fair, they were less often put on the spot. If Truman had a major strength as a chief executive, it was his ability to comprehend and synthesize the learned views of his many advisers and experts, even if the result sometimes served their interests better than his own. Adopting the formulation of the redoubtable George Kennan, the Truman Doctrine argued that the United States needed to contain an aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union, lest the world end up with another totalitarian blitzkrieg across Europe. It was as powerful a grand strategic vision as any President has ever offered. It also led inexorably to calls for a bigger and better security state—which would require still more expert opinion from still more advisers like Kennan.

Drawing on such ideas, Truman presided over a vast transformation of the American security establishment, including the creation of the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, and the C.I.A. He also helped to bring about the desegregation of an empowered and permanently mobilized American military. Dwight Eisenhower would balefully dub these powerful new institutions the "military-industrial complex"; he warned that they might come to dominate American society. Truman worried less about their existential significance. He took office in a moment of crisis, and the crises never stopped. The big new bureaucracies were mainly just efforts to cope.

The problem of the Soviet Union—what it was, how it worked, what its leaders wanted—occupied more of Truman's time and thought than anything else. From his first moments in office, Truman viewed the Russians with two-fisted suspicion, ever ready to take and give offense. He got "very snappy" around Stalin, in the words of Secretary of State James Byrnes—and proudly so. "I reared up on my hind legs and told 'em where to get off and they got off," he wrote home to Bess from the 1945 Potsdam negotiations. Frank's book does not try to answer the hoary question of who started the Cold War—whether Stalin or Truman or maybe even Churchill was really to blame. It does show that they were all mostly feeling their way in the dark, relying not so much on

a ruthless calculus of power as on leaps of instinct and imagination.

The early Cold War found its domestic analogue in McCarthyism, a term that both illuminates and obscures the political dynamics of the Truman years. It was Truman, not McCarthy, who introduced a loyalty program for federal employees. But McCarthy, far more than Truman, put his stamp on the anti-Communist Zeitgeist. When McCarthy announced, in February, 1950, that "I have in my hand" a list of Communists lurking in the State Department, he was attacking Truman's foreign policy: How could the United States have allowed the Soviets to build a bomb and the Communists to take over China, if not for some act of internal treachery?

McCarthy's example points up some of the contradictions of the Truman era, and of the politics that limited Truman's range of action. Today, the postwar years are often seen as a time of bipartisan coöperation and good will, when the Marshall Plan passed by an overwhelming majority, Republicans and Democrats regularly conferred in Washington cloakrooms, and intellectual giants like Kennan bestrode the State Department's new Policy Planning Staff. It was also an era of vicious, operatic partisanship. McCarthy denounced Truman as soft on Communism, Marshall as a tool of Soviet masters. Truman could give almost as good as he got. "I think the greatest asset the Kremlin has is Senator McCarthy," he declared during a 1950 press conference. Just imagine what they would have done with Twitter.

Although he could punch back when needed, Truman often kept his most cutting views to himself. Throughout his Presidency, he made a practice of writing caustic letters to his enemies and critics, then tucking them away unsent, steam effectively blown off. Frank recognizes a precious gift to the biographer: a subject who, miraculously and generously, takes the time to write down his innermost feelings and thoughts.

The letters invite counterfactual speculation: What if Truman *had* sent them? What if he had actually uttered the words out loud? Sometimes it might have been just what the country needed. Truman privately worried that J. Edgar Hoover's F.B.I. wanted to become an American "Gestapo." But although Truman engaged in some backroom wrangling with Hoover, he never tried to fire him or hold the F.B.I. to much public account.

Frank's book is filled with other might-have-beens. Nuclear power might have ended up under military control; radioactive waste might have been deployed as a weapon; the Korean War might have expanded into China. On the domestic front, Truman might have lost the 1948 election, thus making the Chicago *Tribune's* famous "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN" headline a statement of fact rather than a symbol of bad polling. For all the things that happened during Truman's Presidency, Frank argues, the events that were averted deserve to be part of the historical discussion, too. Above all, the world did not descend into a nuclear-armed Third World War, a prospect that loomed over every minute of Truman's Presidency and pervades every page of Frank's book. That may have been Truman's greatest accomplishment.

In the nearly seventy years since Truman left office, the institutions that he helped to create have had remarkable staying power. NATO, despite repeated challenges to its relevance, endures as the critical military pact of the Western world. Japan and Germany, with the help of American reconstruction funds, developed into prosperous, stable democracies. Even the U.N. is still limping along—not exactly the great peacemaking body of postwar ambitions but certainly more lasting than its predecessor, the League of Nations.

And yet many of today's most combustible conflicts can be traced back to Truman's moment as well. In Russia, Vladimir Putin has cited NATO expansion as one justification for the war in Ukraine—and it is NATO (b. 1949) that is preparing to mobilize against him. There is talk of a "new Cold War" with China and of the clarifying if dread-laden politics that it might produce—with Taiwan (also b. 1949) as the up-and-coming hot spot. The dictatorship of North Korea, consolidated in part through Truman's land war, continues to embrace nuclear-weapons development (also very Truman). In outlets such as *Foreign Policy* and *Foreign Affairs*, insiders wring their hands over the possible collapse of the "liberal international order," by which they mean the complex of institutions—NATO, the World Bank, the U.N.—erected in the great world-remaking experiments of the nineteen-forties.

Donald Trump, as a candidate and then as President, helped to fuel anxieties that the postwar order was done for at last. Joe Biden has since tried to shore it up, with the help of appointees who would like nothing more than to go down in history as the twenty-first century's Kennan or Acheson or Marshall. Politically, too, Biden is a bit like Truman: a decent sort, thrust into office at a moment of crisis, and subject to his own foot-in-mouth problems. Like Truman, Biden is facing a Republican Party in thrall to a demagogue. Whether consciously or not, Trump owes much of his big-lie political style to Truman's great adversary, McCarthy. And Biden, like Truman before him, has been unable to fully dislodge it.

On the whole, though, Republicans and Democrats sort themselves differently from the way they did in Truman's day. Back then, each party contained a mishmash of views, both liberal and conservative, in contrast with today's rigid ideological divisions. On the Democratic side, Franklin Roosevelt's winning coalition stitched together several seemingly incompatible constituencies: liberal élites, industrial workers, the white "Solid South," and a small but growing number of Black voters. That coalition started to fracture under Truman, when the Southern Democrats (or Dixiecrats) broke away from the Party, with South Carolina's governor, Strom Thurmond, as their standard-bearer. Sixteen years later, Thurmond became one of the first Southern Democrats of national stature to make the leap over to the Republican Party.

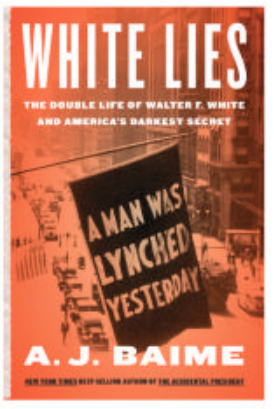
A son of border-state Missouri, Truman actually shared many of the Dixiecrats' racist views. "The Trials of Harry S. Truman" quotes him using the N-word more than once, and notes that he did not believe in interracial marriage or social equality. Frank is inclined to explain Truman, though, rather than cancel him. "Truman was a man with ca-

sual prejudices, some that he tried to rid himself of and some that he simply couldn't," Frank writes. Indeed, Truman rose above his raising to champion an ambitious racial-justice agenda. His Committee on Civil Rights, created in 1946 following a surge in white-supremacist violence, came out in support of an anti-lynching law, voting rights for Black Americans, and a more robust system of federal enforcement.

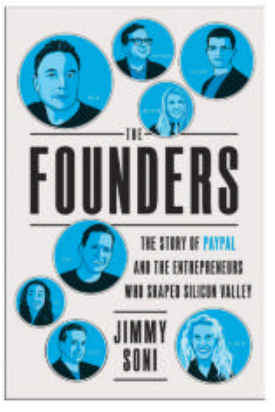
Truman failed to get what he wanted on civil rights, however, as on so many other issues. Mid-century bipartisanship could often rest on a shared commitment to white supremacy and a set of common assumptions about who mattered in American politics and who didn't. Looking back, one can easily tick off everything else that Truman did not do, especially compared with Roosevelt's towering legislative achievements: he did not win universal health care or nationalize the steel industry or effectively defend the labor movement from corporate backlash. Perhaps the best that can be said is that he tried, often pushing against powerful conservative forces across the aisle and within his own party. As Biden squirms under the mercurial flexing of Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, it is worth remembering that Roosevelt won so much in large part because he enjoyed hefty congressional majorities. Other Presidents have not been so lucky.

Biden might yet be hoping to pull off a Truman-style electoral surprise—in his case, defying the pundits with a midterm Democratic sweep. If that happens, he may yet regain some legislative momentum. But, as Truman well knew, it can be achingly difficult to steer the ship of history, much less to gain credit for setting its direction. In 1953, when he returned to Independence, after Eisenhower's Inauguration, Truman was pleasantly surprised to see the townspeople turn out to greet him, as if at least someone, in the end, appreciated what he had tried to accomplish. "It was the pay-off for thirty years of hell and hard work," he wrote in his diary. He was reflecting on his career in Washington, where each new generation tends to believe it can control the nation's destiny, only to discover that history has other plans. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



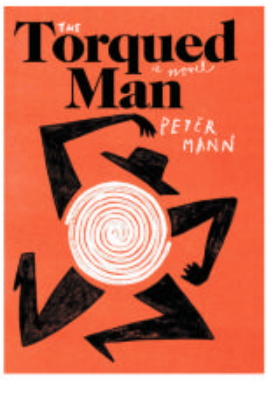
White Lies, *by A. J. Baime (Mariner)*. Walter F. White, the subject of this urgent, much needed biography, led the N.A.A.C.P. from 1929 until his death, in 1955. He joined in 1918, working undercover in the South—a light-skinned Black man, he could pass as white—to investigate lynchings, identifying perpetrators and sending reports to the press and to state capitols. White's career, beginning three years after "The Birth of a Nation" came out and ending just before the Montgomery bus boycott, allows Baime to portray an entire society struggling and failing to reckon with its legacy of racial terror. None of the killers in the forty-one murders White investigated were convicted. And, though he spent decades campaigning for a federal anti-lynching law, only now does such a bill (named for Emmett Till) look set to pass Congress.



The Founders, *by Jimmy Soni (Simon & Schuster)*. In 1998 and 1999, seven young men, including Peter Thiel and Elon Musk, founded two companies with related but distinct goals: Confinity aimed to facilitate the transmission of money between PalmPilots; X.com sought to unify all the offerings of the financial sector, such as bank accounts, investment funds, and transfers. The story of the companies' bitter rivalry and eventual merger into the now ubiquitous platform PayPal is the subject of this entertaining history, which draws on interviews with founders and other staff. Soni's account memorably renders the personalities involved and engages with ideas about financial sovereignty, open-source technology, and the place of politics in Silicon Valley.



Free Love, *by Tessa Hadley (Harper)*. Phyllis, the protagonist of this novel set in England in 1967, lives a neat suburban life with her husband and their two children until she meets Nicholas, the twentysomething son of family friends. They begin an affair, and Phyllis, frequenting Nicholas's grungy London digs and mixing with artists and counterculture intellectuals, feels a passion she has not experienced before. Hadley brilliantly renders both Phyllis's flight from domesticity and her family's attempts to deal with the social consequences of her absence. The radicalism of the cultural moment is underscored by the emergence of family secrets, once buried in the name of class and decorum and now fuelling raw desires.



The Torqued Man, *by Peter Mann (Harper)*. This début spy novel juxtaposes two manuscripts supposedly found in Berlin at the end of the Second World War. One tells the story of Frank Pike, an ex-I.R.A. fighter recruited by the Nazis to fan anti-British sentiment in Ireland, through the fastidious diary of his besotted German handler, Adrian de Groot. The other—dismissed by de Groot as a "puerile espionage potboiler"—narrates the same time line from the perspective of Pike's mythical alter ego, Finn McCool, who embarks on a murder spree targeting Nazi doctors. As the chapters alternate between the manuscripts, two irreconcilable portraits of Pike emerge, while de Groot's love for the Irishman gradually emboldens him to political resistance.

MUSICAL EVENTS

SINGING SHADOWS

Tyshawn Sorey's "Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)," at the Rothko Chapel.

BY ALEX ROSS



Two formidable artistic creations bear the name "Rothko Chapel." The first is an ecumenical spiritual space, in Houston, built to display huge, dark paintings by Mark Rothko. The second is a half-hour composition by Morton Feldman, which had its première in the chapel in 1972, a year after the site opened. Each work possesses a legendary aura. The chapel, the brainchild of the art patrons Dominique and John de Menil, projects an abyssal stillness that mesmerizes more than a hundred thousand visitors every year. Feldman's composition, a sparse soundscape for viola, chorus, celesta, and percussion, long ago became a classic of modern music; according to the Feldman archivist Chris Villars, in the past two decades it has received more than a hundred and thirty performances, in twenty-seven countries. Together, the music and the art constitute a monument of twentieth-century modernism—a locus of its dreams and sorrows. Fifty years on, a third voice has joined this interdisciplinary conversation: that of the composer Tyshawn Sorey, whose "Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)" had its première in the chapel last month.

Relationships between artists and composers can be facilely drawn. The fastidious Debussy had little in common with the Impressionist painters to whom he was often compared. With Rothko and Feldman, though, a profound kinship exists. Around 1950, both turned toward an ethereal form of abstraction, avoiding the more hectic modernisms of the period. The painter applied himself to opaque fields of color, windows to otherness and nothingness. The composer reduced his language to isolated notes and chords, letting one sound die away before the next arose. Rothko's images were distant, shrouded; Feldman's music stayed soft. In the sixties, the two men developed a personal bond. Feldman visited Rothko's studio while the chapel project was under way. Rothko admired Feldman's music, even if he favored Mozart above all. The critic Brian O'Doherty, who once observed Rothko listening to Feldman's "The Swallows of Salangan," commented that in both men's work "attention is translated into yearning or desire, a yearning implicit in Rothko's light and Feldman's expanding sound."

The resemblance between Rothko and "Rothko Chapel" is strongest at the midpoint of Feldman's piece. For several minutes, the chorus dwells on a hazy six-note chord, with individual voices taking turns so that the sonority is sustained continuously. Chimes touch on the remaining notes of the chromatic scale. If the music were marked fortissimo, it would be brutal on the ears, but Feldman tells the singers to be "barely audible," dampening the dissonance. The effect is analogous to that of Rothko's walls of plum and black, which make a severe first impression and then disclose lighter pigments.

That chord of eternity occupies only a few pages of the score. The rest sometimes departs radically from the Rothko aesthetic and, indeed, from the remainder of Feldman's output. The composer was generally steadfast in his resistance to conventional tonality, faithful to the Schoenbergian precept that the musical languages of the past were defunct. "Rothko Chapel" represents an extraordinary exception. Throughout, the viola seems to be trying to achieve lyrical flight, and in the final minutes it unfurls a clean-lined melody—a wistful, modal theme that Feldman had written in his teenage years. When he was composing the piece's ending, he told the de Menils, "my eyes filled up with tears."

Sorey's piece incorporates the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child."

ILLUSTRATION BY HOKYOUNG KIM

The tears were primarily for Rothko, who had died by suicide in 1970. Ryan Dohoney, in his absorbing study "Saving Abstraction: Morton Feldman, the de Menils, and the Rothko Chapel," notes that Feldman reacted to his friend's death by sketching a sweetly euphonious piece called "For Mark Rothko." This turned into "Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety," a memorial for the composer's piano teacher. The shock of Rothko's act evidently pulled Feldman toward sounds of primordial innocence. Nothing equivalent exists in the painter's mature œuvre. It would be a bit like finding that Rothko had painted a human figure onto one panel of the chapel.

The meaning of those tears changes when you consider the work's Jewish resonances. The closing melody, Feldman said, was "quasi-Hebraic," and other passages had "the ring of the synagogue." He might have been thinking of Rothko's childhood: the painter was born in the Pale of Settlement, in what is now Latvia, and was devoutly religious in his youth. More generally, the darkness of Jewish history was weighing on Feldman's mind. In the same month that he completed "Rothko Chapel," he wrote "I Met Heine on the Rue Fürstenberg," which evokes an imaginary encounter in Paris with the exiled poet Heinrich Heine. During a talk at the première of "Rothko Chapel," Feldman spoke of the painter's "relentless confrontation with reality," and reached for a striking metaphor: "There is no choice, there is no time, the Gestapo is coming up the stairs."

"Rothko Chapel" is perhaps best understood not as a personal narrative about either Rothko or Feldman but as a depiction of the very act of exploring a multilayered work of art. At times, as in the central passage, the music appears to mimic Rothko's impassive, towering surfaces. The solo viola hints at the stray thoughts of the viewer. Bass-drum and timpani rolls suggest interior unease, or perhaps the distant noise of the outside world. The Jewish melody is a memory that arises out of nowhere—a voice from the past that speaks in the present tense. The wordless chorus gives no ground to that outpouring of emotion, remaining fixed on its six-note chords. The painting is unchanged by its audience. So, too, is the music: our feelings in the face of Feldman's own uncanny creation run the same complicated course.

For some years, a chief custodian of musical activity at the Rothko Chapel has been the pianist Sarah Rothenberg, who runs the perennially thoughtful chamber-music and jazz series DACAMERA, in Houston. She organized a performance of "Rothko Chapel" there in 2011, and three years later presented "For Philip Guston," Feldman's five-hour-long trio for flute, piano, and percussion. (DACAMERA's recording of "Rothko Chapel," for the ECM label, is one of the finest to date.) The chapel, which turned fifty last year, reopened in 2020 after an extensive restoration, which included the installation of a room-brightening louvered skylight. To celebrate the anniversary, Rothenberg solicited a new work from Tyshawn Sorey, who, at the age of forty-one, has moved into the front ranks of younger American composers, his music inflected by both classical modernism and avant-garde jazz.

The choice made perfect sense. In a public conversation with Rothenberg after the première, Sorey described Feldman as his "hero," and one of his chief models. In several recent pieces, he has not only echoed aspects of Feldman's sound world but also followed his predecessor's habit of giving dedications to colleagues in his titles. These works begin with a simulacrum of the Feldman style and then swerve into a different realm—roaring dissonances, in "For Marcos Balter"; spacious, radiant sonorities, in "For George Lewis."

The building blocks of "Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)" are essentially the same as those of "Rothko Chapel": sustained choral chords, questing viola lines, rumblings and chimings of percussion. Yet significant differences soon appear. The viola is broader, more restless, more impassioned. One phrase is marked "legato, molto espressivo"—editorializing that is absent from "Rothko Chapel." In the Feldman, members of the ensemble seem independent of one another, coinciding like parts of a mobile; the chorus is indifferent, otherworldly. Sorey plots subtle connections among the disparate parts. The chorus stays quiet for many minutes, and when it enters, with an A in the tenors, it is synchronized with an A on the timpani.

From the start, Sorey shapes his material so that it acquires a narrative momentum—a paradoxical effect, since "Monochromatic Light" is about twice as long as "Rothko Chapel" and flirts with stasis. A rising minor third keeps recurring; we hear hints of minor-mode tonality, especially in the area of C-sharp minor. Sorey follows Feldman in introducing vocal solos, but instead of an alto and a soprano he chooses a bass-baritone. Viola and voice trade whispery, upward-groping figures, as if they were searching for the same theme. Feldman's strict modernist ethos tended to discourage this kind of goal-oriented thinking; Sorey is an innately gripping musical storyteller, even when he is working with minimal means.

As in "Rothko Chapel," the viola is given a full-fledged melody at the end. In place of Feldman's Hebraic song, Sorey inserts the Black spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." The impact is starkly different. Feldman's melody, marked "very, very simply," is a shimmering dream vision, set at a steady tempo. Sorey's spiritual, having been anticipated in those minor-mode passages, is more an organic growth that struggles into being, winding through changing meters. If Feldman looks back to a world that is gone, Sorey might be gesturing toward a tragedy that is ongoing.

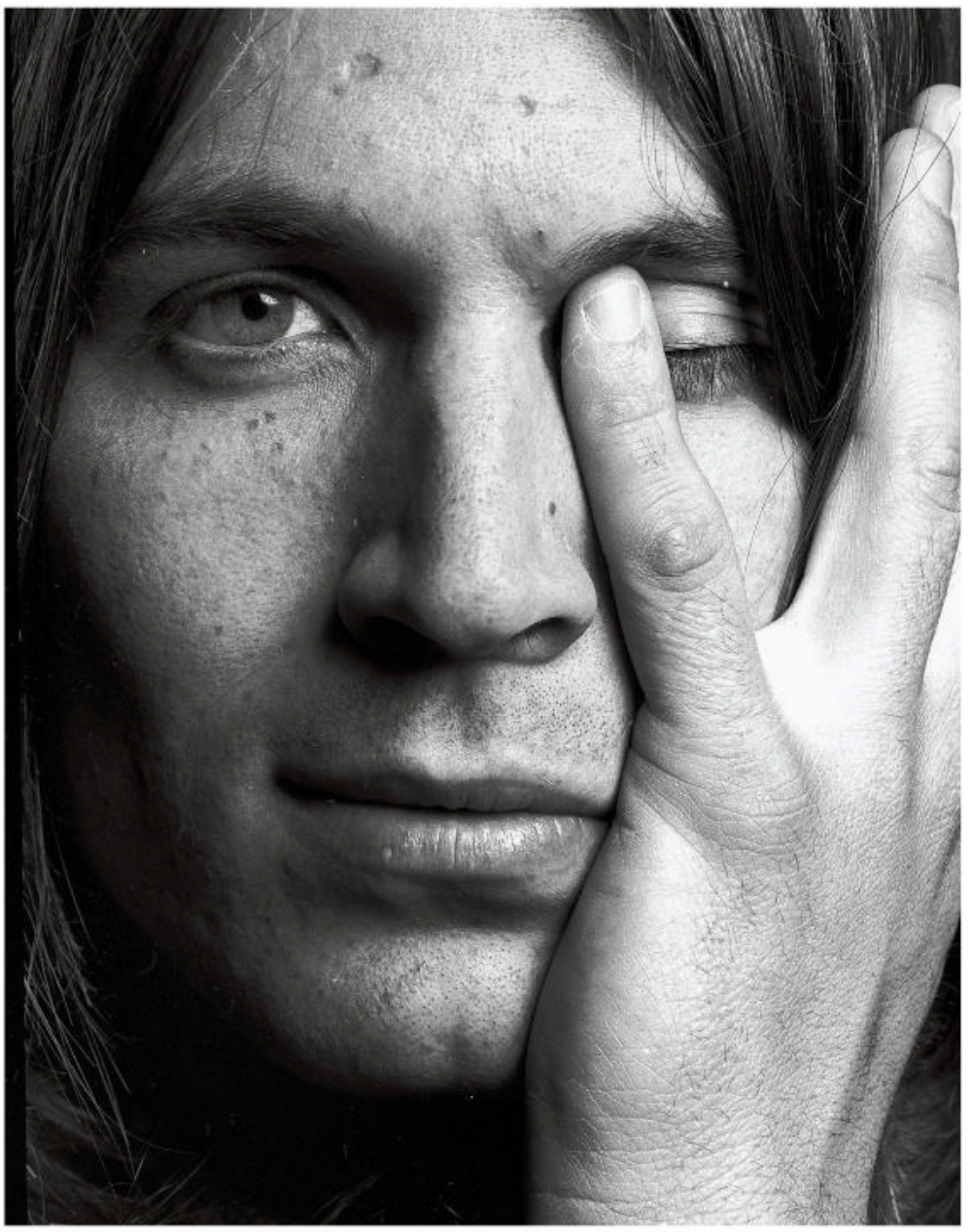
Rothenberg assembled a brilliant group of performers for the première, which Sorey conducted. The violist was the searingly expressive Kim Kashkashian, perhaps the finest living exponent of her instrument. This could also be said of Steven Schick, who played percussion. The Houston Chamber Choir maintained eerie precision, as did Rothenberg herself, at the piano and the celesta. The vocal soloist was the masterly bass-baritone Davóne Tines, who quietly hummed along to Kashkashian's "Motherless Child." (The spiritual also figures in "The Black Clown," the music-theatre project that Tines helped originate in 2018.) The final phrase trailed off, disappearing into an ambiguous chord. The audience was left staring into Rothko's blackness, which, after this supremely haunting performance, no longer looked the same. ♦

POP MUSIC

YOUNG ONCE

The youthful melancholy of the Lemonheads.

BY AMANDA PETRUSICH



Evan Dando's songs feel saturated with a kind of directionless longing.

DAVID TONGE / GETTY IMAGES

In June, 1992, the Lemonheads released "It's a Shame About Ray," the band's fifth record, and its first to garner international renown. The album featured the singer and guitarist Evan Dando, the bassist Juliana Hatfield, and the drummer David Ryan. Five months earlier, Nirvana's "Nevermind" had landed at No. 1 on the *Billboard* 200, and so-called "alternative rock," as it was then known, was reaching a commercial zenith. I first learned about the Lemonheads through that most potent nineties triad: the group had been featured in *Sassy* magazine's "Cute Band Alert," it had a video in heavy rotation on "120 Minutes," MTV's late-night dumping ground for stuff too weird or grating for prime time, and Dando had scored a cameo in the film "Reality Bites," in which he coolly ended a conversation by saying, "I'm Audi 5000."

The Lemonheads were getting big. Dando, the band's chief songwriter, had even appeared on "Regis and Kathie Lee" to promote the album. "This is a young, giant star," Regis Philbin announced. Dando ambled onstage, wearing a tan secondhand jacket. "This is in," Regis said, fingering the threadbare lining and nodding. "See, I'm out, I'm just totally out." At one point, Dando described his mother, who was sitting in the audience, as "cool bananas," which intrigued Regis. "It just means cool bananas," Dando explained. (Was anyone ever so young?)

This month, "It's a Shame About Ray" is being reissued with bonus material, including B-sides, demos, and radio sessions, and in April the Lemonheads will be performing these songs at a handful of tour dates. In the thirty years since its release, I have come to think of "It's a Shame About Ray" as a perfect album. Certainly, there are records more sophisticated, more dangerous, or more expert, yet there are few so exquisitely self-contained. Dando's songs are saturated with a kind of directionless longing—a troubling, inescapable sense that there's more out there for him. Often, his protagonists are walking around waiting for something interesting to happen. For most writers, it's extraordinarily difficult to catch and hold feelings of pathos, idleness, hunger, a kind of hazy but manageable melancholy. Dando's songs are short (many are under or around two minutes), with choruses and hooks so easygoing, so suffused with nonchalance, that it feels as though they must have arrived fully formed and without struggle.

Dando, who is now in his mid-fifties, is hunky in a dopey-yet-strapping, I-rolled-off-the-couch-like-this way; in the nineties, he became an alt-rock pinup, appearing on the April, 1993, cover of *Spin* shirtless and golden-skinned, and with his tongue in the model Adrienne Shelly's mouth. In a 1994 profile of Chloë Sevigny for this magazine, Jay McInerney described the Lemonheads as "considered either very cool or really bogus" and referred to the creation of an anti-Dando fanzine called *Die Evan Dando, Die*, thus named "presumably because he is too cute and his songs are too catchy." (Sevigny, who is featured in the video for "Big Gay Heart," a track from the album "Come On Feel the Lemonheads," is one of several celebrities to appear in the band's videos: a forlorn Johnny Depp stuffs his belongings into a grocery bag and takes off in the video for "It's a Shame About Ray"; Angelina Jolie makes out with Dando as his defeated girlfriend looks on in "It's About Time.")

Dando was brought up in Back Bay, a historic and moneyed neighborhood in Boston. His mother was a model, and his father worked as a real-estate attorney. As a teen-ager, Dando attended the

private Commonwealth School, where, in 1985, he started a band called the Whelps, which later evolved into the Lemonheads. The inaugural lineup included the bassist Jesse Peretz (who went on to direct films and television shows) and the singer and guitarist Ben Deily. The trio's first record, "Hate Your Friends," was released on the Boston-based independent label Taang! Records (an acronym for "Teen agers are no good"), which specialized in local punk and hardcore. "Hate Your Friends" may sound jarring and cacophonous to anyone chiefly familiar with the band's sweeter, late-career output, but nonetheless it's tuneful and energetic. The Lemonheads signed with Atlantic Records and released "Lovey" in 1990. Since then, the band has had more than forty members. Dando once described it as "kind of like a collective."

"It's a Shame About Ray" eventually went gold, yet for a while it seemed as though Dando himself might not survive the decade. In 1995, the band was scheduled to play at the Glastonbury Festival, in England; Dando arrived two hours late and was booed off the stage. (He later told the *Guardian* that he had been in bed with two women and a bag of heroin.) He admitted that he had smoked crack and damaged his vocal cords during the sessions for "Come On Feel the Lemonheads," telling *Q* magazine, "I went to the throat doctor and I told him I'd been smoking crack and he said, 'Don't do that, man. That's dangerous.'" After that, rumors that he was dead would periodically circulate, but Dando ended up outlasting many of his contemporaries.

The Lemonheads have not released new material since "The Lemonheads," in 2006. (That lineup included the bassist Karl Alvarez and the drummer Bill Stevenson, both members of the punk-rock band the Descendents, with contributions from Garth Hudson, the organist for the Band, and the singer and guitarist J. Mascis, of Dinosaur Jr.) In 2009, the Lemonheads released a covers record called "Varshons." On it, Dando takes on Townes Van Zandt's "Waiting Around to Die." Unlike Van Zandt, who sounds heartsick, frayed, and desperate, Dando gives a performance that is practically jaunty. That album was followed, nearly a decade later, by "Varshons II." In the years since, Dando has been promising to release new songs, but they have yet to materialize.

"It's a Shame About Ray" was recorded at Cherokee Studios, in Los Angeles, and produced, at Atlantic's suggestion, by the Robb Brothers. In the nineteen-sixties, the Robbs (Dee, Bruce, Joe, and Craig) had briefly served as the backing band on "Where the Action Is," a variety show hosted by Dick Clark, but by the early seventies Bruce, Dee, and Joe had become more focussed on production. They opened Cherokee in 1972, and during the following decade worked on a series of remarkable records, including Steely Dan's "Pretzel Logic," David Bowie's "Station to Station," and Michael Jackson's "Off the Wall."

The Robbs recruited some unexpected players for the "Ray" sessions, including Jeff (Skunk) Baxter, a guitarist turned defense consultant who had been a founding member of Steely Dan and a guitarist with the Doobie Brothers. It is almost impossible to imagine a band less germane to the dishevelled alt-rock vibe than Steely Dan, yet Baxter's pedal-steel parts on "Hannah and Gabi"—a pretty, fragile song about being a terrible partner ("I'm out wandering around / You're but one thing I've found")—are warm and rubbery, giving the song a lilt that recalls Gram Parsons. The acoustic demo included on the reissued record, which features only Dando on vocals and acoustic guitar, is listless by comparison.

"It's a Shame About Ray" is the only album by the Lemonheads to feature Hatfield, who is a dynamic and beguiling artist on her own; her soft, almost childlike vocals on "My Drug Buddy," a loping, breezy ode to the person you call when you want to get high but don't want to be alone, give a potentially devastating track an unexpected airiness. In fact, much of "It's a Shame About Ray" should be devastating—these are songs about being young and lost, "like a ship without a rudder's like a ship without a rudder's like a ship without a rudder," as Dando puts it—but isn't. Since that record's release, Dando has remained spacey and carefree despite the nihilism that plagued his Generation X cohort. He never wanted to be a pop star. At times, it has seemed as though he barely wanted to be a professional musician. The reissue of "It's a Shame About Ray" closes with an echoing, acoustic demo of "Confetti," a song that addresses being the less interested party in a romantic entanglement. It's a minute and fifteen seconds long. Dando doesn't need much time to say his piece: "He kinda shoulda sorta woulda loved her if he could've / He'd rather be alone than pretend." ♦

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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 Charlie Hankin, must be received by Sunday, March 13th. The finalists in the February 28th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 28th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS

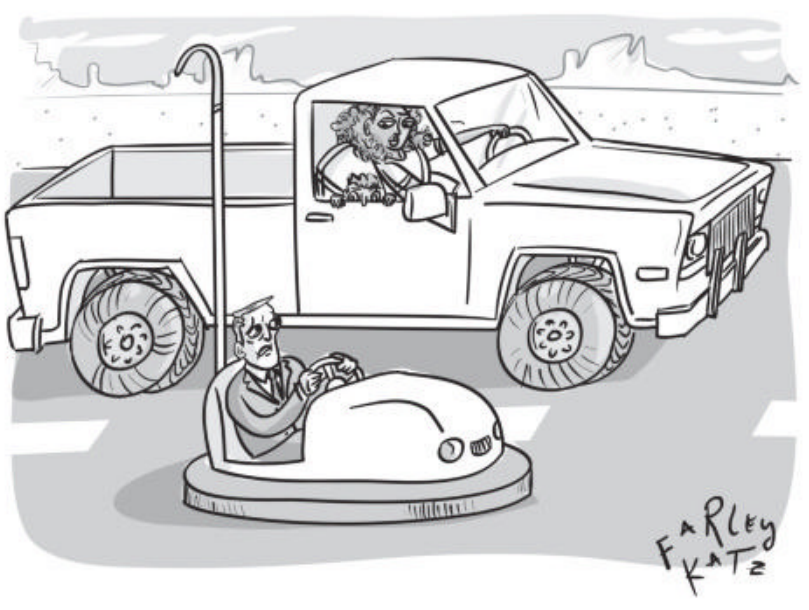


“So far, it looks like no one is coming to the recital.”
Don Borchert, Mission Viejo, Calif.

“Most fans sympathize with our decision to eat the cellist.”
Mark Strout, Norwell, Mass.

“O.K., we have a catchy theme song. Now let's work on food and shelter.”
Tyler Stradling, Mesa, Ariz.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“The dealer said it scored high in crash tests.”
Benjamin Bogard, New York City

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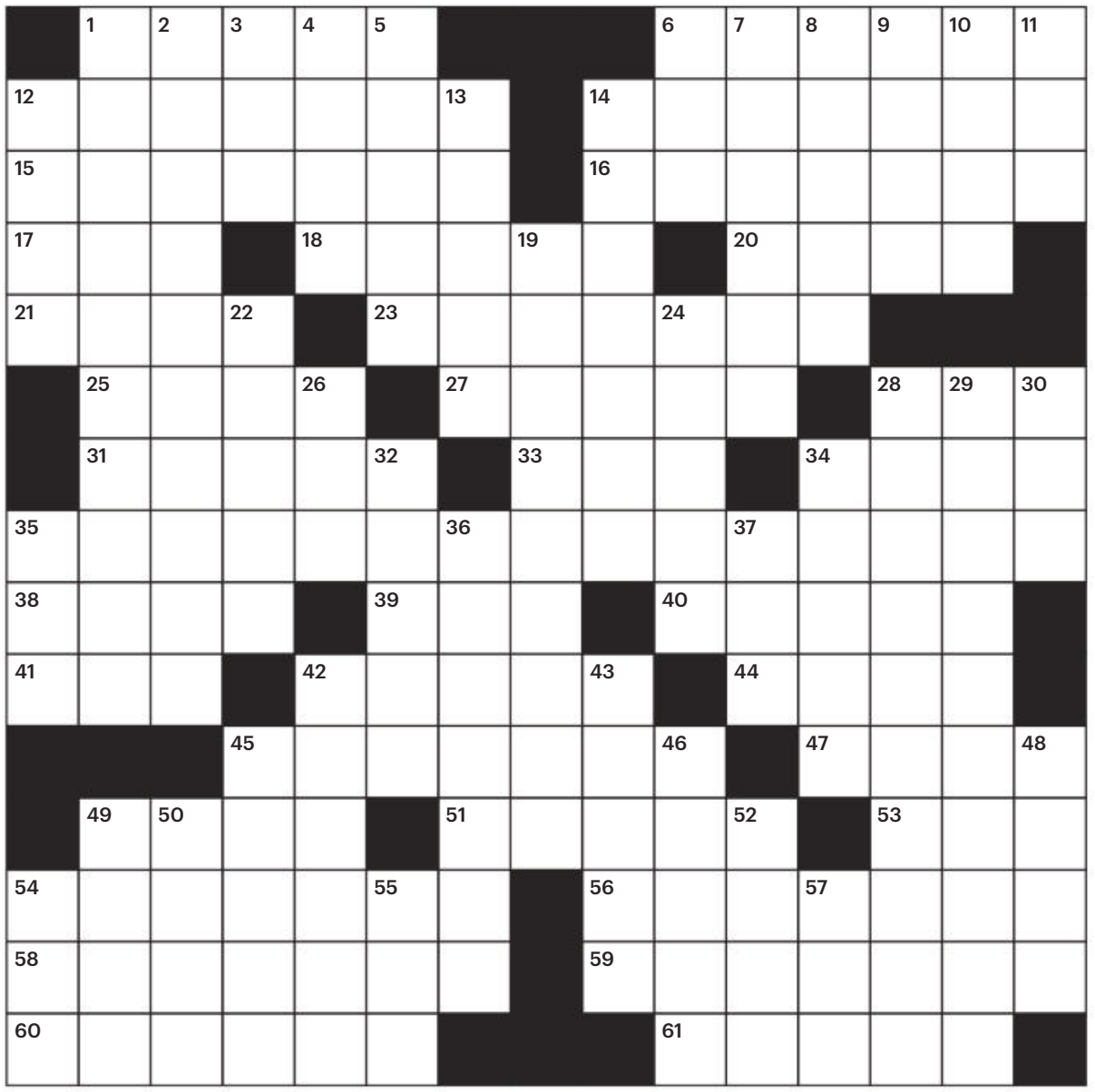


PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A lightly challenging puzzle.

BY CAITLIN REID



ACROSS

1 What an artisan practices
6 Civil-rights champion Evers
12 "Heads up!"
14 Native name of Easter Island
15 Home of the Magic
16 Catsuit, e.g.
17 Single
18 Hauled around
20 Anti-cruelty org. since 1980
21 Elusive feline whose name comes from Quechua
23 Took back
25 Oft-discarded part of an apple
27 Noggin
28 Abbr. on a transcript
31 The "O" of the N.F.L.'s O.B.J.
33 "Consider This" network
34 Impersonal assistant?
35 "We were just talking about you!"
38 Essential ___
39 Test for a Ph.D. seeker
40 Helped
41 "Fuzzy Wuzzy ___ a bear . . ."
42 Like some concerns
44 Up for anything
45 Twist out of shape
47 Title character sought in a 2003 Pixar film
49 Tater
51 Foot the bill
53 Need after a blowout, maybe
54 Order in the court?
56 Weaver transformed into a spider by Athena
58 "And how!"
59 Headwear for Mr. Peanut and Scrooge McDuck
60 Metaphor for wild fluctuations
61 A real mouthful?

DOWN

1 Traditional Thanksgiving centerpiece
2 People who set an example
3 Alecia Moore, ___ Pink
4 Comic Sans or Papyrus
5 Architectural style dating back to fifteenth-century Britain
6 "The Old ___ and the Sea"
7 Device for treating anaphylaxis
8 Passé
9 Tiny bug
10 Distinctive vibe
11 Free (of)
12 Bit of knitting
13 Sacred tribal emblem
14 Reindeer with a nose for navigation?
19 Consistency of character
22 Gray ___
24 Divided Asian peninsula
26 Bugling beast
28 "Yoink!"
29 June celebration of the L.G.B.T.Q. community
30 Trouble
32 Enter one's account credentials
34 Midsize car
35 Piglet's mom
36 Waste, with "away"
37 Hit the dirt?
42 Big name in chocolate
43 "Fantastic!"
45 Preserves in a brine, perhaps
46 ___ deck
48 Carries debt
49 Tart fruit used to flavor some gins
50 Ballerina's knee bend
52 ___ deck
54 They might pop up on a Web site
55 Attach a patch, say
57 Contemporary of Fidel

Solution to the previous puzzle:

A	U	D	I	O	■	B	B	Q	S	■	■	C	T	S
S	H	O	C	K	V	A	L	U	E	■	P	O	O	P
F	U	T	U	R	I	S	T	I	C	■	E	M	M	E
O	R	E	■	A	D	E	■	D	O	O	R	M	A	N
R	A	D	S	■	E	D	E	N	■	N	U	I	T	S
■	■	■	T	E	O	■	R	U	S	T	■	T	O	E
■	■	D	U	N	G	E	O	N	M	A	S	T	E	R
■	S	U	N	D	A	Y	S	C	A	R	I	E	S	■
T	H	E	T	I	M	E	I	S	R	I	P	E	■	■
E	E	C	■	V	E	L	O	■	T	O	O	■	■	■
A	L	O	N	E	■	I	N	C	H	■	N	I	B	S
C	L	U	E	S	I	N	■	L	O	C	■	C	L	E
H	O	R	S	■	G	E	T	A	M	O	V	E	O	N
M	U	S	T	■	E	R	A	S	E	R	H	E	A	D
E	T	E	■	■	R	S	V	P	■	A	S	S	T	S

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