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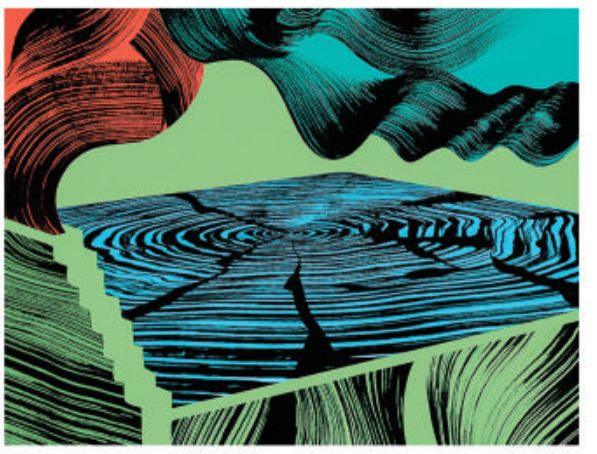
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DAILY COMMENT
Peter Slevin writes about regional efforts to prepare for escalating restrictions on abortion rights.



ELEMENTS
Rivka Galchen on what timber from old buildings can reveal about climate change.

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LEFT: SAUL LOEB / AFP / GETTY; RIGHT: TYLER KEETON ROBBINS

THE MAIL

ADDRESSING CHILD SUICIDE

As a mental-health professional, I found Andrew Solomon's piece heartbreakingly accurate in its portrayal of the impact on families when a child dies by suicide ("The Unthinkable," April 11th). I hope that readers will not conclude, based on the stark illustration of the hopelessness and frustration that the featured families experienced, that nothing can be done to alter a child's trajectory. Professional mental-health-care providers have succeeded in guiding children away from suicide and self-harm through a continuum of services—from hospital-based crisis intervention to school-based and community outpatient programs to innovations like my organization's TeenCentral.com therapeutic-support Web site. In the past, such efforts had to combat the stigma surrounding mental-health issues, but, ironically, the clear emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on kids has helped to break down that stigma among American families. It's true that not every intervention results in an intended outcome, and that our society needs to do more to help providers address long-standing funding and workforce issues; but it's important to remember that effective forms of help are available to many children.
Michael W. Slack
President and C.E.O., KidsPeace
Schnecksville, Pa.

Thank you so much for publishing Solomon's remarkable, necessary article on child suicide—an often overlooked and unrecognized phenomenon. Although Solomon talks about how expensive mental-health treatment can be, he elides one crucial element of those expenses: it can be very difficult to find a psychiatrist, psychologist, or hospital psychiatric group that takes insurance, including Medicare or Medicaid. Those that do frequently aren't taking new patients, because, of course, they are overloaded. There are even fewer resources specifically directed at children. If insurance companies are not forced to offer better mental-health coverage in their plans, then our society will be poorly equipped to tackle the problem of child suicide.
Michelle Bisson
The Bronx, N.Y.

Solomon notes that data on suicide among youths and adolescents are sorely lacking. Indeed, leading suicide theories and most empirical studies have largely focussed on adults, even though rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are high during late childhood and escalate dramatically in adolescence. But academics and clinicians are pursuing promising research to understand suicidal thoughts and behaviors in young people. Clinical-psychology researchers are designing and testing technology-assisted tools, in applied settings such as pediatric emergency departments, that may aid in suicide-risk assessment and prediction. Other studies collect data from young people in real time, using cell phones or wearable technology to better understand the temporal and contextual dynamics of suicidal thoughts in everyday situations. I hope that narrative pieces such as Solomon's will continue to boost awareness of youth suicide, and highlight advances in medical and psychological science that, through rigorous empirical work, provide nuance to our understanding of this complex, and tragic, clinical outcome.
Olivia Pollak
Doctoral Student in
Clinical Psychology
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MAY 11 – 17, 2022

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Guadalupe Maravilla titled his show at the Brooklyn Museum (on view through Sept. 18) "Tierra Blanca Joven," after the catastrophic volcanic eruption that displaced his Mayan ancestors in the fifth century. As a child in the nineteen-eighties, Maravilla, too, was forced from his home, fleeing the violence of the civil war in El Salvador. After surviving cancer, several years ago, the New York-based artist became a sound healer, and his sculptures incorporate ritual gongs, which can be heard at the museum in related audio pieces.

PHOTOGRAPH BY VICTOR LLORENTE

As New York City venues reopen, it's advisable to confirm in advance the requirements for in-person attendance.

MUSIC

Tori Amos

POP ROCK With the release of her landmark début, "Little Earthquakes," Tori Amos became a luminary of the nineties feminist singer-songwriter movement, and her high-wire piano rock has lost none of its potency since. A formative inspiration to younger generations of songwriters, Amos still wields high drama, angst, and vulnerability as keys to making meaning in a brutal world. She wrote her sixteenth album, this past year's "Ocean to Ocean," during the depths of a pandemic lockdown, at her home in the coastal English city of Cornwall, using the music to process the quiet chaos. Amos reflects on grief, the wisdom of nature, and—on the song "29 Years"—her own artistic journey toward "elusive truth." Through the decades of mystery, Amos's listeners keep finding her.—*Jenn Pelly (Kings Theatre; May 11.)*

Brad Barr

INSTRUMENTAL The guitarist Brad Barr has performed genteel folk-rock songs and jazz-infused jams in his bands the Barr Brothers and the Slip, respectively. As a soloist, he labors in yet another gear, presenting instrumental meditations that gaze pointedly inward. The All for One Theatre founder Michael Wolk beckoned Barr to record a series of instrumentals for his company to employ as incidental music. Those compositions form the body of Barr's recent album, "The Winter Mission," which milks the guitar for its atmospheric powers. Such works are inherently open to interpretation. To Barr, the album rotates on his talisman number, two hundred and sixteen; to his listeners it might conjure quiet passion, mystery, or cavernous introspection.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Triad Theatre; May 13.)*

Jennifer Cardini

ELECTRONIC This d.j. of long standing in Paris's house and techno scenes is the kind of spinner who routinely makes not just a dancer but a listener take notice. A Cardini set tends to feel linear without being predictable; each successive selection seems to turn a different corner. On Cardini's recent edition of BBC Radio 1's "Essential Mix," her assured pacing makes the two-hour running time fly by. Prancing Hi-NRG keyboard patterns, a flurry of acid squelches, shoulder-jacking square-wave bass lines, all check—but the pinnacle comes near the midway point, when the beats drop out entirely, leaving one's limbs hinged upon their reappearance.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Good Room; May 13.)*

"Lucia di Lammermoor"

CLASSICAL In the Metropolitan Opera's new production of "Lucia di Lammermoor," the director Simon Stone parses the forces that drive Donizetti's tragedy—financial

SUMMER PREVIEW

Al-Fresco Concerts, Out-of-Town Highlights

This summer's classical performances reflect a pandemic reset that feels more than temporary. **Lincoln Center** has collapsed all of its seasonal programs and series into a single initiative, **Summer for the City** (May 14-Aug. 14). The festival embraces diversity, with free events that include a Pride-themed Mini Kiki Ball (June 24) and a Juneteenth celebration (June 19). The **Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra,** survivors of the reorganization, plays six different programs, featuring Henri Vieuxtemps's highly embroidered Violin Concerto No. 5, with Joshua Bell (Aug. 2-3), and Mozart's Requiem (Aug. 5-6).

The **Metropolitan Opera's** season, typically finished in May, runs into June, with Brett Dean's "Hamlet" (May 13-June 9). Yannick Nézet-Séguin leads the Met orchestra in back-to-back concerts, at Carnegie Hall—Act I of Wagner's "Die Walküre" (June 15) and an all-Berlioz program (June 16). As part of their contract, the players secured a permanent chamber concert series of their own, at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall (June 9).

As the **New York Philharmonic** looks forward to the reopening of a renovated David Geffen Hall, in the fall, it accompanies the pianist Beatrice Rana to Jazz at Lincoln Center, for Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 (June 2-4). At the eighth annual **Time:Spans Festival,** leading-edge new-music groups—**Sō Percussion** (Aug. 17), **Ensemble Signal** (Aug. 19), the **International Contemporary Ensemble** (Aug. 20)—take up works written in the past decade.

For the warm-weather inclined, **Death of Classical** hosts "Hot Dogs, Hooch & Handel" (May 27), allowing audiences to wander Green-Wood Cemetery, refreshments in hand, for felicitous encounters with clusters of Baroque musicians. The orchestra **the Knights** brings a program designed around Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata, which its dedicatee famously never played, to the Naumburg Bandshell, in Central Park (June 14). At Bryant Park, **New York City Opera** stages abridged versions of "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" (May 27) and "La Traviata" (Aug. 12), and it streams them online.

Out of town, **Bard SummerScape** frames its 2022 festival around Rachmaninoff. Garrick Ohlsson performs Brahms's complete works for solo piano at **Tanglewood,** in the Berkshires (Aug. 16-25). And at **Caramoor,** in Katonah, N.Y., Michael Gordon, a cofounder of Bang on a Can, unveils "Field of Vision" (July 24), a free site-specific piece with forty percussionists entertaining the audience in and around the estate's verdant Sunken Garden.

—*Oussama Zahr*



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DIEGO MALLO



SUMMER PREVIEW

HAIM, J Balvin, Beach House

The summer's contemporary-music calendar is bustling, as spring postponements find fresh dates and as new events from anxious performers continue to spring up.

Soothing sounds waft across town. The singer-songwriter **Tomberlin** sets up at Music Hall of Williamsburg, débuting songs from her new album, "i don't know who needs to hear this . . ." (June 10). Following the mellow pandemic release "What We Drew," the house d.j., singer, and producer **Yaeji** plays her subtle dance tracks at Brooklyn Steel (June 19). At Webster Hall, delicate music emanates across the stage, with the beaming sunshine soul of **Corinne Bailey Rae** (June 24) and the ethereal dream-pop electronics of **Purity Ring** (June 25). At Kings Theatre, the Baltimore band **Beach House** runs through a lush, hypnotic catalogue (July 19-20).

The calm is disrupted by a string of rap performers pushing out in different directions. On May 18, the Atlanta group **EarthGang** lets loose the bluesy trap of its recent album, "Ghetto Gods," at Brooklyn Steel. The same day, at Terminal 5, the throwback indie label **Griselda,** from upstate New York, unites key figures from its roster—Westside Gunn, Conway the Machine, and Benny the Butcher. On May 20, the noise group **Injury Reserve** and the evasive duo **Armand Hammer** continue a co-headlining tour, at Warsaw. The Compton rapper **Buddy** shares SoCal bounce beats with a crowd at Bowery Ballroom, on June 23. And at Webster Hall, on June 27, **Lil Tracy,** the scion of musicians, melds melodic rap and emo.

Summer weather brings a slew of worthwhile open-air shows. As part of its Summer Concert Series lineup, the Rooftop at Pier 17 presents the rapper **Pusha T** (June 16), the Kathleen Hanna-led punk-rock band **Bikini Kill** (July 8), and the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer **Elvis Costello** (Aug. 11). The sci-fi bandleader **George Clinton** guides an ensemble of performers from his famed funk collective, Parliament-Funkadelic, across Central Park's SummerStage, on June 15. The BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival 2022 invites an eclectic cast of characters to the Prospect Park Bandshell, opening with the modern sax colossus **Kamasi Washington** (June 8) and continuing with performances from the Afrobeats pioneer **Davido** (June 17), the soul-fusion band **Khruangbin** (Aug. 4), and the neo-soul master **Erykah Badu** (Aug. 5).

Stadiums welcome a wide-ranging class of off-center stars. **J Balvin,** the Prince of Reggaetón, descends upon Barclays Center, with collaborations from his album "Jose," on May 22. Forest Hills Stadium hosts indie-folk artists, both fresh and familiar—the Justin Vernon-fronted experimental project **Bon Iver** (June 3), the soft-spoken millennial bard **Phoebe Bridgers** (June 16), and the chamber-pop troupe **Fleet Foxes** (Aug. 13). And, at Madison Square Garden, the summer starts and ends with trailblazing bands—**HAIM,** a sister trio that has evolved continuously, up to and through the 2020 album "Women in Music Pt. III" (May 17), and **Rage Against the Machine,** iconic rap-rock revolutionaries who take over the hallowed venue for a week (Aug. 8-9, Aug. 11-12, and Aug. 14).

—Sheldon Pearce

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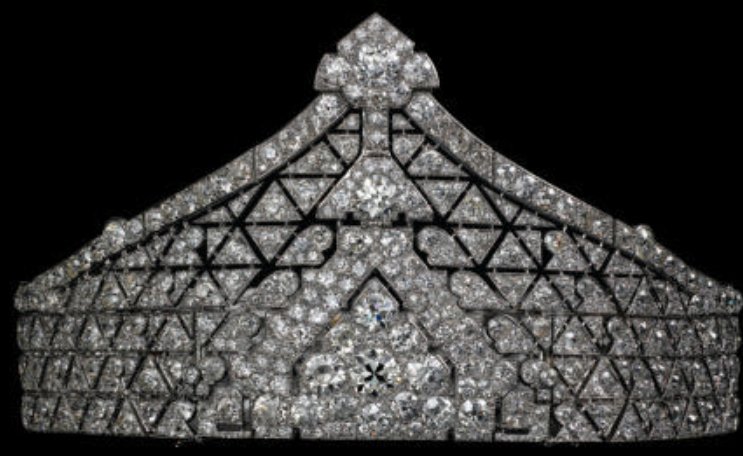
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desperation, familial abuse, clan conflict—to create a modern-day staging with uncomfortably acute resonances. Stone's onstage film crew and overly enthusiastic use of the Met's revolving platform immerse viewers in a forgotten, economically distressed town in the Rust Belt, where Nadine Sierra's good-hearted Lucia is tricked by her sleazebag brother (Artur Ruciński's elegantly sung Enrico) into thinking that her beloved (Javier Camerana's tender Edgardo) has abandoned her. When Lucia understands, too late, what's happened, she sings the most famous mad scene in all of opera—a twenty-minute virtuosic display often handled by sparkly voices. Sierra's rich soprano sounds captivating in this music, imbuing it with a warmth that makes Lucia's pain all too real. Riccardo Frizza conducts, with a light touch that sometimes goes slack.—*Oussama Zahr (Metropolitan Opera House; May 14 and May 21 at 1 and May 17 at 7.)*

PinkPantheress

DANCE PinkPantheress's existence as a recording artist manifested itself during the pandemic. The pop phenomenon's music has thrived in the short form, on TikTok, pairing U.K. underground dance sounds, such as drum 'n' bass and garage, with the distilled lucidity of pop-punk. The effect, on her début, "to hell with it," from 2021, is a beguiling display of dreams and nightmares, delivered with such hyperreality and restraint as to be uncanny. It was only sixteen months ago, during her first year of university, that she began to share these diaristic but spare songs, the virality of which led to a major-label record deal, and a U.S. tour—including this headlining stop at a banquet hall that has also served as a dim-sum restaurant, under the Manhattan Bridge.—*J.P. (88 Palace; May 13.)*

Samara Joy and Pasquale Grasso Trio

JAZZ Samara Joy, the winner of the 2019 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, has all the goods to hold a room spellbound, but so does Pasquale Grasso, a master guitarist. Nonetheless, Grasso does a superb job of selflessly supporting the technically gifted and swinging singer, without letting you forget what a monster player he is. Joy and the trio leader Grasso, neo-traditionalists who met at Purchase College, approach standards, and also instrumental pieces with recast lyrics—including an adaptation of Fats Navarro's luminous 1947 "Nostalgia"—with the glee of wide-eyed enthusiasts uncovering inspiration in a music older than the two of them put together.—*Steve Futterman (Bar Bayeux; May 11.)*

THE THEATRE

Funny Girl

Watch Beanie Feldstein in the recent Ryan Murphy historical soap "Impeachment: American Crime Story," where she plays a naïve, troubled, and eventually embattled Monica Lewinsky, and you'll see a lot of what makes her an appealing actor. She's vulnerable, with big quivering eyes, and she knows how to use the fundamental freshness and innocence of her affect to create a queasy sense of dramatic irony for viewers. She's a good performer with pathos to spare. That's why it's strange to see her talents so misjudged and misapplied in the new Broadway production of the 1964 musical "Funny Girl," directed by Michael Mayer, with a revised book by Harvey Fierstein. Feldstein's voice is sweet in the dead center of her range, but it otherwise just can't justify the casting. And the big, broad humor in this uneven show is fatally devoid of the lower-key, more soulful and emotionally precise fare that might one day yield Feldstein a hit.—*Vinson Cunningham (August Wilson; open run.)*

How I Learned to Drive

Paula Vogel's masterwork of scattered narrative and dangerously controlled tone is the kind of horror story that never sets its humanism aside. It tells the fraught, almost physically painful story of a girl—soon a woman—named Li'l Bit (Mary-Louise Parker), who is sexually abused throughout her adolescence by her uncle by marriage, Peck (David Morse). The unthinkable and sometimes brutal trick of Vogel's play, which skips through time like an artfully thrown stone, is to make such bleak material intermittently funny and consistently wise. The trick of this new production, directed by Mark Brokaw for Manhattan Theatre Club, is the casting of Parker and Morse, two cerebral performers who, palpably, think as they go. They reprise roles that they originated, in the play's 1997 Off Broadway première, and their canniness now, in middle age—together with Vogel's insouciant attitude toward linear time—gives the harrowing plot the texture of softly remembered regret.—*V.C. (Samuel J. Friedman; through May 29.)*

The Minutes

Tracy Letts's play, directed by Anna D. Shapiro, is a loopy bureaucratic comedy that's also a kind of textual mystery. Mr. Peel (Noah Reid), a young councilman in a typical small American town, returns to work after some time off—his mother has recently died—and comes back to odd changes. One of his colleagues is gone, and nobody will give him a reason—or share, without a struggle, the minutes of the meeting he's missed. What ensues is a sharp satire of democracy on the smallest stage, and a much less sharp interrogation of American history and myth. An abrupt midstream change in genre comes across as forced and needlessly didactic, perhaps because, given the timing of this production—originally slated for 2020, it was postponed due to the pandemic—it feels feebly matchy-matchy with the culture wars encircling history and public schools.—*V.C. (Studio 54; through July 24.)*

Mr. Saturday Night

Sometimes entertainment is a mercifully simple affair. Case in point: put Billy Crystal on a stage, give him some jokes, and let him interact with the crowd, and it'll probably add up to a good time. The comedian and longtime Oscar host hits his marks again in "Mr. Saturday Night," a musical based on a 1992 movie of the same name, with a book by Lowell Ganz, Babaloo Mandel, and Crystal himself, music by Jason Robert Brown, and lyrics by Amanda Green. The story is fairly basic: when a faded star comedian is declared dead on a televised "In Memoriam" roll call, he takes the fluky fifteen minutes of fresh fame and tries to turn it into a comeback. The songs are forgettable, and forgettably sung. But the structure of the musical is nicely roomy, giving Crystal ample time to perform standup, sell jokes, and serve up his shtick. It works!—*V.C. (Nederlander; open run.)*

DANCE

New York City Ballet

The Stravinsky Festival continues for a second week. The third program in the series (on May 11 and on the evening of May 14) offers a triptych of well-known Balanchine ballets on ancient Greek themes, with "Apollo," "Orpheus," and "Agon." (Aaron Sanz and Joseph Gordon début as Orpheus.) Program IV (on May 12-13 and at the May 14 matinée) is more varied, and includes a seldom seen work, "Divertimento from 'Le Baiser de la Fée.' " The original "Baiser de la Fée," created in 1928, was a story ballet inspired by a haunting Hans Christian Andersen tale. Balanchine choreographed other versions into the seventies, eliminating the story but featuring a mysterious and difficult solo for the lead male dancer, who appears to struggle against an invisible force. It is one of the most striking male solos in the Balanchine repertory. "Divertimento" shares a bill with Jerome Robbins's highly dramatic "The Cage" and the delicate pas de deux "Duo Concertant."—*Marina Harss (David H. Koch Theatre; through May 29.)*

"The Missing Element"

A Works & Process production, with creative direction by the beatbox virtuoso Chris Celiz and the b-boy Anthony Vito Rodriguez, "The Missing Element" combines the collective mouthing of the Beatbox House with a crew of experts in krump, flex, and breaking, including Brian (HollowDreamz) Henry and King Havoc. The show, which was created during the pandemic in bubble residencies and has been presented in several forms, live and online, now has its full world première.—*Brian Seibert (Guggenheim; May 15-16.)*

"Nearly Stationary"

The visual artist Barbara Kilpatrick has a long history with dance, designing exquisitely eccentric costumes and sets for the choreographer Vicky Shick, among others. "Nearly Stationary," at Hudson Hall, in Hudson, N.Y., is an installation of Kilpatrick's photographs, sculptures, and costumes. Silas Riener and Rashaun Mitchell, who are exquisite and eccentric themselves, dance a new work in response to the exhibit



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SUMMER PREVIEW

Shakespeare, "The Kite Runner," Meta "Seagull"

At forty-four, the writer and performer Danai Gurira has had an unusually broad career. In 2005, she and Nikkole Salter débuted their two-woman play, "In the Continuum," about the toll of the AIDS crisis on Black women in Africa and the U.S., and in 2016 Lupita Nyong'o starred in a Broadway production of Gurira's play "Eclipsed," set during the Second Liberian Civil War. Meanwhile, Gurira broke out as an actress in AMC's zombie-apocalypse series "The Walking Dead" and joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe, in "Black Panther," as the Wakandan warrior Okoye. This summer, she adds to her unique résumé a turn as one of Shakespeare's most malevolent men. At the Public Theatre's free Shakespeare in the Park, Gurira stars in **"Richard III"** (starting previews on June 17, at the Delacorte), directed by Robert O'Hara.

Shakespeare in the Park's sixtieth-anniversary season continues with the return of Shaina Taub and Laurie Woolery's boisterous musical adaptation of **"As You Like It"** (Aug. 10), part of the community-embracing Public Works initiative. At the Park Avenue Armory, two other classics are revamped. Robert Icke's modern adaptations of Shakespeare's **"Hamlet"** (June 1) and Aeschylus' **Oresteia** (June 9) are performed in repertory by a British ensemble led by Alex Lawther (as Hamlet) and Lia Williams (as Klytemnestra). On Broadway, Giles Croft directs **"The Kite Runner"** (Hayes, July 6), Matthew Spangler's adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's best-selling novel, which follows the lives of two childhood friends across decades of upheaval in Afghanistan.



Off Broadway attractions include **"Between the Lines"** (Tony Kiser Theatre, June 14), a new musical by Elyssa Samsel, Kate Anderson, and Timothy Allen McDonald, based on the novel by Jodi Picoult and her daughter, Samantha van Leer, about a girl who finds refuge from reality in her favorite book. Will Arbery, who wrote the acclaimed "Heroes of the Fourth Turning," returns with **"Corsicana"** (Playwrights Horizons, June 2), directed by Sam Gold, in which a woman with Down syndrome and her half brother forge a connection with a local artist after their mother's death.

Anyone who saw all six hours of "Gatz," Elevator Repair Service's mesmerizing take on "The Great Gatsby," knows that a new E.R.S. spin on a classic text is well worth noting. The troupe premières **"Seagull"** (N.Y.U.'s Skirball Center, July 7), a meta-theatrical adaptation of Chekhov's "The Seagull," directed by John Collins. Another eye-catching experimental work requires a trip upstate—the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's production of **"Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play"** (in Garrison, N.Y., starting July 8). First put on in 2012, this antic, epic comedy, written by Anne Washburn and the late composer Michael Friedman, imagines a post-apocalyptic world in which an episode of "The Simpsons" sparks an unlikely new oral tradition; Davis McCallum directs. At the Williamstown Theatre Festival, Daniel Fish—the director behind the recent reinvention of "Oklahoma!"—sets his sights on another mid-century musical, Frank Loesser's "The Most Happy Fella." **"Most Happy in Concert"** (starting July 13, on the Main Stage) features a female-identifying and nonbinary cast.

—Michael Schulman

amid some of its costumes, as the Four Parts Quartet plays John Cage's "String Quartet in Four Parts."—*B.S. (Hudson Hall; May 14-June 5.)*

Bijayini Satpathy

Satpathy, known for her explorations of the classical Indian dance form Odissi, and also for her vivid, fluid dancing, is a resident artist at the Metropolitan Museum this year. As part of that residency, she has been considering her relationships to the art of different eras and places. A new series of solos takes its inspiration from works in various corners of the museum's collections; each solo, performed at 2 and again at 3, lasts about thirty minutes. (Attendance is included with a museum ticket.) On May 14, Satpathy dances in the Islamic wing. On May 15, her solo addresses the museum's modern and contemporary collections. And on May 21 her dance takes place in the Astor Court, a re-creation of a Ming-dynasty-era garden.—*M.H. (Metropolitan Museum of Art; May 14-21.)*

Ogemdi Ude

On the heels of presenting three solos at Abrons Arts Center in March, this Nigerian American choreographer joins forces with two other dancers. Ude's new piece, "I know exactly what you mean," part of Danspace Project's Platform 2022: The Dream of the Audience (Part II), extends her investigation into the processing of grief. This time, she plays with storytelling and lies. The dancers make funny faces and groove together to the Atlanta trap music that they love.—*B.S. (Danspace Project; May 12-14.)*

ART

Terry Adkins

The sculpture "Matinee," from 2007-13, is an affecting anchor in a succinct, decades-spanning show of works by this influential artist and musician, who died in 2014, at the age of sixty. A tribute to Bessie Smith, the piece doubles as a performance prop—many of Adkins's hybrid constructions were worn, played, or otherwise used in collaborative events that he called "recitals." A big drum, its head printed with an enlarged image of Smith's eye, rests at the base of a clothing rack poignantly outfitted with empty wooden hangers, each one etched with a song title associated with the blues singer. Found objects and materials with an evocative, worn character and mysterious provenances—parachute silk, microphone stands, milk crates, and a taxidermied peacock feature here—were key to Adkins's deep and imaginative engagement with Black history. The implication of usefulness—be it ritual, theatrical, or more quotidian—in these objects lends them an anarchic spark, which balances their innate melancholy.—*Johanna Fateman (Paula Cooper; through May 28.)*

"Faith Ringgold: American People"

Ringgold, now ninety-one years old, is sorely overdue for canonical status after



SUMMER PREVIEW

New Ballets, Paul Taylor, Tap Artistry

American Ballet Theatre finally gets its New York première of the ballet "Of Love and Rage," by the company's choreographer-in-residence, Alexei Ratmansky. The work, which débuted in California days before the lockdown, is a large-scale, evening-length spectacle, inspired by a first-century adventure-romance from the Greek author Chariton of Aphrodisias. It opens during A.B.T.'s summer season, at the Metropolitan Opera House (June 13-July 16), which also features "Don Quixote" (with a promising début by the young dynamo Catherine Hurlin), "Swan Lake" (of course), and a new work by the California-based Alonzo King.

At the Joyce, the **Paul Taylor Dance Company** performs three intriguing programs (June 14-19) that combine reconstructions of early Taylor experiments not seen in years—among them "Events II," from 1957, and "Fibers," from 1961—with new pieces by contemporary dancemakers. Later, the theatre hosts **Dormeshia** (July 26-31), a tap artist of enormous warmth and finesse. The Joyce has also orchestrated the return of the highly regarded **Pacific Northwest Ballet** (at the David H. Koch, June 22-26), its first visit in five years. The run includes works by Ulysses Dove, Crystal Pite, and Twyla Tharp.

For **Summer for the City** (May 14-Aug. 14), Lincoln Center transforms into an outdoor playground devoted to performance, relaxation, and audience participation. The festival introduces a giant dance floor, called the Oasis, on Josie Robertson Plaza, which will host classes and social dancing on warm summer nights. The **BAAND Together Dance Festival** (Aug. 9-13) returns, with mixed bills of major New York companies. At the Rose Theatre, Aug. 11-13, **A.I.M by Kyle Abraham** performs a danced version of Mozart's Requiem, through the lens of electronic music.

For those itching to get out into nature, **Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival,** in Becket, Mass., offers shows both indoors, at its newly renovated Ted Shawn Theatre, and out, on a stage with a sweeping view of the Berkshires. Along with appearances by the Brazilian-inflected tap troupe **Music from the Sole** (July 20-24) and **Miami City Ballet** (Aug. 24-28), there is a program designed by the New York City Ballet dancer **Taylor Stanley** (July 27-31). Stanley's "Dichotomous Being" reveals his remarkable shape-shifting qualities through solos created by the former Batsheva dancer Shamel Pitts and by the ballet maverick William Forsythe; also included is a quartet from Andrea Miller's recent piece "sky to hold."

—*Marina Harss*



SUMMER PREVIEW

Making Peace, Virgil Abloh, Barbara Kruger

The Chilean-born artist Cecilia Vicuña, a self-described "poet of precarity," creates daring, beautiful works—paintings, textiles, books, performances, films—that interweave language, spirituality, progressive politics, and ancient Andean culture. Vicuña has lived in New York City since 1980, and now the Guggenheim presents the artist's first museum retrospective, **"Cecilia Vicuña: Spin Spin Triangulene,"** in her adopted home. (Opens May 27.)

As the war in Ukraine rages on, it's hard to imagine a more timely summer show than **"Designing Peace,"** at the Cooper Hewitt. Twenty-five countries are represented by forty pacifist propositions—models, maps, objects, mobile-phone apps, videos, full-scale installations—including rugs woven from discarded bullet casings and plans for a memorial garden at the forthcoming International African American Museum, in Charleston, S.C. (Opens June 10.)

The quicksilver collagist Ray Johnson (1927-95), best known for disseminating his art through the U.S. mail, was once dubbed "New York's most famous unknown artist." The unknown aspect of Johnson's art was recently magnified by a major discovery—a cache of photographs that he took in his final years, using disposable cameras. The first show on this surprising new chapter, **"Please Send to Real Life: Ray Johnson Photographs,"** is on view at the Morgan Library & Museum. (Opens June 17.)

In 2021, the Met installed a bronze plaque on its façade, acknowledging that the museum is situated on Lenape land and honoring "all Indigenous communities—past, present, and future." A similar spirit informs its wide-ranging exhibition **"Water Memories,"** which places historic, modern, and contemporary works by Native American artists—including Cannupa Hanska Luger, Cara Romero, and Fritz Scholder—in conversation with those of their Euro-American counterparts. (Opens June 23.)

The vibrant, smart, and scathingly funny paintings of Robert Colescott (1925-2009)—the first Black artist to represent the U.S. at the Venice Biennale, in 1997—riff on famous works by Goya, Manet, and van Gogh, among others, to skewer racial stereotypes and academic pretensions. The New Museum, which organized a retrospective of the painter's work in 1989, revisits his œuvre in **"Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott."** (Opens June 30.)

"Streetwear in my mind is linked to Duchamp," Virgil Abloh told Doreen St. Felix, whose Profile of the wildly influential artist and designer was published in these pages before his life was cut tragically short, by cancer, in 2021. **"Virgil Abloh: Figures of Speech,"** at the Brooklyn Museum, considers his legacy and includes never-before-seen objects from his archive. (Opens July 1.)

Before there were viral memes there was Barbara Kruger, whose aphoristic text-and-image works ("I Shop Therefore I Am"; "Your Body Is a Battleground") have been predicting and reflecting American culture for the past forty years. MOMA devotes its soaring second-floor atrium to the site-specific commission **"Barbara Kruger: Thinking of You. I Mean Me. I Mean You."** (Opens July 16.)

—Andrea K. Scott

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 penchants 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, at the New Museum, of more than a hundred works, with effects that can be deeply moving and feel 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), in which 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.)*

Alan Saret

Since the nineteen-sixties, this New York artist has coaxed wire, whether single strands or rolls of mesh, into wild, ethereal forms. The sculptures assembled in this exhibition seem less like objects and more like abstracted angels and demons, each imbued with unique personalities and powers. A two-part piece titled "In Love," first conceived in 1983, features a stunning volume of galvanized-steel hex netting (simultaneously suggesting a storm cloud, a charred bush, and a Balenciaga creation in tulle) leaning toward a smaller, teardrop-shaped partner made of multicolored magnet wire. "Spring Breath Be," from 2012, is a hanging snarl of spiked curlicues, and the new "Willow Creek," completed in 2022, is an elegantly irregular column that plays on the vaporous potentials of weblike fencing. Saret is often described as a post-minimalist, in part because of his fondness for industrial materials, but his work, with its mystic, anthropomorphic, and even feral qualities, defies isms, and his misfit alchemy feels especially fresh right now.—*J.F. (Karma; through June 4.)*

"Whitney Biennial 2022: Quiet as It's Kept"

This startlingly coherent and bold exhibition is a material manifesto of late-pandemic institutional culture. Long on installations and videos and short on painting, conventional sculpture, and straight photography, it is exciting without being especially pleasurable—geared toward thought. The innovative, intimately collaborative curators David Breslin and Adrienne Edwards ignore rather than oppose pressures of the ever-romping art market, which can see to itself. Delayed for a year by COVID-19, the show consolidates a trend that many of us hadn't suspected: a sort of fortuitously shared conceptual sensibility that suggests an in-group but is open to all who care about art's relations to the wide world. My favorite work in the show is the indelibly disturbing and enthralling "Your Eyes Will Be an Empty Word" (2021), by the veteran Cuban American artist and singularly plainspoken social activist Coco Fusco—a gorgeous twelve-minute video exploration of Hart Island, New York's potter's field, for unidentified or unclaimed corpses. Shots of the artist laboring in a rowboat along its shores alternate with drone overviews of a really quite lovely place where rows of small stone markers perfunctorily memorialize innumerable lost lives. Beauty stands in for unconsummated mourning. The work can seem to invoke both the cascading fatalities of the COVID pandemic and, by chance, the remorseless current carnage in Ukraine.—*P.S. (Whitney Museum; through Sept. 5.)*

MOVIES

The Army of Crime

Robert Guédiguian's vigorously heroic yet mournful Second World War drama recounts the real-life story of a group of French Resistance fighters—Communist immigrants from elsewhere in Europe, many Jewish, all led by an Armenian poet, Missak Manouchian (Simon Abkarian), whose survival of genocidal massacres in Turkey stiffens his resolve to battle the German occupiers. The independent anti-Nazi assassins and saboteurs unite under Manouchian's command—and that of the Communist Party—to form a band of unintentional outsiders whose schemes are dramatized with less attention to detail than to motive. Guédiguian offers an antidote to the acclaimed but tendentious "Army of Shadows." He makes painfully explicit the relentless rattle of anti-Semitic invective in print and on the radio; shows French police officers tracking, capturing, and torturing Resistance fighters; and depicts French officials arresting Jews and deporting them to French concentration camps. Guédiguian depicts history in its human essence: in the face of persecution and exclusion, the Communist Party, in his view, offered these unmoored and unwelcome refugees the warmth and common cause of a tight, extended family. Released in 2009.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Tubi.)*

Detective Story

William Wyler's 1951 drama shows the dangers that women face when abortion is illegal—and suggests that an underlying sociopathology, the control of women's sex lives, drives men to ban abortion. The film is based on a play by Sidney Kingsley, and most of the action takes place on a single set, at a Manhattan police station. Kirk Douglas stars as Detective Jim McLeod, a brutal officer whose violent hatred of criminals is rooted in his childhood—his father, a criminal, abused his mother and drove her insane. The prime target of Jim's hatred is an abortionist named Karl Schneider (George Macready), whom he has previously arrested and assaulted. When deep secrets about Jim's wife, Mary (Eleanor Parker), emerge, Jim implodes under the force of his own unrelieved fury. The drama's tension involves the destructive extremes of masculinity, linking strength and courage with pitiless judgment and sexual domination; the essential subject is society's—rather, men's—obsession with women's virginity, and the film's liberal-minded perspective brings a hint of reality to rigid Hollywood mores.—*R.B. (Streaming on Pluto and other services.)*

Monstrous

In Chris Sivertson's movie, written by Carol Chrest, we meet Laura (Christina Ricci), who flees a cruel husband and takes her son, Cody (Santino Barnard), to California. Their new home is an isolated rental property beside a pond, from which a malign and dripping figure—reported, or imagined, by Cody—emerges. The era, apparently, is the late nineteen-fifties or the early sixties, to judge by Laura's hulking Chevrolet and by the full skirts and polka dots in which she is arrayed. Although the period styling feels overripe, that very sense of surfeit is a clue. Something more than a marriage, we feel, has gone awry for Laura. Mystery buffs will see a twist coming from afar, and connoisseurs of horror will be underscared, yet the film sits squarely in the Ricci canon. Once again, she leaves us wondering: Is her character the victim of menace and disorientation, or could she herself be the wellspring of strangeness?—*Anthony Lane (In theatrical release and on video on demand.)*

Never Rarely Sometimes Always

Eliza Hittman's third feature, from 2020, tells a spare story in compelling detail: Autumn Callahan (Sidney Flanigan), a seventeen-year-old high-school student in a small Pennsylvania town, learns that she's pregnant. Unable to get an abortion in that state without parental consent, she travels to New York, with her cousin Skylar (Talia Ryder), for the procedure. Hittman, who also wrote the script, stays intimately close to Autumn, spotlighting her cramped life at home and in school, her independent-minded ferocity, and her physical sufferings (including attempts at ending the pregnancy herself). But, above all, this is a drama of social fabric—of the impact of policy and prejudice on the daily thicket of administrative details, the nerve-jangling tension that women endure from ambient sexual aggression, and the oppressive air of surveillance and terror sparked by the war against abortion. The young women's journey to New York—and their encounter with a Philadelphia hipster (Théodore Pellerin)—offers an anguished apprenticeship in the wider world's network of money and power.—*R.B. (Streaming on Freevee and other services.)*

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SUMMER PREVIEW

Afrofuturism, Speedy Action, Literary Lives

The blockbuster season is, as usual, filled with fantasy franchise films, such as the sequels **"Jurassic World Dominion"** (June 10) and **"Thor: Love and Thunder"** (July 8), and the "Toy Story" spinoff **"Lightyear"** (June 17), but its more visionary offerings also spotlight original stories, including Jordan Peele's horror drama, **"Nope"** (July 22), starring Daniel Kaluuya, Keke Palmer, and Steven Yeun, about a Black-run horse farm in Northern California that's invaded by space aliens. In David Cronenberg's **"Crimes of the Future"** (June 3), starring Viggo Mortensen, Léa Seydoux, and Kristen Stewart, accelerated evolution drastically transforms the human species. In the Afrofuturist musical **"Neptune Frost"** (June 3), directed by Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman, a coltan miner (Bertrand Ninteretse) and an intersex hacker (Cheryl Isheja and Elvis Ngabo) unite against a repressive regime. Katie Aselton's comedy **"Mack & Rita"** (August 12) stars Elizabeth Lail as a young woman who is struck by lightning and turns into a senior citizen (Diane Keaton).

Realist drama, too, takes many forms this summer, including the high-speed action of the long-awaited sequel **"Top Gun: Maverick"** (May 27), directed by Joseph Kosinski; Tom Cruise returns as an ace pilot who, this time around, volunteers to train fliers for a secret mission, and Val Kilmer reprises his role as Iceman. David Leitch's thriller **"Bullet Train"** (July 29), about a group of assassins who meet and compete while in transit in Japan, is also a copious star vehicle, with Sandra Bullock, Brad Pitt, Zazie Beetz, Brian Tyree Henry, and Michael Shannon, among many others. The directors Miguel Gomes and Maureen Fazendeiro set **"The Tsugua Diaries"** (May 27) on a farm in rural Portugal that serves as a pandemic bubble for a film shoot; the intimate and imaginative drama, involving the cast and crew's romantic entanglements and artistic connections, runs backward, day by day, from the end of the production to the start. In Claire Denis's turbulent melodrama **"Both Sides of the Blade"** (July 8), a Parisian ex-convict (Vincent Lindon) tries to resume his career as a soccer scout; Juliette Binoche plays his wife, a journalist whose ex is his business partner.

There's a varied array of historical dramas in the offing, starting with Terence Davies's **"Benediction"** (June 3), a wide-ranging bio-pic of the British poet Siegfried Sassoon. It follows the author in the course of fifty years, from his resistance to military service in the First World War to his death, in 1967. (Jack Lowden plays Sassoon in his youth; Peter Capaldi portrays the elderly writer.) Davies presents a poignant vision of Sassoon's romantic relationships with men in a time when homosexuality was illegal in Great Britain, as well as a tribute to Sassoon's literary achievement and a lament for the ravages of war. Baz Luhrmann's first bio-pic, **"Elvis"** (June 24), stars Austin Butler as Presley, Olivia DeJonge as Priscilla Presley, and Tom Hanks as Colonel Tom Parker. The British theatre director Carrie Cracknell's first feature, **"Persuasion"** (July 15), an adaptation of Jane Austen's last completed novel, stars Dakota Johnson as Anne Elliot, a woman from an aristocratic family in financial trouble, who reconnects with her former fiancé, the naval officer Frederick Wentworth (Cosmo Jarvis).

—Richard Brody







TABLES FOR TWO

So Do Fun

155 Third Ave.

The idea of authenticity in food is tempting but slippery. Take, for example, So Do Fun, a new restaurant in Gramercy. If you had to categorize it bluntly, you might call it Sichuan—but it's the first U.S. outpost of a chain founded in 2007 in Guangzhou, the Chinese city historically romanized as Canton, which means that it's Sichuan for a Cantonese clientele. Does this origin story make it less authentic—or, indeed, more authentic, reflecting the organically idiosyncratic way that a specific group of people eat?

Regardless, to experience that idiosyncrasy is pure pleasure: a sort of push and pull through peppercorn punch and mellow sweetness, across the menu's dishes and sometimes within them, too. Sichuan-style boiled fish in chili sauce—a house specialty, advertised on custom takeout containers—is properly, immutably fiery, a glorious morass of dried chilies, Sichuan peppercorns, scallions, cilantro, sesame seeds, and shiny knobs of unpeeled garlic almost completely obscuring the fish, served whole or in supple fillets, dusted with cornstarch so that it holds a sculptural, rippled shape. "You can't just top-skim—you have to dredge," one of my dining companions noted, as he trawled the bottom of a forged-steel skillet with a spoon, unearthing a few bonus morsels of fillet.

A page of Must Haves lists mapo tofu, spicy crawfish, double-cooked pork, and Sichuan-style fried chicken, all of which bear substantial heat. It also includes more understated options, worthy both as dramatic foils and in their own right. Slender slabs of pork belly are battered in coarse, crispy rice meal before they're steamed in bamboo atop chunks of taro, the slightly sugared coating going pleasantly soft, the fat rendered nearly gelatinous. Frilly leaves of Napa cabbage are bathed in a warm chicken consommé, topped with buoyantly crunchy shrimp and segments of preserved egg, almost black and as translucent as stained glass.

Must you have the bullfrog? If you're chasing authenticity, you'd better—it's a popular protein in Sichuan Province. Moreover, the dish is delicious. I'll admit that I balked at the word, but not for a second at the platter delivered to the table, a beautiful mosaic of chopped fresh green chilies (easy to eat around, unless you're a true spice hound) punctuated with pearlescent pieces of tender meat that release easily from small bones. As mild as lobster, bullfrog is a wonderful canvas for the *mala* hum of an oil infused with green Sichuan peppercorns, a more citrusy cousin of the standard red variety.

After I'd ordered the boiled fish, a server steered me away from the boiled beef in chili sauce; too similar, he explained, and suggested the sliced beef with pickles and tomato soup. Its delicate, fruity broth turned out to be on just the right side of cloying, balanced by cubes of silken tofu and the beef, sliced into ruffles so thin that they must have cooked in seconds. If the comfort of the chili sauce took the form of catharsis—heart-racing heat and its attendant sweat—the comfort of the tomato soup was soporific, more soothing than Campbell's. A rousingly refreshing bowl of skinned, chilled cherry tomatoes, meanwhile, with a single dried sour plum that rehydrated in their juice, displayed the versatility of the same flavor profile.

The tomatoes, on the Cold Dish section of the menu, along with noodles and boiled chicken, both slicked in chili oil, could as easily be enjoyed at the end of the meal as at the beginning. The same is true, perhaps more surprisingly, of the brown-sugar rice cake, listed as a snack. Neat rectangles of deep-fried sticky-rice paste tossed in toasted soy flour, sweetened only by a chaste dusting of brown sugar, are served with a side of viscous molasses for dipping. "Some people get them as an appetizer, some as a dessert," a server told me. Some people eat bullfrog, some do not. Some people want their beef to light their tongues on fire, some want it in tomato soup. At So Do Fun, where you can choose your own adventure, authenticity is in the eye of the beholder. *(Dishes $8.95–$36.95.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
AFTER THE LEAK

Those who have watched Samuel Alito during his sixteen years as a Supreme Court Justice will not have been surprised to learn that his draft opinion in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, a challenge to a restrictive Mississippi abortion law, is written in a register of scorn. Alito's 2015 dissent in Obergefell v. Hodges, the case that recognized the right of same-sex couples to marry, complains that "those who cling to old beliefs" will be forced to "whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes," lest they be subject to "turn-about" persecution by gays and lesbians and their sympathizers. What's different about his Dobbs opinion, which was leaked to Politico last week, though, is that it's not a dissent. It was, apparently, circulated in February as the draft "opinion of the court," with four other Justices joining Alito to overturn Roe v. Wade (decided in 1973) and its successor, Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992). Alito calls Roe "egregiously wrong" and writes that there is no constitutional right to seek an abortion—not at any stage, in any pregnancy, or for any reason he acknowledges. His signature note of grievance may still be present, but it is accompanied by a blast of triumphalism.

Assuming that Alito's majority stays intact—and that the final opinion resembles the draft—Dobbs will mark a shift in the country that goes beyond access to abortion. (The decision had been expected in late June.) Alito's companions in aiming to throw out Roe are, it seems, Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett, the last three of whom were nominated by Donald Trump. Chief Justice John Roberts had reportedly hoped that a majority could be found to uphold the Mississippi law while leaving Roe, in some form, in place. But his vote hardly matters. The ambitions of the Court's five most conservative members seem unrestrained.

The most immediate effect of Dobbs, if the draft opinion holds, will be that tens of millions of women will abruptly lose access to abortion. The ruling itself would not institute a ban, but it would give states almost boundless power to do so. More than twenty states already have measures in place that would severely curtail access: "trigger laws," designed to go into effect once Roe is overturned; restrictions in state constitutions; or laws that predate Roe but were left on the books.



After the draft was leaked, Louisiana legislators moved forward with a bill that would not only ban almost all abortions but would define them as homicides. Sixteen states, meanwhile, have laws protecting abortion rights. This should be cold comfort to people who live in those jurisdictions or who have the financial means to travel. Their own rights will be conditional; they may feel that their choice of where to live is constrained; their country will be more divided and unequal than it is now. But the burden will fall most heavily on Americans with less money.

One way to illustrate the reach of Alito's draft is to look at what the options for defending reproductive rights would be in its wake. Congress could, in theory, enact protections, although the filibuster is a barrier. But a Republican-controlled Congress could also, with the help of a Republican President, introduce a nationwide ban. Following the leak, people around the country donated to funds that, for example, would help someone of limited means in Missouri, which has an onerous trigger law, pay for a plane ticket to obtain an abortion in Massachusetts. These efforts echo the work of groups such as the Jane Collective, which helped women find reputable abortion providers during the pre-Roe era. They are a positive means of providing mutual support—for now. Some Missouri legislators, however, have pushed for a measure that would allow anyone who helps someone obtain an out-of-state abortion to be sued. A follow-up case to Dobbs could easily involve a pregnant person's unrestricted right to travel to get care

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

in another state. (Women who have miscarriages may be exposed to legal scrutiny, too.) In fact, Alito's opinion offers a blueprint for a future finding that the Constitution not only doesn't protect abortion but prohibits it.

The extremism of the draft has given rise to theories about who leaked it and why—to prevent further edits or to force them? There will be an investigation, but what seems clear is that there has been a breakdown at the Court. Its ability to function as a space for thoughtful deliberations and its air of legitimacy both seem diminished. The leak may be more a symptom of that decline than a cause.

Roe has held for nearly fifty years, with the support of a majority of Americans, and yet, to hear Alito tell it, it has no real place in the country's history or law or in any reasonable concept of liberty. Roe and Casey are part of a long series of cases in which the Court, relying in large part on the Fourteenth Amendment, has recognized certain unenumerated rights that derive from the Constitution, even if they are not spelled out there. A number of those cases have involved a right to privacy—a notion that Alito disparages. The Alito opinion, despite its claim to be limited to abortion, thus casts doubt on Obergefell and even on Griswold v. Connecticut, the 1965 case that recognized the right of married couples to obtain contraception. Some commentary surrounding the leak has portrayed fears that these rights could be taken away as overblown, but, whatever the political will, the Alito draft creates a legal pathway to do so. Certain forms of contraception may be imperilled by Dobbs itself: some opponents of reproductive rights put intrauterine devices in the category of "abortifacients," alongside the morning-after pill. We may be entering an increasingly un-private era.

Alito notes that "women are not without electoral or political power." Indeed, an effect of his draft opinion would be that Americans who care about reproductive rights will be asked to expend a great deal of energy carrying their fight to every level of government, perhaps most especially in elections for state legislatures, which is where, for the immediate future, access to abortion will be doled out or withheld. For many, it will be dispiriting and deeply sad to be asked to wage battles long thought won, when there are so many other struggles to be fought—child care, climate change, Trump. The light that Dobbs casts on each party's priorities could nonetheless be bracing. Elections are worth the effort. It may be Alito's Court, but it's not yet his America.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

SCOOPING THE COURT
ROE-GATE



Supreme Court watchers have been calling the leak of a draft opinion in advance of the Court's abortion decision "unthinkable" and "unprecedented." Chief Justice John Roberts has ordered an internal investigation by the marshal of the Court, and former Attorney General Bill Barr has suggested that a criminal probe may be warranted. Fifty years ago, however, the Court sprang another leak—two, in fact—in connection with the original Roe v. Wade decision. A rookie writer named David Beckwith published a story in *Time* asserting that the Court was about to legalize abortion, a few hours ahead of the official decision. Speaking by phone the other day from his home in Austin, Texas, Beckwith said, "In my little incident, no one had any mal intent." He joked, "They just had the bad judgment to trust me."

Beckwith, a law-school graduate, joined *Time's* Washington bureau in 1971, just as the Supreme Court was about to hear arguments in Roe v. Wade. On July 4, 1972, he noticed what he called "one of the strangest stories I'd ever seen" on the front page of the Washington *Post*. It had no byline and quoted no sources by name. But it contained an extraordinary number of confidential details about a struggle inside the Supreme Court's chambers over the right to abortion. The story revealed that, while a majority of the Justices clearly supported a constitutional right to abortion, Chief Justice Warren Burger, who opposed abortion rights, wanted to hold off announcing a decision until President Richard Nixon could fill two vacancies on the Court—which Burger hoped would change the outcome.

Although no one seemed to pick up on the *Post's* account, published on a national holiday, Beckwith took notice. He decided to dive in and report out the story, interviewing more than a dozen Court insiders, including Justices and clerks.

A close reading of the *Post* story shows that it was leaked by someone with inside knowledge of the Court's private deliberations. It revealed the date on which the Justices had met to discuss the case, and also disclosed that the Court's reigning liberal, Justice William O. Douglas, was enraged by what he viewed as Burger's delay tactics, which he saw as an attempt to subvert the outcome. Douglas circulated a memo describing the Chief Justice's improper power plays to his fellow-Justices and their clerks. Within days, its contents were on the front page of the *Post*.

Douglas Brinkley, a historian who is writing a book in which Douglas is a central figure, thinks it's plausible that Douglas himself gave the memo to the *Post*. "Douglas leaked constantly to the press," Brinkley said. "That was his modus operandi." He was a passionate defender of individual liberty and the right to a zone of privacy. He'd written the 1965 decision supporting the right to contraception, on which Roe was modelled. "He was very worked up about it," Brinkley said. "There would be no Roe without Douglas." The Justice also moved in the same social circles as the *Post's* editor, Ben Bradlee, and its owner, Katharine Graham, although Bradlee's widow, Sally Quinn, is dubious that Douglas was close enough to Bradlee to leak the memo to him. The journalist Bob Woodward said that the recent leak was a "big, big deal," but that a leak from the Supreme Court, generally, "is not that unusual." His book "The Brethren," co-authored with Scott Armstrong, used as sources five Justices and approximately a hundred and forty Court clerks.

The Court heard Roe v. Wade a second time, in October of 1972. Beckwith continued digging, and on January 22,

1973, *Time* published his article, predicting that the Court was about to legalize abortion.

In scheduling his story, Beckwith had been guided by an anonymous source, who asked him to hold off until after January 17th, when the decision was slated to be announced. But then Burger unexpectedly delayed again: he was about to preside over Nixon's second Inauguration, and, Beckwith surmised, he was so afraid to stand face to face with Nixon, who opposed abortion rights, that he postponed the Roe announcement until the week after. *Time,* though, printed Beckwith's article as planned, scooping the Court on its own decision.

Today, such news would have broken the Internet, as the Alito leak did. But Beckwith said that not even the New York *Times* picked up his story. One *Time* subscriber who did notice the piece was Justice Harry Blackmun. He was the author of the Roe decision, and he was furious that he had been preëmpted before he could announce the decision that he had anticipated would be the apex of his legal career. (He was further upstaged by Lyndon Johnson, who died the same day that the Roe decision was announced.)

"Blackmun lit a fire under Burger," Beckwith said. The Chief Justice summoned the top editors of *Time* to Washington to discuss the leak, and Burger, out for blood, presented them with a three-inch-thick binder detailing all of Beckwith's contacts with Supreme Court personnel.

Although Beckwith said that his investigation had taken "a lot of shoe leather," one Court clerk, Larry Hammond, a law-school classmate of Beckwith's, confessed to the Justices, thinking that he had been the only source. "He took the hit, poor guy," Beckwith said. Hammond was forgiven by the Justices, including Burger, and went on to a distinguished legal career.

Burger, in his meeting with *Time's* editors, had demanded that Beckwith be fired for "espionage." Instead, the editors realized just what an industrious journalist they had. Beckwith stayed at *Time* until 1989.

After decades of reporting, Beckwith became an aide to conservative politicians, including former Vice-President Dan Quayle. He is not a fan of the Roe decision, and he worries that the recent leak of Alito's draft opinion was aimed at influencing the outcome of the case in a way that his own story was not. "But I'm still enough of a reporter to say the more information out there, the better," he said. "Good for the guys who got the story."

—Jane Mayer

IN THE *STREETS*
PRIMAL *SCREAMING*



Last Tuesday afternoon, less than twenty-four hours after a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion indicated that the fight to protect Roe v. Wade would soon suffer an epochal defeat, New Yorkers began showing up at Foley Square, in lower Manhattan. "CHANNEL YOUR RAGE INTO ACTION," an announcement shared on social media read. "WEAR GREEN." The threat to Roe had been a slow build, but the suddenness of the leak meant that the protest was marked by improvisation. People wore green bandannas, hoodies—whatever was in their closets—and carried signs bearing Sharpie'd slogans, ranging from the succinct ("RAGE") to the specific ("I SURVIVED AN ILLEGAL ABORTION in Birmingham Ala. in 1969 #NeverAgain"). Helicopters buzzed overhead.

"It's scary that something we relied on for fifty years can be taken away," a law student named Savannah, who held a drawing of a coat hanger, said. Although demonstrators knew that the fall of Roe was unlikely to impinge on abortion rights in New York State, that was little comfort. "I'll probably be fine, but this type of stuff always hurts people who don't have access to health care," a woman named Morgan said, holding a sign made from a box her mother had sent her containing natural deodorants.

But the reality of reproductive rights wasn't just hypothetical; it was personal and cross-generational. In a group of four thirtysomething women, one had had an abortion and another had accompanied a friend to a clinic. Daniele, in a green turtleneck, had texted friends who play in a band with her ("twee-inflected feminist K Records-y pop"), hoping, since the Supreme Court's opinion was still a draft, that "if we really scare the shit out of them they'll change their minds." Her bandmate Tasha, who wore a green beret borrowed from Daniele and works at an art museum, had invited a co-worker and left work early: "Our boss was very supportive. She said, 'Bring everyone.'"

Nearby, a man named Jonathan Walker wore a pink pussyhat, from the 2017 Women's March. "My wife couldn't be here. I'm wearing her hat," he said. Both are actors; his wife was doing a Zoom reading of a Charles Busch play. Walker's grandmother volunteered for the birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger a hundred years ago, and when he was a teenager, in the seventies, his mother had an



"You've got something in your teeth."

abortion. "She was fifty-three years old. It was unviable," he said. "I hope this doesn't sound weird, but I thought it was really cool: Wow, my mom is having an abortion!" That morning, he had called his mother, who is ninety-seven. "She was just completely undone when she heard the news about the leaked draft. She said, 'You go to that rally for me.'"

Two women in their sixties, Sue and Lori, wore matching green sweaters and fanny packs. Sue, a retired pediatrician, held up a sign shaped like a shield. "My kids were really into cosplay, so this is really Link, from 'The Legend of Zelda,' underneath," she said. She had an abortion in her twenties, when she was a "nerdy medical student" in Pittsburgh. "I was grateful that I was seen by clinicians who didn't judge me, didn't slut-shame me. And that I was able to get this taken care of and kept on my road and followed my dream." After med school, she worked for the C.D.C. and now has three children. She said, "I can't believe that we have to do this—"

"—again," the friends said in unison.

A group called Abortion Access Front had set up a "Primal Scream Station," with placards of the six conservative Justices' faces. An employee named Molly was dressed in a sequinned vulva costume. "This is my summer vulva outfit," she said. "Unfortunately, we have to do so much protesting that I have a winter vulva outfit as well." She yelled, "Step right up! Be a primal screamer! Flip 'em off!" Some women counted down from three and screamed long and loud. Wobbling, Molly said, "That made me want to have a cigarette—Jesus Christ!"

Sue, the retired pediatrician, partook. As she and Lori left the square, she said, "We exercised our right to scream."

—Michael Schulman

VISITING DIGNITARY
MISSION CREEP



MISSION: Her Excellency Samia Suluhu Hassan, the sixth President of the United Republic of Tanzania, and its first female head of state, desires a stroll through Central Park.



Samia Suluhu Hassan

OBJECTIVE: To correct certain impressions advanced by Hassan's predecessor, John Magufuli (nickname: the Bulldozer), who largely closed off Tanzania to the rest of the world and whose COVID strategy centered on three days of national prayer, after which he proclaimed, "The Corona disease has been eliminated thanks to God." He died nine months later, seemingly thanks to COVID. (Official Tanzanian-government stance: heart problems.) Hassan, who was vaccinated publicly, is on a good-will tour of the United States, declaring Tanzania again open to visitors, investors, and science.

STRATEGY: Meet at Ritz-Carlton. Hassan is incoming from Washington, D.C., where she attended a summit with Kamala Harris. In New York, she will appear at the première of "The Royal Tour," a PBS program in which Hassan guides the host, Peter Greenberg, around her country for nine days—Zanzibar, Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Kilimanjaro. She hopes to attract American tourists. (Hassan, to Harris: "This is where the lovers and shakers of entertainment and leisure reside." Harris, to Hassan: "Indeed.")

Rendezvous at Ritz bar with Greenberg—short beard, jaunty smile—creator of "The Royal Tour," in 2001. ("Back in the days when the Travel Channel actually did travel. Now they do ghosts.") Previous tour guides: Netanyahu, King Abdullah II, Paul Kagame. "We turned down Putin," Greenberg says. "I don't want to see six-pack abs anymore."

Smile at prodigious number of Tanzanian diplomats in the travelling party, who occupy three floors of the Ritz. (Greenberg: "Everybody wants to go shopping.") Do not be alarmed when informed that the weather (chilly) and probability of establishing a security perimeter in the Park (null) have persuaded diplomats to reconsider stroll. Alternatives: A drive through the Park? Vehicles not permitted. A drive around the Park? Wait for motorcade, police escort, and brief halting of pedestrian traffic along Central Park South. Watch men with earpieces hold conversations until one approaches and says, "She's ready."

ACTION SUMMARY: Hassan exits elevator, trailing assistants, and wearing blazer and black-and-red hijab. Bearing: dignified, with deadpan joke delivery. Accept President's offer of fist bump. Walk past armed officers to idling black S.U.V., surrounded by more men with earpieces. Hassan describes past trips to New York. She confirms intel, re: diplomatic visits and shopping. (She has frequented "H&M, Zara, Calvin Klein.")

S.U.V. heads uptown. Hassan appreciates the varied vegetation and all the people. "We have very few parks for people to have fun," she says. "Most of them are game reserves and land reserves." Inform Hassan of New York's own impressive wild game: the Harlem deer, the Central Park coyote. Hassan, amused, says, "I think we should give you some lions and rhinos and elephants."

Hassan offers litany of her exploits as Greenberg's Tanzania tour guide: Animal sightings—her favorite, a leopard; his, a warthog. ("I said, 'You're serious?' They have ugly faces!") Driving for the first time in twenty years—stick shift! "Ministers are not allowed to drive," she says. A fishing excursion near Hassan's home town, a village in Zanzibar called Kizimkazi; they caught wahoo. "A fish like this!" Hassan says, holding her arms out wide. (Greenberg, later, under light interrogation: "Do you want the real story? When you're the President, things appear on your boat.")

S.U.V. passes zoo. Presidential reaction: underwhelmed. The Serengeti is bigger. Hassan recounts gruelling filming schedule. "They didn't treat me as a President," she says. "I remember a point where I stood in the grasses, and I was fearful of the lions. And another time, with the Maasai, where I nearly fainted. It was dehydration." She hopes it will

pay off—she aims to increase tourism from a million and a half visitors a year to five million.

AFTER-ACTION REPORT: Despite mission creep, objective attained. Presidential Park assessment: "I'm impressed. The Park is big." Première status: success. President bullish on next screening, in Los Angeles. "I'll meet my fellow movie stars," she says. "Peter, who have you invited?"

Greenberg: "I cannot reveal."

Hassan, shrugging: "Maybe Will Smith."

—Zach Helfand

PANDEMIC PROJECT
HAT TRICK



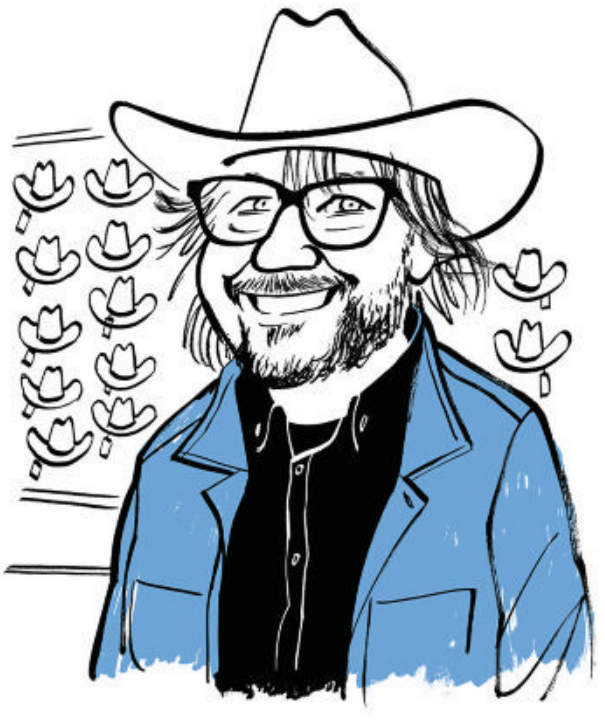
Jeff Tweedy, of Wilco, retired his trademark off-white Stetson about five years ago after he looked out from the stage one night and saw that a number of fans were wearing the same hat. "I felt like Madonna," he said the other day, in Chicago. He's played largely hatless ever since. But for Wilco's twelfth studio album the band is returning to its roots (roots music), and the fifty-four-year-old front man is feeling ready to reinstate the image repertoire. The band will première all twenty-one tracks of "Cruel Country"—"I love my country, stupid and cruel"—at Solid Sound, the music-and-arts festival that it throws every two years at MASS MOCA: lawn chairs, vintage Luccheses, craft I.P.A. Tweedy had to complete the costume.

In search of a new hat, Tweedy wandered the leather-fragrant aisles at Alcala's Western Wear, a vaquero haberdashery in Chicago, which has been his home since the nineties. He passed hats that, he said, were suitable for a villainous Mountie, R. L. Stine, Lemmy from Motörhead, and the photo booth at his cousin's bar mitzvah. But he struggled to find something that felt like him. A lot was riding on this purchase. "My first live review comes out where I'm wearing a stupid hat," he prophesied gravely. " 'Ruined by a Stupid Hat: It was a great show—can't believe he wore that hat.' "

In a charcoal button-down and black Converse Jack Purcell glasses, Tweedy tilted more *Neorealismo* than spaghetti Western. Distant eyes, apologetic laugh. His father worked on the railroad in southern Illinois. "My upbringing isn't super-country," he said. "It's Midwest. But when we cleaned out my mom and dad's house there was this bag of cowboy boots. My mom had kept all the boots I'd worn up until when I was five or six, maybe, with holes in the bottom. Dozens of pairs."

Wilco's predecessor, Uncle Tupelo, which dissolved in 1994, after Tweedy split with Jay Farrar, pioneered alt-country—banjo, harmonica, fiddle, Tweedy's punk wit, Farrar's gloom. For years, Wilco dodged sonic expectations. But why fight the wind? The band is good at writing country songs. Simple forms gave the guitarist Nels Cline and the drummer Glenn Kotche room to get weird. The guys got together this winter and recorded the live takes. "I'm not a big jam-band fan or anything, but this is kind of my version," Tweedy said of a five-minute instrumental break. "Like, what I always picture people liking about that music."

The album began as an exercise in a group chat that Tweedy had with the writer George Saunders and the comedian Nick Offerman. ("We're all in love," Offerman once explained.) At the outset of the pandemic, Tweedy vowed to send them a demo a day. A lot of people, it seemed to him, were talking about what America was, or hadn't been, or ought to be again, but they weren't really saying anything. "Anything you think is different isn't different," Tweedy said. The same pathologies repeat through the generations. He gestured toward an angular cattleman hat embellished with creases. "It's like the early version of distressed jeans," he said. "People wanted 'em to look like you'd had 'em for a while. Think about it, a guy two hundred years ago, and he's, like, 'I can't walk out in front of the guys in *this!*' " (Tweedy defers to his wife, Sue Miller, for such aesthetic validation. She was the other reason he stopped wearing cowboy hats: "She thinks I look cuter. It's hard for me to say that. I feel way cuter with the hat.")



Jeff Tweedy

He picked up what looked like a small buckskin umbrella—promising. "If you get a big enough brim, maybe it will draw attention away from my waistline," he said. Inspecting himself in a mirror, he smoothed his shirttails over his hips. "I keep trying to buy bigger guitars."

After an hour, he opted for a beige Stetson. "No, you have that," his studio manager said.

"We don't have this!" Tweedy protested.

On the way to the register, a sales associate entreated Tweedy to peruse the aisles of cattle prods and thousand-dollar piteado belts, but Tweedy demurred. "I've got full-on Nudie suits and shit," he said. "I just haven't been able to fit into them for a long time."

He went on, "I blame Jamba Juice. I haven't been there in years, but I'm still paying for it. I got out of the hospital seventeen years ago"—rehab—"and I weighed a hundred sixty-five pounds because I had lost so much weight from anxiety and shit. And thought, Ah, this is great! Clothes fit. I'm sober, I'm clean. I'm gonna keep this up. I'm only gonna eat smoothies on the road." After months of downing Peanut Butter Moo'ds (frozen yogurt, bananas, chocolate milk), his running shorts got tight. He decided, "I'm just gonna get Jamba Juice twice a day. And then I was sitting there one day, waiting for my order. And I'm flipping through their book of nutritional facts . . ."

Reformed, he tried out a new diet. "I made a bet with my wife that I could lose weight eating only Snickers," he said.

"Who won that bet?" his studio manager asked.

"Susie did."

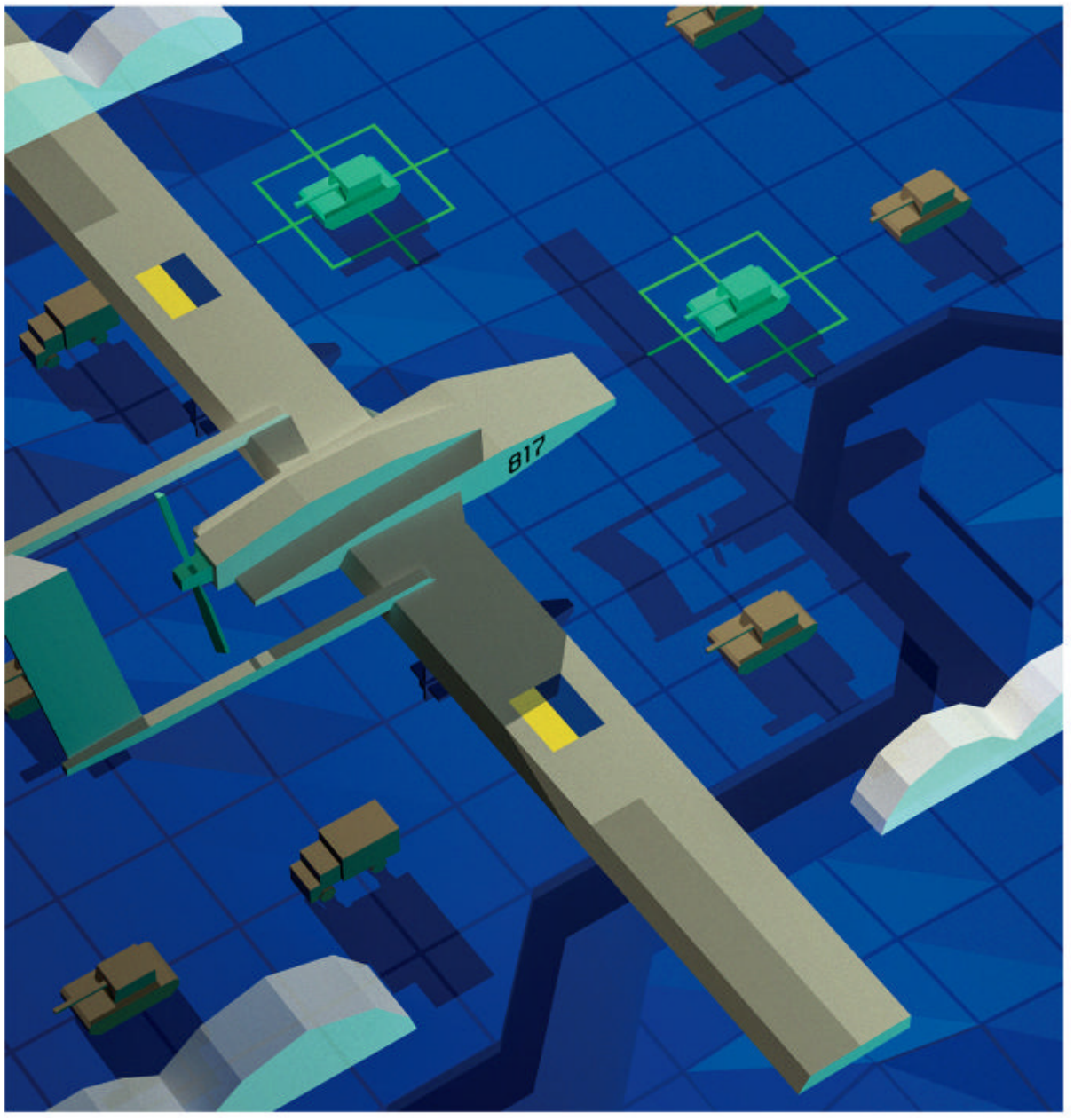
—Hannah Seidlitz

ANNALS OF WAR

WEAPON OF INFLUENCE

A new drone has changed the nature of warfare and enabled Turkey's rise.

BY STEPHEN WITT



In Ukraine, Selçuk Bayraktar, the drone's inventor, has become a folk hero.

A video posted toward the end of February on the Facebook page of Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, showed grainy aerial footage of a Russian military convoy approaching the city of Kherson. Russia had invaded Ukraine several days earlier, and Kherson, a shipbuilding hub at the mouth of the Dnieper River, was an important strategic site. At the center of the screen, a targeting system locked onto a vehicle in the middle of the convoy; seconds later, the vehicle exploded, and a tower of burning fuel rose into the sky. "Behold the work of our life-giving Bayraktar!" Zaluzhnyi's translated caption read. "Welcome to Hell!"

The Bayraktar TB2 is a flat, gray unmanned aerial vehicle (U.A.V.), with angled wings and a rear propeller. It carries laser-guided bombs and is small enough to be carried in a flatbed truck, and costs a fraction of similar American and Israeli drones. Its designer, Selçuk Bayraktar, the son of a Turkish auto-parts entrepreneur, is one of the world's leading weapons manufacturers. In the defense of Ukraine, Bayraktar has become a legend, the namesake of a baby lemur at the Kyiv zoo, and the subject of a catchy folk song, which claims that his drone "makes ghosts out of Russian bandits."

In April, 2016, the TB2 scored its first confirmed kill. Since then, it has been sold to at least thirteen countries, bringing the tactic of the precision air strike to the developing world and reversing the course of several wars. In 2020, in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan's dictatorial leader, Ilham Aliyev, used the TB2 to target vehicles and troops, then displayed footage of the strikes on digital billboards in the capital city of Baku.

The TB2 has now carried out more than eight hundred strikes, in conflicts from North Africa to the Caucasus. The bombs it carries can adjust their trajectories in midair, and are so accurate that they can be delivered into an infantry trench. Military analysts had previously assumed that slow, low-flying drones would be of little use in conventional combat, but the TB2 can take out the anti-aircraft systems that are designed to destroy it. "This enabled a fairly significant operational revolution in how wars are being fought right now," Rich Outzen, a former State Department specialist on Turkey, told me. "This probably happens once every thirty or forty years."

I spoke with Bayraktar in March, via video. He was in Istanbul, at the headquarters of his company, Baykar Technologies, which employs more than two thousand people. When I asked him about the use of his drones in Ukraine, he told me, "They're doing what they're supposed to do—taking out some of the most advanced air-defense systems and armored vehicles in the world." Bayraktar, who is forty-two years old, has a widow's peak, soft eyes, and a slightly off-center nose. He was flanked by scale models of new drones, mounted on clear plastic stands, which he displayed to me with the unconcealed pride of an aviation geek. "Any U.A.V. built today to fly, I pilot it myself, because I, like, love it," he told me. Bayraktar, who has more than two million Twitter followers, uses his account to promote youth-education initiatives, celebrate Turkish martyrs, and post pictures of new aircraft designs. "Some people here consider him like Elon Musk," Federico Donelli, an international-relations researcher at the University of Genoa, told me.

In May, 2016, Bayraktar married Sümeyye Erdoğan, the youngest daughter of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's President. Erdoğan is the leader of a

ILLUSTRATION BY TODD ST. JOHN

political Islamist movement that, the analyst Svante Cornell has written, wishes "to build a powerful, industrialized Turkey that serves as the natural leader of the Muslim world." Turkey's arms industry has grown tenfold in the past twenty years, and most of the country's military equipment is now manufactured locally. "The Bayraktars, and particularly the TB2s, have turned into the flagship of the Turkish defense industry," Alper Coşkun, a former Turkish diplomat, told me.

Turkey borders Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, and the European Union, and it faces Russia across the Black Sea. Donelli told me that the shifting allegiances and complex politics of the region reminded him of Europe in the days before the First World War. "In Bayraktar, they have a kind of genius who can change the historical path of Turkey," Donelli said.

Erdoğan has held power since 2003. During that time, he has seized control of the courts and the press, amended the Turkish constitution, and advocated for a return to traditional roles for women. Journalists critical of the Erdoğan regime have been beaten with baseball bats and iron rods, and opposition activists have been sentenced to decades in prison. But Turkey's economy is stagnating, and its inflation rate rose to seventy per cent during the past twelve months. In 2019, Erdoğan's party lost the mayoralty of Istanbul, which it had held since the nineteen-nineties. The TB2 is a spectacular propaganda machine, and Erdoğan has used its success to promote his vision for Turkish society. As Bayraktar told me, "In this day and age, the biggest change in our lives is driven by technology—and who drives the changes? The ones who create technology."

Bayraktar and his family live on Baykar's grounds, which he compared to a university campus, with sports facilities and a park that he called "bigger than Google's." While we spoke, his mother, Canan; Sümeyye; and the couple's four-year-old daughter, also named Canan, were eating dinner in an adjacent room. Bayraktar told me that he was one of the oldest engineers at Baykar, and that many of the firm's programmers are women. "My software side comes from my mother," he said.

Bayraktar was born in Istanbul in 1979, the middle of three brothers. His father, Özdemir, the son of a fisherman, graduated from Istanbul Technical University and founded an auto-parts company; Canan, his mother, was an economist and a computer programmer in the punch-card era. The brothers were introduced to machine tools at an early age. "We were working, all throughout our childhood, in the factory," Bayraktar told me. By the time he was a teenager, he was a competent tool-and-die-maker. Özdemir was also an amateur pilot, and as a boy Selçuk would survey Turkey's splendid geography from the window of his father's plane. "A small aircraft, it's like sailing in there," he told me. "You feel like a bird." Bayraktar was soon building radio-controlled airplanes from kits, sometimes modifying them with his own designs. "I was hiding my model aircraft under my bed, and working on it secretly," he said. "I should have been studying for my exams."

Bayraktar's radio-controlled aircraft prototypes impressed academic researchers. In 2002, after graduating from Istanbul Technical, he was recruited to the University of Pennsylvania. For his master's degree, he flew two drones in formation at the Fort Benning Army base, in Georgia. Bayraktar then began a second master's, at M.I.T., where he pursued the difficult and offbeat goal of trying to land a radio-controlled helicopter on a wall. His adviser, Eric Feron, remembered Bayraktar as a dedicated craftsman and an observant Muslim, with a passion for youth education. He recalled Bayraktar's enthusiasm when he tutored Feron's daughter in her mathematics homework, and the time he demonstrated his helicopter to a troop of Girl Scouts. "He was a good pilot," Feron said. "But I did not understand all that he was after until I got invited to his wedding."

While Bayraktar was a student, the United States was using Predator drones to strike targets in Afghanistan and Iraq. Bayraktar disapproved of U.S. foreign policy—"I was obsessed with Noam Chomsky," he told me—and engaged in social activism with other graduate students, most of them foreigners. But he was drawn to the autonomous vehicles. While still enrolled at M.I.T., he began building small prototype drones at the family's factory in Istanbul.

Özdemir set out to secure government support for Selçuk's drones. Özdemir was friendly with Necmettin Erbakan, an Islamic nationalist and a vitriolic critic of Western culture. Turkey had been a secular republic since the nineteen-twenties, but Erbakan, a professor of mechanical engineering, believed that by investing in industry and grooming technological talent the country could become a prosperous Islamic nation. In 1996, Erbakan had been elected Turkey's Prime Minister, but he resigned from the post under pressure from the armed forces, and was banned from politics for threatening to violate Turkey's constitutional separation of religion and the state. (Erbakan, who had developed connections with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, blamed his ouster on "Zionists.")

Bayraktar briefed Erbakan on his work, and by the mid-two-thousands Bayraktar was spending his school breaks embedded with the Turkish military. The Bayraktar family also had ties to Erbakan's protégé, Erdoğan, who was elected Prime Minister in 2002. Bayraktar's father had been an adviser to Erdoğan when he was a local politician in Istanbul, and Bayraktar recalled Erdoğan visiting the family house.

Bayraktar's first drone, the hand-launched Mini U.A.V., weighed about twenty pounds. In early tests, it flew about ten feet, but Bayraktar refined the design, and soon the Mini could stay aloft for more than an hour. Bayraktar tested it in the snowy mountains of southeastern Anatolia, surveilling the armed rebels of the P.K.K., a Kurdish separatist movement. Feron recalled his astonishment when he contacted Bayraktar in the mountains. "He has no hesitation to go to the front lines, to really the worst conditions that the Turkish military can go into, and basically be with them, and live with them, and learn directly from the user," he said. Bayraktar told me he prefers to field-test a drone in an active combat theatre. "It needs to be battle-hardened and robust," he said. "If this doesn't work at ten-thousand-feet elevation, at minus-thirty-degrees temperature, then this is just another item that you have to carry in your backpack."

Bayraktar began developing a larger drone. In 2014, he débuted a prototype of the TB2, a propeller-driven fixed-wing

aircraft large enough to carry munitions. That year, Erdoğan, who was facing term limits as Prime Minister, won the Presidential election. A popular referendum had given him control of the courts as well, and he began using his powers to prosecute political enemies. "They arrested not only a quarter of active-duty admirals and generals but also many of Erdoğan's civil-society opponents," Soner Cagaptay, who has written four biographies of Erdoğan, told me. Bayraktar dedicated his prototype to the memory of Erdoğan's mentor, Erbakan. "He gave all his life's work to changing the culture," Bayraktar said. (In his posthumously published memoirs, Erbakan asserted that, for the past four hundred years, the world has secretly been governed by a coalition of Jews and Freemasons.)



In December, 2015, Bayraktar oversaw the first tests of the TB2's precision-strike capability. Using a laser to guide dummy bombs, the drone was able to strike a target the size of a picnic blanket from five miles away. By April, 2016, the TB2 was delivering live munitions. The earliest targets were the P.K.K.—drone strikes have killed at least twenty of the organization's leaders, along with whoever was standing near them. The strikes also taught Bayraktar to fight for the airwaves. Drones are controlled through radio signals, which opponents can jam by broadcasting static. Pilots can counter by hopping frequencies, or by boosting the amplitude of their broadcast signal. "There's so many jammers in Turkey, because the P.K.K. had been using drones, too," Bayraktar said. "It's one of the hottest places to fly." Turkey's remote-controlled counter-insurgency was thought to be the first time a country had conducted a drone campaign against citizens on its own soil, but Bayraktar, citing the threat of terrorism, remains an enthusiastic supporter of the campaign.

That May, he married the President's daughter. More than five thousand people attended the wedding, including much of the country's political élite. Sümeyye wore a head scarf and an immaculate long-sleeved white dress from the Paris designer Dice Kayek. By then, the Turkish state had taken on an overtly Islamic character. In the nineteen-nineties, the hijab was banned in universities and public buildings. Now "having a hijab-wearing wife is the surest way to get a job in the Erdoğan administration," Cagaptay wrote. Bayraktar regularly tweets Islamic blessings to his followers on social media, and both Sümeyye and the elder Canan wear the hijab.

Like Bayraktar, Sümeyye is a second-generation member of Turkey's Islamist élite, and she graduated from Indiana University in 2005 with a degree in sociology. "She has great ethics," Bayraktar told me. "She's a real challenger." Other people describe her as a fashionable, feminist upgrade on her father's politics—a Turkish version of Ivanka Trump. "Women have lost significantly under Erdoğan in terms of access to political power," Cagaptay told me. "When there are women appointed in the cabinet, they have token jobs."

In June, 2016, terrorists affiliated with ISIS killed forty-five people at the Istanbul airport, and soon a new front was opened in Syria, where Turkey used Bayraktar's drones to attack the short-lived ISIS caliphate. (The drones were later turned on Syria's Kurds.) In July, a small group inside the Turkish military staged a coup against Erdoğan. The coup was chaotic and unpopular—the main opposition parties condemned it, a conspirator flying a fighter jet dropped a bomb on the Turkish parliament, and Erdoğan was reportedly targeted by an assassination squad sent to his hotel. Erdoğan blamed the followers of Fetullah Gülen, an exiled cleric and political leader who now lives in Pennsylvania, and purged more than a hundred thousand government employees. (Gülen denies involvement in the coup.) Bayraktar was now part of Erdoğan's inner circle, and his drones were marketed for export.

Bayraktar is a Turkish celebrity, and his social-media feeds are crowded with patriotic reply guys. When he gives talks to trainee pilots, which he does often, he wears a leather jacket decorated with flight patches; when he tours universities, which he also does often, he wears a blazer over a turtleneck. In our conversation, he referred to concepts from critical gender theory, spoke of Russia's violations of international law, and quoted Benjamin Franklin: "Those who give up essential freedom for temporary security deserve neither security nor freedom." But he is also an outspoken defender of Erdoğan's government. In 2017, Erdoğan held a constitutional referendum that resulted in the dissolution of the post of Prime Minister, effectively enshrining his control of the state. Using politically motivated tax audits to seize independent media outlets, his government sold them in single-bidder "auctions" to supporters, and a number of journalists have been jailed for the crime of "insulting the President." Erdoğan frequently sues journalists, and Bayraktar has done so, too. He recently celebrated a thirty-thousand-lira fine levied against Çiğdem Toker, who was investigating a foundation that Bayraktar helps run. Bayraktar tweeted, "Journalism: Lying, fraud, shamelessness."

Bayraktar's older brother, Haluk, is the C.E.O. of Baykar Technologies; Selçuk is the C.T.O. and the chairman of the board. (Their father died last year.) In addition to being used in Ukraine and Azerbaijan, TB2s have been deployed by the governments of Nigeria, Ethiopia, Qatar, Libya, Morocco, and Poland. When I spoke with Bayraktar, Baykar had just completed a sales call in East Asia, marketing its forthcoming TB3 drone, which can be launched from a boat.

Several news sources have reported that a single TB2 drone can be purchased for a million dollars, but Bayraktar, while not giving a precise figure, told me that it costs more. In any event, single-unit figures are misleading; TB2s are sold as a "platform," along with portable command stations and communications equipment. In 2019, Ukraine bought a fleet of at least six TB2s for a reported sixty-nine million dollars; a similar fleet of Reaper drones costs about six times that. "Tactically, it's right in the sweet spot," Bayraktar said of the TB2. "It's not too small, but it's not too big. And it's not too cheap, but it's not too expensive."

Once a fleet is purchased, operators travel to a facility in western Turkey for

several months of training. "You don't just buy it," Mark Cancian, a military-procurement specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told me. "You have married the supplier, because you need a constant stream of spare parts and repair expertise." Turkey has become adept at leveraging this relationship. It struck a defense deal with Nigeria, which included training the country's pilots on TB2s, in exchange for access to minerals and liquefied natural gas. In Ethiopia, TB2s were delivered after the government seized a number of Gülenist schools. Unlike dealing with the U.S., obtaining weapons from Turkey doesn't involve human-rights oversight. "There are really no restrictions on use," Cancian said.

Buyers are also supported by Baykar's programmers. The TB2, which Bayraktar compares to his smartphone, has more than forty onboard computers, and the company sends out software updates several times a month to adapt to adversarial tactics. "You've seen the articles, probably, asking how World War One-performance aircraft can compete against some of the most advanced air defenses in the world," Bayraktar said. "The trick there is to continuously upgrade them."

Much of the drones' battlefield experience has come against Russian equipment. Russia and Turkey have a complicated relationship: Russia is a key trading partner for Turkey, Turkey is a popular holiday destination for Russian tourists, and Russia is overseeing the construction of Turkey's first nuclear power plant, which, when completed, will supply a tenth of the country's electricity. In 2017, Turkey angered its allies in NATO when it bought a Russian missile system, triggering U.S. sanctions. Still, both Turkey and Russia are seeking to restore their standings as world powers, and even before the war in Ukraine they were often in conflict.

In the Libyan civil war, Turkey and Russia backed opposing factions, and the TB2 faced off against Russia's Pantsir-S1, an anti-aircraft system that shoots missiles at planes and can be mounted on a vehicle. At least nine Pantsirs were destroyed; so were at least twelve drones.

Another theatre opened in the Caucasus in 2020, when Azerbaijan attacked the ethnic-Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Last month, I met Robert Avetisyan, the Armenian representative to the United States from Nagorno-Karabakh, at a café in Glendale, California. Avetisyan told me, "During the first several days, Azerbaijan was not successful, in anything, until the Turkish generals took the joysticks." Armenia has a security alliance with Russia, which provides most of its military equipment, some dating to the Soviet era. For six weeks, TB2 drones bombarded that equipment relentlessly; one independent analysis tallied more than five hundred targets destroyed, including tanks, artillery, and missile-defense systems. "We lost the air war," Avetisyan said. TB2s also targeted Armenian troops, and footage of these strikes was shared by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense. A six-minute compilation of the videos, posted to YouTube midway through the war, shows dozens of variations on the same scene: Armenian soldiers, cowering in trenches or huddled around transport trucks, alerted to their impending death by the hiss of an incoming bomb before a blast sends their bodies hurtling through the air.

Avetisyan sent me a translated statement from Arthur Saryan, a twenty-seven-year-old veteran of the war. Saryan had been standing with a small deployment of soldiers when his unit was hit by a bomb at around two in the morning. "We had no idea that we were the target," Saryan said. "We heard it only two or three seconds before it hit us." The bomb created a fireball. "Everyone was burnt. All the bodies were burnt and the cars immediately caught fire." Six soldiers were killed, and seven were wounded. "It was a horrible scene," Saryan said.

Bayraktar's TB2 drones fly slowly, and their propellers should be easy to locate. But in Nagorno-Karabakh the drones seemed to evade enemy reconnaissance, either through radar jamming or through technical incompetence. "A striking feature of the video clips was the utter helplessness of the doomed systems," the Israeli missile

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expert Uzi Rubin wrote, after reviewing Azerbaijani footage of precision air strikes. "Some were seen being destroyed with their radar antennas still rotating, searching in vain for targets." The Azerbaijanis also deliberately triggered enemy radar by flying unmanned crop dusters at Armenian positions. If the Armenian missile launchers took the bait, revealing their location, they were destroyed by TB2s.

Turkey and Azerbaijan share close linguistic and political ties, but the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict represented a new level of coöperation. "There's such cultural affinity between the Azerbaijanis and the Anatolian Turks—they say, 'One nation, two states,'" Outzen, the former State Department specialist, told me. "Now they're starting to say, 'One nation, two states, one army.'" This is bad news for Armenia, which is wedged between the two. Turkey has not acknowledged its role in the Armenian genocide of 1915, and the Azerbaijani President, Aliyev, has referred to Armenia as "a territory artificially created on ancient Azerbaijani lands."

Such claims have led the influential Armenian diaspora to block Western components from being used in Bayraktar's drones, through both congressional action in the U.S. and pressure on manufacturers. But an analysis of a downed TB2 in Nagorno-Karabakh revealed that the aircraft was using a G.P.S. transponder made by the Swiss manufacturer Garmin. The company issued a statement saying that it had no supply relationship with Baykar, and that the transponder was commercially available. Nevertheless, Bayraktar has sought to reduce his reliance on Western components; in a recent Instagram post, he claimed that ninety-three per cent of the TB2's components were now manufactured in Turkey. Bayraktar's development cycle has a D.I.Y. element that can make the Pentagon's practices seem out of date. "Our services are so culturally tied to a cumbersome acquisition process," Andy Milburn, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, told me. "What he's doing is so modular, so replaceable." Feron, Bayraktar's graduate adviser, recalled the aftermarket modifications that Bayraktar made to store-bought drones. "Sometimes in the aerospace industry they do a lot of simulations, but they never touch the machine," Feron said. "He's much more of a builder."

Last October, Ukraine announced that it was constructing a factory outside Kyiv to assemble Bayraktar's drones. Shortly afterward, Ukraine released video of a TB2 conducting a strike against an artillery position in the contested eastern region of Donbas. The Air Force colonel who runs Ukraine's drone program has not revealed his identity, citing security concerns, but in 2019 he travelled to Baykar's facility in western Turkey for three months of training. "I loved it there," he told Al-Monitor, an online newsletter.

"The acquisition of certain systems—like the TB2 and the American Javelin anti-tank missile—may actually further incentivize a Russian invasion instead of deterring one," the military analyst Aaron Stein wrote in a prescient blog post in December. In February, Russia invaded.

The early days of the war looked like a repeat of Nagorno-Karabakh. Publicly available footage suggests that TB2s destroyed at least ten Russian missile batteries and disrupted the Russian supply lines by bombing transport trucks. In the past few weeks, though, the release of strike videos has slowed. This may be due to security concerns, but it's also possible that the Russians have caught up—the TB2 has no real defense against a fighter jet, and in the lead-up to the invasion the Russian military trained against the drones. In early March, Ukrainian officials announced that they were receiving another shipment from Baykar; by the end of the month, a tally of press releases showed that Russia claimed to have shot down thirty-nine TB2s, which would likely constitute the bulk of the Ukrainian fleet. Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelensky, was initially enthusiastic about the TB2, but in April, at a press conference in a Kyiv subway station, he downplayed the aircraft's importance. "With all due respect to Bayraktar, and to any hardware, I will tell you, frankly, this is a different war," he said. "Drones may help, but they will not make the difference." Still, a couple of weeks before, Alexey Yerkhov, the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, had complained about the sale. "Explanations like 'business is business' won't work, since your drones are killing our soldiers," Yerkhov said, in remarks addressed to the Turkish government.

In our conversation, Bayraktar condemned Russia's actions but declined to discuss operational specifics. "Let's not put any of these countries at risk," he said. "If any poor Ukrainian was hurt, I would be very sad. I would be responsible on the day of judgment." Bayraktar's software upgrades respond to customer feedback, and his designs continue to evolve. His latest production drone, the twin-prop Akinci, can fly to forty thousand feet and can be equipped with jamming countermeasures. In March, he tweeted a picture of the prototype for Baykar's first jet, the Kizilelma, which resembles an autonomous F-16 without a cockpit. (In addition to the military vehicles, there is also the Cezeri, a human-size quadcopter, which Bayraktar has termed a "flying car.")

Bayraktar is also investing in autonomy, and told me that he was ahead of the competition in this area. "That's what our expertise is," he said. "Push a button, and the aircraft lands." An autonomous drone might find its way home if its communication links were severed. To develop such systems, Bayraktar will need to retain programming talent, but Erdoğan's regime is struggling against brain drain. "I, personally, know a whole bunch of people who have left," Cagaptay said. "In Turkey, they don't see a future for themselves."

"Sometimes oppression is worse than death," Bayraktar told me. He was referring to Ukraine's efforts to defend itself against the Russian invasion, but, a month after we talked, the Turkish civil-rights campaigner Osman Kavala was sentenced to life in prison, after a politically motivated trial that Amnesty International called a "travesty of justice." On May 1st, the Ukrainian defense ministry resumed releasing footage from Bayraktar's drones, showing them striking a pair of Russian patrol boats. Another video released that day showed Ukrainian soldiers, against a backdrop of destroyed Russian vehicles, dancing, laughing, and singing Bayraktar's name. ♦



TUCKER CARLSON ON THE ALIEN INVASION

BY TEDDY WAYNE

The radical left's panties are in a twist over the hordes of extraterrestrial aliens who—based on little more than wild speculation from quack scientists and so-called Pentagon videos—they claim will kill us all in their ravenous hunt throughout the galaxy for energy sources. (*Cocks head quizzically.*) Huh. I guess extraterrestrials are anthropomorphically cute so long as they fill the coffers of liberal billionaire filmmaker Steven Spielberg and his shadowy cabal of global financiers.

Before you cower in your bunker, ask yourself a few questions. (*Squints in constipated bafflement.*) Has an extraterrestrial alien ever gotten into college over your more qualified child? Are extraterrestrial aliens gouging you at the gas pump? Has an extraterrestrial alien tried to sue you for sexual harassment over a polite invitation to enjoy a few glasses of champagne while viewing your private bow-tie collection?

No. The extraterrestrials have no interest in formal education, having already absorbed all our data through processes we don't yet understand; they fuel their spaceships not with oil but with animal organs; and, as intrepid visitors from another solar system, they reject our country's prevailing "victim" mentality. In fact, until seven hours ago, when a fleet of thirty-two thousand spacecraft repelled every nation's defense system and simultaneously landed in two hundred and fifty-six equidistant locations around the globe, an extraterrestrial alien had never even set foot on Earth, let alone dug up an old photo that the woke police now deem racist, showing you in costume for an "Antebellum South" party you attended way back in the late twenty-tens.

You know it, I know it, and Joe Biden knows it—assuming his advisers thought it was worth interrupting his afternoon nap. (*Chortles uncontrollably for longer than any person would when telling a joke that he's already rehearsed three times.*) So why does the warmongering left insist we get drawn into a bloody fight with extraterrestrial aliens who are simply creating impenetrable domes around our economically and morally bankrupt cities—domes that many people, incidentally, believe would help with climate change, assuming it actually existed?

Hmm . . . I wonder if all this panic over extraterrestrial aliens is meant to distract Americans' attention from the very *terrestrial* aliens who are pouring across our open borders, pushing hard-working citizens out of jobs in manufacturing, farming, and Nascar driving.

Everyone agrees the aliens possess advanced laser-beam technology, but rational people understand that it's not anything to worry about. Yet, in the alarmist mainstream media, all you see is laser-beam panic. These beautiful beams of blinding white light have been used for nothing other than the worldwide vaporization of salamanders. You heard me right: salamanders. (*Smirks like a preppie in a nineteen-eighties movie as he humiliates the working-class protagonist before yelling at his unexpectedly kindhearted blond girlfriend to get in his red convertible.*) The Democrats would have you believe that this was a warning shot, a demonstration of the aliens' awesome might. The Democrats would also have you believe that they have always cared so, so deeply about salamanders. (*Furrows brow to pantomime the fictitious notion of empathy.*) "Oh, the poor salamanders, we must protect them at all costs and send our sons off to die in the Great Salamander War." (*Scowls as an old-money scion would upon being told that his country club will be forced to integrate.*) Salamanders are slimy, repulsive amphibians. They have no place in a decent society. Salamanders are a massive pest to anyone who owns a home in rural America—*real* Americans, that is, with two middle names, who attended private school in San Diego. The aliens did us a huge favor by shooting a thirteen-mile-wide laser beam in Rio de Janeiro that branched out into several billion rhizomatic tentacles that instantaneously reduced every salamander on Earth to a wisp of smoke. Maybe instead of declaring death to the aliens we should be writing them a thank-you note for saving us a call to the salamander exterminator.

The alien "invasion" is simply a pretext for a *government* invasion. First, they made you put on a pointless mask, then they forced you to get a dangerous vaccine, and now they're mandating a ridiculous curfew, since the laser-beam tentacles are effective only after sundown. I don't know about you, but I'd rather live under Xikon V's intergalactic rule than Joe Biden's early-bird-special tyranny. At least the former is a strong leader who understands that a country gets ahead through blue-collar grit, family values, and developing an efficient laser-beam-tentacle-to-organ-harvesting-cauldron pipeline.

I'm being given the signal that it's time to wrap up by my new producer, Zarg. Long live Xikon V. See you next time on "Tucker Carlson Tonight," the show that is the sworn enemy of lying, pomposity, smugness, and groupthink. (*Impressively manages to deliver catchphrase with a straight face.*) ♦

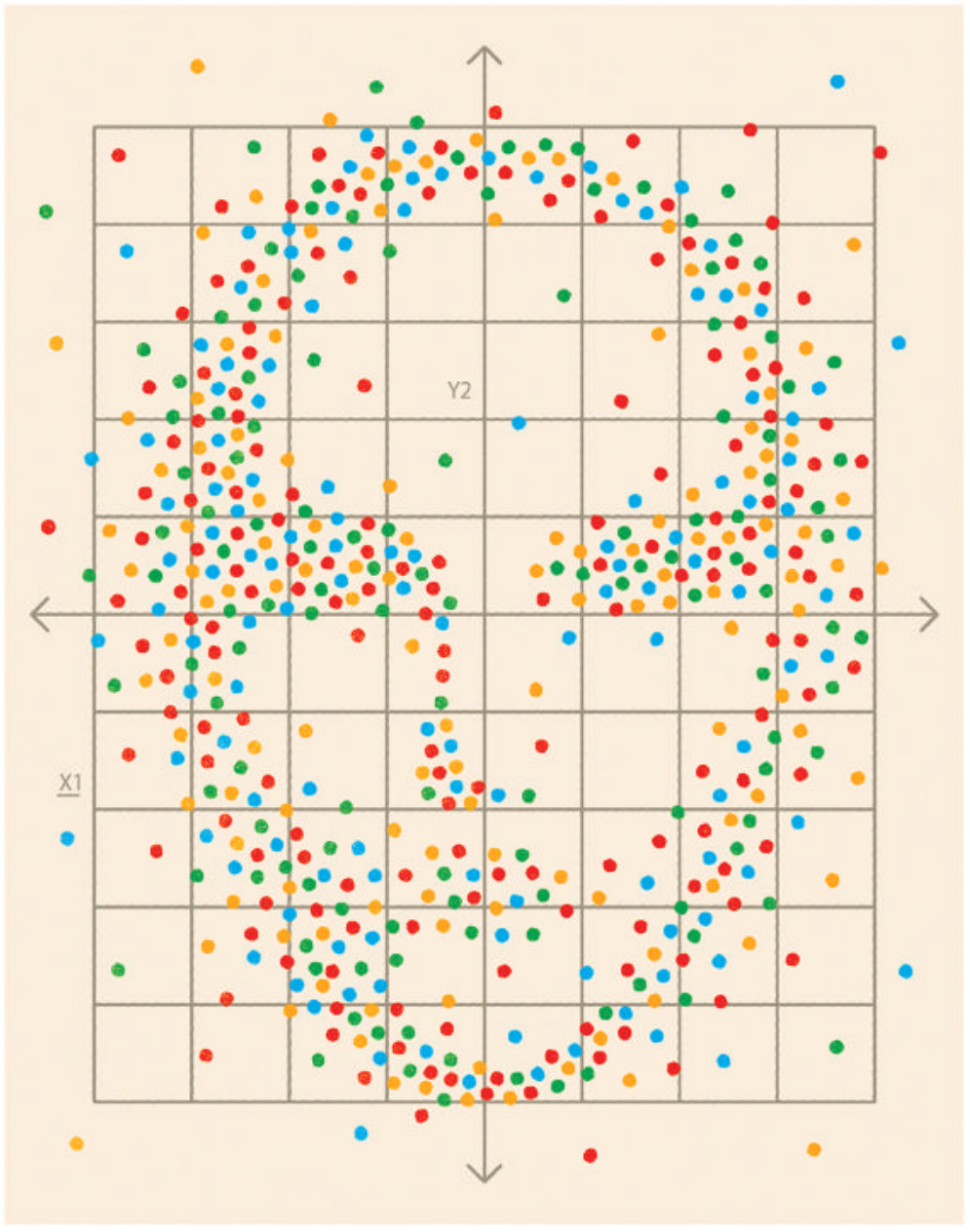
LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

DEPT. OF *SCIENCE*

THE GROTHENDIECK MYSTERY

Alexander Grothendieck revolutionized mathematics—then he disappeared.

BY RIVKA GALCHEN



While living in an internment camp in Vichy France, Alexander Grothendieck was tutored in mathematics by another prisoner, a girl named Maria. Maria taught Grothendieck, who was twelve, the definition of a circle: all the points that are equidistant from a given point. The definition impressed him with "its simplicity and clarity," he wrote years later. The property of perfect rotundity had until then appeared to him to be "mysterious beyond words."

Grothendieck became a revered mathematician. His work involved finding the right vantage point—from there, solutions to problems would follow easily. He rewrote definitions, even of things as basic as a point; his reframings uncovered connections between seemingly unrelated realms of math. He spoke of his mathematical work as the building of houses, contrasting it with that of mathematicians who make improvements on an inherited house or construct a piece of furniture. Colin McLarty, a logician and philosopher of math at Case Western Reserve, told me, "Lots of people today live in Grothendieck's house, unaware that it's Grothendieck's house." The M.I.T. mathematician Michael Artin, who worked with Grothendieck in the early sixties, laughed when I asked him about Grothendieck's contributions. "Well, everything changed in the field," he said. "He came, and it was like night and day. It was a revolution."

When Grothendieck was forty-two years old, he abruptly left the field of mathematics. For a while, he still did occasional private mathematical work—"to my own surprise, and despite my long-standing conviction," he later wrote, "that I would never publish a single new line of mathematics in my lifetime." By the time he was sixty-three, his whereabouts were known by almost no one. Nor was it known whether he was still pursuing solutions to the problems that had obsessed him for decades. Stories circulated of a bearded man wearing a long robe, hermited away somewhere in the Pyrenees.

Grothendieck wrote that his central work had been cruelly abandoned by others—but that wasn't entirely true. Research was still ongoing in mathematical domains termed "Grothendieck universes," and although his work wasn't always cited, his methods were used so often that to cite him would be like citing Leibniz or Newton every time you used calculus. In 1992, two mathematicians, Leila Schneps and Pierre Lochak, decided that they would find Grothendieck.

The mathematical house builder Alexander Grothendieck was born in March, 1928, in Berlin, to Alexander Shapiro and Hanka Grothendieck. Hanka was married to a different man, so the child's last name at birth was Raddatz. Shapiro, who went by Sascha, came from a middle-class Hasidic family, against whom he had rebelled. Hanka had left behind a well-off Protestant family. Both parents were anarchists. Sascha had been imprisoned in Russia for his involvement in the 1905 revolution; he lost an arm after being shot during one of his attempted escapes.

In 1933, Sascha left Berlin and moved to Paris, and Hanka followed soon afterward. They left Alexander in Hamburg, with a family that took in children. Maidi, his half sister via his mother, was put in an institution for disabled children, though she was not disabled. Sascha and Hanka spent some time in Spain, during the civil war. They wrote only a handful of letters to their children.

By 1939, the family that had taken

"Whole fields of mathematics speak the language that he set up," a professor said.

ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN PETERS-COLLAER

Grothendieck in had grown concerned. Grothendieck looked Jewish. They located Sascha and Hanka, and the boy was put on a train from Hamburg to Paris. Shortly after Grothendieck's reunion with his parents, whom he hadn't seen in six years, Sascha was sent to an internment camp outside the city. (He later died in Auschwitz.) The mother and child were sent to Rieucros, a camp in the south. "The administration of the camp turned a blind eye toward the kids, however undesirable they might be," Grothendieck writes in "Récoltes et Semailles" ("Harvests and Sowings")—a manuscript of more than a thousand pages that was recently published, by Gallimard, in France. "We came and went as we pleased. I was the oldest, and the only one to go to school. It was a four- or five-kilometre-long walk, often in rainy and windy weather, wearing makeshift shoes that always got wet." Grothendieck makes almost no other mention of the camp. He follows its description with a long paragraph about a teacher who unfairly gave him a bad grade for a math proof that he did in his own way, ignoring the textbook. He also decries his textbooks as lacking "serious" definitions of length, area, and volume.

For many years, Grothendieck idealized his parents. He identified closely with his father, with whom he had spent very little time, and whose biography he sometimes conflated with that of another Alexander Shapiro, a famous anarchist of the same era. Grothendieck recalled that as a child he loved rhymes, feeling that their sonic connections pointed to a mystery beyond words. For a time, he spoke exclusively in rhymes, "but fortunately," he wrote fifty years later, "that period has passed."

After Grothendieck had spent two years in Rieucros, a Protestant activist organization negotiated with the Vichy government for the release of some of the internees. Grothendieck was separated from his mother and housed as a refugee in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, an Alpine area famous for centuries of resistance to repressive governments. Many of the local residents were cowherds. There, some five thousand "undesirables," mostly children, were successfully hidden from the Nazis. The staple food was boiled chestnuts, which was served three times a day. Mushrooms or chicken was added if available. Sometimes the children were sent to the woods to hide for a few days.

If Grothendieck's childhood was characterized by the fairy-tale aspect of being in a dark wood without parents, then his early adult life was also like a fairy tale, as obstacles were repeatedly overcome with almost magical ease. After the war, Grothendieck reunited with his mother and attended the University of Montpellier. He worked in the vineyards to support himself and Hanka, who was weak from tuberculosis, which she had contracted at Rieucros. While at the university—which was not an important center of mathematics—Grothendieck independently pursued research on ideas having to do with measures, a field that less gifted students might dismiss as obvious. He ended up rediscovering a celebrated problem, Lebesgue's theorem. From that moment forward, Grothendieck thought of himself as a mathematician.

He went to Paris and studied with the most important French mathematicians of the time, including Laurent Schwartz, who would soon be awarded a Fields Medal, the highest award in mathematics. At the end of a paper coauthored by Schwartz, fourteen questions were listed. "Many of those questions, individually, would have been enough for a Ph.D.," the mathematician Pierre Cartier said. In a short time, Grothendieck solved them all.

A more pedestrian problem was that Grothendieck was stateless. He had a right to French citizenship but did not avail himself of it, because that would mean he could be conscripted into the military. (When Grothendieck was later invited to visit Harvard, he almost didn't get a visa, because he refused to pledge not to attempt to overthrow the United States government; he said that he would be fine going to jail in the U.S., so long as he had access to as many books as he wanted.) Without French citizenship, he could not be hired at French universities. He worked in the math department of the University of São Paulo for two years, where he told people that he ate only bananas, bread, and milk, "so as not to lose any time over it." He then spent a year at the University of Kansas, and while there did work that culminated in a paper now known as the *Tohoku* paper, for the Japanese math journal in which it was published. The paper broadened spectral sequences—a fundamental tool in algebraic topology—and made them more powerful. Grothendieck's contributions may sound like Martian language to non-mathematicians, but the connections revealed in his work were dramatic. "Spectral sequences wasn't even seen as a subject on its own two feet," Barry Mazur, a mathematician at Harvard who was friends with Grothendieck in the nineteen-sixties, told me. "It's more of a technique. But Grothendieck didn't approach anything as a mere technique."

Mazur suggests that it's possible to glimpse the essence of Grothendieck's approach to mathematics by looking at two concepts—categories and functors. A category can be thought of almost as a grammar: take triangles, perhaps, and understand them in terms of their relationship to all other triangles. The category consists of objects, and relationships between objects. The objects are nouns and the relationships are verbs, and the category is all the ways in which they can interact. Grothendieck's discoveries opened up mathematics in a way that was analogous to how Wittgenstein (and Saussure) changed our views of language.

A functor is a kind of translation machine that lets you go from one category to another, while bringing along all the relevant tools. This is more astonishing than it sounds. Imagine if math could be translated into poetry, and somehow it made sense to take the square root of a stanza.

The mathematician Angela Gibney describes Grothendieck's vantage point in a way that I find particularly approachable: if you want to know about people, you don't just look at them individually—you look at them at a family reunion. Ravi Vakil, a mathematician at Stanford, said, "He also named things, and there's a lot of power in naming." In the forbiddingly complex world of math, sometimes something as simple as new language leads you to discoveries. Vakil said, "It's like when Newton defined weight and mass. They

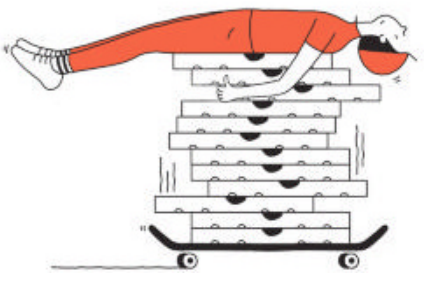
had not been distinguished before. And suddenly you could understand what was previously muddled."

As a young man, Léon Motchane studied mathematics and physics in Russia, but after the Revolution he had to give up his studies to help support his family. He worked in insurance and banking, and lived in France. In 1958, he founded the Institut des Hautes Études Scientifiques, in Bures-sur-Yvette, about an hour outside Paris. I.H.E.S. is similar to the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, which Motchane had visited. Part of the guiding principle behind both institutions is that scientific thinking can be nourished in a community, where ideas are worked out through conversations and connections between people. When putting I.H.E.S. together, Motchane contacted the elder statesman of mathematics Jean Dieudonné, who was as revered as his name had destined him to be. Dieudonné had been a founding member of Bourbaki, a group of mathematicians in France who were collectively rewriting the foundations of mathematics, and signing the work N. Bourbaki. (They once sent out invitations for the wedding of N. Bourbaki's daughter, who was marrying a lion hunter named Hector Pétard.)

Dieudonné agreed to accept a position at the newly formed I.H.E.S., on the condition that Motchane also hire Grothendieck. Initially, the two of them constituted the paid staff of I.H.E.S., and mathematicians came down from Paris to attend a weekly seminar. Grothendieck's hiring followed the death of his mother, in 1957. By the end of 1959, he was in a relationship with Mireille Dufour, who had cared for his mother. At I.H.E.S., Dieudonné set aside what he was working on in order to be a kind of scribe to Grothendieck. It was as if Matisse had set down his paintbrushes to assist a young Picasso. Nearly twelve golden years of mathematics followed, and thousands of pages of foundational theorems.

Grothendieck's I.H.E.S. seminar met on Tuesdays. Sometimes he would ask someone else to lecture. "He had this incredible ability to ask the right person to do the right thing," the mathematician Nick Katz, of Princeton, said. Katz went to I.H.E.S. as a young mathematician in the late sixties. "Grothendieck was engaged in this wonderful project, and to be asked to be a part of it—it was like Jesus asking you to be a disciple."

The "wonderful project" consisted of looking at algebraic geometry from a new point of view. This was motivated partly by trying to find a solution to the Weil conjectures, an idea that the mathematician André Weil (also a Bourbakist) described in a letter to his sister, the philosopher and mystic Simone Weil, written while he was serving time in a military prison for failing to report for duty in the French Army. (The conjectures were formally introduced in a paper in 1949.) Weil's conjectures detailed unexpected correspondences between the mathematical fields of number theory and topology. He showed that the number of solutions to certain polynomial equations—you may remember in high school trying to solve for x and y and coming up with more than one possible solution—was related to the number and kinds of holes in a geometric visualization of the solutions to the equations, and that this seemed to be true for equations in two dimensions or seventeen dimensions or a million dimensions. But Weil's conjectures were conjectures. Grothendieck saw a way to prove them, using what are called schemes, sheaves, and motives. Sheaves were a mathematical bundling system of sorts, also developed during an incarceration: Jean Leray came up with the system while he was a prisoner of war.



"What Grothendieck would do is work until late in the night writing up his thoughts, and then throw them downstairs to Dieudonné at 5 A.M., who would then clarify and fill out what Grothendieck had put together until 8 A.M. or so," McLarty told me. Vakil describes the experience of reading the texts that came from that time as "scriptural." He said, "Every single sentence is obvious, based on what came before. In that way, it's simple."

Many people who knew Grothendieck during his time at I.H.E.S. speak of his kindness, his openness to any kind of question, his gentle humor. He was often barefoot. He fasted once a week in opposition to the war in Vietnam. Mazur recalled that Grothendieck had met a family at the local train station with nowhere to stay, and he invited them to live in the basement apartment of his home. He had a machine installed that helped make taramosalata—a fish-roe spread—so that they could sell prepared food at the market.

Grothendieck spoke of problem-solving as akin to opening a hard nut. You could open it with sharp tools and a hammer, but that was not his way. He said that it was better to put the nut in liquid, to let it soak, even to walk away from it, until eventually it opened. He also spoke of "the rising sea." One way to think of this: there's a rocky and difficult shore, which you must somehow get your boat across. There may be a variety of ingenious engineering feats that can respond to this challenge. But another solution is to wait for the sea to rise, providing a smooth surface to cross effortlessly. The mathematician and writer Jordan Ellenberg said of his first encounters with Grothendieck's work on schemes, "Once you see it set up this way, it doesn't read like a style or trend. It feels inevitable, like: This is what it is." Grothendieck's rewriting of foundations can seem complex and difficult, but only because, Ellenberg said, they were previously described in the wrong terms. "We have a word for difficult, and a word for easy, but we need a word for something about which it is difficult to understand that it is easy."

Grothendieck almost never worked with specific examples. It has been said that once, when he was asked to use a prime number to demonstrate something on the blackboard, he said, "You mean an actual number? O.K., take fifty-seven." Fifty-seven is not a prime number—it's nineteen times three—and it is now known as Grothendieck's prime.

Grothendieck returned students'

drafts of papers with extensive markings, including comments on word choices and where a comma should go. The mathematician Luc Illusie described how, after submitting pages, he would go to Grothendieck's home in the afternoon and sit side by side with him for hours, going over each comment, stopping only for tea and dinner. "Some students were overwhelmed by this, or discouraged, but, to me, I saw him as a very sweet man," Illusie said.

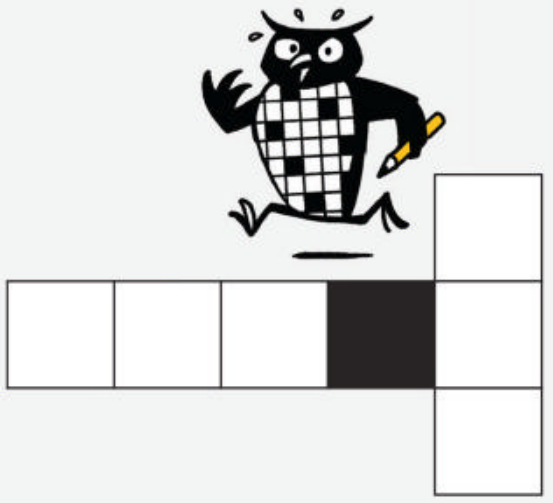
Still, a sharper side of Grothendieck was increasingly visible. Mazur, who worked at I.H.E.S. at the time, explained that Grothendieck had become an ardent environmentalist. He wouldn't let his wife, Mireille, drive a car, "though he himself had a motorbike to get to and from the institute," Mazur said. No car meant that shopping for groceries was difficult for Mireille, who took care of their three young children. (When the children complained about school, Grothendieck told them to do what interested them; none of them graduated from high school.) Mazur remembered a meal that he and his wife, Gretchen, hosted at their home near I.H.E.S., in May, 1968. Before the dinner, they learned that Grothendieck had become a vegetarian. "We had never known any vegetarians—it was new for us," he said, laughing. So they went into Paris to go to Fauchon, the high-end grocery store. "You could get bulgur wheat that was labelled 'bulgur wheat.' It was that kind of place." It was the time of the student uprisings, when riots and riot squads were common. The Mazurs were conscious of making their way to an élitist grocery, which presumably Grothendieck would have been against. "We probably spent one-third of our monthly salary there," Mazur said.

The Grothendiecks arrived. Mazur told me, "He came in and saw the spread and said with a big smile, 'This is wonderful!'" And then he turned to Mireille and said in a harsh voice, "See how easy it is to make a vegetarian meal!" "That kind of turn was very characteristic of Grothendieck," Mazur said. "That's why I'm telling you this story. And, how should I put it? It affected all of his friendships, eventually. All of his relationships." Of the taramosalata-making family, Mazur added, "Of course, it was Mireille who had the burden and responsibility of taking care of all those people."

In 1970, Grothendieck abruptly left. He left the I.H.E.S., he left the twelve to sixteen hours a day of thinking about math, he left his wife and his three children. His work on the Weil conjectures was not yet complete: his theory had solved only three of the four conjectures. His stated reason for leaving was that he had found out that five per cent of the I.H.E.S.'s funding was coming from the French ministry of defense. But those who knew him say they felt that this could have been resolved and was not the real reason. Some recall that in 1968, when he tried to speak to striking students, he was disturbed to realize that they saw him as a mandarin figure of the institution—not as the outsider he saw himself as. Grothendieck knew an enormous amount about math, but little about himself or anything else. His mentor Jean-Pierre Serre—whom Grothendieck named as the origin of all his most profound mathematical contributions—later wrote to him, "I have the impression that, despite your well-known energy, you were quite simply tired of the enormous job you had taken on. . . . Did you not come, in fact, around 1968-1970, to realize that the 'rising tide' method was powerless against this type of question"—the solving of the fourth conjecture, for example—"and that a different style would be necessary?" Whatever the actual reason was, Grothendieck encouraged his colleagues to leave, too, telling them that mathematics was a siren song keeping them from what they should be doing—though, as with his mathematics, he was spare on the specifics.

Grothendieck devoted himself to a new project, Survivre et Vivre, which aimed to save the planet and the human species. He was particularly drawn to Arthur Koestler's language about "sleepwalking toward Armageddon," and he described scientists and mathematicians as the most dangerous people on the planet, because they carelessly put destructive technological power in the hands of politicians. For about two years, he was the primary contributor to a monthly newsletter called *Bulletin de Liaison*, signing some of his

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Grothendieck also envisaged a commune, in a house with at least twelve rooms, which would have "the warmth of a family environment." In 1972, this idea became a reality, in the town of Châtenay-Malabry. He began dating a mathematician, Justine Skalba, whom he had met at a talk at Rutgers; soon afterward, she agreed to leave her studies and follow him. The commune, founded with friends, started with only four people, but others came and went, and sometimes meetings were held on Survivre issues which attracted up to a hundred people. Grothendieck sold sea salt and organic vegetables, but others called him "the bank," because he was the source of all cash. The commune fell apart within a year. Skalba had a child. By the time the child, John, was two months old, she had left Grothendieck; John grew up having almost no relationship with his father and went on to study math at Harvard—he took a class taught by Mazur—before becoming a scientist who works with A.I.

Grothendieck eventually took a teaching position at Montpellier, which was still not an important center of mathematics. "After a few years of intensive anti-military and ecological campaigning of the 'cultural revolution' type, that you have certainly heard echoes of here and there, I basically disappeared from circulation, lost at some provincial university God knows where," Grothendieck wrote in the eighties, in an application for a research position, so that he would no longer have to teach. "Rumor had it that I spent my time keeping sheep and digging wells. The truth is that apart from numerous other activities, I was valiantly lecturing at the university just like everybody else." He ended the application, which he called "Sketch of a Program," by writing, "Today I am no longer, as I used to be, the voluntary prisoner of interminable tasks, which so often prevented me from springing into the unknown, mathematical or not. The time of tasks is over for me. If age has brought me something, it is lightness."

It is said that the ancient Greek mathematician Pythagoras made pronouncements on numbers from behind a curtain. His followers, the cult of Pythagoras, conducted their research with the enthusiasm of spiritual seekers. They ate bread, honey, vegetables, and seeds, avoiding meat. When one follower demonstrated logically the existence of irrational numbers—numbers that cannot be expressed as a fraction, and that continue on indefinitely when expressed in decimals—the Pythagoreans are said to have taken the infidel out on a boat and tossed him overboard. Mathematicians take their ideas of beauty and purity pretty seriously. The mathematician Paul Erdős used to refer to particularly elegant proofs as "straight from the Book," meaning the book of God (though he doubted God's existence, and would refer to him as the SF, for Supreme Fascist).

Around 1985, mathematicians who had known Grothendieck began to receive fragments of a manuscript, along with personal letters. This was "Récoltes et Semailles," subtitled "The Life of a Mathematician; Reflections and Bearing Witness." To an outsider like me, it's a coherent and imaginative piece of writing that is also, in its obsessiveness, deranged. To those who knew Grothendieck, it was more distressing. One mathematician has said that he preferred to read it as a novel, because the narrator seemed to be in so much pain. A substantial part of "Récoltes et Semailles" is a jeremiad, describing a degraded mathematical community intent on burying Grothendieck. It also speaks of a select number of visionaries, whom he terms Mutants.

Jean-Pierre Serre received a section of the manuscript, and responded in a long letter that includes the following passage:

> You are surprised and indignant that your former students did not continue the work which you had undertaken and largely completed. But you do not ask the most obvious question, the one every reader expects you to answer: why did you yourself abandon the work in question?

The former student whom Grothendieck particularly vilified was widely recognized as his most brilliant: Pierre Deligne. But Deligne had wronged him through an ingenious piece of mathematics. Four years after Grothendieck left the I.H.E.S., Deligne had proved the fourth and final Weil conjecture. "But he solved it the wrong way," Michael Artin said, with an impish smile—he didn't use the foundational system that Grothendieck had established. Ravi Vakil told me that mathematicians sometimes describe this moment with an analogy: "It was as if, in order to get from one peak to another, Deligne shot an arrow across the valley and made a high wire and then crossed on it." Grothendieck wanted the problem to be solved by filling in the entire valley with stones. He wrote about a dream in which he was "cut deeply in many places." When he awoke, he said, he realized that this image of "massacre" had made clear the "reality of intentions and dispositions of others that I had strongly perceived."

"Récoltes et Semailles" is repeatedly framed in terms of childhood. The mathematical ideas that Grothendieck felt were abandoned are called "orphans." Among the section titles are "Toward the discovery of the Mother," "The tome and high society—or the moon and green cheese . . . ," and "Death is my cradle (or three toddlers for one moribund)." Yet there is very little talk of Grothendieck's actual childhood, or mother, or father. The other theme used repeatedly in section titles is death: "A wind of burial . . . ," "Gangrene—or the spirit of our times," "The Posthumous student," "The funeral," "The coffin," "Encounters from beyond the grave," "The massacre," and ". . . and the chainsaw."

In 1991, Leila Schneps, a young American mathematician, was handed a manuscript copy of Grothendieck's 1984 application, "Sketch of a Program," by another mathematician, Pierre Lochak. "Maybe it was a pickup thing for mathematicians," she said, smiling. "Pierre is now my partner." She was aware that Grothendieck was a very general thinker. "I do number theory, which is abstract, but I like to work with mathematical objects, if that makes sense," she said. "So it's not as abstract. I didn't think I would be drawn to Grothendieck's work."

But, when she read the manuscript, she found it to be incredibly beautiful: "One idea in there is that we have been writing math in a way that is all wrong." Grothendieck argued that mathematicians hide all of the discovery process, and make it appear smooth and deductive. "He said that, because of

this, the creative side of math is totally misunderstood. He said it should be written in a different way, that shows all the thinking along the way, all the wrong turns—that he wanted to write it in a way that emphasized the creative process."

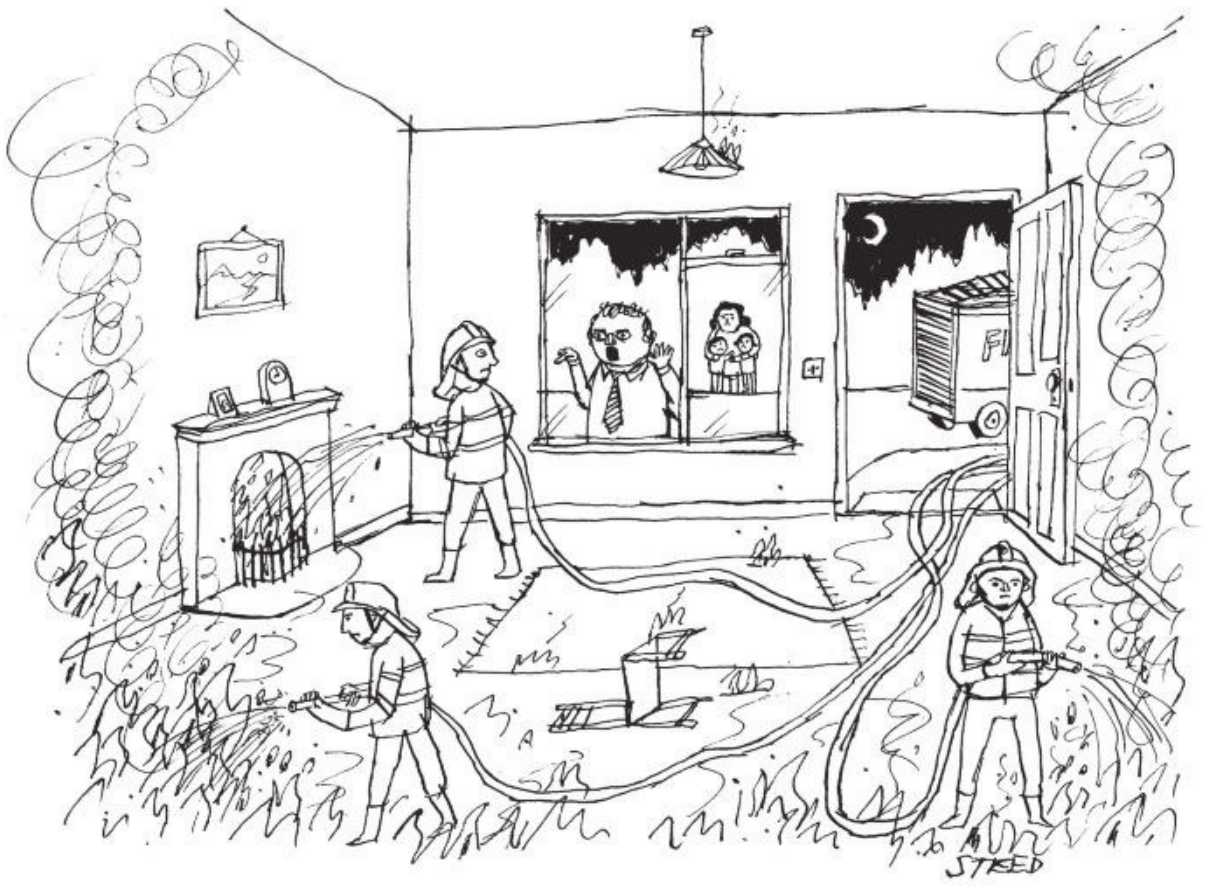
Schneps was also captivated by other late work of his, about what are called *dessins d'enfants:* "It's this idea that any simple picture, made of vertices and segments—whatever you can draw in this way—that there's a natural connection between each and every one of these drawings and an actual equation with coefficients that are algebraic numbers—and this is so weird." This involved an area of math called Galois theory, which Schneps also worked in. "He saw that the absolute Galois group acts on these drawings. And then he did something that I find so touching. He actually drew it. He drew these little drawings. Grothendieck did not do examples, of course—and here he was, doing an example, something concrete." Schneps thought, O.K., this is for me. She and Lochak went searching for Grothendieck.

By then, he was living as a hermit, at times subsisting only on dandelion soup. He kept his address a secret so that he would not be found. Schneps and Lochak spoke to a couple of thin, bearded men, one of them living in a shack in the middle of a wheat field. "He said he would leave us to decide inside our soul whether he was Alexander Grothendieck," Schneps said. He wasn't Alexander Grothendieck. They journeyed up to a hut in the mountains to meet another thin, bearded hermit; he also was not Grothendieck. The area, which was not too far from where Grothendieck had hidden in the woods as a child, was a magnet for people who were living outside traditional systems, or without official paperwork. Finally, they found yet another thin and bearded man, buying vegetables in the market—the true Grothendieck.

A tremendous, demanding, tumultuous friendship was struck up. "Sometimes he was so nice. Other times, we would knock on his door and he would slam it in our faces, or he would tell us that we were messengers of Satan," Schneps said. She recalled that, if a leaf broke off a plant in his home, he would place the fallen leaf in its own glass of water. He told Schneps and Lochak that he and the plants could communicate. "I think he was very lonely," she said. He was preoccupied with the problem of evil and felt that, when people set aside what they were doing and focussed on this, the evil would end. "I don't think he was crazy," she said. "Look at us chatting away here, with everything going on in Ukraine." It was the end of February. "He would say that we are the ones who are crazy." She and Lochak attempted to visit him each year. At times, he would gather a basket of apples from his yard to give to them; at other times, he would accuse them of trampling on him. He never spoke with them about mathematics.

Schneps and Lochak, along with friends, founded the Grothendieck Circle, a group devoted to preserving and making accessible as much of Grothendieck's work as possible. Schneps also organized a conference around his work, and collaborated with the mathematician Winfried Scharlau, who has written a deeply researched biography.

Grothendieck's work also survives as the structure in which much of math happens today. When Fermat's Last Theorem was proved, by Andrew Wiles, in 1994, Grothendieck's contributions to algebraic geometry were essential. Ravi Vakil said, "Whole fields of mathematics speak the language that he set up. We live in this big structure that he built. We take it for granted—the architect is gone."



"Leave that bit."

• •

Schneps recalled that, in one of her visits to Grothendieck before his death, in 2014, he explained his conviction that lived experience could lead one intellectually astray. "As I told you, he never started from examples, and this was the way he thought about everything, not just mathematics," she said. And so the example of his own life was something that he didn't want to take seriously. Grothendieck shed or burned most of his meagre possessions, but even at the end of his life he still had a painting that had been made of his father in the internment camp.

Early on in "Récoltes et Semailles," he expands on the metaphor of the title:

> I know that there is a nourishing substance in everything that happens to me, whether the seeds are by my own hand or by others—it is up to me to eat it and watch it transform into knowledge. . . . I have learned that in the harvest, however bitter, there is substantial flesh which it is up to us to nourish ourselves with. When this substance is eaten and has become part of our flesh, the bitterness, which was only the sign of our resistance to the food intended for us, has disappeared. ♦

LIGHT AND SHADOW

Matthew Wong's art conveys a life of extraordinary pain and self-determination.

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

Matthew Wong, the gifted Canadian painter who died by suicide at the age of thirty-five, just before the pandemic, worked from a studio in Edmonton, on the east side of the North Saskatchewan River. The neighborhood is industrial, but not in an arty way. It is industrial in an industrial way. The squat building that houses Wong's workspace—which remains as he left it, with barely a brush moved—has more loading docks than doors, and stands before a parking strip that can accommodate eighteen-wheelers. One part of the facility is devoted to a manufacturer of industrial lubricants, another to a food-processing company.

Wong's studio, protected by a metal door and an alarm, is tucked into a corner office on the second floor. For years, unknown to the other tenants, he came to paint—producing, in a furious outpouring, works of astonishing lyricism, melancholy, whimsy, intelligence, and, perhaps most important, sincerity. He played with a dizzying array of artistic references, but he shared the early modernists' conviction that oil on canvas could yield intimate and novel forms of expression.

In Wong's lifetime, his work was heralded—remarkably so, given that he was largely self-taught and spent no more than seven years with a brush in hand. "One of the most impressive solo New York debuts I've seen in a while," the critic Jerry Saltz wrote, in 2018. After Wong took his life, the *Times* proclaimed him "one of the most talented painters of his generation." Museums began assembling his art into major exhibitions, with one currently at the Art Gallery of Ontario and a retrospective opening this year at the Dallas Museum of Art. Wong's paintings have been acquired by MOMA and the Met.

This institutional recognition has been accompanied by a crasser kind of interest. Wong, who was diagnosed as having depression, Tourette's syndrome, and autism, conducted most of his relationships through social media, and even some of his closest contacts found him hard to know. In the three years since his death, the art market has been in a frenzy over his work, with prices escalating to multiple millions, and the rabid auctioneering has helped to shape his story into the caricature of a brilliant but tortured outsider: another Basquiat, another van Gogh.

I arrived at Wong's studio with his mother, Monita: tall, rail thin, elegant, her hair tightly pulled back. Since her son died, she has sought to protect his legacy and, still grieving, has barely given interviews. Monita was Matthew's business manager, confidante, and omnipresent companion, and she still speaks about him in the present tense. "My son is half of myself," she told me. She drove him to the studio every day that he went there, and has kept paying rent on the space in the hope of reconstituting it, object for object, in a building in Edmonton that will house the Matthew Wong Foundation, which she firmly controls.

We climbed the stairs to the second floor, and I waited at the studio door while Monita deactivated the alarm. It felt as though a safe containing a cherished memory was being unlocked. For Matthew, the studio was a sanctuary. After moving in, he texted a friend, Peter Shear, a painter in Indiana, that he would spend sixteen hours a day there if he knew how to drive. "It's a great space," he said. "No artists, as technically this is an office building." He sent a photo, taken through venetian blinds, of the vast, empty lot outside. "As you can see this area is pretty dead," he said, approvingly.

Monita and I entered an antechamber, where some canvases were stacked, and she paused. She had warned me that she could tolerate only a brief time inside. Wong's paintings—mostly imagined landscapes—are portals to luminous, vibrant, moody places. Though not surreal, they are the product of reverie: poetic concoctions inspired by memory, stray ideas, or the paint itself as he compulsively worked it. Midnight forests glow, somehow, without light, by a painterly magic. A milky tundra extends across a horizon, looking soft, opulent, ominous. Spectral icebergs—vulnerable, tentative, lost—drift in glass-like seas.

Wong bent perspectival space to fit his own emotional coördinates, and he allowed discrete categories to dissolve into dream dialectics: what is inside might be outside, or the other way around. Trees take on the shape of leaves; forests take on the appearance of folkloric embroidery. But it is also possible to ignore the representational elements and receive the images as pure abstraction. He applied paint urgently, in divergent gestures—thick impasto beside mesmerizing pattern work, or even areas with no paint at all—that cohered in an unsteady harmony.

The physicality of Wong's process was evident around us. He often painted with the canvas propped against a wall, scooping pigment from paper-towel palettes or applying it directly from the tube. Drop cloths were stained with explosions of spent color and covered in supplies: half-squished tubes of oil paint, cardboard boxes, a five-gallon Home Depot bucket filled with brushes.

Walking through his space, Monita hardly spoke, except to ask me not to touch anything. I stepped carefully around a pair of paint-splattered sneakers and past a large piece that had been shipped from southern China, where Wong made his earliest oils. An easel held a black-and-white painting of two figures.

After a few minutes, we rushed out. The studio, frozen in time, spoke of a

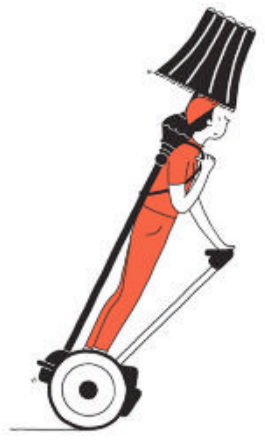


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One of Wong's late works, "See You on the Other Side," reflects a longtime interest in lone figures in otherworldly landscapes.

life interrupted. It was a fitting memorial. At the start of his career, Wong had written of his interest in "the residue and traces of human activity." Fascinated by voided surfaces, he hoped to conjure "in various states the mysterious ghosts of what-has-just-been."

Many of Wong's paintings feature solitary figures, set adrift. They are overwhelmed by nature—riding in a car at dusk, or traversing a ribbon of paint that becomes its own end. Sometimes they are hard to see, or are present only in the form of an empty chair, or an object left behind. Their footprints tell us where they are going.



Wong knew what it meant to feel uprooted. He spent much of his life shuttling between continents, and even before he was born his family wrestled with displacement. When Monita was a young girl, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, her family fled mainland China for Hong Kong, and her father, formerly a rich man, found work in the marble industry. He rebounded well enough to send Monita to boarding school in Toronto. As an adult, back in Hong Kong, Monita married Matthew's father, Raymond, and together they ran a company that distributed fabrics. In 1983, she became pregnant. Mistrusting the local health-care system, she flew to Toronto to give birth to Matthew, then returned with her son. "It was very simple," she told me.

Raising Matthew was far from simple, though. He was curious and intelligent, but from a young age he found social interactions overwhelming. He later told a friend that on his first day of kindergarten he was "crying in a corner not wanting to let go of Mom's hand." Bullied and ridiculed, he came to hate school. "To this day, I shrink a little when I pass a group of adolescent friends," he said. "There is a distinct kind of laugh that exists in the world that makes me jump out of my soul every time I hear it."

Wong was aware that he was wired differently from others; he once told Monita, "Mom, why do people take cocaine? So that their brain will function fast—but for me that's natural." He had a near-photographic memory, able to absorb vast amounts of information about whatever he was interested in. In time, he developed a striking conversational style—disorienting or charismatic, depending on his interlocutor's view—because he was often several steps ahead, making associations across topics.

By the age of thirteen, struggling with his racing intellect, Wong began to express suicidal thoughts, and he was diagnosed as having depression. Given a prescription for Prozac, he discovered that art, too, could be fortifying. An American friend had introduced him to Puff Daddy's "No Way Out," and the music was a revelation. Wong started reading hip-hop magazines, memorizing lyrics, sometimes spontaneously breaking into raps. "At school, I was powerless and the biggest loser, but afterwards back home with my headphones on I was somebody different," he once wrote. In his imagination, he was a guest on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," or partying with beautiful people at the Tunnel, the famed hip-hop night club. Like Jay-Z, he was telling anyone who didn't know the difference between a 4.0 Range Rover and a 4.6 to "beat it."

When Matthew reached high-school age, Monita decided to return to Toronto. She worried about navigating the complexities of Hong Kong's educational system, and she was convinced that her son would receive better medical attention in Canada. Recognizing that she and Raymond would have to shut down their business, she pitched the move as an adventure. "It's a good time to travel," she told her husband.

In Toronto, they enrolled Matthew in a private school. By then, doctors had explained that he also had Tourette's syndrome, and Monita urged him to embrace the new diagnosis. "Nobody can look down on you unless you are doing it, too," she told him. With her encouragement, he took to announcing his Tourette's at the start of conversations.

Wong began to thrive in his new school, exhibiting a teen-ager's enthusiasm for high and low culture. On trips to New York, he went to IMAX screenings of professional wrestling. "I would actually walk around town alone, in my head imagining I was in some WWF scenarios," he later recalled. He also got heavily into free jazz. "Coltrane's 'Meditations' was playing around the clock in the house," he once told Peter Shear. "Ornette Coleman was my idea of easy listening, no joke."

Later, Wong attended the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, moving into an apartment off campus with his father, who helped care for him, while Monita returned to Hong Kong. He hoped to become an investment banker—believing that the profession was a gateway to a glamorous life—until he took Econ 101 and realized that he was disastrous at math. Instead, he majored in cultural anthropology, and he excelled; he was a sharp observer, an avid reader, a connoisseur of culture. Socially, too, he was doing well. Then, in his junior year, he fell into a suicidal depression. Monita, in Hong Kong, arranged for him to return to Toronto, and his doctors there helped him navigate the episode. From afar, she tried not to worry about her son's future.

Wong was nearly six and a half feet tall, handsome, thin, with high cheekbones and eyebrows that ramped toward the bridge of his nose, intensifying his gaze. He disliked having his photo taken, except in carefully executed selfies, and even those he often deleted soon after posting them online. A photo that Monita took of him on graduation day at Michigan, in 2007, shows him in a slim-cut suit, with his back to her. Aware that he is being photographed, he gives an awkward victory sign as he hurries to avoid the lens.

After college, Wong returned to Hong Kong, and the family settled in Discovery Bay, a resort town on an island accessible by ferry. He found work as a corporate headhunter, impressing the company's C.E.O. with his erudition, but the job required smooth talking, and he didn't stay long. "He hated it," Monita told me. "You have to lie. That was not his mentality." Through a golf acquaintance of Monita's, Wong got an internship at PricewaterhouseCoopers. Between the long hours and the commute, he was getting home close to dawn, napping, then

returning to work, but he was determined to succeed. Hyper-keen on fashion, he bought some fancy suits. "He looked like a prince," Monita recalled, though his conspicuous style did him no favors with the other interns. "He didn't really behave that well, either," a friend added. After nine months, he was unemployed again.

Wong was trying to find his way in a city that offered him no clear berth: he was neither a native—his Cantonese was just passable—nor an expat. In his mid-twenties, he had no friends and no way to support himself. Searching for something to hold on to, he began attending open-mike poetry readings, and soon he was writing and sharing poems, improving fast. "He spoke honestly, bluntly—and this made communication uncomfortable sometimes," John Wall Barger, an American poet who was living in Hong Kong, wrote in an unpublished reflection. "If he hated a poem of mine, no matter how excitedly I presented it, he'd say so. He was very tall, but quiet: hovering at the edge of the group. You forgot he was there, but then he would cut in a conversation with a snippet of hip hop or a joke that didn't always make sense."

At the readings, held in bars, there were internecine squabbles and dramas, and some of the poets treated Wong unkindly. He looked down on them, too. "He masked his sadness with a scowl," Barger noted. One evening, drunk and frustrated, Wong burned some of his poems outside a bar. Then he began insulting people's families. One poet attacked him, and a fight ensued, with the poet swinging at Wong while others tried to pull the men apart. Police became involved, and Wong was suspended from the readings, but he eventually returned. "This is practically the only social interaction I have," he told an acquaintance, Nicolette Wong.

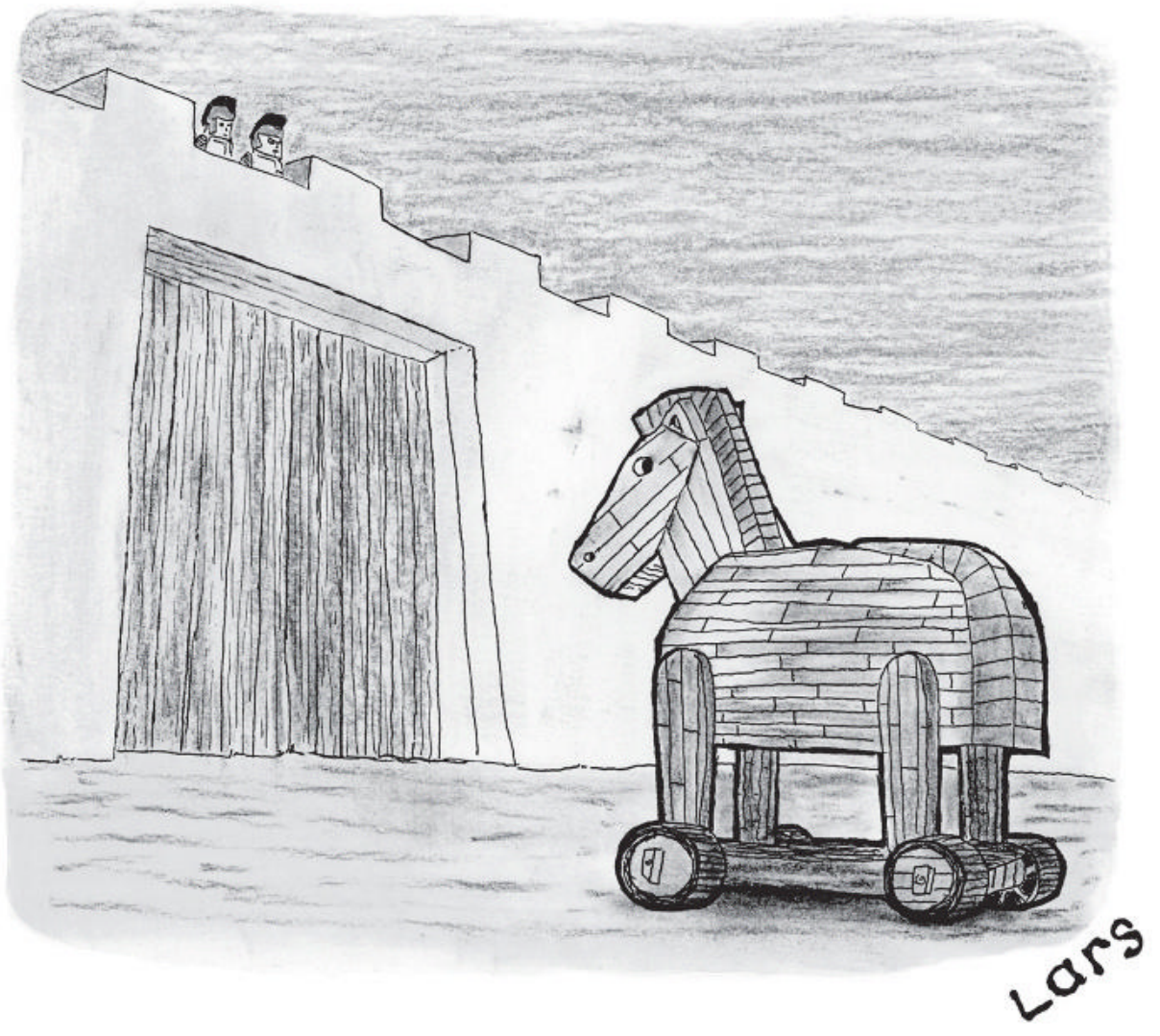
Although he never felt that he truly belonged, Wong befriended a few poets who, like him, were on the group's margins. At one of the readings, he met a woman who worked at a gallery, and they began dating. Often, Wong and Barger sat on a bench outside Barger's home, where they smoked, talked about art, and read their poems. Wong was in awe of the Surrealists John Ashbery and James Tate. In his own poems, he was interested in "expressing an indeterminate space where names, places and situations don't really matter—just a faint glimpse of a gut feeling, something in the air." He was drawn to Freud's theory of the uncanny, and to Lorca's notion of *duende:* a creative force—emergent from flesh, touched by death—that is indifferent to refinement and intellect.

"Seeking the *duende*, there is neither map nor discipline," Lorca wrote, in an essay that Barger and Wong discussed. "We only know it burns the blood like powdered glass, that it exhausts, rejects all the sweet geometry we understand, that it shatters styles and makes Goya, master of the grays, silvers and pinks of the finest English art, paint with his knees and fists in terrible bitumen blacks."

One day in 2009, shortly before Wong began writing poetry, he was in his grandfather's bedroom in Hong Kong. "Something in me was pushed by an urge to visually reproduce the uncalculated, almost accidental slice of poetry in front of me," he later recalled. Using an old Nokia phone, he took a photo of his grandfather's belongings. "It was the first thing I remember doing out of my own creative volition."

Wong continued taking pictures—"street signs and found geometric arrangements out in the urban environment"—and his girlfriend suggested that he get a master's in photography at the City University of Hong Kong. He enrolled, even though the program was for "creative media" professionals, not artists. In a report to his adviser, he described his work as if it were going in an exhibition. He documented mementos that Monita's mother had saved from her home in mainland China. ("Domestic surfaces of my maternal grandmother's storied apartment on the eve of its permanent evacuation.") He shot night skies in which the ground was a lightless mass. ("Again, there is the insistence on perception of a void.")

Wong had an eye for lone, vulnerable figures, and he loved the photographer William Eggleston, who exalted the mundane. But he despised formal techniques, like bracketing, and compositional guidelines, like the rule of thirds. There was no *duende* in any of that: such fussiness, he thought, made photos lifeless and stiff. Eventually, he



"That's weird. The app says to look for a Nissan Sentra."

started to take pictures without even looking through the viewfinder; he was interested in how the process made *him* feel. "To take photographs is a way of confirming that I exist, which is something I question all the time," he told Dena Rash Guzman, a poet who interviewed him in 2012. "When I can make an image I'm satisfied with, then that question goes away for a little while."

Perhaps inevitably, Wong developed a deep skepticism of photography, which he came to think of as "an incredibly unnatural art form." Bothered that photos could often be "immediately grasped," he instead pursued a loose, poetic ideal. For a student exhibition in the fall of 2011, he pressed tree branches between paper and glass: stark, spindly shapes that offered no easy interpretation. He also included digitally manipulated images of a photo that he had painted over, creating swirling abstractions. Wong reassured his adviser that his work was "derived from a technique whose arc is similar to photography." He titled the show "Fidelity."

After the exhibit, Wong flew to Italy to serve as a docent for the Hong Kong pavilion at the Venice Biennale. During off-hours, he encountered a Julian Schnabel retrospective and some large Rorschach-blot-style paintings by Christopher Wool; these works, he later noted, caused a "radical shift" in his thinking. He began to draw obsessively, and made several abstract works with ink, acrylics, Wite-Out, and spray paint. He told his adviser that these "quizzical reflections" had arisen "out of a clash between material and chance."

By summer, Wong was drawing with charcoal on paper, smearing it in wild gestures, as if releasing anxieties, or in sedate fields of gray. He also conducted experiments inspired by Wool's Rorschach paintings and by traditional Chinese works. As he later wrote, "I just bought a cheap sketch pad, along with a bottle of ink, and made a mess every day in my bathroom randomly pouring ink onto pages—smashing them together—hoping something interesting was going to come out of it." He was painting watercolors, too. Pretty soon, most of his attention was focussed on making marks on paper, "a last resort, with no prior skill." That December, he told Barger that he thought *duende* had never touched his poems, but "I think it may have struck me one or two times in my paintings."

On a recent afternoon, I met Monita for lunch at Joss Cuisine, on Santa Monica Boulevard, in Beverly Hills. Every winter, she and her husband flee the cold and darkness of western Canada. Often, they go to Los Angeles, where they have friends, and where they can play golf in the California sun. These trips also offer a respite from the loss that hangs over them in Edmonton.

When I arrived, Monita was at a sidewalk table, conducting business on her phone. Plans were under way for the building that will house the Matthew Wong Foundation, and she was in negotiations with the engineering firm that built the Sydney Opera House. Special care would be needed, she said, to create a repository for Wong's work which can withstand harsh weather. "It will be like a vault," she said.

To launch the foundation, Monita had to create a full catalogue of her son's work, a task that proved challenging. Wong at one point was making multiple paintings a day, some of which he documented but later destroyed. His art also became harder to track as it rushed into the secondary market. A few of Wong's earliest supporters had sold pieces that they had acquired, and for Monita that stung—though she softened, a little, when it became clear that some of the sellers were artists who needed the money. Fakes and opportunists also surfaced. One painter showed me a complimentary note that Wong had sent him, and said, "If you promise to include his quotes about me, it might help my career."

In managing the estate, Monita has surrounded herself with a small, trusted circle. At the table, we were joined by an old family friend, Cecile Tang—a glamorous émigré from Hong Kong, who had come to California in the nineteen-sixties to study film, then returned home, where she wrote and directed movies, one of which found its way to Cannes. For years, she has been running Joss Cuisine.

Cecile had known Matthew. "When he first was exploring what his medium of expression was—that was so touching," she said. "He didn't use photos, or a pencil, so when he picked up his paintbrush he was almost like a child." (Wong had told Guzman, "I can't draw at all—if you told me to draw an apple or your face, what would result would likely be a disaster.")

As Wong devoted himself to painting, he wanted to work with oils, but studio space in Hong Kong was impossibly expensive. Then Monita learned that Cecile's brother, who lived in Zhongshan—a city just across the water, in mainland China—had been painting in the studios at a cultural compound called Cuiheng Village. Rent was negotiable, even free.

"Do you want it?" Monita asked Matthew. "I can organize it." He said yes. He and his girlfriend had grown apart, and he told Monita that he wanted to focus on art. "I'm too inward to really give in a relationship," he confessed to a friend. Still, the separation tore at him; he was sure that she was his only love. "I have a hope," he added. "I will succeed, and we will have earned the right to be together." Wong said later that this was the moment when he began to paint and draw in earnest: "It was basically that or suicide."

The Wongs had a condo near a golf course in Zhongshan, and they relocated there. "They were so concerned with Matthew," Cecile said. "He was in their mind all the time—to help him find his way of expressing himself. And how will he support himself after they're gone?"

At Cuiheng Village, Monita had one of the studios renovated; she added air-conditioning and racks for paintings, and put together furnishings. (When I asked if Matthew had worked with her, she said, "My son? Ask him to assemble something? Forget it! My son is scared of sharp objects.")

After weeks of preparation, Monita dropped Matthew off to paint. When she returned that evening, she found the studio in disarray. "Paint was *everywhere*," she told me. "I looked at him and said, 'Oh, my God. What are we going to do?' The entire floor was covered in oils. I tried to clean it up, so that he could work a second time."

In those first weeks in the studio, Monita sometimes joked that her son was like a gorilla wielding a paintbrush. But Matthew was pursuing a deliberate goal. After his epiphany in

Venice, he had begun to read about art voraciously, and he kept at it in Zhongshan. Wong later recalled that when he went to visit Monita's mother, who lived near a row of park benches, "I would often borrow painting books from the library and sit on one of these immersed and obsessed."

Wong absorbed art across history and geography, China and the West. In these early years, he was fascinated by the work of Bill Jensen, the American Abstract Expressionist. "It comes from some place outside talk, somewhere deeper and ineffable," he told Peter Shear. Jensen sometimes began his process with arbitrary marks and allowed the paint itself to guide him toward order. In Zhongshan, Wong attempted a similar approach: "I may just pick a few colors at hand and squeeze them onto the surface, blindly making marks, but at a certain point I will inexplicably get a very fleeting glimpse of what the image I may finally arrive at will be, sort of like a hallucination."

Wong bought his paints with no particular image in mind, and he used cheap brushes. "Throw 'em away after one use," he recalled. "Or, rather, they fall apart after one use." His work was shaped by intense movement, at close proximity to the canvas. He did not have technical virtuosity, but he had good instincts; he hoped to create work that reflected his devotion to "living a day-to-day life in paint."

Every night, after achieving a "painting buzz," he ate dinner and watched a movie with Monita. Then he typically read—poetry, novels, essays—or texted with artists he met online, or painted on paper. He went to bed contemplating art. ("Can't sleep in such a state thinkin bout paintin.") He woke up in the same state.

"Man, I'm so far gone off the painting deep end," Wong told Shear after months of working this way. "I register virtually everything I see outside in terms of a painterly effect. Now it is really scary. I have internalized it, so it is kinda normal to me and not panic inducing, but I can imagine if a stranger were to walk these shoes for like a block they'd be terrified of how they were experiencing the world." He added, "Faces jump out at me everywhere . . . shadows of branches on a night street, selectively lit by lamps, eyes, mouths, patina on walls. I don't think hallucinatory is the word for it. . . . I wish I knew if there was a word."



Wong made art at a relentless pace, telling a friend, "Not painting is pain."

"Pareidolia," Shear suggested.

While painting, Wong would allow glimmers of a landscape or figuration to emerge—mirages in pigment. The result, he hoped, would be something akin to Coltrane's "Meditations." As he told Shear, "After about the fifth consecutive listen you get numb to it and only then do your ears open up and it sounds like 'music.'"

The canvases quickly piled up. When the piles overwhelmed his space, he moved paintings into the director's studio—or *he* moved, to work in someone else's space. In 2015, he noted, "There must be over a thousand works of mine in both Hong Kong and Zhongshan combined." He knew that painting had become a compulsion. "Is there something wrong with working as much as I am?" he asked Shear. "Sometimes, I feel guilty. But I can't stop."

Every morning, Wong would roll out of bed and, on the family's terrace, make a quick ink painting on Chinese paper, while his parents slept. When it rained too hard to paint outside, he felt "immobilized, neutered." If he finished before his mother was ready to bring him to the studio, he tried to manage his anticipation. "I'm waiting for a ride to the duty hole," he told Shear one morning. "In the meantime just firin' off Facebook messages like blank bullets to anywhere and anything that will listen."

Goethe wrote that "talent is nurtured in solitude," but good art often blossoms out of human connection. Basquiat maintained a creative symbiosis with Warhol, as Robert Rauschenberg did with Jasper Johns. Van Gogh believed that his brother Theo was essential to his paintings—"as much their creator as I."

Wong was a solitary presence at

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Cuiheng Village, but he was not a loner. On trips to Hong Kong, he met with a friend or two to paint, watch movies, smoke weed, conduct stoner debates: could a painting evoke John Bonham's drumming? "When Matthew made a good joke, it was clever and required you to move into some mental space with him," one of his friends recalled. "He would be grinning like a horse, and it would be funny as hell."

Online, Wong became enmeshed in a much larger community. He had discovered painting at a time when Facebook was hosting a vibrant, wide-ranging artistic conversation. "There was this glorious moment when artists from all over were connecting in an authentic, meaningful way, without 'branding' or ugly competition," Mark Dutcher, a painter in Los Angeles, told me. Dutcher himself opened his process to hundreds of followers. "It was sincere and special," he said.

Wong was ideally suited to the medium. Communicating from behind a keypad, he was vulnerable, opinionated, witty, able to talk about anything. In a milieu known for polish and snobbery, he had no filter. From China, Wong sought guidance on questions like what the optimal brand of paint was, or if it was possible to mix acrylics with oils. (Not recommended.) He gave his friends the feeling that together they were preparing to storm the citadels of the art world.

"He was one of those people who made you want to go into your studio," Spencer Carmona, a painter in California, told me. Another artist recalled, "He had an intense, wild depth of curiosity." Wong shared thoughts on Freud and Rilke, and on contemporary fiction, such as Lisa Halliday's "Asymmetry." Opinions on movies spilled out of him fully formed. "As Good as It Gets" was "a perfect romantic comedy in the way it constantly deflates sentimentality." "Inherent Vice" was "occasionally brilliant but quite scattered, which I guess is the point."

With Shear, Wong texted mostly about the painting life. Almost daily, he would ping him with a playful permutation of his name: "Whodashear," or "Shear Volume," or "Overnight Sheardom." On one occasion, Wong opened with "The Shear drama of the scale shifts."

"Sorry what??" Shear replied.

"Just a sentence," Wong explained.

"I've been sentenced," Shear said. "Sentenced to confusion."

"Gonna go do an ink," Wong said.

The two men acted as though they were walking in and out of each other's studio. Wong frequently showed that he was attentive to Shear's art. "Sometimes I'm painting for a while along the road and at a certain point I realize I've gone down a Shearesque mode of painterly inquiry," he once told him. He was quick to praise, and delicate with criticism. When Shear mentioned that he was working as a janitor, Wong said, "It's a fine job if you're an artist." He made it clear that he had no such obligations himself. "The only person I have any contact with outside of Facebook is pretty much my mom," he said. "If you are ever wondering how all these paintings are getting painted . . . well, imagine life with nothing and nobody to answer to and there you go."

After just a week in his Zhongshan studio, Wong was speaking about his work with the confidence of a rapper gone platinum. He told Nicolette Wong that his paintings were "sheer, genuine acts of will." He wondered aloud if he was a genius. "I've already decided the title for the film that will be loosely based on the beginnings of my artistic life—a film which will win the Palme d'Or and Best Actor awards at Cannes," he said. "The film will be titled 'The Master.'"

But, along with the bravado, Wong had crushing doubts. "Do you ever look at the stuff around you then get hit with a paralyzing grip of insecurity?" he once asked Shear. "I feel like that now." A month before his first solo exhibition at Cuiheng Village, Wong talked down the show: "Nothing too glamorous, but at least it's not a vanity exhibition LOL." As the date approached, he grew more pessimistic. "I dunno, man," he told Shear. "The whole scenario right now just looks fucking bleak."

Only two friends came. They found Wong stylishly dressed—striped shirt, black pants—but anxious. He gave a tour, discussing each canvas in detail, down to the brushstrokes, as if the works were made by someone else. Then he retreated. "Mostly we were standing in a corner as if it were not his exhibition," one friend



"The gray in your beard doesn't make you look older. It just makes you look like you dye the rest of your hair."

recalled. Then Wong cryptically said, "You want to check this out?" He left the hall and led his friends to his studio. He put some rice paper on the floor. Silently, he made an ink painting.

Wong had been nursing a growing apprehension about his work. He knew that his abstractions were good, but also that they were not especially distinguishable from abstractions by countless other artists. He regarded the praise he received online as "a comforting mirage." For an untrained painter hopelessly far from New York, Facebook was essential, but he feared that it was also an invitation to mediocrity, a "love fest in a dead end kinda way."

The alternating currents of insecurity and confidence became a propulsive force in Wong's creative life. After the exhibition in Zhongshan, he pinged Shear. "How does one hop onboard with any of the various factions of ascendant thirty somethings in the global art scene today?" he asked. "It seems like they're all ascending together. Nobody ascends alone anymore."

From southern China, though, Wong's only way forward was alone. He told Shear that he was going to change his approach to painting. The problem with Abstract Expressionism, he said, was that few people could tell whether it was good or bad. He wanted to make use of symbolic imagery, to play with figuration. He reworked some old pieces; in one, he scratched the outline of two people. "Ugliness executed with finesse seems to go over well," he told Shear. "Late Picasso is always good to go back to for that."

Wong's paintings became stranger, cruder. Uncanny forms—semi-organic shapes, with stray kinks and curves hammered flat—assumed an unlikely congruity. They appeared first in his morning ink exercises, which began to mature into consequential works in their own right. (After his death, they became the subject of a show in New York.)

Wong lost some followers who were committed to his earlier work. But important fans remained. When he posted a painting in this new vein on Facebook, he got a complimentary response from John Cheim, whose gallery, Cheim & Read, represented several accomplished artists. In the painting, called "Memento," a dark, twisted mass stood against a yellow background, resembling cracked soil. There was angst and fury in the central form, with some features that were legible—a face partly obstructed by wild hair, some prison-like netting—and others that weren't. It wasn't necessarily a museum piece, but it was good, and people on Facebook affirmed it.

He wondered how to further advance his work. "Painting a good piece doesn't alleviate anything," he wrote to Shear. "First thought: 'Ken I doo eet agen?' "

"Hehe I struggle, too," Shear wrote.

"Everyone is crying best piece ever," Wong said. "That's actually the worst feeling in the world lol. I believe not in God, but I believe in signs from the ether. Stuff like this is sobering. It tells one, 'Now imagine if you were a blue chip artist—this feeling is magnified and intensified a thousand times over every time you pick up a brush.'"



Wong was learning in public, creating and posting images at tremendous speed. "It was shocking how every day he just kept making leaps in his work," Dutcher, the painter in L.A., told me. But Wong sometimes posted pieces even before they were finished, and the quality varied. When a well-known artist suggested that he slow down, he was irked. Terrified that painters in Brooklyn might mock him, he obsessively deleted images of paintings that he had reworked, telling Shear, "I feel like I'm pretty exposed to the winds right now, just a weird shiver down the spine."

In October, 2015, Monita helped Wong secure a three-day show at a government-run art center in Hong Kong. He filled the space with forty pieces, and this time with many more friends. One threw him an after-party. It was Wong's first genuine exhibition. The venue was not prominent, but he sold his paintings, which provided him a little money to make more art.

Afterward, Monita told me, Matthew fell into another deep depression. It is not entirely clear why. Around this time, according to a friend, he had learned that his ex-girlfriend was engaged. In response, he painted that whole night. He once confessed to another artist that Monita had chided him, "You're never going to have a girlfriend. Nobody will be able to please you. You're a prince." Monita says that she maintained a pragmatic attitude—she told him that, given his struggles, he should never have children—but that she hoped he would find a woman.

For months, the depression did not abate. "It's pretty pervasive in my overall life right now," Wong told Shear in January. "I don't even really feel like fighting or resisting it, this darkness. The weird perverse part is I'm painting in the midst of it all. Even as my attitude is only one of futility, the game plays on."

Monita took Matthew to America for a months-long stay—an escape, a quest for momentum. Shear had arranged a joint show for them, titled "Good Bad Brush," in Washington State. Matthew and Monita also visited Texas, Michigan, Los Angeles, and New York. While travelling, Wong made art every day. But, even as his environment changed, his melancholy remained. He was barely earning money, and his oil paints and canvases remained in China. "I'm feeling really terrible, shaking and shit," he told Shear. "Walk two steps then I get nauseous and dizzy."

Visiting a friend in Edmonton, Monita decided that they would stay, reasoning that Matthew would benefit from the Canadian health-care system. Put on a waiting list to see a therapist, he continued to seek relief through ink drawings, watercolors, gouaches on paper. A few weeks later, Shear shared a painting from his studio. "Very nice," Wong said. "In the middle of an anxiety attack." Twenty minutes later, Shear checked in on him. "I'm fine," Wong assured him. "Just did a painting."

Two years after Wong was inspired by the paintings at the Venice Biennale, the exhibition's curator showcased a curious artifact, called "The Encyclopedic Palace." It was an eleven-foot-tall architectural model, built in the nineteen-fifties by an auto mechanic in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania ("The



For Wong, "The Other Side of the Moon" was a tremendous breakthrough.

Mushroom Capital of the World"). The structure had taken years of obsessive work to construct—out of wood, brass, celluloid, hair combs—with the hope that it would inspire a museum on the National Mall which housed all human knowledge. Instead, it languished for twenty-two years in a storage locker in Delaware, until it was transferred to the American Folk Art Museum. The exhibition at the Biennale caused a stir, and the art world responded. "Outsider" artists began to appear with increasing frequency in galleries and museums.

The term "outsider art" is almost impossible to define, but its origins can be traced to a trip that Jean Dubuffet took to Switzerland, in 1945, to visit psychiatric hospitals, seeking art made by patients. He called what he found "*art brut*": "raw art," which was "created from solitude and from pure and authentic creative impulses—where the worries of competition, acclaim, and social promotion do not interfere."

In that sense, Wong both was and was not an outsider artist. He had an M.F.A., but he had taught himself to paint. He worked out of compulsion, but he also cultivated an audience and a community of peers. He was caught between East and West: he had once noted, "I'm trying to see where I can fit into the Chinese painting equation," but he was primarily seeking entry to the New York art world.

From Zhongshan, Wong wrote to Shear, "I'm technically an outsider artist. Are you?"

"I never got my test results," Shear wrote.

"Just not very brut," Wong responded. "lol."

While looking for a way to show in New York, Wong learned about White Columns, a nonprofit space specializing in artists who are not formally represented. On John Cheim's recommendation, he submitted images of six paintings by e-mail, with a request to stage an exhibition. Two hours later, the director, Matthew Higgs, responded. He explained that White Columns was booked through the next year, but that he was curating a group show in September, 2016, for an East Village gallery called Karma. Focussed on landscapes, the show was titled "Outside"—"as in 'the outdoors,' but also to allude to an 'outsider' aesthetic/attitude/spirit." He invited Wong to include two of his paintings. One featured a naked man, possibly Narcissus, gazing into a pond; the other portrayed a man on a rock masturbating to a woman. Rendered in acrylic, they had the raw but honest figuration of an untrained painter.

Wong was running errands with his mother when Higgs's offer arrived on his phone. Monita, who turned sixty that year, recalled, "It was the best birthday present." Thrilled, they asked Cheim how to price his paintings. He suggested an ambitious figure—three thousand dollars apiece—but noted, "It's about the opportunity, not about the money." Monita told her son, "We should go to New York!"

At the opening, in Amagansett, Long Island, the two showed up early, and found Higgs in the gallery. "Hi, Matthew—I'm Matthew," Wong said. Higgs was confused. He told me, "Very few artists travel that kind of distance to go to a forty-person group show." Monita and Matthew had brought more paintings in the trunk of their car, and they were eager to show them. "If you went to art school, they would have told

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you, 'Do not do that,'" Higgs added. "But there was an extraordinary unself-consciousness about it, and that was quite disarming."

Karma's founder, Brendan Dugan, was similarly intrigued; in the run-up to the show, people who knew Wong from social media registered enthusiasm about his work. "They were talking as if I should know who he was," he told me. At the show, Dugan heard about a crowd in the parking lot. Walking out to investigate, he found Monita and Matthew trying to sell pieces from their car. Struck by their sense of urgency, he offered to meet the following week in New York.

In the meantime, Wong visited painters he had befriended online. One of them, Nicole Wittenberg, invited him to a gathering at her Chinatown studio. He arrived, again with his paintings, and they propped them up on windowsills and radiators—an impromptu exhibit. Wittenberg thought that they were good, but encouraged Wong to be bolder. As her friends chatted, Wong smoked intently and talked very little. After the others left, he opened up and asked questions. "He wanted to know how his work would get into the public eye," she recalled.

A few days later, Matthew and Monita went to Karma, with paintings and drawings, to make the case to Dugan that the gallery should represent him. It was an awkward meeting. Dugan struggled with their forwardness, and they struggled with his polite reserve. Afterward, Monita and Matthew left to have lunch.

"What do you think?" Matthew asked.

"It's good he did not say anything negative," Monita said.

After their meal, they returned to Karma to pick up their paintings, and they ran into Dugan again. This time, Monita recalled, "he was so warm." She guessed what had happened. Earlier, Wong had mentioned selling two paintings to Andrea Schwan, an influential art-world publicist. Monita figured that Dugan must have been in touch with her while they were at lunch: "He said, 'Andrea is like a sister to me.' He walked us out onto the street, and he was so talkative, and he said, 'Why don't you send me some more images? We'll see what we can do.'" The next day, Dugan offered to take a few of Wong's paintings to an art fair in France, the Paris Internationale.

Dugan's offer was a kind of audition, but Monita and Matthew strove to treat the relationship as formal representation. During an extended visit to Hong Kong, Wong tracked Karma's Instagram feed, hoping to see his work hanging in the show. He wrote to Dugan asking for updates. "It was so intense," Dugan recalled. "Imagine you have someone you haven't even really met, and he's calling you, like, twenty-four hours a day, while you are trying to make it all happen." Dugan eventually sent a photo from the show, and then stopped responding.

For Wong, the wait was excruciating. "That was one of the worst weeks of my life," he later recalled. He worried that Dugan's silence indicated that the work was not selling (which turned out to be true) and, perhaps worse, that it reflected a deeper lack of acceptance. Dugan, for his part, told me that he was uncertain how to manage Wong's expectations. "He was desperate to make this happen quickly," he said. "He *needed* it."

As Wong waited anxiously for news from Paris, he was changing his approach again. With the prospect of backing from a New York gallery, he became tougher on himself: he was no longer painting for the Internet. Ruthlessly, he destroyed pieces that he did not think were promising. He switched to smaller brushes. He slowed down. Rather than teasing out images from the pigment as he worked—or "simply painting every day aimlessly," as he put it—he sought to begin with a vision. His output dropped to a painting a day, though this, he noted wryly, "still isn't really slow by any rational standards."

Wong's travels in North America had given him new ideas. He had visited artists' studios, and gone to museums where he could study masterworks with his nose inches from the canvas. The pieces that he made on paper had become more lyrical, with his old gestural fury giving way to subtler, more obsessive mark-making. He was allowing overt beauty to creep in. In January, 2017, he and Monita returned to Edmonton, where he resumed working with oils on large canvases—something that he hadn't done in about a year. He had studied the use of light in works by Eleanor Ray and Chen Beixin, and absorbed lessons from such masters as Gustav Klimt and Yayoi Kusama. He told Shear, "I finally figured out how to paint."

Confused about where things stood with Karma, Matthew and Monita travelled to New York, and met Dugan at a diner on the Lower East Side. Wong struggled to suppress his sense of hurt. He didn't want to hear that he was *developing;* he wanted to be fully represented. Dugan regretted his lack of communication from Paris. "When you are a gallery, you want to deliver for your artist," he told me. He offered Matthew and Monita an optimistic update: since the Paris fair, Karma had been able to sell two of his works.

Dugan had not seen any of the new paintings that Wong was making in Edmonton, but, at the table, Wong pulled out his phone and showed him a piece titled "The Other Side of the Moon." Dugan was stunned. "It was a huge breakthrough," he told me. The painting—which portrayed a lone figure in a sublime, lush landscape—had a refinement rarely evident in Wong's earlier pieces. It transmitted the glowing magic of a Persian illuminated manuscript, the charge of an Impressionist masterpiece, the strangeness of a sixties sci-fi book cover. Karma took the canvas, and three other new paintings, to an art fair in Texas. This time, Wong's work sold. The Dallas Museum of Art even purchased a piece.

A few weeks later, Karma exhibited more of Wong's paintings at Frieze New York. Jerry Saltz, the senior art critic for *New York* magazine, told me that he was wandering among the booths when his wife, Roberta Smith, an art critic at the *Times*, called him. "Get over to Karma right away," she said. "You have to see this."

Smith told me that she had called Saltz partly out of excitement and partly out of professional competitiveness—to establish that she had discovered the work first. "I had walked into Karma's booth and there was this amazing landscape," she recalled. "You looked at it quickly, then looked again and realized its intensity, the technique, all these small brushstrokes. You understood that

it was made in this obsessive way, but also with a certain amount of wit."

Saltz rushed over. "It was like the top of my head caught on fire," he recalled. "I saw a kind of visionary. I just saw something that seemed to be informed by a thousand sources, like this incredible cyclotron of possible influences. Yet unlike most artists who are influenced by early-twentieth-century styles, and never quite escape those influences, here I felt like I was seeing right through them to his own vision."

Self-consciously, Wong was allowing all that he had gathered in his head to emerge on canvas. Describing one of his works to Frank Elbaz, a Parisian gallerist, he explained, "There's that oblique seeming referentiality to historical precedents like Vuillard and Hockney but filtered through something more personal." Occasionally, the references were overt. He painted an homage to Klimt's "The Park," adding a man reading. He rendered a version of Hokusai's "The Great Wave" in a manner that recalled van Gogh. The water was angular, daggerlike, with the sky an electric orange and the negative space around the wave resembling a bird gazing out beyond the edge of the canvas.

Wong's paintings were melancholy but playful, growing in size and ambition. It's easy to imagine how they might have failed: with the slightest aesthetic nudge tilting them into cliché, or illustration, or banal earnestness. That he had kept them teetering made them only more alluring. Elbaz told Wong that he was like an early modernist, shuttled to the twenty-first century in a time machine built out of a DeLorean. " 'Back to the Nineteenth' could be a good title for your biopic," he said.

Just six years after Wong had picked up a paintbrush in Hong Kong, Karma staged his first New York solo show, in 2018. He had been tremendously eager to have it, but the more successful he became the more he felt the need to outdo himself. "Something can become a mannerism so quickly, especially with artists who have established themselves," he told Shear in 2014. "The things they do that were at some point, even recently, a breakthrough have long worn out their welcome."

Wong told Dugan that for his second solo exhibition he envisioned paintings united by a single color; the title, he said, would be "Blue." The idea—with its nod to Picasso—spoke of Wong's ambition and state of mind, and also his interest in a register that was "neither ironic nor wholly sincere" but, instead, something like Kanye West's video for "Bound 2," an elusive blend of kitsch, fame, and earnestness.

He worked furiously on "Blue," telling Nikil Inaya, a friend in Hong Kong, "If I continue at this pace, I will be dead in a few months." The paintings were full of otherworldly longing. "Blue View" portrays a window in a haze of cyan, its gradations so subtle that reproductions fail to capture its sorrowful glow. In "Autumn Nocturne," a moon becomes entangled in an azure forest, the brushwork intricate and deft. In "Unknown Pleasures," named for an album by Joy Division, a road approaches a mountain but never reaches it.

By the end of 2018, Wong was telling Inaya, "I am deep in a cave of nihilism." He said that part of him hoped for a more conventional life. "He would speak about the idea of finding a final painting, and then, at last, retiring," Inaya told me. "But the counter-argument for Matthew was 'I don't know what else I could do.'"

In January, Monita took Matthew to Los Angeles, to escape Edmonton's winter weather and isolation. "When we are there, Cecile spoils him," she



told me. Though thin, Wong had a relentless appetite; it was not beyond him to eat a second entrée while others got dessert. Cecile fed him lavishly.

Wong had developed friendships with some well-known artists: Nicolas Party, Jennifer Guidi, Jonas Wood. On a visit to Wood's studio, he asked about technique and scrutinized his paintings. Later, he returned to join a poker game. Wong fell in with a Hong Kong fashion designer and impresario, Kevin Poon, who took him partying late into the night. "He was having fun," Poon recalled. "People were taking photos of him, and he wasn't even that wary."

That spring, Wong's work was included in a book on landscape painting, by the critic Barry Schwabsky, and he flew to New York for a panel discussion about it at the Whitney. At a dinner afterward, "Matthew had the magnetic personality at the table," Schwabsky told me. "He was the one everyone wanted to talk to. But the striking irony was that it was clear that Matthew considered himself to be socially awkward and ill at ease, even though this was not visible at all. My wife was basically ready to adopt Matthew. She was trying to convince him to move to New York. She was going to find girlfriends for him."

Wong still yearned to be with a woman, and though he was able to build friendships online, he was never fully comfortable in person. One female friend, meeting him in New York, ran up and hugged him; he tensed, and said, "I don't hug people." Another told me, "I felt like I loved him. He was so intimate but in the least creepy way." A Canadian painter who had a crush on him begged him to meet at an artists' retreat. He declined. In 2017, he had been given a diagnosis of autism, and he suspected that he also had borderline personality disorder, or something like it. Schwabsky told me, "He felt he was incapable of being in a relationship."

Wong rarely depicted himself in his art. Just after his first real breakthrough, in 2017, he painted "The Reader," offering a view of himself, from his grandmother's window in Hong Kong, immersed in art history on a park bench. On the windowsill, he painted a knife in a glass of water, to mark his metamorphosis; the detail, he later noted, signified the "implied violence fundamental to any change."

In 2019, Wong revisited the symbol. In an oil on canvas, he painted the same knife in a glass, up close, as if it were a towering monument. The liquid appears to be blood. The sky is an apoc-

alyptic orange. There is no artist, just his icon of change.

By that summer, Wong seemed to be hinting at an intention to disappear, in ways that now haunt his friends. He had finished the work for "Blue," but he was still feverishly making art: "Not painting is pain," he had once told Peter Shear. On June 30th, Wong sent Dugan an image of an ambitious new canvas that, he said, would be his sole contribution to Karma's booth at Frieze London, that fall. The work depicted a solitary figure gazing at an inviting home, across a white expanse that looks like a frozen lake. If you stand close enough, you can see that the expanse is unpainted canvas—an artistic void. Flying across it is a bird, perhaps a phoenix, rendered almost in calligraphy. Wong titled the painting "See You on the Other Side."

Wong's student preoccupation with voids seemed to be returning. That May, he told Claire Colette, a painter in Los Angeles, that he had written a poem for the first time in three or four years. Titled "The Shape of Silence," it contained these lines:

> Imagine reading a novel
> Where instead of looking at the words
> Your gaze was fixed on the spaces
> Between them. When you get to the end,
> What would you say of what you saw and felt?

On a trip to Hong Kong earlier in the year, Wong had told Inaya, "This is the last time I'm in this town." He began saying that he would no longer go to art events, not even his own. "Enough of that," he told a painter that August. "I never have a good time."

From Edmonton, Wong focussed on friends he had made online. When Shear posted a photo of his window on Instagram, Wong asked if he could paint a version of it. He produced dozens of paintings like this for others, in some cases including friends' names in the titles: "Sunset, Trees, Telephone Wires, for Claire." Together, the paintings mapped a web of relationships, with the artist in the empty space between them.

In mid-September, Wong and his mother returned to New York. "Blue" would open on November 8th, and was poised to be a tremendous success; Wong was already earning tens of thousands of dollars from his paintings, and buyers were lining up. At Karma, Wong expressed a specific idea of where every painting should hang, but also told Dugan that he was extricating himself, personally, from his work. He explained that he would not attend the opening, and that he wanted the cover of the catalogue to contain no title, no name, no images. Instead, the frontispiece would feature a line from Beyoncé's "Party." Dugan agreed to Wong's vision for the catalogue, but tried to convince him that his presence was also important. On September 19th, the two met for a parting breakfast. Dugan was flying to London for Frieze. Wong was preparing to return to Edmonton. As they said goodbye on the sidewalk, Wong told him, "I'll see you on the other side."

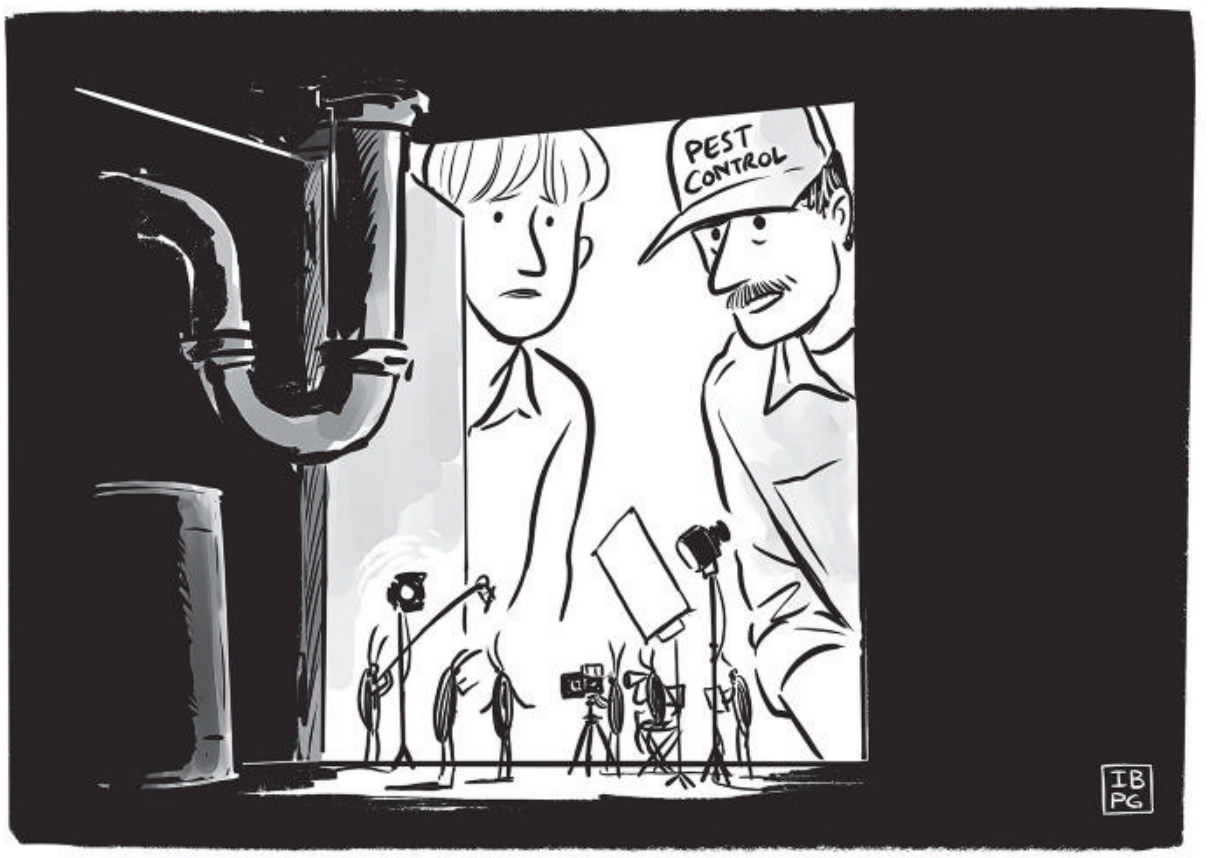
That afternoon, Wong had lunch with his mother and Scott Kahn, an elderly painter whom he had befriended. During the meal, the talk was upbeat, but when Monita left the table Wong's sadness poured out. "He said, 'I go into these deep, dark places that I wouldn't wish anyone to go to,' " Kahn recalled. "And he said it in such a way that it shook me to my core, nearly bringing tears to my eyes."

By evening, Wong had become engulfed in darkness. "Felt really close to death," he told Colette, "even if just mentally/spiritually." He said that he sensed malevolent energies coursing through the city. Unsure if they were psychotic figments, he still worried that the energies were endangering him and his friends: "It's like a wind or a shudder. Evil."

The following morning, Wong stopped by Karma, where the artist Alex Da Corte had recently finished installing a show. Titled "Marigolds," it was inspired by Eugenia Collier's story about a young Black girl struggling with the vagaries of race, poverty, and adolescence—as Collier wrote, "Joy and rage and wild animal gladness and shame become tangled together." In a fit of resentment, the girl tears up her neighbor's marigolds, but later recognizes the moment as a turning point from blind innocence to maturity and compassion.

At a gathering at Karma, Da Corte spoke about the story. "It's about reconciling moments when one feels grief or rage," he told me. "Living in the world can be so fraught, and you have to navigate it the best you can with humility and grace."

Listening to Da Corte speak, Wong felt thunderstruck. "He said some things



"If you see one intrusion of roaches shooting an indie film, it means you've got dozens already submitting to Sundance."

that sent a crack right down my soul for a direction of good and light," he told Colette that evening. Weeping, he ran from the gallery. For a while, his anxieties ebbed: convinced that he had attained clarity, he spoke about healing and transformation. But he remained in the grip of his illness. "There is so much darkness everywhere right now, and yet I feel very tender and vulnerable, empathetic and no longer resentful of many things," he went on. "Perhaps it's an empathetic tendency, but walking around New York despite being in the midst of circumstantial bliss both physically and mentally I feel a pull of death walking these streets."

In 1908, Pablo Picasso was in Paris, browsing in a shop that specialized in secondhand goods, when he noticed a painting jutting out of a pile. It was selling for five francs—basically the value of the canvas—but Picasso was enthralled by the image, of a woman leaning on a branch. It was both striking and naïve: the woman's left hand was hard to distinguish from her right. The painter was a retired customs officer named Henri Rousseau. Later that year, Picasso held a banquet for him, a gesture of respect and also of light mockery. Painters like Picasso were interested in untrained artists for their authenticity, but to fully embrace them risked slighting their own sophistication.

Monita told me that her son could never shake the feeling that members of the art establishment viewed him with condescension, even as they celebrated his work. He was terrified of being a rube, like Rousseau, celebrated and dismissed all at once.

As if to demonstrate his sophistication, Wong unleashed a storm of images on Instagram as he left New York. From LaGuardia Airport, he used his phone to take screenshots of juxtaposed art works and posted scores of them in rapid-fire sequence. The work spanned the well known and the obscure, and the connections between them ranged from obvious to unfathomable. He brought together a painting by Dike Blair, of vending machines under a pagoda-like structure, and a Korean poem, "Ear," by Ko Un. He posted a floral Louis Vuitton jacket alongside Matisse's seminal "Le Bonheur de Vivre." He paired his friends' paintings with masterworks.

The images piled up more rapidly than anyone could take in. Some artists were intrigued, some baffled, some worried. It's not clear that Wong understood what he was trying to achieve. "He reached out and said, 'I hope it isn't strange that I am doing this,'" the painter Louis Fratino recalled. Wong told Colette, "It all happened so quickly, on a subconscious level."

Eventually, Wong decided that his posts represented a stripping away of artifice. "I am aware of the intensity of this spectacle, but this kind of flow, rhythm, speed is the default natural state of my mind and senses 24/7," he told his Instagram followers. "It is how I have managed to teach myself some things about painting, relying on the Internet and the library. Being diagnosed as autistic, this is how I connect the dots."

Wong was suffering, but he still projected generosity. He reached out to a young painter, Benjamin Styer, whom he had once unsentimentally critiqued. "I have incredible respect for you," he said. "Keep going." He bought friends' work. Cody Tumblin, a painter who knew Wong well, told me, "He was looking to support people in these hyper-specific ways. It seemed like this desperation, like he really wanted to do something good." Wong posted a video demonstrating how he made his gouaches. He invited his followers to watch "Pineapple Express" with him. He was entering a manic state.

On the morning of September 30th, Wong started texting Spencer Carmona, the painter in California, in long, frantic passages. "A lot of what he was saying didn't make a whole lot of sense," Carmona told me. "He was saying that he was being, like, gang-stalked through targeted ads online—from Instagram posts, from the Karma gallery, from Brendan. He was convinced that they had subliminal messages." Wong feared that the music he loved was being secretly altered. "I immediately knew something wasn't right."

Wong reached out to Colette, asking if she was free for a call, but she was sick with the stomach flu and didn't respond. He texted Tumblin. "Can we FaceTime?" he asked. "We don't ever see each other to talk, and I'd like to have that kind of relationship with my friends." He appeared on Tumblin's phone in a black T-shirt, unshaven, his



hair all pushed forward. "He was talking ninety miles an hour," Tumblin told me. Wong spoke of his juxtapositions, and of his anxieties, and he described conspiracies that extended from Kanye to members of his family. At one point, he wept. "He said, 'It's important that you know, so that you can talk about these things,' and that's when it started to get scary."

The following morning, October 2nd, "See You on the Other Side" was unveiled at Frieze. Wong texted Brendan Dugan, who was at the Karma booth, standing beside the painting. "Drinking coffee," Wong wrote. "About to do a little drawing." He asked Dugan to call whenever he could. "Nothing urgent," he added, "but, yeah."

As Dugan tended to the booth, Wong's texts grew troubling. One included an image of a piece that Alex Da Corte had posted on Instagram, titled "True Love Will Always Find You in the End." It featured a cartoon skeleton emerging from a candy-colored staircase. "Now I'm genuinely frightened," Wong wrote.

Dugan called. It was clear that Wong was not well. Dugan and Monita spoke, too. Calls went back and forth. Eventually, Wong sent three texts indicating that they would see each other soon for the opening of "Blue." At some point, he climbed to the roof of the building where his family lived, and stood in the cool air under a big Western sky, with clouds adrift ten thousand feet above.

Suicide was rarely far from Wong's mind—he often referred to it—and the lightness of flight had long preoccupied him. When he began his life as an artist, he was taken by Yves Klein's iconic "Leap Into the Void," which uses photomontage to portray a man in a suit swan-diving off a building: he is going to either escape gravity or crash to his death. As a student, Wong took a photo in homage to it, and he had returned to Klein's photo in his juxtapositions. Birds and wings and wind were themes that recurred in his art—right up to "See You on the Other Side," with its calligraphic phoenix crossing a void toward home, leaving the artist stranded.

Just a few days before Wong climbed to the rooftop, he had sent a fellow-painter a poem by A. R. Ammons. It was about yellow daisies. They are "half-wild with loss." Then they

> turn
> any way the wind does
> and lift their
> petals up
> to float
> off their stems
> and go.

During my trip to Edmonton, Monita offered to take me to Matthew's resting place. It was a short drive over the North Saskatchewan River: a few turns and we were at a nondenominational cemetery, on the edges of a golf course. We passed a tiny chapel, its gray modernist steeple pricking the sky, and pulled up to a cluster of mausoleums. Monita was wearing a gray puffer and a white surgical mask. As she parked, she said, "I will take off my mask." I did, too.

A suffocating loss surrounds her. All the work that she does for the foundation—all the respectful attention showered on her son by museums, artists, auctioneers, and critics—is a reminder of this loss. "I am in so much pain, no one will understand," she told me. From afar, some of Matthew's friends also struggle with his death—"I miss having him in my studio," Shear told me. They weigh nagging questions. Was there any way they could have intervened? Were his vulnerabilities somehow overlooked? "You kind of saw the machine of the art world devour him a little bit," one painter told me.

Monita and I followed a cobblestoned path among the mausoleums. Matthew's was made of polished Canadian red granite and stood five or six feet tall, with space for two people. It was unclear why she chose a structure for two. At some point, she filled the second chamber with books by writers Matthew loved: David Foster Wallace, Donna Tartt, Ocean Vuong.

Matthew's funeral was held two weeks after he died. A few people from the art world made the trip to Canada. Some locals also came: a contractor who had worked on the Wongs' apartment, a therapist. Online, artists who knew him paid tribute. Some made pieces in his honor. Shear painted a haunting gray oil titled "Edmonton." Matthew Higgs, the curator who first showed Wong in New York, told me he expects that, after the market noise around Wong fades, a deeper understanding of his work will emerge. "I think it stands for something more than itself," he said. "We'll have a clearer idea of what Matthew was trying to say to us."

Since Matthew was put to rest, Monita has been visiting his grave site weekly. At the mausoleum, she poured water from plastic bottles into two plants. At Christmastime, she told me, she adds a small tree.

Two Chinese inscriptions are chiselled into the granite. One is a quote from a Cantonese pop song, about crossing a landscape of obstacles—"high mountains and deep seas"—with grace, detachment, and love. The other is a statement from Raymond about the joys and worries that Matthew had brought him and Monita, their commitment to remaining strong for him, and their undying affection.

The mausoleum also features a poem, "June," that Matthew wrote in 2013, shortly after he separated from his girlfriend and immersed himself in painting. Its narrator has pulled away from his love and dissolved into fragments. But he coheres, somehow, and trails her, like a ghost or a dream. Imagining that she is waiting for him—"perhaps expecting me to turn up around the corner in the rain"—he tries to close the gap between them by shutting his eyes and kissing her.

I asked Monita why she chose this poem. "I felt that it was speaking to me," she said. "June is my birthday month."

We were standing in the crisp air, with a remote northern sun lightly warming us, when a huge white-tailed jackrabbit emerged from a shrub. It sat in some mulch by Matthew's mausoleum, a few feet from us, and fixed its gaze on the polished granite, as if paying respects—like a Surrealist detail in a poem by James Tate. Monita and I stopped talking and watched. Some birds took off from a nearby tree. In the distance, there was a murmur of suburban traffic. We waited for the hare to run off, but it seemed content to just sit there and wait. At last, Monita whispered, "Maybe it's keeping Matthew company." ♦

If you are having thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text TALK to 741741.



"Animal Farm" was taught in university courses. Many students identified with Benjamin, the donkey who is skeptical of the



new farm but keeps his thoughts to himself.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOSH COCHRAN

LETTER FROM CHENGDU

A BITTER EDUCATION

A teacher in China encounters the limits of free expression.

BY PETER HESSLER

At Chinese universities, when a student reports a professor for political wrongdoing, the verb that's used to describe this action is *jubao*. It happens rarely, but the possibility is always there, because potential infractions are both undefined and extremely varied. A student might *jubao* a teacher for a comment about a sensitive historical event, or a remark that seems to contradict a Communist Party policy. Ambiguous statements about Xi Jinping, the President of China, are especially risky. In 2019, during a class at Chongqing Normal University, a literature professor named Tang Yun offhandedly described the language of one of Xi's slogans as coarse. After students complained, Tang was demoted to a job in the library.

Other problems can involve class materials. In the fall of 2019, I started teaching at Sichuan University, in southwestern China, where I met a law-school teacher from another institution who had developed a syllabus with some sensitive content. The course included "Disturbing the Peace," an Ai Weiwei documentary about the artist's encounters with the Chinese judicial system. For two years, the teacher used the film in class without incident, but then, when he was partway through another semester, some students decided to *jubao*. Within a week, the teacher had been replaced with a substitute instructor. But the process can be slower, and much less predictable, if an initial complaint is made on social media, which was how it happened to me.

One evening in mid-December of 2019, I was about to leave my office for class when my wife, Leslie, called. A friend had just sent her a message copied from Twitter:

> American writer and journalist Peter Hessler, under Chinese name Ho Wei . . . who moved to China with his family in Aug. 2019 to teach Non-fiction writing at Sichuan University, has possibly been reported for his behavior/speech.

The tweet was by a Chinese academic in the United States. She had included a blurry screenshot from Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter. People in China often distribute such images, because original Weibo posts can be removed by censors, who have more trouble monitoring screenshots. Leslie's friend said that the report was spreading quickly on Chinese social media. "I wanted to warn you before you started class," Leslie told me.

That evening, I was teaching nonfiction; on other days, I had two sections of freshman English composition. The freshman classes were currently reading "Animal Farm," but my department had assigned that book as a required text, and I couldn't think of other materials that might have triggered somebody to *jubao*. There wasn't enough time to search for the original comment. I decided to start the evening class as normal, hoping that the report hadn't come from this group.

My office and the classroom were in a wing of a new building on Sichuan University's Jiang'an campus, in the southwestern suburbs of Chengdu. Walking to class took little more than a minute, but I passed six surveillance cameras along the way. The cameras were among the many things that had changed since I'd last taught in China, more than twenty years earlier. In the nonfiction classroom, another camera was mounted on the wall behind me. When I stood at the lectern, the camera was positioned above my right shoulder, pointed at the students.

I heard some whispering while I called roll. It was the fourteenth week of the term, and the class of about thirty students had developed a good rapport. But tonight they seemed unsettled. Finally, a girl sitting near the front said, "Mr. Hessler, have you seen this?"

She handed me her phone. She had

pulled up screenshots of the Weibo posts, which consisted of seven comments. The first one read, in Chinese:

> To have Ho Wei teaching in our institute is truly treasonous.

I scanned the other posts. "I know where this is coming from," I said. "It's from another class. It doesn't have anything to do with you."

Hoping to change the subject, I began the evening's lesson. The students had been writing profiles and feature stories, and I asked an engineering major named Tim to read his draft aloud. Tim had researched an online community that called itself the Federation of Stingy Men. Federation members were obsessed with living entirely off the interest from their savings and investment accounts, even though many of them were well employed. They shared strategies: one person explained that three millimetres is the minimum amount of toothpaste necessary for brushing your teeth, and a millionaire documented how he travelled to the airport, with all his luggage, on a ride-share bike. Tim wrote, "There are some people who have been living this kind of abnormally thrifty life . . . because of the habits they developed when they were poor."

The students' off-campus research had been a highlight of the semester. I had already decided that the following week we would proceed to a local Porsche salesman, the profile subject of a student named Anna. The salesman told Anna that it was pointless to try to rip off his customers, because of everything a Sichuanese person must have gone through in order to accumulate enough money for a Porsche. "The people who are capable of buying luxury cars have exhausted every means to earn profits and they have coped with all kinds of people," he said. "It's impossible to deceive them."

During breaks in class, a number of students said that they hated the *jubao* behavior. I told them not to worry, and that we would meet the following week. But in truth I wasn't certain. The Weibo posts had claimed that I was "finished," a term that, in Chinese, could also be read as a death threat. One Twitter user translated the last line:

> [Ho Wei] spoke w/o restraint only b/c he considered himself a big writer; I think he's gonna die soon.

I first came to Sichuan in 1996, as a Peace Corps volunteer. I was sent to a small college in Fuling, a remote city on the Yangtze River, where I taught English language and literature. My students had been born in the mid-nineteen-seventies, when the nation's population was more than eighty per cent rural. Most of them had grown up on farms, and often they were among the first in their village to receive a higher education—only six out of every hundred young Chinese made it to college. My students tended to be shy, quiet, and traditionally minded. In class, when they wrote about public figures they admired, about two-thirds selected Chinese political leaders. The most popular choice was Mao Zedong:

> Though he is responsible for the Great Cultural Revolution, we mustn't deny his achievements. As everyone knows, no gold is pure, no man is perfect.

> I think Mao Zedong fully deserves to be a worthy in the world's history. I am afraid only Lenin and Churchill can compare with him.

In truth, their generation was connected most closely to Deng Xiaoping, who, in 1978, initiated the policies that became known as Reform and Opening. Since then, more than eight hundred million Chinese have been lifted out of poverty, according to the World Bank, and the population has become majority urban. Virtually all my Fuling students have entered the new middle class, and we've stayed in close touch over the past quarter century. Sometimes they write about struggles that I was oblivious of in the classroom:

> For three years [at the college], I did not eat well and sleep well. I remember in 1996, for half a year, I just had one meal a day. I was a sad man. But now I am happy about my life.

I moved back to Chengdu in order to reconnect with these former students, but I was also curious about the next generation. Most of the people I taught in Fuling came from relatively large families, because they were born before the institution of the one-child policy. In 1997, during my second year in Fuling, I asked a class of twenty freshmen about their families, and just one was an only child. In 2019, when I posed the same question to a section of fourteen freshmen, only one had siblings. Among all my students that fall, nearly ninety per cent were only children. I learned that when asking this question I had to clarify what I meant by the word "sibling," because otherwise students might include cousins in their responses. As families shrank, the term broadened—for many young people, a cousin was a kind of substitute brother or sister.

With such sweeping social changes, there's always been concern about how younger generations will turn out. Since the mid-eighties, the foreign and Chinese media have reported on spoiled only children, known as Little Emperors. Like American millennials, young Chinese are digital natives, but their online world is sharply delineated by the Great Firewall, the government's system of Internet censorship and site-blocking. Patriotic education has intensified under Xi Jinping, who has consolidated power to a degree not seen since the days of Mao. In 2018, the constitution was changed to abolish Presidential term limits, making it possible for Xi to become President for life. Some young people who have come of age in this climate are known as *xiao fenhong*, Little Pinks, because they are rabidly nationalistic.

After the Weibo posts about me appeared, the majority of social-media responses seemed critical of the attack. "This generation of young people is impossible," one Weibo user wrote. Another responded, in English, "Real problem is big brother." A number of people referred to Xi Jinping, although, in the dance of Chinese censorship, they avoided writing the President's name:

> The main reason is not that the teacher cannot disagree with the student's thinking, it's that no one can disagree with <him>.

> I took a poetry appreciation class in my sophomore year. In the class, the teacher satirized *** in front of more than 100 students, and nothing happened. Later, microphones were installed on the ceiling of each classroom.

Early the following morning, the head of my department telephoned. He sounded worried, and he asked me to come to campus to meet with the dean. I was teaching in the English department at the Sichuan University–

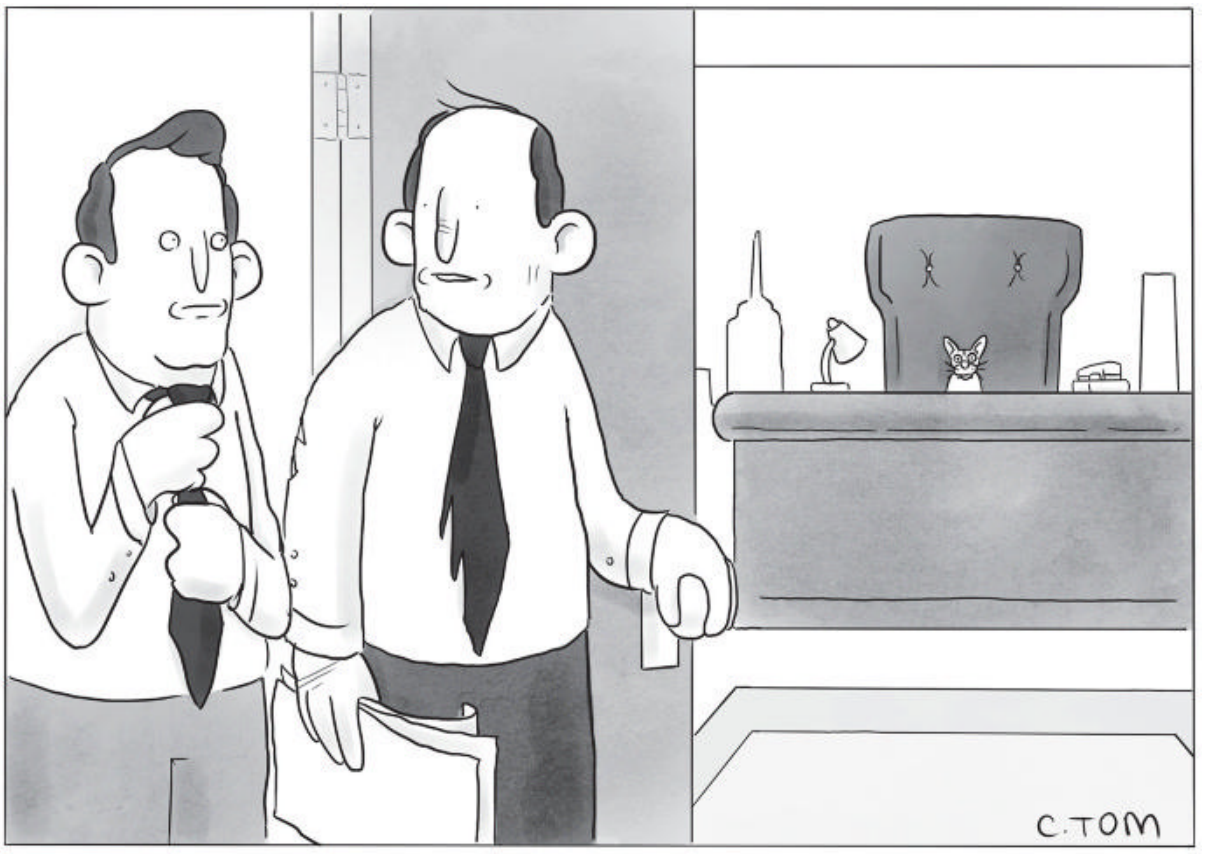
Pittsburgh Institute, or SCUPI. This kind of program is known as a hybrid: Chinese engineering students spend two or three years on the Chengdu campus, taking courses in English, and then can apply to complete their degrees at the University of Pittsburgh or at another American or foreign institution. All my freshmen were in SCUPI, although my nonfiction class also included undergraduates from other departments.

There are currently about forty hybrid programs in China, reflecting another major shift in education. In the nineties, Chinese students rarely went abroad: out of the more than two hundred young people whom I taught in Fuling, I knew of nobody who went on to study outside the country. By the time I went to Chengdu, millennials constituted two-thirds of China's passport holders. In 2019, there were three hundred and seventy-two thousand Chinese studying at American institutions, and most of them paid full tuition. On the American side, money has become a prime motivation for hybrid programs.

SCUPI, though, is not a hybrid in terms of politics. The University of Pittsburgh cannot establish political guidelines for the Chengdu program, which, in terms of legal status, is entirely under the umbrella of Sichuan University. Recently, when I contacted the University of Pittsburgh and asked to talk about SCUPI, the response reminded me of a Chinese institution: initially, a Pittsburgh spokesman seemed helpful, but then, after a number of delays, he declined the request.

At SCUPI, students are required to take the same mandatory political courses as other undergraduates, and instructors are subject to the oversight of the Communist Party. After the Weibo posts appeared, I knew that Party officials at the university would investigate, and I located the materials that had triggered the attack. They were editing comments I had made on the draft of a freshman's argumentative essay, which I now sent to the department head.

As a teacher in China, I had a special fear and loathing for the argumentative essay. In the nineties, my students were provided with "A Handbook of Writing," a state-published text whose section on "argumentation" featured a model essay entitled "The Three Gorges Project Is Beneficial." The counter-argument paragraph listed some reasons to oppose the Three Gorges Dam: flooded scenery, lost cultural relics, the risk of an earthquake destroying the structure. "Their worries and warnings are well justified," the essay continued, and then proceeded to the transition: "But we should not give up eating for fear of choking."



"He just kept sitting on keyboards until he made partner."

• • •

I found it hard to teach this essay for various reasons. First, nobody was allowed to argue about the Three Gorges Dam. Fuling was one of the places that would be affected, and in low-lying parts of the city the government had painted red lines that marked the water level of the future reservoir. Another red line, figuratively speaking, was the topic of the dam itself. At that time, it wasn't possible for a Chinese scientist to publish an open opposition to the project.

An infinitely smaller problem, but one that occupied infinitely more of my energy, was that transition sentence. Chinese education traditionally emphasizes imitation of models and rote literary phrases, and my Fuling students diligently incorporated the transition into their argumentative papers. It infected other writing, too: personal narratives, dialogues, literary essays. I might be reading a paper about "Hamlet," when suddenly a voice would boom out, worse than Polonius's: "But we should not give up eating for fear of choking." The words are a direct translation of *yinyefeishi*, a Chinese literary phrase. Over and over, I tried to explain that this sounds terrible in English.

More than two decades later, at Sichuan University, I occasionally received a freshman argumentative essay that choked up the same phrase. And there were plenty of subjects that remained off limits for argumentation. For a returning teacher, this was a mystery: how had China experienced so much social, economic, and educational change while the politics remained stagnant, or even regressive? Nobody in freshman English was going to argue that it was a bad idea to remove Presidential term limits, or that the internment camps in Xinjiang should be abolished. Even if a student took a pro-government stance on a sensitive topic, he couldn't fully engage with a counter-argument. And there was some risk for a teacher who played devil's advocate while editing.

One of my freshmen—I'll call him John—submitted a draft of an essay arguing that it was necessary for the government to limit free speech. He wrote that, "in a civilized country with the rule of law," citizens aren't allowed

to make statements that question national sovereignty. I responded in the comments section:

> It's not accurate to say that in a civilized country with rule of law, people are not allowed to make statements that challenge national sovereignty and social stability. In the United States, Canada, Europe, etc., anybody can make a statement claiming that some part of the country deserves independence.

In the Weibo posts, the comment had been turned into something else:

> In class, a student gave a speech saying that the country's sovereignty cannot be violated.
> Ho Wei asked why it's allowed to be violated in Quebec, Texas, California, and Scotland. People violate their national sovereignty every day.

The posts continued in this vein: using details from my comments and fabricating other things, the author created a scene in which I argued aggressively in the classroom, browbeating students about China's government. The Weibo account was anonymous, and it was quickly removed from the site, possibly by censors. Reading the fictional argument, I remembered that that freshman classroom was the only place I taught that did not have a surveillance camera. There wasn't any digital proof that the argument hadn't occurred.

In class, John was quiet, and his academic performance was somewhere in the middle of the group. We had never had an unpleasant interaction, and I had a good impression of his cohort. Could he have done this on his own? Or was somebody else from the class involved? Or Little Pinks elsewhere in the university? A security agent? I couldn't decide if the Weibo posts were clumsy or devious—they were clearly inaccurate, but they seemed calculated to draw maximum attention.

One of my comments had been particularly critical of the Party. In John's paper, he mentioned that free speech isn't necessary because the government always informs citizens about key events in an accurate and timely manner. On the day I marked the essay—December 7, 2019—I had no idea how soon this particular issue was going to affect us all. In my comments, I referred to the SARS outbreak of 2003, when the Chinese government was accused of hiding the true number of infections. That April, a doctor in Beijing told *Time* magazine that there were sixty cases in his hospital alone, whereas the official number of cases in the capital was only twelve. I mentioned the role of whistle-blowers and journalists, and wrote:

> One of the functions of the media anywhere in the world is to report on things that the government might want to hide. We have seen over and over, in countless countries, that official information is not always timely or accurate.

Some of my most powerful memories from the classroom in Fuling involve incidents in which I made a statement that touched, even obliquely, on a sensitive aspect of Chinese history or politics. At such moments, the room would fall silent, and students would stare at their desks. It was a visceral response, and it became the same for me—looking out over the bowed heads, my heart raced and my face grew hot. Initially, I considered these to be the instances when I felt most like a foreigner. But I came to realize it was the opposite: my body was experiencing something that must be common to young Chinese. The Party had created a climate so intense that the political became physical.

During my first three and a half months teaching in Chengdu, I hadn't yet had that sensation. I was probably better at speaking diplomatically, but there are so many Chinese sensitivities that any foreign teacher is bound to trespass. Recently, a nonfiction student told me that in October of 2019, when Leslie visited my class to talk about her experiences as a journalist, she casually used the phrase "China and Taiwan." She had stumbled into a forbidden zone: those two proper nouns can be linked by history, culture, geography, politics—but never by the conjunction "and." Even the act of connecting these places linguistically implies that they are separate.

Two years later, my student recalled that there had been some glances, and a classmate had whispered something about correcting the phrase. But the students had let it go. Neither Leslie nor I had noticed; after I was told about it, we couldn't remember the larger context. I was certain that I broke many other such taboos, and in the old days I would have felt it—somehow these students were more capable of controlling outward reactions. Still, they had been trained like hawks to be alert to such phrases.

At Sichuan University, a half-dozen political courses were mandatory for all undergrads. My Fuling students had had similar requirements, but since then another two decades of Communist history had piled up, and now the course names seemed to be getting longer: Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought and Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Research on Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. If these titles were ungainly, things got worse when you opened the texts:

> Only by taking the socialist core values as a major task with basic internality and targeted norms can we realize these core values while enhancing the people's self-confidence in the path forward, theoretical self-confidence, institutional self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence, in order to ensure that socialism with Chinese characteristics is always moving in the right direction and constantly showing stronger vitality.

That sentence was quoted by one of my freshmen, who wrote his argumentative essay in favor of reforming the political classes. His topic was among the edgiest, which made it difficult to research. One afternoon, he came to my office.

"When I search on Baidu, I can only find the counterpoint of my argument," he said. "Or I find people who say things like 'I don't care if I'm brainwashed, as long as it gives some benefit to us.'" He believed that most useful sources had been removed by censors or blocked by the firewall.

At the institute, I was provided with a list of unblocked English-language search engines, which I dutifully passed on to my classes, although, with the exception of Bing, I had never heard of any of these sites. They sounded like obscure rock bands: Dogpile, Yandex, WolframAlpha, Swisscows, DuckDuckGo. Even this third-tier-festival lineup was subject to cancellation: in 2019, during the first week of fall semester, a student could still do a DuckDuckGo search, but by week four the firewall made it DuckDuckGone. A site could be accessed only if it allowed content to be censored, like Bing, or if it remained so lightly trafficked that it didn't draw attention.

Sometimes freshmen showed up to my office hours simply to ask me to Google something. I had subscribed to a virtual private network before leaving the

FIRST DAY OF WAR

First day of war.
Rockets, not birds, whizzed by the window in the morning.
She jumped up in jolly pajamas,
barefoot across the cold floor as across the blue skies,
barefoot across the skies, what is this red flying by the window?
What is this terrible there? With such a satanic whiz
it flies over our heads toward a morning of peace.
Why does transparent glass tremble so, why does transparent soul,
why does it tremble?
So the war came, with no invitation.
No one prepared beds, no one covered the table
with snow-white tablecloth—later, how
to wash the drops of blood from the white
linen cloth?—"So this is a war?" she asked at the closed door,
barefoot in jolly pajamas, what a guest,
uninvited, terrible, I won't open, I won't offer it anything, I won't wear
a pretty dress. "Do not open," the door boomed.
"Do not offer it anything. Do not wear a pretty dress.
If it starts breaking in, hit it—hit it—with an axe."

—Ludmila Khersonsky

(Translated, from the Russian, by Valzhyna Mort.)

United States, and a number of students asked for help signing up for the same service, but I didn't know how to do it without an overseas credit card. Domestic V.P.N. providers could be arranged over WeChat, but the quality varied, and first-year students were often intimidated, because such services are illegal in China.

Over time, I learned that the best advice was: Talk to an older student. Along with mandatory political courses, learning how to *fanqiang*, or climb the wall, was essentially part of the curriculum at Sichuan University, which is among the top forty or so institutions in China. Relatively few of my freshmen seemed to be climbing the wall, but many of the juniors and seniors clearly used Google and other blocked sites. It wasn't a secret that many professors had tech support that helped them arrange V.P.N. services. One of my juniors, a liberal-arts major, described it as almost like a game. She told me, "Whenever they ask us in class to Google something, some students say, 'We don't have a V.P.N., so how can we Google? Can you tell us how to use a V.P.N.?' And they say, 'Sorry, we have support, but we're not allowed to tell you.'"

In my nonfiction class, a senior named Yidi profiled her V.P.N. dealer. That was the term Yidi used—it was like sourcing drugs. "I've been paying him on WeChat for a while, so I want to find out who he is," she told me, when she proposed the project. The dealer agreed to an interview, at which point Yidi learned that he was neither a hardened criminal nor a tech guy. He had developed an online course in art history after attending graduate school in Europe, where he became accustomed to a free Internet. After returning to China, he shopped around for a V.P.N. service and realized how easy it would be to set up such a business. That was an old story: the user who becomes a dealer.

When Yidi asked how much the business cost to run, the dealer responded, "If I tell you, you will probably ask for a refund." But he went ahead: for three hundred yuan a year, a little less than fifty dollars, he could rent a Vultr virtual private server overseas, which could handle up to fifty Chinese customers, each of whom paid the dealer an annual subscription fee of three hundred yuan. And then he scaled it up: fifty times three hundred, minus the minimal overhead, as many times as he pleased.

Yidi was one of the best writers in the class, with a breezy, funny voice. Her story had no sense of surprise or outrage—students seemed accustomed to contradictions and mixed messages. They weren't shocked that the university required classes in Xi Jinping Thought while tacitly encouraging students to contract with illegal-V.P.N. dealers, just as they weren't shocked when one of those dealers turned out to be somebody with a sideline in art history. Yidi wrote:

> The business is operated on WeChat, one of the most meticulously monitored social-media platforms in the world, and I was concerned that such an approach is tantamount to distributing anti-sexual harassment leaflets on public transportation during International Women's Day. But my dealer dispelled the myth. "Hundreds of millions of Chinese are getting around the wall, you think the state will punish them all?"

The dealer was exaggerating the numbers, but his point was that the Party wants some porousness in the firewall. People in the export business need to access Google Trends and other useful tools, and scholars and researchers depend on full access to the Internet. Yidi thought that more than half the students she knew at Sichuan University used a V.P.N., which was similar to other estimates I heard. In society at large, the figure is much lower, especially among older people. In 2017, when I surveyed a group of my former Fuling students, I asked whether they used V.P.N.s, and only one out of thirty responded in the affirmative. For most Chinese, the hassle and the expense act as deterrents. But it's much more common among the young and the élite. Yidi's dealer told her, "It's a good business, the gray market of China."

By the time I met with Minking Chyu, the SCUPI dean, Party officials had already interviewed a number of my students. Chyu told me that the students all said they hadn't witnessed any classroom exchange like what had been recounted on Weibo.

In the hybrid arrangement at Sichuan University, Chyu represented the University of Pittsburgh. Originally from Taiwan, he was now a citizen of the United States, where he had begun his career as a professor of engineering and later became an administrator. He wasn't directly involved in any Party

investigation, but officials communicated their findings to him. In our meeting, Chyu told me that the officials were satisfied that the incident had not occurred as it was described on Weibo. (Chyu subsequently claimed that he was not aware of any investigation.)

I had brought John's essay with my comments, but Chyu said this wasn't the issue, at least not yet. All that mattered was that nobody had formally started the *jubao* process, filing a complaint with the administration. A number of Chinese and foreign journalists had contacted me about the incident, and I asked Chyu if it would be accurate for me to say that I had not been reported. Chyu said yes, and after I issued the statement the social-media conversation died down.

That month, my department held a meeting about the incident with a Party official from the university. I explained what had happened, and an American professor asked if any topics were explicitly forbidden in our classrooms. In response, the Party official read from a statement, in English: "These include sex in a graphic or degrading manner, political opinion that may not be generally agreed upon, religious material promoting or degrading the tenets within, and topics deemed politically sensitive."

This was a typical Party approach—by not being specific, authority remained broader and more flexible. The American professor spoke again. "Sometimes we have discussions and students raise topics themselves," he said. "And they might raise a topic that seems borderline. To what extent do we interrupt?"

"It's better not to talk about it," the official responded, this time in Chinese. "Because this is still a Chinese student. You don't know if that student will *fanguolai*"—turn it upside down.

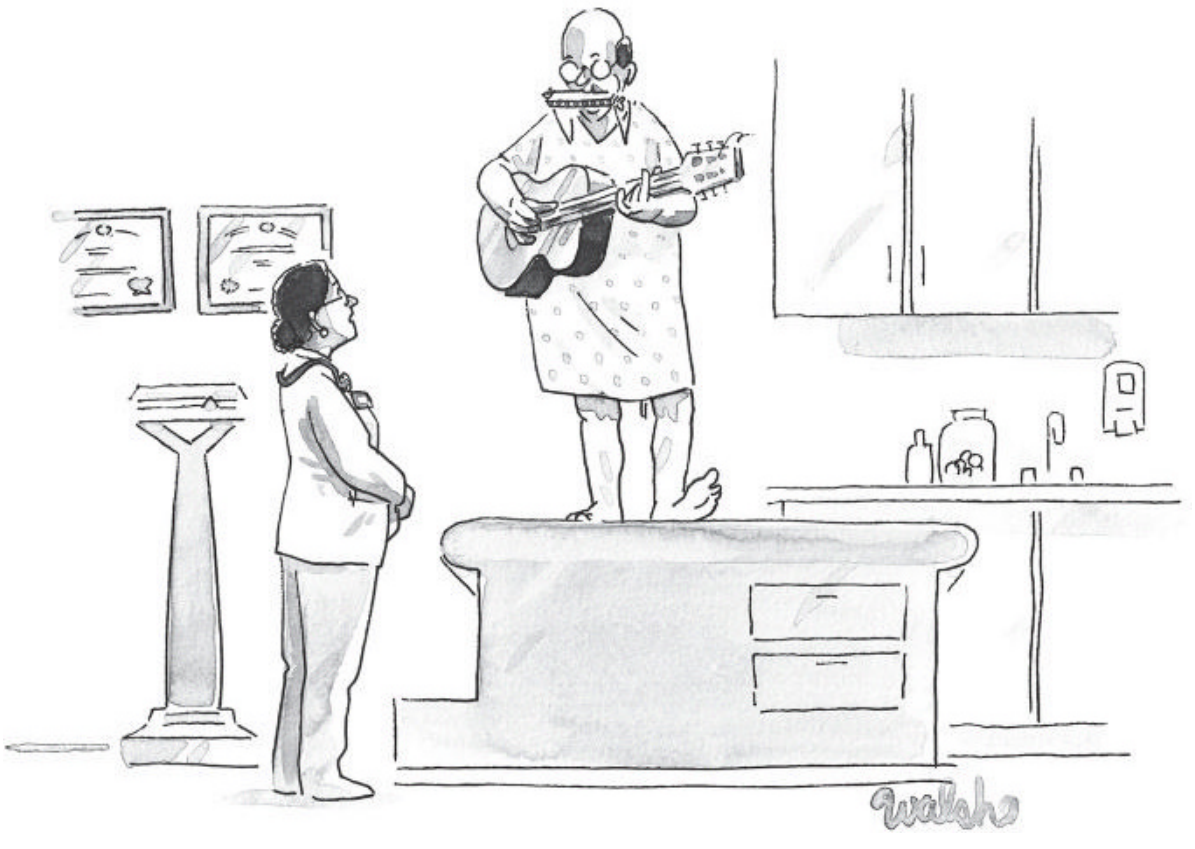
Throughout the various meetings, nobody ever said that I had done anything wrong. But neither was I told that it was a violation for a teacher's private editing comments to be twisted and then posted on social media. If officials had spoken with John, and if they knew more about what had happened, they kept their findings to themselves. The general approach was to proceed as if nothing had occurred, which meant that, five days after the Weibo attack, I was scheduled to teach John and his cohort again. We still had three weeks together in the classroom.

When I discussed *jubao* culture with the law-school teacher who had been disciplined after using the Ai Weiwei documentary, he explained that the fear ran in two directions. Administrators were afraid of what students might do, and they also feared higher officials. With the parameters deliberately left undefined, outcomes were also uncertain. After the incident with the documentary, the head of the department quickly reassured superiors that he would discipline the teacher. The punishment, though, was relatively light. The teacher was suspended from that class, but he was allowed to continue with his other courses. He told me that a large scandal would have reflected poorly on everybody. "They were protecting me, but they were also protecting themselves," he said.

The teacher mentioned the practice of using students as *xinxiyuan*—literally, "information personnel." This wasn't new: in the Peace Corps, we had been told that some students were almost certainly tracking classroom content. In 1997, one volunteer got into an altercation with a taxi-driver and was taken to the police station, where a Peace Corps administrator was also called in. In the course of questioning, it became clear that the police had a record of sensitive political comments that the volunteer had made in class during the previous year and a half.

But we never knew the exact mechanisms. Even after more than a quarter century, with a number of Fuling students who are very close friends, I've never heard a word about the monitoring. My impression is that the Party is shrewd about recruitment for such jobs, and the vast majority of students remain outside this subsystem. And there's little incentive, and also significant risk, for them to ask questions. "It's a waste of time to find out," one of my more liberal Sichuan University students told me. It was like following a thread that connected to an enormous tapestry, which was how I felt about the surveillance cameras. When I counted the devices in my local subway station, at Dongmen Daqiao, I saw fifteen cameras at track level, forty-seven at the turnstiles, and thirty-eight for the escalators. The total came to a hundred cameras, not to mention the two devices that were positioned in each individual subway car. Who was monitoring all this stuff?

The law-school teacher had heard that he had been reported by a group of students, but he didn't know which ones. He said he wouldn't have been angry at any individual. "He doesn't know that his mind is being enslaved," the teacher said. "I'm angry with the system."



"Unfortunately, folk music is only effective against societal ills."

When I came to class after the Weibo attacks, John was sitting alone toward the back. He didn't make eye contact when I greeted the students.

We were scheduled to discuss "Ani-

mal Farm," but I had decided to delay Orwell for a week, until I could gauge the group's dynamics. That day, we talked about some sample papers, and then we did an editing exercise. Everything seemed normal, although John didn't participate in the discussions. I couldn't tell if he was deliberately avoiding my gaze—he had always been shy.

I felt relieved to hear the final bell. A few students seemed disappointed that we hadn't talked about "Animal Farm," and they lingered after class. One boy remarked that he had found the novel to be even more depressing than "1984." "Because Winston has his happiness," he said. "At least he has a moment. Here the animals don't even have that."

Another student brought up "Brave New World," commenting that Huxley's fictional society is quite different from Orwell's. "But the end is similar," he said. "It's also very negative."

"Big Brother," the first boy said. "Some students want to be Big Brother."

John was still in the classroom, collecting his things, and now I was careful not to look in his direction.

"What about you?" the boy said to me. "Do you want to be Big Brother?" He said it lightly and laughed; I couldn't tell what he meant by the comment.

Of the many things that are banned, blocked, or censored in China, the novels of George Orwell do not make the list. Last year, when I entered Xinhua Winshare, one of the largest of the bookstores that are overseen by the Party in downtown Chengdu, the first table displayed twenty titles that documented the career and theories of Xi Jinping in mind-numbing detail: "Xi Jinping's Seven Years as an Educated Youth," "The Story of Xi Jinping's Poverty Alleviation," "Xi Jinping in Xiamen," "Xi Jinping in Zhengding," "Xi Jinping in Ningde." Less than thirty feet away, another table featured stacks of books marketed as the Dystopian Trilogy: "1984," "Brave New World," and "We," a novel that was banned in the Soviet Union after it was written, around 1920, by Yevgeny Zamyatin. Nearby, a security camera hung from the ceiling, and the cover of the Orwell volume declared, "War Is Peace. Freedom Is Slavery. And Big Brother Is Watching You." There were also copies of "Animal Farm," and another Chinese translation of "1984." In 2021, more than two hundred thousand copies of "1984" were sold in Chinese editions, along with a hundred thousand copies of "Animal Farm."

Many of my students had read Orwell in high school, and his books were taught in various courses at Sichuan University. Less than two weeks after the Weibo attack, students from another department invited me to attend their dramatic performance of "1984." When I entered the lecture hall, the professor greeted me warmly; he asked only that I not mention the name of the class. I sat at the back of the hall, near a security camera. There was another camera in the front.

The assignment had been to perform a new version of a classic story. At the beginning of the play, some boys and girls acted out the Two Minutes Hate, yelling Chinese curses that reminded me of a Cultural Revolution struggle session: *Fangpi!* (Fart!) *Yangliande zhu!* (Sheep-faced pig!) *Yangliande luozi!* (Sheep-faced mule!) After that, the play focussed on Julia, who becomes Winston Smith's lover. In the novel, Julia is a highly sexualized, unintellectual figure who simply hates the control of the state, but the Sichuan University students turned her into a secret Party agent. She is assigned to entrap Winston—but then, in carrying out her mission, she can't stop herself from falling in love with him. Her feelings are shattered when she sees how quickly Winston gives her up under torture. After that, she renews her dedication to the state, and the play ends with the Party identifying a new target, with a Chinese name. "Comrade Julia, congratulations on accomplishing this task," a superior says. "Your next mission is Ye Lianke."

I hadn't thought it was possible to make "1984" any darker, but the students had succeeded. Afterward, one of the writers told me that she'd expanded Julia's role because the original character seemed underdeveloped—the writer had recognized a strain of misogyny in the novel. On the whole, my students were good readers of Orwell. As part of our "Animal Farm" unit, they wrote about the character they most identified with. A common choice was Benjamin, the donkey who is skeptical of the new farm but keeps his thoughts to himself:

> As a Chinese saying goes, *huocongkouchu*, which means that all one's troubles were caused by his tongue. We have two eyes, two ears, two hands, but only one mouth, which just tells us we should observe more, listen more, do more, and speak less.

Some students identified with Boxer, the faithful and slow-witted horse who gets worked to death:

> I am a person without independent thinking, too. I often believe what others say to me, and I always complete the work given by other people without any personal thinking. If I am one of the animals in the farm, I will believe the word said by the leader such as Snowball and Napoleon. . . . Maybe I will be brainwashed by Napoleon and finally become the animal who does whatever Napoleon orders me to do. In the end, I will be put away by Napoleon.

The students could be brutally honest about themselves. They wrote well—when I contacted them for permission to quote their papers for this story, some made minor edits, but these excerpts are essentially as I first received them. I saw few signs of Little Emperor syndrome, which seems to be based primarily on a Western imagining of what an only-child society might be like. For one thing, most of my students had spent surprisingly little time alone. Chinese schools often require additional on-campus study periods, and quite a few of my students had lived in dormitories during high school, a practice that's common in China.

My students were spoiled mostly in the sense of having been provided every possible opportunity to do more work. This is typical in Chinese families: extra resources are dedicated to education. In one nonfiction class, I asked students how much time they had spent in tutoring sessions during middle school, and the average figure was six and a half hours a week. Personal essays about childhood often described devilishly designed competitions. One boy wrote about how, as a third grader, he had been enrolled in a supplementary math program that had six hundred applicants. An exam quickly winnowed the group down to sixty children, who were divided into an A team and a B team. From there, the program embarked on an endless series of examinations, with kids constantly demoted and promoted, like Premier League franchises.

Everything came down to numbers,

because that's the principle of the *gaokao*, the national college-entrance examination. When a student applies to university, scores are all that matter—no teacher recommendations, no list of extracurriculars. One attraction of SCUPI was that its cutoff *gaokao* score was lower than that of other departments. In order to enter SCUPI in the fall of 2019, a student in Sichuan Province needed 632 points out of 750. The next-lowest cutoff was 649, which allowed a student to enter a number of less prestigious departments, including Water Resources, Sanitation Testing and Quarantine, and Marxism. English was 660, econ 663, math 667. The university's Web site listed the numbers, and status was measured accordingly. The ultimate campus élite, the Brahmins of Sichuan University, occupied the School of Stomatology. At first, this mystified me—why such a fuss about oral medicine? But the School of Stomatology at Sichuan University's West China Medical School is recognized as the best in the nation, and it took a remarkable 696 points to enter its program in clinical medicine. Other undergrads resented the stomatologists; my students said they held themselves apart. If asked about his major, a stomatologist might coyly avoid answering, like a Harvard grad who says he went to school "in Boston."

Most of my students seemed traumatized in some way by the *gaokao* experience. A few described having had suicidal thoughts, and one boy wrote a personal essay about being hospitalized for stress-related heart trouble. In 2020, I asked students in a freshman class how they had reacted to learning their *gaokao* scores, and seventeen out of eighteen said they had been disappointed. Leslie and I sometimes joked that in America every child is a winner; in China, every child is a loser.

Yet students generally supported the Chinese system. Each semester, my freshman classes debated whether the *gaokao* should be significantly changed, and the majority answered in the negative. Many came to the same conclusion in argumentative essays. (Spring of 2020: "We cannot give up eating for fear of choking, we should treat *gaokao* dialectically. On the whole, its advantages far outweigh its disadvantages.") One major reason was that numbers are incorruptible—the richest man in Sichuan might buy that Porsche, but he can't buy his kid's way into stomatology. And, despite their youth, many students were realists. A nonfiction student named Sarinstein—he created this name because he admired Sartre and Einstein—profiled a ten-year-old schoolboy. He observed how, in the classroom, the boy's cohort had been seated, from front to back, according to their exam scores. Sarinstein wrote:

> China's system cannot afford individualized education, caring for one's all-around and healthy growth. . . . Our system is merely a machine helping the enormous and somewhat cumbersome Chinese society to function—to continuously supply sufficient human resources for the whole society. It is cruel. But it is also probably the fairest choice under China's current circumstances. An unsatisfying compromise. I haven't seen or come up with a better way.

They often used the term *neijuan*, or involution, a point at which intense competition produces diminishing returns. For them, this was unavoidable in a vast country. For one writing assignment, a freshman engineering student named Milo returned to a Chongqing auto-parts factory that he had first visited eight years earlier, for an elementary-school project. This time, when Milo interviewed the boss, he was struck by how old the man looked. The boss explained that booming business required frequent travel and many alcohol-fuelled banquets with clients. "I had no time to take care of my family," he told Milo. "My kids do not understand me and even dislike me, since I seldom show up. What's more, after drinking so much alcohol, I sometimes have a terrible stomachache."

On the factory floor, a foreman whom Milo remembered said that the workforce had been reduced by a third, because of automation. Milo titled his essay "Farewell, Old Factory," and he concluded:

> Everyone in the society must try their best to follow the world's trends. This is a colorful and fascinating world, but this is also a cruel world. If you are not good enough, you will be eliminated without a trace of pity.

In my first book, "River Town," I described the "childlike shyness" of my Fuling students, who seemed young because they were entering a new world. To some degree, this had been true for every generation of modern Chinese. Time and again, young people had entered the maelstrom of overwhelming change, whether it involved war or revolution, politics or economics.

But my students at Sichuan University were old souls. They knew how things worked; they understood the system's flaws and also its benefits. The environment they were entering was essentially the same one in which their parents had worked: for the first time, China has been both stable and prosperous for a period that's longer than a university student's memory. When they wrote about their parents' generation, and about the society that they would someday inherit, they could be completely cold-eyed:

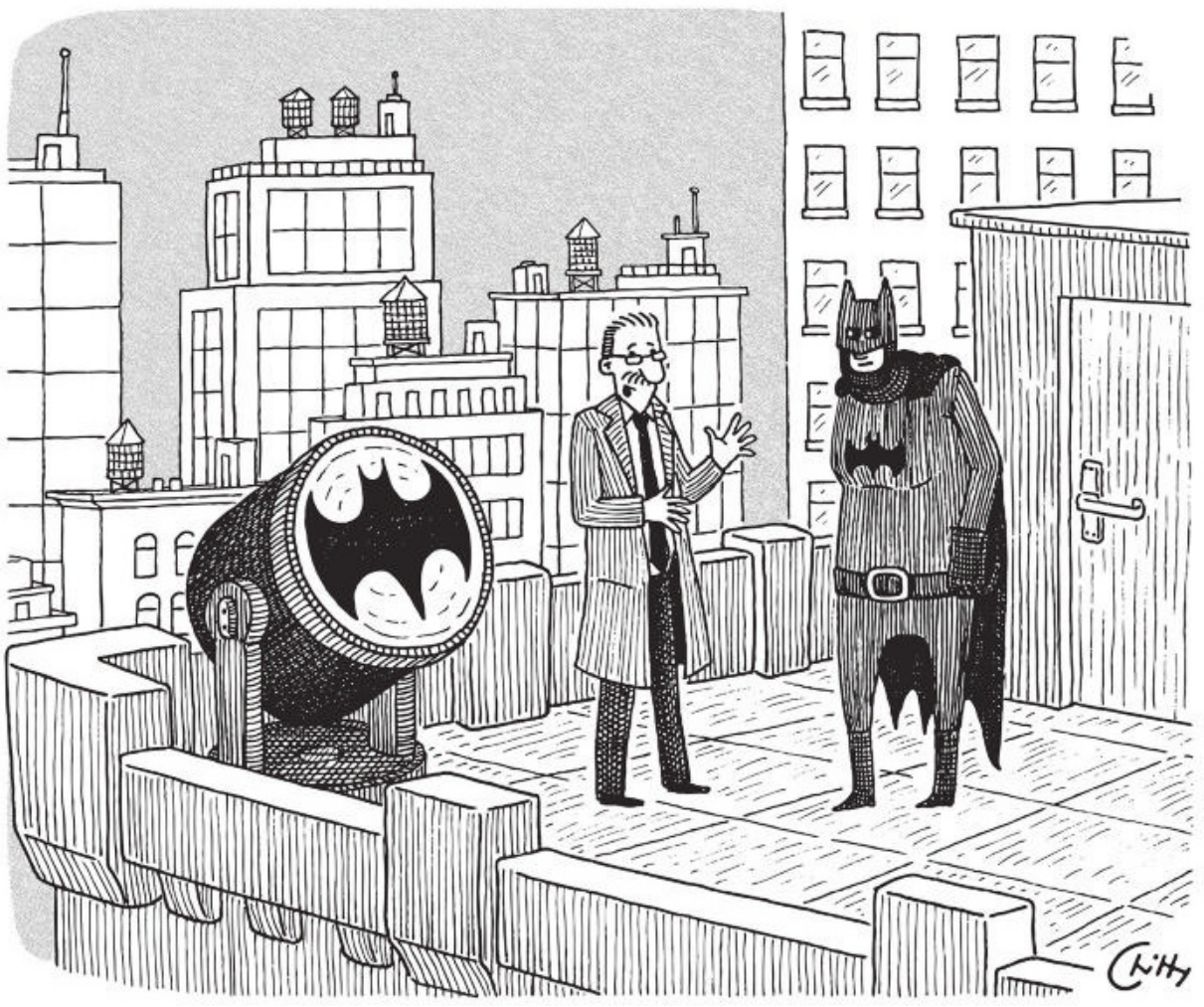
> My parents were born in the 1970s, and I think they now fit into the lower middle class in China. They are characterized by firm patriotism and nonchalant cynicism. They strongly support the People's Republic of China, not by praising the Chinese government, but by criticizing foreign governments. They refuse to use Apple products, decline to travel to Japan, and dismiss Trump as crazy and malicious. Yet they seldom admire China with passion. They have witnessed corruption in Chinese bureaucracy as well as injustice in society, which they are not able to redress, so they always say, "Things are just like that." . . .
>
> I think my generation, born in the age of the Internet, is puzzled and somehow depressed by the conflict between Chinese beliefs and Western ones. Propaganda about liberty and reason prevails on the Internet while propaganda about patriotism and Communism prevails in the textbooks. Youngsters are mostly attracted by the former, but when passing exams and pursuing jobs, they should bear in mind the latter, and in practice in China, more often than not, the latter functions better.

Reading words like that felt heartbreaking but also inspiring: even the act of describing a situation with no easy solution is a kind of agency. Despite the stifling political climate and the soul-crushing *gaokao* routines, the Chinese educational system produced no small number of people who could observe and analyze, think and write.

At the university, I never again had an experience like the one with John. A little more than a month after that incident, the pandemic shut down the campus, and I never saw him in person again. Recently, I contacted him, sending a long e-mail and a screenshot of the original Weibo posts. Almost immediately, John responded, and within hours we were talking via video connection.

John told me that he was mortified to learn that the attack had been connected to his essay. He claimed that in the fall


THREE WEEKS AGO, I'D NEVER HEARD OF MITSKI, LET ALONE LISTENED TO A NOTE OF HER MUSIC.
NOW I CAN'T STOP.
IF YOU'RE AS UNFAMILIAR AS I WAS, MITSKI IS AN INDIE-MUSIC DARLING WHO WRITES SHORT, COMPLEX, AND UTTERLY PERFECT POP SONGS.
NOBODY, NOBODY
BODY, NOBODY, NO-
SHE IS EXTREMELY POPULAR ON TIKTOK, A PLATFORM I REGARD WITH SUPERSTITIOUS, CAVEMAN-LIKE FEAR.
NOBODY, NOBODY, NOBODY, NOBODY, NOBODY, NO-
AT MY AGE, I RARELY GET FIXATED ON NEW MUSIC, AND ALMOST NEVER BY ARTISTS WHO ARE YOUNGER THAN ME.
I'M MORE USED TO BEING LED BY ARTISTS MY OWN AGE OR OLDER-
SINGING ABOUT THINGS I'M EXPERIENCING, OR ON THE CUSP OF, OR LONGING FOR.
THE WORLD OF MITSKI'S SONGS IS FULL OF EXPERIENCES I'VE HAD BUT AM UNLIKELY TO EVER HAVE AGAIN.
I'VE BEEN MARRIED FOR AGES-
IF I EVER HAVE ANOTHER FIRST KISS, IT'LL BE BECAUSE EITHER AN UNSPEAKABLE TRAGEDY HAS OCCURRED OR I'M DOING SOMETHING UNFORGIVABLE.
MAYBE SOMEDAY SHE'LL WRITE SONGS ABOUT THE TEDIUM OF PARENTHOOD, OR THE SADNESS OF A NECK WATTLE.
BY THEN, I'LL HAVE MOVED ON TO BONE LOSS AND MENOPAUSE, SO I GUESS SOMEBODY SHOULD START MAKING THAT ALBUM.
HERE'S AN EMBARRASSING THING ABOUT ME: WHEN I'M SUPER INTO A SONG, I OFTEN IMAGINE MYSELF PLAYING IT AT A PARTY, SAY, OR SOME SUCH SOCIAL SITUATION.
SINGING ON ONE OF MY LITTLE WALKS
TOSS YOUR DIRTY SHOES IN MY WASHING MACHINE
HEART-
HOW MY FRIENDS WOULD LOVE ME FOR THE JOY I'D EMBODY! HOW BEAUTIFUL I WOULD BE, HOW TRANSPORTED, HOW TRANSFORMED!
BABY, WILL
YOU KISS ME
ALREADY
AND-
OF COURSE, THEN I REMEMBER I'M A SCHLUBBY FORTYSOMETHING SINGING LOUDLY AND BADLY IN PUBLIC.
I KNOW WHO YOU PRETEND I AM-
OH, FUCK.
ALSO, THE LAST TIME I DID THIS, I LOST MY HOUSE KEYS.
MITSKI IS ON TOUR AGAIN AFTER TAKING A LONG STEP AWAY FOR HER PERSONAL MENTAL HEALTH, A MOVE I RESPECT. I DID NOT TRY TO BUY A TICKET.
I JUST DON'T THINK I COULD HANDLE THAT LEVEL OF YOUTHFUL EXUBERANCE.
I DO HAVE PLANS TO SEE LIVE MUSIC AGAIN, BUT, LIKE ME, THEY'RE LEGACY ACTS.
MIDDLE-AGED, RUEFUL JOY, HOWEVER, I CAN DO.
BUT IF YOU SEE ME OUT THERE BOPPING AROUND LIKE A DORK, I BEG YOU- THINK CHARITABLE THOUGHTS.
BUT WHEN HE WALKS IN, I AM LOVED, I AM LOVED-
AND, MAYBE, KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR MY HOUSE KEYS.



"Can I get an e-mail address, too? Just for when you're hiding in the cave."

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of 2019 he had heard only that I had been reported. John didn't post on Weibo, and he hadn't seen the original attack. "I'm sorry," he said. He had no idea how the editing comments had become public.

Over the years, I had talked about the incident with a few politically savvy students and professors. One teacher who knew John had told me that the boy didn't seem like a Little Pink. The teacher and others imagined the same scenario: that some other student had seen the essay, or heard details from it, and then written the attack. When I spoke with John, he said that he had mentioned some of the editing comments to his roommates, and that he had also taken the paper to the institute's writing center, where other students and tutors may have seen it. From looking at John's face, and from his over-all reaction, I believed that he was telling the truth.

"Actually, after you gave the comments on the paper, I was a little upset," he said. "I totally agree with you about the comments, if we don't consider the politics. But I had to consider the politics, because I am under a certain circumstance in China. Your comments were against the traditional politics."

I asked if he would have the same reaction now.

"Yes," he said. "It's not that the comments are wrong. It's just the feelings."

For many students, the experience of the pandemic seemed to confirm a general idea that the benefits of the Chinese system greatly outweigh its flaws. In assignments, a number of them wrote angrily about the government's initial coverup and missteps. But they recognized that China was the only large country in the world that, after early mistakes, had been able to dramatically change course and keep fatalities to a minimum. They were realists, but I wouldn't describe them as cynical. In the course of several semesters, I asked more than a hundred students if they expected their generation to have a better life than their parents' generation had, and eighty-three per cent said that they did.

The Little Pink phenomenon, which seems to be amplified by social media, was not something I observed in the classroom. In my experience, the Chinese students of twenty-five years ago were much more nationalistic, and much less aware, than the students of today. Li Chunling, one of China's most prominent sociologists, has carried out many large-scale surveys of young Chinese. In her book "China's Youth," she describes a pattern of less interest in joining the Party, in addition to a tendency for high income and higher education to correlate with reduced national identification. But Li emphasizes that this is not a sign of dissidence. "They see Western democratic institutions as better than China's current systems," she writes. "But they see little value in immediately instituting a Western-style democratic order, because China's current situation seems to demand the institutions that it has."

Li also writes that, with regard to highly educated young Chinese, "simple propaganda-style education will not be effective." Over the course of four semesters, I couldn't remember any student bringing up Xi Jinping in class. I recently reviewed more than five hundred student papers and found the President mentioned only twenty-two times, usually in passing. Undoubtedly, fear played a role. But there also seemed to be a genuine lack of connection to the leader. I often gave an assignment that I had previously given in Fuling, asking freshmen to write about a public figure, living or dead, Chinese or foreign, whom they admired. In the old days, Mao had been the most popular choice, but my Sichuan University students were much more likely to write about scientists or entrepreneurs. Out of sixty-five students, only one selected Xi Jinping, which left the President tied with Eminem, Jim Morrison, and George Washington. The student who chose Washington wrote, "The reason why I admire him most is that he gave up his political power voluntarily."

In early April, 2021, my teaching contract wasn't renewed. Dean Chyu had been in the United States since the start of the pandemic, and he e-mailed me with the news. First, he said that SCUPI had other candidates, but, when I checked with my department, I was told that there wasn't any recruitment taking place—because of the pandemic, it was extremely difficult to get foreign teachers into China. After I wrote to the dean again, he added a different reason, citing a Chinese rule that supposedly prevented the university from extending a short-term contract like mine. I offered to sign a

long-term contract, but he declined, without explanation. Recently, I wrote to Chyu, and he responded in an e-mail that he was too busy to do an interview. (When contacted by a fact checker, Chyu claimed that I never expressed interest in signing a long-term contract, and he said that he had made plans to replace me before the pandemic began.)

During the pandemic, there had been periodic social-media attacks about my writing, by Little Pinks and others. Two professors at Sichuan University told me that mid-level administrators had had to file reports about these incidents, which supposedly was one of the reasons my job ended. (Chyu and a former university official claim that they were not aware of any such reports.) The professors also told me that nobody at the top had issued a direct command to not renew my contract, because the system created enough nervousness that people were likely to err on the side of caution. "*Tianwei bukece*," one professor explained, using a phrase that means the highest authority remains unclear. "You have to guess what the exact order is."

Near the end of June, less than a week before my wife and daughters were flying out of China, a deputy director of the university's foreign-affairs office requested a meeting. The official told me that the university would have been happy if I had stayed, and that I was welcome to apply for a position with a different college. He said that the refusal to renew my job had been made by Dean Chyu alone. "He did not know the whole situation here," the official told me. (Later, when contacted by a fact checker, the official denied saying this.) It impressed me as another way in which the system functioned effectively: in the hybrid arrangement, the decision to get rid of the American teacher could be blamed on the American institution.

When my final class of freshmen read "Animal Farm," I asked them to reimagine the story at Sichuan University. In one boy's version, a mob of students take over the campus and penetrate the administration's central computer room, hoping to change grades, only to realize that the security cameras are still operating. Another boy, named Carl, described a revolt in which students successfully expel professors and staff. Afterward, all students are equal, but some become more equal than others:

> Without teachers, the undisciplined people give up studying completely, while the self-disciplined people work harder every day, especially the people from the West China College of Stomatology. Although they said there was no discrimination, the students at Pittsburgh Institute were about 15 points worse than those of other colleges of Sichuan University in the college entrance examination.

Carl's story ends with the stomatologists embarking on successful careers while other students fail to get jobs, thus destroying the university's reputation.

When teaching Orwell, I often thought about why such books aren't considered a threat to the Party. In the novels of the Dystopian Trilogy, futuristic societies distract and control individuals by various methods: the continuous war and rewritten history of "1984," the sex and soma drugs of "Brave New World," the surgical removal of human imagination in "We." But none of these books anticipates how useful competition can be in sustaining a long-term authoritarian state. In China, nationalistic propaganda might be effective for children and other people at a lower level, but there's a tacit understanding that it won't work as well for the highly educated. As long as these individuals have opportunities to advance and improve their lives, they are less likely to oppose authority. And the system doesn't need to be hermetically sealed in the manner of "1984." The



vast majority of Chinese students who go abroad choose to return—for them, it's as simple as *yinyefeishi*. If they were truly afraid of choking, they would remain in the United States.

And there's a point at which competition becomes a highly effective distraction. For most of my students, the greatest worry didn't seem to be classroom security cameras or other instruments of state control—it was the thought of all those talented young people around them. In October of 2019, when China celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, I asked students what the holiday meant to them. One freshman wrote:

> Holiday means others went out to play and I am studying, which is the time that I have the highest relative efficiency. I could learn more than others and I will get a higher GPA. Holiday is the best time that I can go surpass my classmates in study.

At Sichuan University, there is one independent and liberal student-run publication. *Changshi*, or *Common Sense*, was founded in 2010, and the name is partly in homage to Thomas Paine's pamphlet. Somehow, *Common Sense* has survived the current political climate, although it no longer publishes on paper, uses no bylines, and has no list of staff writers. During my final semester, the most prominent stories were an investigation into the sudden death of a student on campus and a feature about an undergraduate who was trying to sue the university because of low-quality cafeteria food. A number of journalists from the magazine had taken my nonfiction class.

The week before I left the university, I met off campus with the publication's staff. There were about twenty students, almost all of them female. That was another aspect of university life that wasn't quite Orwellian. From "1984": "It was always the women, and above all the young ones, who were the most bigoted adherents of the Party, the swallowers of slogans, the amateur spies and nosers-out of unorthodoxy." In my experience, female students seemed less nationalistic than the men, and I suspected they were less likely to *jubao* a professor.

During our meeting, the *Common Sense* staff asked what I thought about young people today. I mentioned the intense competition, and I said that I had been impressed with my students' understanding and analysis of the system around them. "But I don't know what this means for the future," I said. "Maybe it means that they figure out how to change the system. But maybe they just figure out how to adapt to the system. What do you think?"

"We will adapt," somebody said, and several others nodded.

"It's easy to get angry, but easy to forget," another woman remarked.

A third woman, one of the smallest in the group, said, "We will change it." ♦

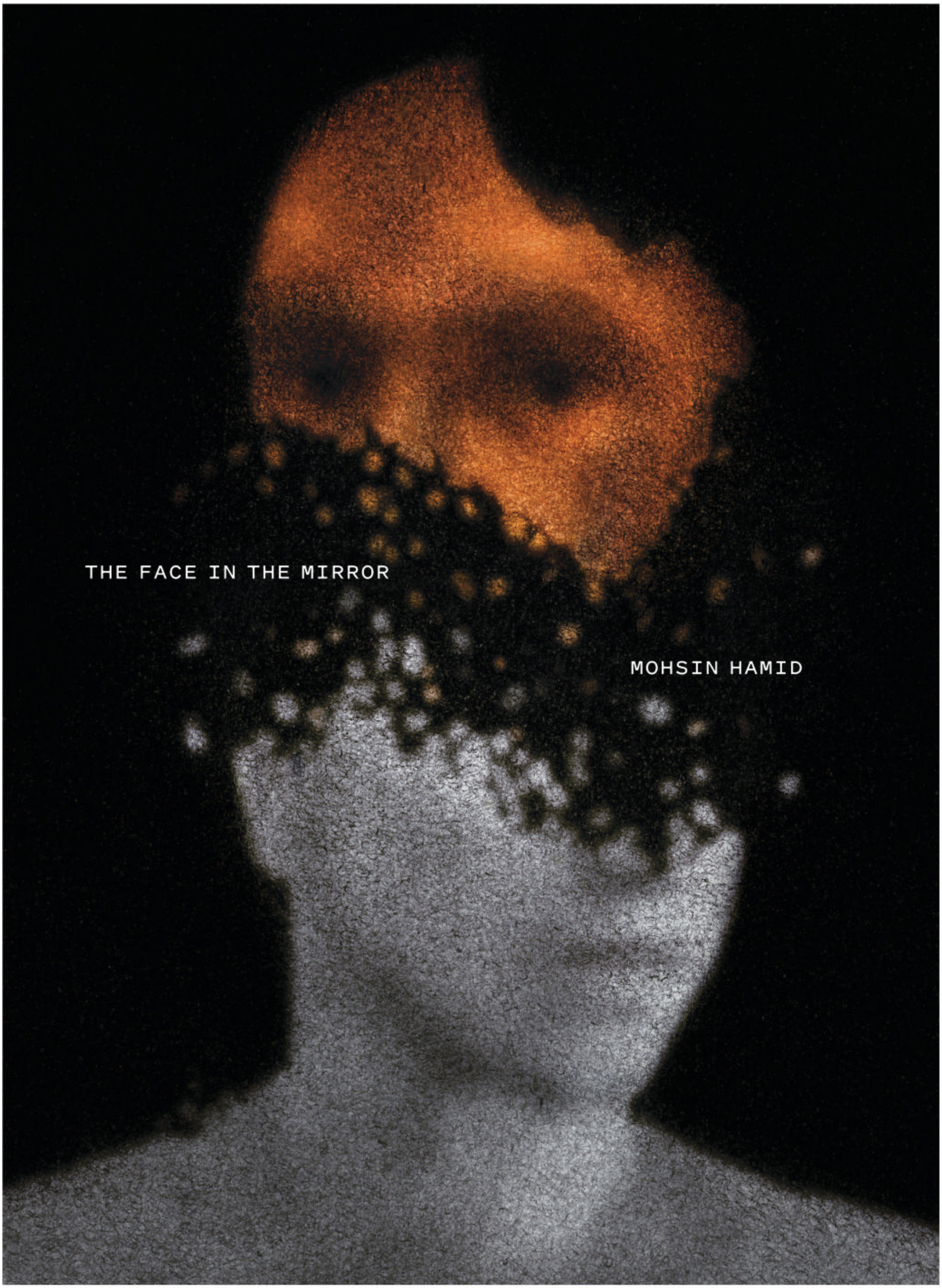


ILLUSTRATION BY DADU SHIN

One morning Anders, a white man, woke up to find he had turned a deep and undeniable brown. This dawned upon him gradually, and then suddenly, first as a sense as he reached for his phone that the early light was doing something strange to the color of his forearm, subsequently, and with a start, as a momentary conviction that there was somebody else in bed with him, male, darker, but this, terrifying though it was, was surely impossible, and he was reassured that the other moved as he moved, was in fact not a person, not a separate person, but was just him, Anders, which caused a wave of relief, for if the idea that someone else was there was only imagined, then of course the notion that he had changed color was a trick, too, an optical illusion, or a mental artifact, born in the slippery halfway place between dreams and wakefulness, except that by now he had his phone in his hands and he had reversed the camera, and he saw that the face looking back at him was not his at all.

Anders scrambled out of his bed and began to rush to his bathroom, but, calming himself, he forced his gait to slow, to become more deliberate, measured, and whether he did this to assert his control over the situation, to compel reality to return through sheer strength of mind, or because running would have frightened him more, made him forever into prey being pursued, he did not know.

The bathroom was shabbily but comfortingly familiar, the cracks in the tiles, the dirt in the grouting, the streak of dried toothpaste drip on the outside of the sink. The interior of the medicine cabinet was visible, the mirror door ajar, and Anders raised his hand and swung his reflection into place before his eyes. It was not that of an Anders he recognized.

He was overtaken by emotion, not so much shock, or sorrow, though those things were there, too, but above all the face replacing his filled him with anger, or, rather, more than anger, an unexpected, murderous rage. He wanted to kill the colored man who confronted him here in his home, to extinguish the life animating this other's body, to leave nothing standing but himself, as he was before, and he slammed the side of his fist into the face, cracking it slightly, and causing the whole fitting, cabinet, mirror, and all, to skew, like a painting after an earthquake has passed.

Anders stood, the pain in his hand muted by the intensity that had seized him, and he felt himself trembling, a vibration so faint as barely to be perceptible, but then stronger, like a dangerous winter chill, like freezing outdoors, unsheltered, and it drove him back to his bed, and under his sheets, and he lay there for a long while, hiding, willing this day, just begun, please, please, not to begin.

Anders waited for an undoing, an undoing that did not come, and the hours passed, and he realized that he had been robbed, that he was the victim of a crime, the horror of which only grew, a crime that had taken everything from him, that had taken him from him, for how could he say he was Anders now, be Anders now, with this other man staring him down, on his phone, in the mirror, and he tried not to keep checking, but every so often he would check again, and see the theft again, and when he was not checking there was no escaping the sight of his arms and his hands, dark, moreover frightening, for while they were under his control there was no guarantee they would remain so, and he did not know if the idea of being throttled, which kept popping into his head like a bad memory, was something he feared or what he most wanted to do.

Eventually he attempted, with no appetite, to eat a sandwich, to be calmer, steadier, and he told himself that it would be all right, although he was unconvinced. He wanted to believe that somehow he would change back, or be fixed, but already he doubted, and did not believe, and when he questioned whether it was entirely in his imagination, and tested this by taking a picture and placing it in a digital album, the algorithm that had, in the past, unfailingly suggested his name, so sure, so reliable, could not identify him.

Anders did not normally mind being alone, but as he was just then it was as if he was not alone, was, rather, in tense and hostile company, trapped indoors because he did not dare to step outside, and he went from his computer to his refrigerator to his bed to his sofa, moving on in his small space when he could not stand to remain a minute longer where he was, but there was no escaping Anders, for Anders, that day. The discomfort only followed.

He began, he could not help it, to investigate himself, the texture of the hair on his scalp, the stubble on his face, the grain of the skin on his hands, the reduced visibility of the blood vessels there, the color of his toenails, the muscles of his calves, and, stripping, frantic, his penis, unremarkable in size and heft, unremarkable except in not being his, and therefore bizarre, beyond acceptance, like a sea creature that should not exist.

Anders messaged in sick the first day. On the second he messaged to say he was more sick than he'd thought, and probably out for the week, upon which his boss called him, and when Anders did not answer his boss messaged saying you better be dying, but he left Anders alone after that.

That week Anders felt vaguely menaced as he went around town, which he did as little as he could manage, and though this carried its own risks he wore a hoodie, his face invisible from the sides, and if it had been colder on those glorious, early-autumn days he would have worn gloves, but that would have looked ridiculous given the temperature, so he kept his hands in his pockets and a backpack slung over one shoulder to carry whatever he had come out to get, rolling paper or bread or a replacement charging cable for his phone, which meant that his hands could mostly stay hidden, slipping out only to open a door or slide a payment across, a flash of brown skin like a fish darting up to the surface and down again, aware of the hazards of being seen.

People who knew him no longer knew him. He passed them in his car or on the sidewalk, where sometimes they gave him extra room, and where sometimes, unthinkingly, he did the same. No one hit him or knifed him or shot him, no one grabbed him, no one even shouted at him, at least not yet, and Anders was not sure where his sense of threat was coming from, but it was there, it was strong, and once it was obvious to him that he was a stranger to those he could call by name he did not try to look in



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their faces, to let his gaze linger in ways that could be misconstrued.

Almost as disturbing as seeing someone he recognized was the feeling of being recognized by someone he did not himself recognize, someone dark, waiting at a bus stop or wielding a mop or sitting in a group at the back of a pickup truck, sitting in a group that was, he could not help it, that was like a group of animals, not humans, being transported from one task, one site, to the next, and actually this was more disturbing, the moment when one dark man would look at him, look at Anders as though he saw him, their eyes meeting for an instant, not in friendliness or hostility but just as people's eyes meet, as people, and when this happened Anders would look quickly away.

Anders put off telling his father, why he was not sure, maybe because his father had always seemed a little disappointed in him, and this would add to his disappointment, or maybe because his father had enough on his plate, and Anders did not want to increase his burden, or maybe because until his father was told it would not really have happened, Anders would still be Anders, there in the house where he grew up, and the telling would undo that, and make everything different, irrevocably different, but whatever the reason he waited, he waited and then he told.

He did it over the phone, which was a cowardly thing to do, and his father hung up the first time, and the second time asked him if he was high, if he thought this was a joke, and when Anders said no to both things his father asked, with steel in his voice, a steel familiar to Anders, if his son was trying to call him a racist, to which Anders replied he most definitely was not, and so his father said, show me, smart guy, come here and show me if you can.

Anders's father had beaten him properly only once, he had hit him more than a few times, but a solid beating, that was only once, for his mother had long forbidden it, and the time he had beaten Anders it was because Anders had been negligent with a loaded rifle, discharging it by mistake, negligent after repeatedly being warned, and back then Anders was two heads shorter than his father, and his father, Anders thought, had been right to beat him, but it had been a beating Anders would never forget, not the beating or the lesson, and that was the point, a gun was a marker on the journey of death, and was to be respected as such, like a coffin or a grave or a meal in winter, and as he drove to his father now, though Anders was the taller, heavier man, for some reason that beating found its way right into the front of Anders's mind.

Anders's father was a construction foreman, gaunt and ill to his core, ill in his guts, but he did not trust doctors and refused to see them, and his pale eyes burned like he had a fever, or like he was praying for a murder, they had been that way since Anders's mother died, or since she had gotten sick and it became clear she would not get better, or maybe since before that, Anders was not sure, but for all his gauntness his back was erect and his forearms were like corded ropes, and he could walk carrying an improbable load and barely sway, with the kind of strength that just got things done, a fearsome strength, if Anders was honest, and his father was waiting for him on the stoop of his house, and he was looking at his son, the son who had reminded him of his wife, the boy's mother, not that the boy was soft, but he was gentler than was good for him, and he was lost in dreams too easily, and he had her fine stamp on him, a boy in his mother's mold, and as he saw his boy now, as he watched Anders approach, that was all gone, she was gone, and this boy, who made easy things hard, who had not yet found his way, this boy, Anders's father could see, was going to suffer, and his mother had vanished, she was nowhere to be glimpsed in him, and he stood there, Anders's father, a cigarette in his mouth, one hand holding on to the fabric of his son's sleeve, the other rigid at his side, and he wept, he wept like a shudder, like an endless cough, without a sound, staring at the man who had been Anders, until his son took him inside, and they both at last sat down.

Reports began to emerge from around the country of people changing, reports at first utterly disreputable, and easily disregarded, and roundly mocked, but later picked up by reliable voices,

as a question to be confirmed, being confirmed, apparently happening. It was on the television. Anders watched as on the news a reporter interviewed someone who had stopped being white.

To his boss, Anders explained his situation, which was not unique, or contagious, as far as anyone knew, and returned to the gym after a week off, and his boss was waiting for him at the entrance, bigger than Anders remembered him, though obviously the same size, and his boss looked him over and said, I would have killed myself. Anders shrugged, unsure how to reply, and his boss added, if it was me. Though it smelled of sweat, the gym was empty, it being early, the steel racks and wood-floored platforms and benches with duct-taped tears in their upholstery all unoccupied, and the two of them worked out separately before the gym's members showed up, Anders's boss clanging through monster sets on the squat, thick, his elbows like knees, his knees like heads, his face red with rage, as it was whenever he lifted heavy.

Anders's boss had said he would have killed himself, and the following week a man in town did just that, his story followed by Anders in the local press, or rather online in the regional section of a large publication, the local paper having shut down long ago, this man shooting himself in front of his own house, a shooting heard but not seen by a neighbor, and called in, and assumed to be an act of home defense, the dark body lying there that of an intruder, shot with his own gun after a struggle, but the homeowner was not present, and was nowhere to be found, and then the wedding ring and the wallet and the phone on the dead man were all tallied up, and the messages that had been sent, and the experts weighed in, and the sum of it all was clear, in other words, that a white man had indeed shot a dark man, but also that the dark man and the white man were the same.

The mood in town was changing, more rapidly than its complexion, for Anders could not as yet perceive any real shift in the number of dark people on the streets, or, if he could, he could not be sure of it, those who had changed still being, by all accounts, few and far between, but the mood, yes, the mood was changing, and the shelves of the stores were more bare, and at night the roads were more abandoned, and even the days were shorter and cooler than they had been recently, the leaves no longer as confident in their green, and while these seasonal shifts were perhaps only the course of things, the course of things felt to Anders more fraught.

There were flare-ups of violence in town, a brawl here, a shooting there, and the mayor repeatedly called for calm, but militants had begun to appear on the streets, pale-skinned militants, some dressed almost like soldiers in combat uniform, or halfway like soldiers, with military-style trousers and civilian jackets, and others dressed like hunters, in woodland colors, or in jeans and ammunition vests, but all the militants, whatever their attire, visibly armed, and as for the police, the police made no real effort to stop them.

The next time Anders went to see his father was on a day with some chill in it. He used the back roads, proceeding hesitantly, pausing and observing at intersections, like a herbivore, out of an instinct for self-preservation, ascertaining what was ahead before he moved, and he had gloves on his hands and a hoodie over his head and sunglasses over his eyes, ineffectual concealment, but perhaps enough, from a distance, and it was not that he had been threatened, for he had not been, not yet, but



just that he felt threatened, and so he was taking no chances, or none that he could avoid.

His father was slow to answer when Anders knocked on his door, and Anders was struck by how much his father had deteriorated in the weeks since Anders had last seen him, and the son knew for certain that the father was leaving now, knew that this mighty, skinny man was on his way out, nearly gone, and Anders was glad for his sunglasses, so that his father would not have to see the knowledge enter Anders's eyes, and his father was bent over, just a bit, he who had always stood so straight, bent as though his illness had punched him in the stomach that morning and he did not want to show that the blow continued to hurt, but when something so straight and so important is bent, even just a bit, it is remarkable to behold, and Anders beheld it, and they shook hands, their grips firm, firmer than usual, to compensate for the infirmity, and Anders's father did not like to look at Anders, at what his son had become, and he did not like that he did not like it, and so he forced himself to look at his son, to hold on to his son's hand even longer, the brown skin against his pale skin, and he clapped Anders on the shoulder and squeezed him there, for Anders's father an expressive gesture, and he inclined his head in welcome and took his darkened son back home.

Inside the house, the furnishings were dated, and did not match Anders's father, what he would have bought for himself, for they had been bought by Anders's mother, and reminded Anders of her, the little frills on the sofa covers, the lace coasters on the side tables, and in the living room the photos were of all of them, of Anders's parents as young people, of Anders as a baby and as a boy, of the family together, none more recent than about a decade ago, photos already aged by the passage of time.

Anders's father listened as his son told him of his unease, and he watched his son drink a beer while he let his own sit, barely sipped, his beer there out of habit and propriety, because Anders's father could no longer manage the drinking of it, and he fetched the metal flask with his cash in it and gave money to his son, over his son's objections, and he went through his cupboards and helped his son load some essential supplies into his car, or handed them to his son, anyway, the boy would have to do the work, standing was hard enough, and he ignored his pain, for it was part of him now, constant, not remotely bearable, but also not avoidable, and so put up with, like a nasty sibling, and he retrieved a rifle and a box of shells, and he outlasted his boy's reluctance, saying take it and waiting, and he witnessed his boy do what his boy needed to do, which was to stop pretending and to

start to accept the situation, and to receive what his father was holding, what was obviously needed, and his boy grew serious as he held the weight of the rifle and the shells, which was good, seriousness being what the situation required.

Once he had returned to his own home, Anders wondered whether the rifle actually made him safer, for he felt he was all alone, and it was better to be non-confrontational than to stand up to trouble, and he imagined that somehow people were more likely to come for him if they found out he was armed, even though they would not find out, even though so many folks were armed, he just had this sense that it was essential not to be seen as a threat, for to be seen as a threat, as dark as he was, was to risk one day being obliterated.

At work Anders was no longer the only one who had changed, there were others, and a gym that had been almost a whites-only gym now often had three, or even four, dark men present, and Anders had thought this would make things better, but it seemed the opposite was happening, and the gym was increasingly tense, and men who had known each other for years now acted like they did not know each other, or, worse, disliked each other, bore a grudge.

One night as Anders was ready to leave, two men got into an argument, and they took it outside, and they were older guys, but big, bulky and strong and surprisingly quick despite their bellies, and they started to shove each other in the parking lot, and a few people gathered round, but those who gathered did not say anything, that was what struck Anders, they did not tell the two to stop, or cheer them on, they were silent, they just watched, and soon the two men were punching, and it was ferocious, and out of the grunts and the shuffles came the sound of a fist hitting the side of a face, the solid crack of it, the thud, softly liquid and bone-breaking at the same time, such a visceral, disturbing sound that it made Anders turn away, and he walked off, walked off without seeing what happened next, whether the dark one had the better of it or the pale one, Anders did not want to see, and though he did not see, the sound lingered, and it kept coming to him even as he lay in his bed that night, causing a wince, or a grimace, a physical response, Anders twitching there by himself, in echo.

Anders had heard that the militants had begun to clear people out, dark people, running them out of town, and when he saw cars pull up to his house he knew what it meant, though it is perhaps always a surprise when what one is waiting for, what one is dreading, a calamity of this magnitude, actually happens, so Anders was prepared and not prepared, but, prepared as he was, he was not expecting one of the three men who came for him to be a man he knew, a man he was acquainted with, which made it much worse, more intimate, like being shushed as you were strangled, and Anders did not pause for them to get to his door, Anders opened it himself, and he stood there in the doorway, his rifle in his hands, a ready carry, with muzzle high, the son a picture of his father on a hunt.

Anders hoped he looked more brave than he felt, and the three of them were armed but they stopped when they saw him, a few paces away, and they stared at him with contempt and fascination, and Anders thought the one he knew stared at him with enthusiasm, too, like this was special for him, personal, and Anders could perceive how self-righteous they were, how certain that he, Anders, was in the wrong, that he was the bandit here, trying to rob them, they who had been robbed already and had nothing left, just their whiteness, the worth of it, and they would not let him take that, not him or anyone else.

But they did not particularly relish that he had a weapon and seemed to have grabbed part of the initiative, that was their role after all, and they were not expecting this from him, and it muddied the simplicity of the situation, and so they halted, and they faced off, his acquaintance, the two strangers, and Anders, and Anders said hello guys, what can I do.

They spoke, and Anders listened, and in the end the men said he had better be gone when they got back, and Anders said they would have to see about that, and as Anders said it he almost believed he would stay, and he had an anger in his voice, an anger he was glad for, despite their dismissive smiles, but when they withdrew to their cars and Anders felt the magnitude of

FEATHERWEIGHT

At fourteen, I taught myself to sew
on a Singer Featherweight,

which I was an idiot to trade
years later when seduced by a Bernina.

As a child, I made clothes, costumes—
things a feral kid would wear, or Huckleberry Finn.

The only tricky part of sewing is the fitting,
making clothes that fit exactly right.

The actual sewing is easy—it's just
manual dexterity, patience, and precision.

Fitting is geometry and math.
Geometry comes to me easily,

but math is an old childhood enemy.
Its door remains locked. Why?

Because Mrs. E. was drunk, so the second grade
skipped multiplication and division in 1957?

Was that when the trouble began?
Does it date to the Summer of Catching Up?

The writhing and moaning
over the multiplication tables?

I was seven. He was my babysitter.
I wasn't injured. No one knew.

I knew. He was a friend of the family.
It had nothing to do with math.

To me, the geometry's simple.
You dismantle a body's measurements

into shapes traced on featherweight vellum:
the sleeve, the bodice, the skirt.

The parts of the body reunite
when the garment is sewn,

and the dress or the pants appear,
held together only by thread.

—Chase Twichell

his relief, a relief that washed over him and drenched him with defeat, he knew that he would be gone, that, mere minutes hence, he would be fleeing, and this place, his place, so familiar, would be lost to him, his no longer.

When Anders arrived at his father's house, his father took him inside and drew the tattered curtains, and then parked his son's car, the car that had been his wife's car, behind the house, on the narrow sliver of land that his wife had called her garden, where once grew flowers and tomatoes and snap peas and thyme, but which now was a patch of dirt with tufts of weeds, weeds dry and dead at the onset of winter, and Anders's father checked to make sure the car was not visible from the street, moving weakly and stiffly, but also with purpose, and after that, spent beyond reckoning, he sat himself next to his son in the living room, the television on and their rifles at their sides, and they waited there for someone to show up and demand that Anders be given over, but no one did, no one came, no, not on that first night at least.

Anders's father was not yet used to Anders, to how Anders looked, and in a sense he had never been used to him, not even when Anders was a child, silent for so long, struggling to tie his laces or to write in a handwriting that people could read, for Anders's father, though not a particularly good student, had always been competent, competent at the tasks he was given, and not just in school, outside it, too, but his son, his son was different, a difference the boy's mother took to naturally, and so the boy became her boy, and there were walls between them, between him and his son, and Anders's father could understand the bullies who had picked on his son when his son was small, and he could understand those who wanted Anders gone from town now, who were afraid of him, or threatened by him, by the dark man his boy had become, and they had a right to be, he would have felt the same in their shoes, he liked it no better than they did, and he could see the end his boy signalled, the end of things, he was not blind, but they would not take his boy, not easily, not from him, the boy's father, and whatever Anders was, whatever his skin was, he was still his father's son, and still his mother's son, and he came first, before any other allegiance, he was what truly mattered, and Anders's father was ready to do right by his son, it was a duty that meant more to him than life, and he wished he had more life in him, but he would do what he could with what little life he had.

In the morning the power went out, and the house was gloomy, with the curtains drawn and no lights, but still there was illumination enough to see by, and Anders's father judged it best they save their candles for nightfall, and so they managed, in the dimness, and then Anders discovered that his phone no longer had reception, and neither did his father's, and Anders wondered if the service had been cut off intentionally or if the backup batteries at the cell towers had died.

Anders was alone, lying propped up in his old childhood bed, far more alone without access to the online world, or if not literally more alone then more alone in how he felt, and yes the chatter online had been grim, not just in town but all over the country, but it had been something, and now it was taken from him, and time itself slowed, unwinding, like the minutes were tired, were reaching the finish, and then around midnight the power returned without warning and his phone caught a signal and time spooled back up again and continued.

Days passed, and although they heard the crack of gunfire on occasion, one night right outside, they were not themselves confronted, and Anders should have been relieved to have escaped the militants, temporarily, but if he was it was a fraught relief, for living again in close proximity to his father he was shocked to discover the degree of physical pain his father was enduring, pain his father could mask for a beat or two, but not for an entire evening, not for hours at a stretch, and Anders could see it in his father's face, and in his movements, and though his father tried to spare him, and often retired to his bedroom, Anders could hear his muffled grunts and his low-pitched swearing, the battle being waged inside, the battle his father was losing, and it made Anders guilty for not being a better son, for having left his father so abandoned, even if he knew his father would

not have permitted it to be otherwise, that just by being here Anders was taking something from his father, taking his dignity, and forcing his father to allow himself to be seen as he would not, and did not, wish to be seen.

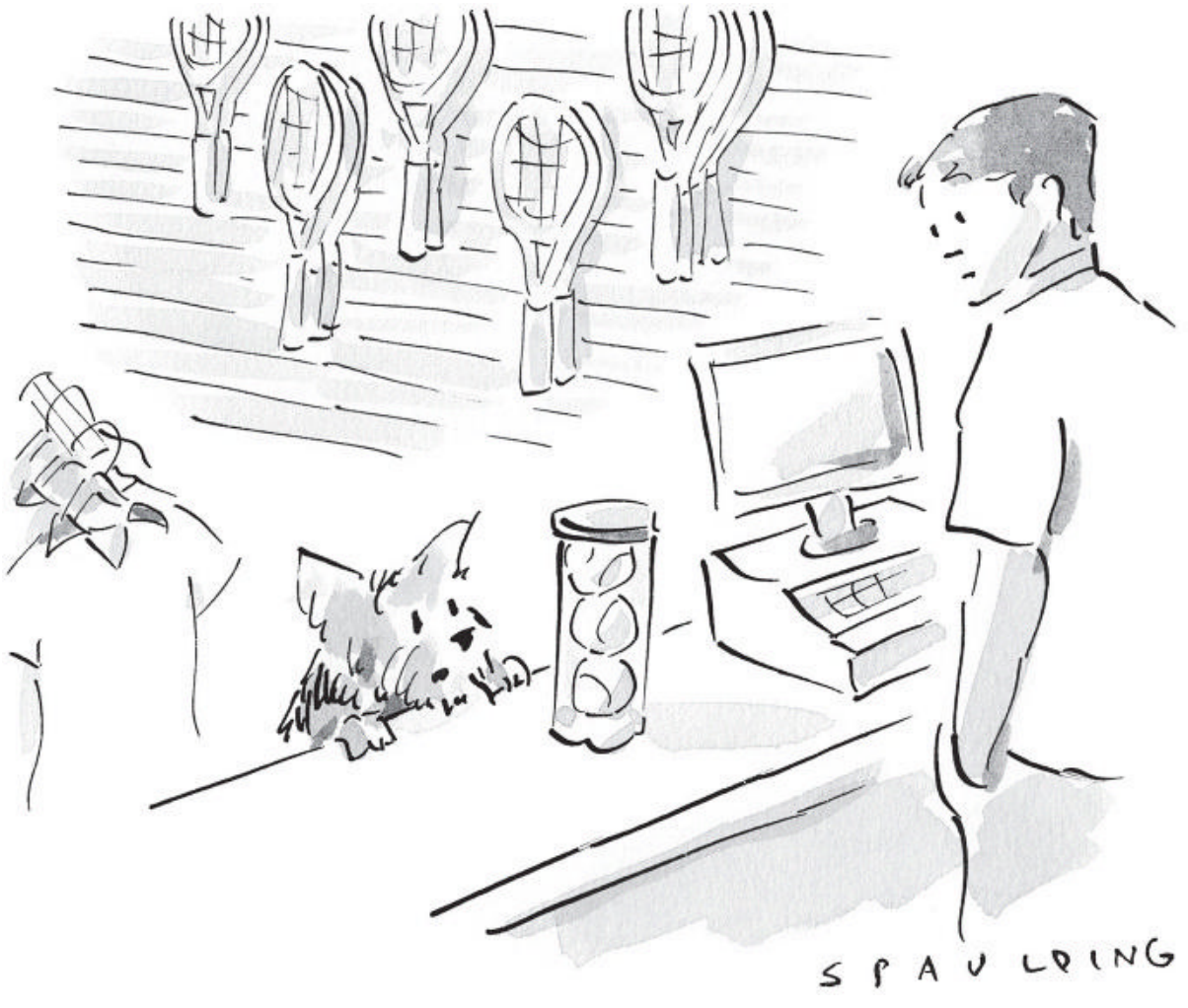
Anders's father rarely left his bedroom now, and there was a smell in it, a smell he could see in Anders's face when his son entered, and sometimes could even smell himself, which was strange, like a fish feeling it was wet, and the smell they could smell was the smell of death, which Anders's father knew was close, and this frightened him, but he was not completely afraid of being frightened, no, he had lived with fear a long time, and he had not let fear master him, not yet, and he would try to continue, to continue to not let fear master him, and often he did not have the energy to think, but when he did he thought of what made a death a good death, and his sense was that a good death would be one that did not scare his boy, that a father's duty was not to avoid dying in front of his son, this a father could not control, but rather that if a father did have to die in front of his son he ought to die as well as he was able, to do it in a way that left his son with something, that left his son with the strength to live, and the strength to know that one day he could die well himself, as his father had, and so Anders's father strove to make his final journey to his death into a giving, into a fathering, and it would not be easy, it was not easy, it was almost impossible, but that was what he set his mind, while he had his mind, on attempting to do.

The pain had reached proportions where periodically there was nothing else left, yearlong hours when there was no person, no Anders's father, just the pain, but then the pain receded for a bit and there was a person again, and when he was a person again Anders's father could look his changed son in the eye, and nod to him, and let the boy take his hand, and listen to the boy's sparse gentle words, so like the words his wife, the boy's mother, had once used, and then, when it was time, gesture with his head toward the door so the boy might step away as the pain came to claim his father again.

After weeks there in hiding, Anders finally ventured out of his father's house, ventured out to score medication to blunt some of the edge of his father's agony, learning about a hospice employee known for his shady dealings, and calling him, and the man who answered said Anders would need to come in person if he wanted to talk, and he sounded so white that Anders did not relish revealing his own color, but Anders put his rifle in his car, and mustered his courage, and drove over there, and no one bothered him on the road, and the man who sounded white turned out to be dark, and Anders thought he did not look like his voice, and then he thought, who knows, maybe he thinks the same about me.

Anders explained his situation, and it was unclear if the man believed him or if he did not, but he advised Anders on what Anders needed, and Anders paid in cash, and there was of course no prescription and no attempt to pretend there was a prescription, there was just a brown paper bag that for some reason reminded Anders of when he was a boy and his father took Anders with him to work and they sat among all the strong men at that building site, and the men respected his father, you could see it in how they acted, and Anders had felt proud as he sat with them, a boy among men, and they had opened their bags and had lunch together like equals.

On the way back to his father with the painkillers, both hands on the steering wheel, Anders noticed just how many dark faces there were, and how the town was a different town now, a town in a different place, a different country, with all these dark people around, more dark people than white people, and it made Anders uneasy, even though he was dark, too, but he was reassured to observe that some of the stores had reopened and the traffic lights were mostly working, and he even passed an ambulance, and it was just driving normally, no siren blaring, just driving from someplace to someplace on a regular day, in no hurry, how crazy was that, and when he got home he went to his father and gave his father the medication, and then Anders passed from room to room and spread the curtains, he spread the curtains wide.



"I really just need the one."

There would be moments in his father's last days when he spoke, just a word here or there, or occasionally the shortest of sentences, and Anders was glad for these moments, these words, even though he did not always understand them, for his father no lon-

ger spoke as clearly as he once did, and now, when words were said that were no more than sounds, Anders often sensed his mother, or anyway Anders sensed his memories and his missing of her, and he hoped his father sensed his mother as well.

Anders's father sometimes looked at the dark person who sat at his bedside and knew it was his son, but sometimes he looked at Anders and did not know who he was, but he knew that he had a duty to this person, that he ought to give him what he could, and so he tried to, and did his very best even, or especially, when he was unsure who this person was, because then he felt a father feeling, or maybe it was a son feeling, as though he was the son and this person was the father, both of them father, both of them son, and they had a bond, and they would make the passage together, or, if not together, at least they would approach it not unaccompanied.

Anders's father died on a crisp, clear morning, shortly after dawn, and Anders was with him in his room when he passed, for he had noticed the change in his father's breathing that night, and he had stayed there with him, and his father had opened his eyes in the darkness, and he had seen Anders at his bedside, Anders seeing his father seeing Anders, and Anders's father had shut his eyes again, and his already labored breathing had grown more labored, until the effort was palpable, the sound of it filling the room, as though Anders's father was breathing through a cloth that was getting thicker and thicker, and the force required by his lungs was increasing, and when he stopped breathing it was after a mighty breath, a mighty breath that took everything out of him, that took him out of him, and with that breath Anders's father was no more.

Anders did not cry at first, he simply sat, and in sitting it was as if they were waiting for something, Anders and his father, the hand in Anders's hand not yet cold, and it was not until Anders took out his phone, a phone he hated in that moment, hating its profanity, the falseness of the distancing it committed against what felt like a sacred immediacy, it was not until he held that slab of glass and metal and its screen lit up and he sought to operate it one-handedly, or one-thumbedly, really, that he started to cry, and he wept so hard and so loud that it surprised him, and made him want to shush himself.

Anders's father had died without debt and having paid for his own funeral arrangements, both being matters of principle for him, severe and uncommon principle, and he had apprised Anders in advance of what had to be done, and the men from the mortuary had arrived like well-dressed plumbers, and they had taken Anders's father to their hearse, and transported him to the funeral home, Anders following, as though he was afraid his father might be stolen or misplaced, and it was only there that Anders was persuaded to leave his father, the professionals telling Anders he would be called to see his father again, as soon as his father was readied, and they did this telling well, they had experience of it, but more than that they spoke in a matter-of-fact fashion that was firm without diminishing the enormity of the situation, and Anders listened to them as others before him had listened to them, and did as they said and went home.



On the drive back the sun was shining as though nothing had happened and there was no snow on the ground and there were hints of green here and there and it was a normal day that could have been almost a nice day, a day that suggested, inappropriately, jarringly, that winter would soon be over, and that spring was beginning to be sprung, and it all just hit Anders, unslept and red-eyed, it hit him right in the face.

Maybe Anders idealized his father and maybe Anders's father was a connection to the distant past for Anders, to traditions with which Anders was not yet familiar and would not now ever be familiar, but Anders was seized with the idea that he should dig his father's grave, dig it himself, and he wondered then if Anders's father had dug Anders's grandfather's grave, and for some reason he thought, he just thought, that he had, and Anders almost called the graveyard and asked if he could, and then he stopped and said to himself, this is crazy, and he did not do it, he did not do it even though he could imagine the feel of the grain of the wooden shaft and the heft of that shovel in his hands, biting into the dirt, but he regretted that decision later, he regretted it, not bitterly, no, only faintly, but he regretted it for as long as he lived.

At the service for Anders's father the casket was half-open, reminding Anders of the back door of their house, which was a two-part door, and Anders's father had sometimes stood there when Anders was a boy, the lower part shut, the upper part open, and Anders's father had liked to rest one hand on the edge and to smoke with the other, and he had looked at Anders with that expression Anders could not quite read, not with affection, not exactly, but not without affection, either, more like he was trying to figure something out, and Anders's father's eyes were closed now, and he had makeup on now, it made him a little strange, and Anders could not see his expression, and Anders would not see his expression again.

Anders had thought he would hate the funeral service but he did not hate the funeral service, it was comforting to be with these other people who came to offer their respects, and Anders did not know who was who and which was which, not until they introduced themselves, although occasionally he could guess, and there were not many of them, but there were enough, the right number, all those who were present being those who cared, and the ceremony did what it was meant to do, which was to make real what had happened and to weave Anders and those others left behind into a shared web of what they had lost, and Anders's pale father was the only pale person present, the only pale person left in the entire town, for there were by that point no others, and then his casket was closed and his burial was occurring and he was committed to the soil, the last white man, and after that, after him, there were none. ♦

THE WRITER'S VOICE PODCAST
Mohsin Hamid reads "The Face in the Mirror."

BOOKS

YOU'RE TALKING NONSENSE

How queer was Ludwig Wittgenstein?

BY NIKHIL KRISHNAN

No one expects contemporary philosophers to be more than mildly eccentric. Creatures of the modern academy, they have careers, not vocations. Some mixture of incentive and professional obligation keeps them productive. They can cultivate the odd quirk—elbow patches or, naughtily, a cigar habit—but more outlandish idiosyncrasies are ruled out by the institutions that discipline them into tameness.

Of course, the archetypal Western philosopher, Socrates, lived before there was an academy to tame him. And he was seen, even in his time, to be—using the word advisedly—queer. Undoubtedly, that was the case in the modern, pejorative-not-pejorative sense: he was attracted to men. But he was also queer in ways that are harder to define.

The Greek word often applied to him was *atopos*, literally, "out of place." His out-of-placeness consisted in what the scholar Martha Nussbaum has called a "deeper impenetrability of spirit." Socrates simply could not be counted on to say what one expected him to say.

He was also queer in how he managed to combine rationality with the most abject unreasonableness. No one can really desire what's bad, he said. It is worse to do wrong than to be wronged. The just man is happier than the unjust man, even when he is being tortured on the rack. What was it like to be in the presence of someone who believed such things?

There is only one canonical philosopher of the twentieth century with anything resembling these traits: Ludwig Wittgenstein. He was one of the founders of a tradition—the "analytic"—that has come to dominate academic philosophy in much of the world. But he has not been afforded the cloak of impersonality that shrouds most analytic philosophers.

Wittgenstein belongs, rather, with figures like Socrates, Jesus, and Gandhi, in that seemingly everybody who met him felt moved to record the encounter. How many people in the history of philosophy are the subject of a two-volume tome of anecdotes? What explains the fascination with the ephemera of one man's life, including among people who claim that the work was the thing?

Even for those who know the facts of that life well, "the difficulty has been to discern in them an intelligible human being," as a reviewer of Ray Monk's definitive biography, "Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius," from 1990, wrote. A young man from a fabulously wealthy and cultivated Viennese family arrives in Cambridge, in 1911, to study with Bertrand Russell, the preëminent logician of his age. He is evidently a tormented soul, and he makes little effort to be liked. He is rude and a bit arrogant but in another way without vanity. He hates the social world of Cambridge, with its gossipy gays and sardonic dons. He quickly shows talent enough to convince Russell that he is no charlatan, and charisma enough to convince Russell that, even if he were, acquaintance might be worth the bother.

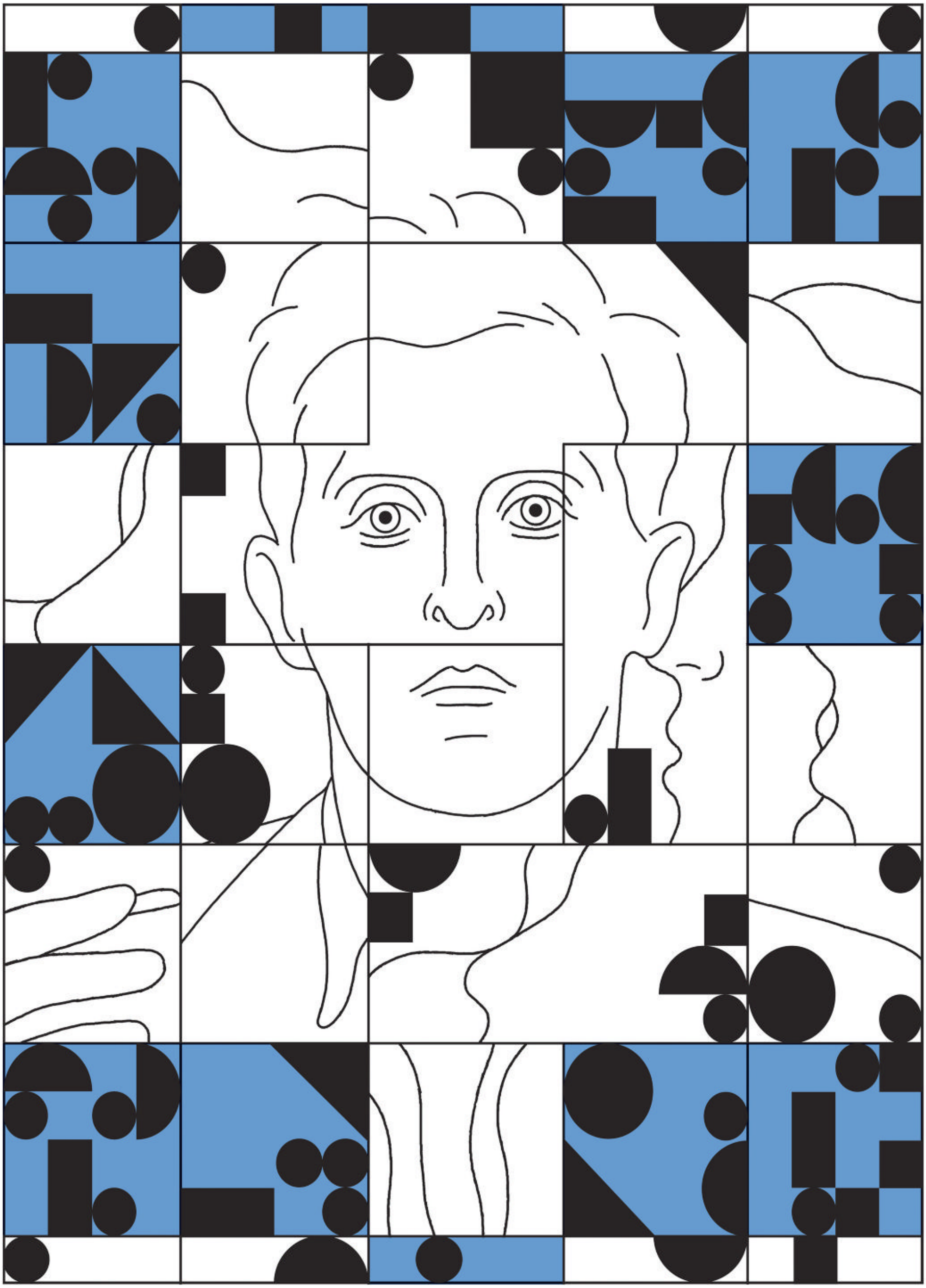
On the verge of a radical breakthrough, he decides to live alone in rural Norway, to think about logic in absolute solitude. But that plan is interrupted by the First World War. He enlists in the Army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire despite being eligible for a medical exemption, and serves as an ordinary soldier even though someone of his class could have joined as an officer. The war and soldiering evidently mean *something* to him, but nothing about his decision is obvious. Neither before nor after the war does he show much interest in workaday politics.

In his free moments as a soldier, he scribbles in notebooks that are divided between remarks destined for an ambitious philosophical manuscript and personal remarks on religion, masturbation, and the quotidian business of being at war. He repeatedly volunteers for the most dangerous posting available to him. Along the way, his manuscript on logic is transformed almost beyond recognition.

The original project seems to have been one that Russell initiated—to show that behind the messy outward "clothing" of language lies a lean body of thought, austere and simple. That aim, to reveal the order behind the disorder, survives the war. But there is now something new. The meaningful use of language, Wittgenstein says, gives us a picture of the world: *there's a tree by your house; there's an apple on that tree*. These are ways that the world is or could be. But he admits that his account of language and thought, by design, leaves out the aesthetic and the ethical: *the tree is beautiful; stealing that apple would be wrong*. Such propositions do not state facts; they are, in his view, nonsensical, even mystical. He is equally forthright about admitting that his strictures apply to his own words: propositions about the nature of propositions don't specify states of the world, either; they, too, lack sense.

After the war, the manuscript is published on Russell's recommendation,

ABOVE: ANTONIO GIOVANNI PINNA



Philosophy appeared on the right-hand pages of the wartime journals; more intimate confessions, coded, were on the left.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEXIS BEAUCLAIR

although Russell is dubious about its contents. Meanwhile, Wittgenstein surprises everyone by forswearing philosophy (whose central problems he thinks he has now solved) and going off to rural Austria to teach schoolchildren; he clouts one student on the head so hard that the boy collapses to the ground. Under scrutiny for his disciplinary methods, and lately convinced that he hasn't, in fact, solved all the problems of philosophy, he returns to Cambridge, slowly making his way to a new, and equally radical, philosophical outlook.

Once, he had hoped to X-ray language and expose the concealed solidities of meaning and logic; now he's after the significance of surfaces—he wants to explore how ordinary language is used in ordinary settings. The results of his inquiries don't lend themselves to a slim volume, and he does not manage to finish another book in his lifetime. He dies in 1951, at the age of sixty-two, of prostate cancer, leaving behind dozens of reverent students and many thousands of pages of unpublished manuscripts.

Those, at any rate, are the basic facts of Wittgenstein's life. For a sense of what he was like, one must turn to the anecdotes. These provide a sense of the man's presence, with his flannel shirts, leather jackets, and tweed caps, his ringing tenor voice. They also provide a sense of the surrounds—the spartan rooms with their canvas chairs and iron stove—where he put on his terrifying performances of thought.

The American philosopher Norman Malcolm, who was a student of Wittgenstein's, writes of the "frequent and prolonged periods of silence" in his classes, of how sometimes, "when he was trying to draw a thought out of himself, he would prohibit, with a peremptory motion of the hand, any questions or remarks." Malcolm goes on, "His gaze was concentrated; his face was alive; his hands made arresting movements; his expression was stern. One knew that one was in the presence of extreme seriousness, absorption, and force of intellect. . . . Wittgenstein was a frightening person at these classes. He was very impatient and easily angered."

Many things angered him: someone failing to tend to one of his houseplants, a student unable to formulate a thought. ("I might as well talk to this stove!") But he could sustain the intensity for only so long. A couple of hours of that, and he would be ready for an excursion to the "flicks."

He loathed British films and generally insisted on American ones, being a particular fan of Carmen Miranda. (He was also a devotee of the pulpy murder mysteries served up in the magazine *Detective Story*.) He would sit in the front row so that he could see nothing but the screen—perhaps fearing memories of the draining lecture. Woe betide any companion who tried to talk to him. There was only the movie on the screen, and Wittgenstein, rapt in his seat, munching on a cold pork pie.

Of the students who still turn up every year for introductory courses on Wittgenstein, some of them are there for the genius logician, the inspiration behind both something called "logical positivism" and something opposed to it, called "ordinary-language philosophy." But other students are there for Wittgenstein the sage, the magus, the riddler—the man who left Russell bewildered by a turn to mysticism at the end of a book that was supposed to be about logic.

The book in question, the "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus," carries the impress of both Wittgensteins. The work was composed during a period of military leave in the summer of 1918, out of those notebooks. It was published in 1921 in German, and in English the following year. Whether anyone at the time or since has understood it fully remains an open question.

One of the few things it's safe to say about the "Tractatus" is that it is concerned with the line between the effable and the ineffable. What, if anything, lies beyond language? Some of Wittgenstein's early readers—the so-called logical positivists of interwar Vienna—saw in him a kindred spirit, someone drawing the "limits of sense," as they did, around the propositions of natural science. Almost everybody rejects that interpretation of the "Tractatus" now, but without agreeing on another.

It's hard to know what to make of a book that begins with "The world is everything that is the case" and ends with "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." The numbering of propositions (from 1 to 7, with innumerable nested propositions—5.251 and so forth), the use of symbols and of a special idiolect, all suggest the kind of work one must be a mathematician to understand. But then we come up against lines—allusive, enigmatic—that would not be out of place in a piece of modernist poetry. A queer book, then, by a queer man.

The queerest thing of all about the "Tractatus" is its notorious proposition 6.54, near the end of the text, which states, of his propositions, "he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless." The reader must "surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly." The lines have inspired a lively debate on how Wittgenstein wanted his book to be read, and on how seriously this remark itself is to be taken. But it has been recognized as significant that Wittgenstein referred to "understanding me," rather than to "understanding my propositions."

Clever students can eventually make sense of the logic and turn out elegant little essays about the "picture theory of meaning," "logical atomism," and "the saying/showing distinction." But cleverness seems the wrong virtue to employ for understanding a man who tells us, mysteriously, that the "world of the happy man is quite another than that of the unhappy man" (6.43). Or that "he lives eternally who lives in the present" (6.4311). Taken out of context, the seeming mysticism comes perilously close to kitsch. Some clever people (starting with Russell) have concluded that we'd do well not to bother with it.

But others see in those remarks a call to a virtue rarer than cleverness. A virtue that could be described as depth. Wittgenstein, Malcolm recalled, likened philosophical thinking to swimming: "Just as one's body has a natural tendency towards the surface and one has to make an *exertion* to get to the *bottom*—so it is with thinking." Whatever depth is, Wittgenstein is one of a small number of philosophers of the twentieth-century canon to have some claim to it. That is the real basis for his place in the canon, and it manifests itself in the *voice* of the "Tractatus," which can lurch without warning from the technical to the confessional. That unprecedented mixing of registers is another aspect of the text's queerness. The challenge of understanding the "Tractatus" is not, then, easily severable

from the challenge of understanding the man who wrote it.

The interpretative industry around Wittgenstein has not been short of material. The bootlegs (samizdat copies of lecture notes, coded notebooks, correspondence) would fill the shelves of a small library. Even now, after his hold over his discipline has loosened—few people walk around calling themselves Wittgensteinians—his life and personality continue to provide fertile ground for speculation.

Yet the surfeit of material makes the task, if anything, harder. Wittgenstein appears to have written, and lived, in a manner booby-trapped against interpreters. Elizabeth Anscombe, a translator of much of his later work and the most brilliant of his devoted followers, maintained that what made Wittgenstein's thought so hard to interpret was that "he was constantly enquiring." His philosophy was never "a finished thing."

The formidable challenge of making sense of the things that Wittgenstein said has not been made any easier by the periodic announcement of the discovery of yet another trove of previously little-known materials. The newest volume, from what seems like a growing Nachlass, is an edition of Wittgenstein's surviving notebooks from the first half of the First World War, "Private Notebooks: 1914-1916" (Liveright). The pages on the right (recto) contained remarks that are clearly an embryonic form of the "Tractatus." Those pages have been widely available, with Anscombe's English translation, since 1961, and scholars of the "Tractatus" have made extensive use of them. The pages on the left (verso) were written in a cipher.

Committed Wittgensteinians have had access to the full notebooks for some time now. German readers have known them under the somewhat tendentious title "Geheime Tagebücher" ("Secret Diaries"), since the embattled publication of that volume, in 1991. Marjorie Perloff, the editor and translator of this new edition, the first to contain a facing-page English translation, points out that the verso text was not especially secret. After all, the cipher that Wittgenstein employed was both basic and known to his siblings, who used it as children (*z* is *a*, *y* is *b*, etc.).

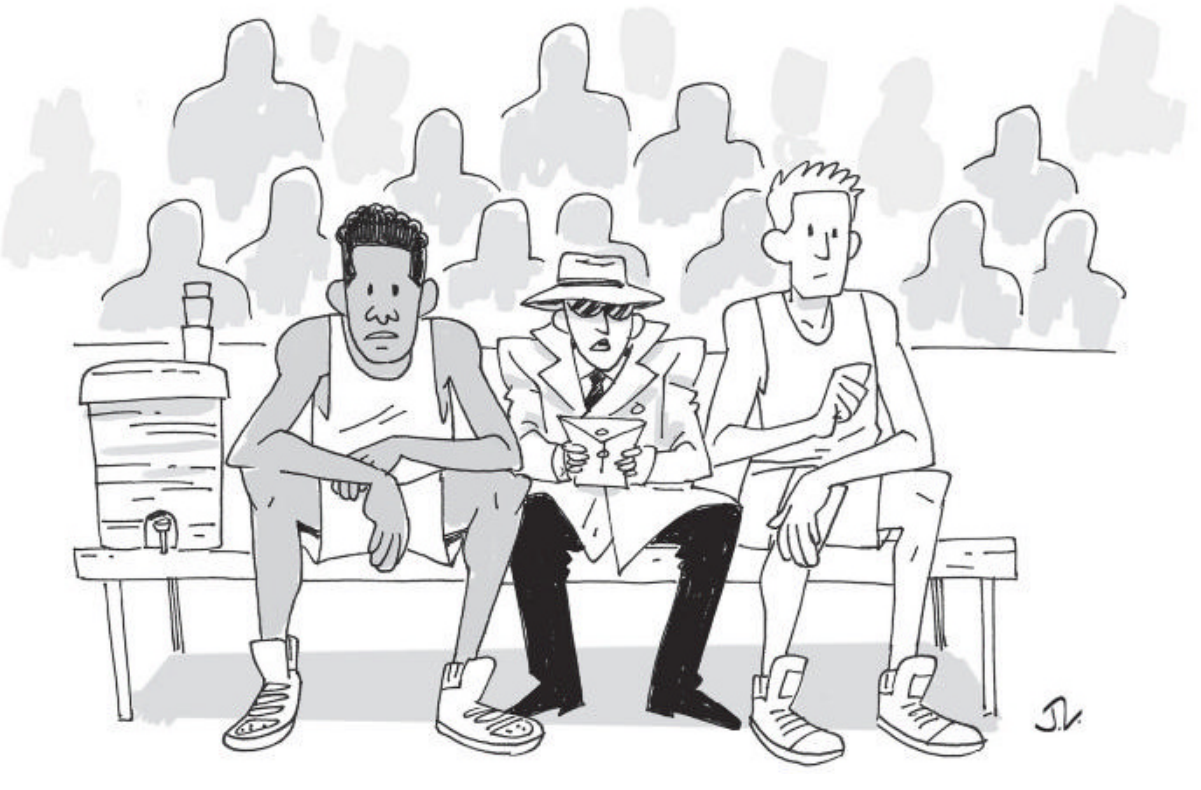
Why has it taken so long for there to be a widely available edition? Answering this question involves delving into the motivations of a large and colorful cast of characters, and Perloff's afterword provides a helpfully succinct summary of the deliberations. The "Tractatus" and one short paper were just about all that Wittgenstein published in his lifetime. But he wrote copiously, and he shared his thinking, from the early nineteen-thirties onward, in lectures or discussion groups with select gatherings of awed students. At his death, there were some twenty thousand pages of manuscript and typescript left to his executors (Anscombe, Rush Rhees, and Georg Henrik von Wright); the material was, his will stated, theirs to "dispose of as they think best."

The executors, despite their reverence for the man, were cavalier with the manuscripts. Some pages may have been burned, some were lost at a railway station, and some were almost eaten by a dog. When it came time to do something about the war notebooks, the executors decided to publish only the recto pages, which they judged to be, as Perloff puts it, "philosophically relevant." Anscombe was especially vehement in refusing permission to anyone who showed an unseemly interest in Wittgenstein's personal life: "If by pressing a button it could have been secured that people would not concern themselves with his personal life, I should have pressed the button."

Rhees worried that the publication of the verso pages, especially on their own, would make "what was a minor and occasional undertone to Wittgenstein's life and thinking . . . appear as a dominant obsession." What undertone was that? Perloff concludes that the executors had in mind "Wittgenstein's expressions of sexual (specifically, homosexual) desire." Their discomfort with these expressions set the tenor for much future academic discussion of Wittgenstein.

Reputable biographies of Wittgenstein either gloss over his sexuality (Brian McGuinness's "Young Ludwig," a lovingly detailed account of the period up to the publication of the "Tractatus") or minimize the part it played in his life (Monk's "The Duty of Genius"). That is despite the fact that they made use of the wartime notebooks, verso and recto. Monk sought to put the point in more general terms. The coded remarks, he said, showed Wittgenstein to be "uneasy, not about homosexuality, but about sexuality itself." Although he treasured love, he saw it as separate from sex. Sexual arousal of whatever sort was, in Monk's view, "incompatible with the sort of person he wanted to be." Moreover, Monk held that much of "Wittgenstein's love life and his sexual life went on only in his imagination."

A luridly speculative biography, from 1973, by the American philosopher William Warren Bartley III, did claim to have unearthed testimony of Wittgenstein's taste for "rough trade" in a



"I think I'm at the wrong bench."

Viennese park; it elicited from Anscombe a coldly furious missive to the *Times Literary Supplement.* Anscombe was, it should be said, a Catholic convert who once wrote to condemn "the rewardless trouble of spirit associated with the sort of sexual activity which from its type is guaranteed sterile: the solitary or again the homosexual sort."

Perloff is unsatisfied by the standard account. To say that Wittgenstein was not really homosexual comes up against the fact that nearly all the people he loved were male and conformed to a distinct type—young, English, intelligent, and entirely ingenuous. There was David Pinsent (who died during the war), then Francis Skinner ("Lay with him two or three times. Always at first with the feeling that there was nothing wrong in it, *then* with shame"), and Ben Richards, a medical student.

Briefly, there was talk of marriage to a Swiss woman, Marguerite Respinger, a relationship that appears to have involved a considerable amount of kissing. But he made it clear, during a prenuptial vacation that he decided should be dedicated to solitary Bible study, that the marriage was to be chaste and childless. (She demurred.) Monk, Perloff concludes, "cannot reconcile himself to his subject's queerness."

Perloff is, of course, talking here about queerness in the sexual sense. The Wittgenstein of these notebooks hints at an earthier sexuality. At the crudest level, they painstakingly record the occasions on which Wittgenstein masturbates: "Feeling more erotic than before. Masturbated again today." "Today I fought for a long time against depression, then for the first time in ages masturbated." "At night masturbated again (while half asleep). This is happening because I am getting so little, almost no exercise." There is no indication of how he feels about the activity, or of the fantasies, if any, that might have fed it.

Every now and then, Wittgenstein notes that he has just heard from his beloved David Pinsent, who was an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge, when they met, in 1912: "Wrote to David. Already longing for a letter from him so as not to lose the feeling of contact with my previous life." "Also, wrote a card to dear David. May heaven protect him and maintain our friendship!" "A letter from David!! I kissed it." Even in code, Pinsent remains a "friend," albeit a friend whose letters one kisses.

Sometimes Wittgenstein mentions his reading. Tolstoy's "Gospel in Brief": "A wonderful book." He notes when he has been productive: "The Russians are at our heels. . . . I'm in a good mood, worked again. I can think best right now when I am peeling potatoes. Always volunteer for it. It is for me what grinding lenses was for Spinoza." Often he expresses his contempt for his boorish fellow-soldiers, many of them (as Perloff helpfully points out) "from the distant Serb, Croat, and Hungarian provinces of the empire," who speak little German and reciprocate his disdain. Whatever must they have made of the prissy, sissy creature they were thrown in with?

Sometimes there are philosophical remarks that are familiar from "Culture and Value," a volume of miscellaneous observations which drew from the verso pages of these notebooks. "When we hear a Chinese man talking, we are inclined to take his speech as so much inarticulate gurgling," he writes. "But someone who knows Chinese will be able to recognize the language inside the sound. Just so, I often cannot recognize the *human being* inside the human being." As is the case with many of Wittgenstein's aphorisms, it is a real question whether the observation is profound or banal.

On the vexed subject of his sexuality, the journal entries only deepen the mystery. Is the tantalizing declaration "In the evening, the baths" evidence of a sexual adventurousness that went beyond the imagination? What sin is he confessing when he announces, "My moral standing is now much lower than it was at Easter"? And what has happened to explain why his "relationship with one of the officers—Cadet Adam—is now very tense"? Is the tension sexual? Need it be? There is material here to feed speculation but not to replace it with certainty. As Perloff wisely declares, "The translator of the *Private Notebooks*, finally, has to respect Wittgenstein's own silences."

She does not, alas, always do so. "Were Wittgenstein alive today, he would be questioning such buzzwords as *systemic* and *intersectionality*," she writes at one point, proceeding to give us what are indubitably her opinions on such subjects, rather than any that might be attributed to a resurrected Wittgenstein. Whether they represent a translator's arrogance or a publisher's demand for "relevance," they fall afoul of what we might call Anscombe's dictum. "Predictions of 'what Wittgenstein would say' about some question one thought of were never correct," she insisted.

Anscombe was in a good position to know. Resistant to acknowledging the most obvious forms of Wittgenstein's queerness, she was nevertheless onto something when she confessed, "I feel deeply suspicious of anyone's claim to have understood Wittgenstein. That is perhaps because . . . I am very sure that I did not understand him."

These notebooks help bring out some of the difficulty of understanding him. Here is a man who loves boys for their simplicity but hates his fellow-soldiers for their boorishness. "Probably we will be attacked," he writes one day in September, 1914. "How will I behave when it comes to being shot at? I am afraid, not of being killed but of not fulfilling my duty properly before that moment. God give me strength. Amen. Amen. Amen." And again: "The situation here is a test of fire of one's character, precisely because it takes so much strength not to lose one's temper & one's energy."

Here is a man with an ambiguous sense of patriotism who goes to war only because it might be a crucible in which he may show himself worthy by doing his duty. Worthy of what? Duty to whom? Only a draconian, unforgiving superego. Notoriously, when Wittgenstein decided to give away his money, it was not to the poor but to his siblings, who were perfectly well provided for already. The sacrifice was itself a good. He took the same attitude to much of life as he did to thinking: it had to hurt for it to count. In a discussion on religious views of existence, he once said, "Of this I am certain, that we are not here in order to have a good time."

A man so demanding of himself was never going to be a tolerant soul. The novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, who met him twice, spoke of him as she might have done of a twentieth-century Socrates: "Both he and his setting were very unnerving. His extraordinary directness of approach and the absence of any

sort of paraphernalia were the things that unnerved people." With Wittgenstein, there were no polite formalities, but Murdoch failed to get much philosophy out of him. What good was a single philosophical conversation? he asked her. What good was a single piano lesson?

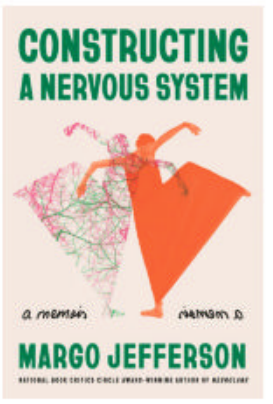
His tendency to turn every human encounter into a confrontation, a reckoning, sounds an awful lot like moralism. But he was not moralistic in the sense of imposing on people the demands of a received body of rules. Compulsory seriousness might be closer to the mark, although his seriousness was compatible with a deep strain of silliness: he was capable of writing campy letters, of joining his friends at the local fairground, of playing the demanding part of the moon in an impromptu reënactment of celestial movements. An intensely rational man—he had, after all, started off as a logician—he loathed mere *reasonableness*, a squalid ideal for squalid people. He rejected the idea that the world's demands on the individual might have a natural limit in the reasonable.

His students at Cambridge, no less than the beleaguered children he taught in Austria, were victims of his appetite for enforcing standards at which any human—any *human* human—must surely quail. He rarely doubted his authority to tell people how to live. One student, Alice Ambrose, was excommunicated after she gave him "cheek." Her offense, she later recalled, was telling him that "he used his power over people to extract worship."

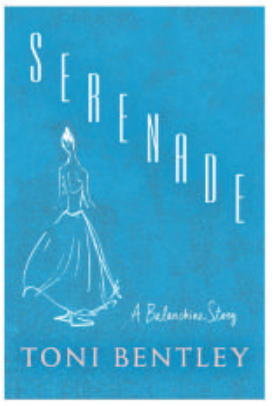
In this, he was unlike Socrates, who, for all his piety, took people as they were. His queerness was compatible with having a good time, with liking people and being liked by them in turn. Wittgenstein, lacking a mode between the deathly serious and the giddily silly, inspired more extreme reactions—alarm, fear, contempt, reverence. Ambrose once wrote, generously, that there was "a very great deal in him to love." Love, yes. But it is hard to find anyone who *liked* him.

And yet this was a man who was charmed and moved by the phrase "It takes many sorts to make a world." He commended the proposition—a byword for liberality, for reasonableness—as "a very beautiful and kindly saying." He never said that he thought it was true. ♦

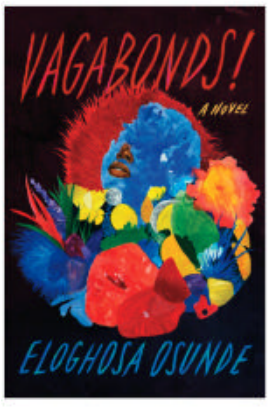
BRIEFLY NOTED



Constructing a Nervous System, *by Margo Jefferson (Pantheon)*. In this follow-up to "Negroland," Jefferson merges memoir and criticism. Drawing on material as disparate as Henry James, "The Wire," "Othello," and Black spirituals, she narrates moments of her life as they unfold in relation to "avatars," models against which she conducts an "identity experiment." "I must break myself into pieces," she explains, "then rebuild." Thus Ella Fitzgerald's stage presence gestures toward a "black female destiny" of "scrutiny and our pity," which a young Jefferson works to avoid; that of Josephine Baker demonstrates a way of embodying the influences of her predecessors. "Great soloists never perform entirely alone," Jefferson writes, and the same is true of her.



Serenade, *by Toni Bentley (Pantheon)*. Taking its title from that of George Balanchine's first American ballet, which premièred in 1934, this personal history by a former New York City Ballet dancer blends various accounts of the work's—and the company's—creation and evolution. In addition to providing a wealth of ballet lore, trivia, and insightful interpretation, Bentley is not afraid to get technical; she describes steps, combinations, entrances, and exits from the perspective of the corps. In endeavoring to conjure the transcendent lyricism of Balanchine's vision and Tchaikovsky's score, the book goes further, touching on deeper, stranger ideas about the symbiosis between life and art.



Vagabonds!, *by Eloghosa Osunde (Riverhead)*. The marginalized residents of Lagos in this début novel—queer lovers, restless spirits, and survivors of sexual violence—rely on increasingly fantastical forms of disguise in order to survive: lies, masks, bodysuits. But true salvation comes from self-revelation and the community that it forges. Village women sharing stories of abuse vanish into thin air, leaving their abusers abandoned. A dominatrix transmutes her clients' shame until it is "submitted, regulated, rewritten into power." Socialites relate their sorrows to a dressmaker, who then creates outfits to conceal pain. In a world that seeks to consign to the shadows those who don't conform, Osunde's vagabonds act as an illuminating force for one another. "If they say we don't exist," a woman asks her lover, "how come I can see you?"



Eleutheria, *by Allegra Hyde (Vintage)*. In the heightened climate crisis imagined in this novel, birds drop en masse from the sky and heat waves cause baseball players to faint midgame. Willa, the daughter of paranoid survivalists, leaves Boston for the Bahamas in search of a group of eco-warriors, led by a man who propounds a carbon-negative life style calculated to appeal to society's élite, offering "the promise of more, not less." Willa's account of what happens when the leader goes missing is intercut with scenes from her earlier life, involving her influencer-wannabe cousins, dumpster diving, and her infatuation with a Harvard professor. Partly satirical, the book is also an urgent, absorbing story that asks how we are meant to live.

BOOKS

BURNED OUT

How fame fed on Edna St. Vincent Millay.

BY MAGGIE DOHERTY



In Millay's diaries, we see a poet working through the toll of public attention.

It was at a party in Greenwich Village, in the spring of 1920, that the critic Edmund Wilson first encountered Edna St. Vincent Millay in the flesh. Wilson, a well-bred graduate of Princeton, was a fan of the twenty-eight-year-old poet's work—he'd taken to reciting one of her sonnets in the shower—but he was, in her physical presence, overcome. Years later, Wilson described the evening: "She was one of those women whose features are not perfect and who in their moments of dimness may not seem even pretty, but who, excited by the blood or the spirit, become almost supernaturally beautiful." He remained in love with her for years, even after she'd refused his offer of marriage. It was as if he were enchanted, caught under the "spell" that she cast on "all ages and both sexes."

This enchantress is the Millay whom many came to know. She was a siren, a seductress, a candle burning with a "lovely light" before being unceremoniously snuffed out. (Millay died at fifty-eight, of a heart attack, after falling down the stairs in her home.) Her appeal was legendary, as was her voice, which the poet Louis Untermeyer described as "the sound of the ax on fresh wood." In her youth, she loved widely and shamelessly, and she was adored by a generation of young women for the verses she wrote about her transient attachments. Today, she is often remembered as the "poet-girl" of the Roaring Twenties, traipsing from bed to bed in downtown Manhattan, if she is remembered at all.

"Rapture and Melancholy: The Diaries of Edna St. Vincent Millay" (Yale) aims to capitalize on that salacious reputation. In an introduction, the book's editor, Daniel Mark Epstein, describes Millay as "the bad girl of American letters," a "bed-hopping" radical whose escapades rivalled Lord Byron's. Epstein, a poet himself and the author of a 2001 biography of Millay, has compiled all Millay's available journals, from her teenage years on. A foreword by the scholar Holly Peppe, Millay's literary executor, promises readers a "wild and dangerous ride" filled with "delicious new details" about Millay's life.

Like so many ardent vows, this is not to be trusted. Millay was an irregular diary keeper; as she wrote in 1927, "This book never gets written in, except when there's nothing to write." She didn't appear to keep a diary at all between 1914 and 1920, the period when her career took off, and Epstein includes fewer than a dozen entries from the seven years after that. The diaries thus shed no light on Millay's youthful affairs, or on the composition of her reputation-making poems, later collected in "A Few Figs from Thistles" (1920), "Second April" (1921), and "The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems" (1922). Indeed, there is little in the diaries about her creative process, besides an occasional note that she "stayed in bed as usual & worked until noon." And the most scandalous entries, about her addiction to morphine, will already be familiar to readers of Epstein's biography or of Nancy Milford's superior book, "Savage Beauty."

What the diaries do reveal is that this supposedly ethereal creature was in fact solidly earthbound. As a teen-ager, Millay described the effects of hard domestic labor on her body ("my poor hands are blistered in a dozen places"); later, rich and married, she wrote about the joy she felt "spading & pulling" in her garden. She tracked the changing seasons, dutifully recording the spring's first bluebird and the comings and goings of herbs. She also recorded mounting bodily ailments: headaches, stom-

SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH FROM ALAMY

ILLUSTRATION BY LILY SNOWDEN-FINE

ach aches, hangovers, nerve pain in her shoulder and back, exhaustion.

If Millay was a consummate performer, entrancing suitors and selling out lecture halls, the diaries are a record of life offstage. After her marriage, in 1923, her days were quiet—sometimes dull and sometimes lovely—though periodically interrupted by the demands of the public, which threatened to withdraw its affections as literary tastes changed. The diaries do not give us much insight into Millay's loves and love poems. But they do offer a compelling portrait of what it's like to live in a mortal, aging body, in a society that insists that its female stars remain beautiful and forever young.

Millay never really had a chance to be a child. Born in 1892 in Rockland, Maine, Vincent, as she was known throughout her childhood, was the eldest of three daughters. Her mother, Cora, a travelling nurse with an artistic streak, divorced her children's dissolute father in 1901. For a few years, she and the girls moved around New England before finally settling in Camden, Maine, where they rented a small house in "the 'bad' section of town," as Millay later described it. Starting when Millay was nine, Cora would leave home for weeks at a time, while Millay ran the household and cared for her sisters. Cora nurtured Millay's literary inclinations; when she wasn't travelling, she read Longfellow's "Hiawatha" to her daughter. Soon, Millay was sending poems to the children's publication *St. Nicholas* and winning cash prizes of five dollars.

Despite the stereotype, poetry and poverty are often incompatible. After Millay graduated from high school, she faced a rather dreary adult life. College was cost-prohibitive, so she began working twelve-hour days at home, cleaning, cooking, washing, and ironing. Her creativity went slack. "I'm getting old and ugly," she wrote in her diary in October, 1911. "I can feel my face dragging down. I can feel the lines coming underneath my skin. . . . I love beauty more than anything else in the world and I can't take time to be pretty." At nineteen, she was lonely. She began writing in her diary to an imaginary lover, and their fantasy assignations broke up the monotony.

It was under these conditions that Millay began to compose "Renascence," the poem that would change her life. In twenty stanzas of rhyming tetrameter, Millay describes a crisis of faith: a speaker, cramped by a sense of the physical world's finitude, is suddenly overcome by the forces of "Infinity" and "Eternity," dies, is buried, longs to return to the world aboveground, and then is reborn with a renewed sense of the soul's capaciousness. When the poem was published, in 1912, in the anthology "The Lyric Year," readers were struck by the maturity of its themes. The poet Arthur Ficke, who would become one of Millay's long-term lovers, wrote to the anthology's editor in disbelief: "No sweet young thing of twenty ever ended a poem precisely where this one ends: it takes a brawny male of forty-five to do that."

For all its precocity, the poem can also be understood as a young woman's effort to reckon with the limitations of a stifling life in Maine. "Renascence" opens with the speaker gazing upon three mountains, like the ones Millay had been climbing all her life:

> All I could see from where I stood
> Was three long mountains and a wood;
> I turned and looked another way,
> And saw three islands in a bay.
> So with my eyes I traced the line
> Of the horizon, thin and fine,
> Straight around till I was come
> Back to where I'd started from;
> And all I saw from where I stood
> Was three long mountains and a wood.

The repetition at the beginning and the end reinforces the sense of claustrophobia: the speaker is trapped in familiar territory. But, after she's reborn, the same landscape delights her: "About the trees my arms I wound / Like one gone mad I hugged the ground." It's as if Millay were reconciling herself to her circumstances—and realizing, perhaps, that the broader world might be more than she could bear.

She soon had a chance to see for herself. After Millay recited "Renascence" at a party, one of the guests, impressed by her poise, offered to connect her with friends who could pay her way through Vassar. Millay enrolled in the fall of 1913, and threw herself into campus life, attending parties, starring in plays, and dating several of her wealthier classmates. (Vassar was all female, and romances between young women were common at the time.) She was also rebellious, skipping class to write poems and leaving the Poughkeepsie campus—a "hellhole," she called it—without permission. Most of the time, her brilliant work saved her from formal sanction; when it didn't, friends came to her rescue. In 1917, at the end of Millay's senior year, the faculty voted to suspend her indefinitely. More than a hundred classmates signed a petition, and she was allowed to graduate on time.

For Epstein, Millay was, at this point, like a "princess in a fairytale," scooped from the ashes and set down among the cultural élite. The diaries, however, show not a princess but a tired young woman with a sensitive stomach: she would run herself ragged trying to write, study, and socialize, and eventually end up "sick abed all day." This pattern—taking on too many commitments, then suffering the physical consequences—would continue for the rest of her life. Some have seen here evidence of Millay's frailty or hypochondria, others her need to be fussed over and adored. But gaining adoration—putting her talent and charm to dazzling effect—had brought Millay to college, bought her food and dresses, and won her scholarships. It may well have seemed worth the hangover.

Only six months after graduation, Millay was once again close to broke. She was living with her sister Norma in New York, in a small, cold apartment on West Ninth Street; the pipes froze, as did the flowers Millay brought home to beautify the space. She was acting and writing poems, but the sisters often relied on male suitors to buy their dinners.

In early 1918, Millay wrote to the editor of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe, and asked her for advance payment on several poems the magazine planned to publish: "First Fig," "Second Fig," and "The Penitent," among others. The poems appeared in June. "First Fig," which Norma later called "the most quoted and misquoted quatrain in America," made Millay's reputation:

> My candle burns at both ends;
> It will not last the night;
> But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
> It gives a lovely light!

Millay had adopted a carpe-diem attitude—historically, the province of

young male poet-roués—and made it her own. Her poems from this era are in praise of the ephemeral: the fleeting attachment, the doomed burst of romantic feeling. "Thursday," from the same batch of poems, is charmingly insouciant:

> And if I loved you Wednesday,
> Well, what is that to you?
> I do not love you Thursday—
> So much is true.

Shameless faithlessness, ecstatic passion, skepticism of enduring love: these became Millay's great themes. In her poetry from the early nineteen-twenties—and, it seems, in her personal life—she explored love's paradoxes, the way inconstancy can inflame ardor. The poems spoke to her female contemporaries, women who were sexually curious, even active, and sick of pretension. Critics praised her in newspapers and magazines; Monroe, in *Poetry*, admired "how neatly she upsets the carefully built walls of convention." Thomas Hardy counted her poetry as one of America's two great attractions, the other being the skyscraper.

Millay's genius lay in her ability to infuse old poetic forms with a savvy modern voice. Only she would end a sonnet about the quest for true love by calling it "idle, biologically speaking"—that technical, multisyllabic "biologically" beautifully undercuts any sentimentality. "Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree," a sequence from 1922, is a sendup of female martyrdom and the institution of marriage. "There was rapture, of a decent kind, / In making mean and ugly objects fair," Millay writes, of a woman who spends her days cleaning the stove and polishing candlesticks. Decent rapture can't help but conjure the indecent variety; Millay knew both well.

Even decades after Millay's death, "Ungrafted Tree" was held in high esteem: the scholar Sandra M. Gilbert called it Millay's "finest sonnet-sequence." More recently, though, critics have tended to trip all over themselves to assure readers that they don't consider Millay significant, or even a particularly good poet. There are several reasons for this overcorrection: an allergy to popular literature, reflexive misogyny, and, perhaps most important, the enduring influence of literary modernism. Modernist poetry was allusive, dense, and difficult, or it was short, cryptic, Imagist. Millay, meanwhile, worked in familiar lyric forms. Certain of her poems could take on a singsong quality, like a child's nursery rhyme. They were more delightful than intimidating.

But other poems demonstrated Millay's sophistication. She was not just a master of the sonnet but a student of it. Late in life, she started an essay about the form, naming Shakespeare as an influence, and much of her work evinces a more mature understanding of love. Her sonnets for Ficke, collected in "Second April," are some of her strongest. In "And you as well must die, beloved dust," Millay borrows the technique of the blazon, a staple of love poetry by men, to praise her lover's "flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,/This body of flame and steel." In these poems and others, Millay, like Shakespeare, plays with gender, assuming an androgynous voice and extolling male beauty without identifying it as such.

Millay wrote her poems for Ficke, who was eight years older, in her twenties. As she imagined their future, it was his beauty that would be "altered, estranged," his body that would turn to dust. "Have you thought," she asks in one sonnet, "How in the years to come unscrupulous Time,/More cruel than death, will tear you from my kiss,/And make you old, and leave me in my prime?" A novice poet when they met, she understandably thought herself "a child"



and him a "hero grown." She had many years and many poems ahead of her. But Time would come for the child, too.

During the nineteen-tens and twenties, Millay achieved the kind of fame that was unusual for a poet then and unthinkable now. Before the age of the movie star, she became America's first starlet. Her books of poems sold out their print runs. She wrote feverishly, working on short stories, plays, a libretto, a novel. She was photographed and interviewed; she was invited to lecture; she won the Pulitzer Prize and became rich. When she published the sonnet sequence "Fatal Interview" (1931), which was inspired by an affair with the much younger poet George Dillon, it sold fifty thousand copies, Great Depression be damned.

But fame is rarely an unmixed blessing for a woman, particularly when it arrives early in life. Like Judy Garland or Britney Spears, Millay had to grow up in public. She was always conscious of her appearance: her diaries show her worrying about being seen without a new dress. At events, the press made sure to comment on her clothing and her figure. "The distinguished young poet . . . resembles more the shy little undergraduate," one reporter wrote, after attending a reading. (Millay was almost thirty-two at the time.) When she married the Dutch aristocrat and merchant Eugen Jan Boissevain, in a small ceremony in 1923, newspapers around the country covered the event; in New York, three put it on the front page. Millay was by then so sick with intestinal problems that she went straight from her wedding to the hospital, where she underwent surgery. The papers covered this, too: "HONEYMOONING ALONE IN HOSPITAL," "POETESS BRIDE TO GO UNDER THE KNIFE."

Aging, then, presented Millay with a challenge: How could she write about wild passion, or tortured love affairs, when she was living a middle-aged woman's low-key life? Her marriage to Boissevain was open, as were the marriages of many of their friends, but, from her diaries, it appears that Millay loved spending time with him at a farm they owned near Austerlitz, New York. "Beautiful sunny day," one entry from June, 1927, begins, shortly after they purchased the property. "This morning at eight under the willows in the pasture Dolly gave birth to a beautiful calf." "Nice cozy rainy day," another from the same summer opens. "Ugin [Boissevain] & I sat by the open fire & Ugin read me from Upton Sinclair's Oil!" The pleasure lasted: nearly seven years later, she described "the crab-apple tree by the front door . . . in full blossom," which seemed "the prettiest thing in the world."

Millay was never able to translate her contentment into compelling poetry.

Much of the verse in "The Buck in the Snow and Other Poems," a collection from 1928, seems inspired by her life on the farm, but it largely falls flat. Anxious to maintain her reputation, Millay tried writing deeply felt but propagandistic political poems, some of which were collected in "Make Bright the Arrows" (1940). These met with critical disapproval. Millay had to produce: Boissevain, who had liquidated his business in 1924, didn't have a steady income, and Millay's family, particularly her youngest sister, Kathleen, needed financial support. She continued to write and to give reading tours, during which she alternated recent poems and verses she'd composed decades earlier, as if to remind audiences of the "poet-girl" they had loved.

Millay's fears of aging infuse "Fatal Interview," her book about Dillon, which she composed throughout her thirties. In contrast to her earlier love sonnets, which are filled with images of flowering and growth, the dominant metaphors of these sonnets are death, decay, and disease. Leeches are administered, doctors called. There are jailers and dungeons and "a casket cool with pearls." Millay's speaker is a predator, ravishing the love object, or "a dense and sanguine ghost," returned to "haunt the scene where I was happiest." There's something vampiric about the love affair represented here, as if the speaker—and perhaps Millay herself—were sucking the life out of the beloved and using it to fuel creativity.

By the mid-thirties, the intensity of Millay's affair with Dillon was waning, and she was forced to reckon with the loss of her youth. Her diaries show her both resisting and succumbing to her fate. She became addicted to morphine, first prescribed to help with lingering nerve pain from a car accident; by the early forties, she was taking as much as two hundred and twenty milligrams in a day, far more than the standard hospital dose, along with codeine, pentobarbital, and alcohol. She recorded each morphine injection in her diaries; she might have her first dose at 5:30 A.M. and her last after midnight. Boissevain, in a strange show of devotion, began injecting himself with morphine, too, though never in such quantities. Ashamed of her addictions and of her descent into middle age, Millay used her diaries to scold herself. "Let Ugin *find* you outdoors, instead of *Still in Bed*, or in your *SPECIAL CHAIR* (Pah!—Old Woman!) in the drawing room," she wrote. "Keep young, keep pretty FOR UGIN."

But Boissevain wasn't her sole adoring fan; she had to keep pretty for the others, too. In his biography, Epstein writes that Millay "dreaded old age as only a woman who has been very beautiful can"; he intimates that she became increasingly dependent on drugs because she couldn't cope with "the demise of her erotic power." This isn't exactly wrong, but it ignores the ways that Millay's financial and professional fortunes were tied up with her youth and beauty. "At forty-seven years of age," Epstein writes, "the image she saw in the mirror was disturbing"—not least, one imagines, because it would be scrutinized by reporters, photographers, and fans with long memories.

The end of Millay's life was sad. She and Boissevain were in debt. Her reputation had crashed. Her drug use had sped up her aging: Wilson, who saw her more clearly than anyone, described her, at age fifty-six, as "heavy and dumpy," with a "bird-lidded look" that reminded him of her mother. Still, she remained observant and curious. In her last diary entry, from May, 1949, she notes that the rabbits and deer grazing around the farm have gray fur, not brown, and resolves to ask her handyman about the animals' "winter hair."

Despite her many years as a cosmopolitan, Millay was at heart a country girl, a New Englander. It's tempting to imagine what would have happened to her had she never left Maine. Perhaps she would have become a female Robert Frost: living in the country, writing poems out of passion, not for money, and finding success only later in life, after wisdom and experience had accrued. Or—and this seems more probable—she would have ended up like the woman in "Sonnets from an Ungrafted Tree": tired, disappointed, married to a man she doesn't love, polishing the stove until she can see her face in it. For all her excesses and insecurities, her faults and bad decisions, there is still something admirable about Millay's curiosity, her play in the klieg lights, her appetite for life. In 1912, Infinity and Eternity had beckoned, and the young Millay had followed. ♦

Ragnar Stara

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THE ART WORLD

GOING FLAT OUT

The revolutionary charge of Henri Matisse.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



Henri Matisse's large painting "The Red Studio" (1911) is so familiar an icon of modern art that you may wonder what remains to be said—or even noticed—about it. Quite a lot, as a jewel box of a show at the Museum of Modern Art proves. The exhibition surrounds the eponymous rendering of the artist's studio with most of the eleven earlier works of his that, in freehand copy, pepper the painting's uniform ground of potent Venetian red. (Some of the original pieces are on loan from institutions in Europe and North America.) In addition, there are related later paintings, drawings, and prints, along with abundant documentary materials. The ensemble, eloquently mounted by the curators Ann Temkin, of MOMA, and Dorthe Aagesen, of the National Gallery of Denmark, immerses a viewer in the marvels of an artistic revolution that resonates to this day.

Gorgeous? Oh, yeah. Aesthetic bliss saturates—radically, to a degree still apt to startle when you pause to reflect on it—the means, ends, and very soul of a style that was so far ahead of its time that its full influence took decades to kick in. It did so decisively in paintings by Mark Rothko and other American Abstract Expressionists in the years after MOMA's mid-century acquisition of "The Red Studio," which had, until then, languished in obscurity. The works that are visually quoted in the piece—seven paintings, three sculptures, and a decorated ceramic plate—cohabit with furniture and still-life elements. Contours tend to be summarily indicated by thin yellow lines. Part of a pale-blue window obtrudes. But nothing disrupts the composition's essential harmony, the details striking the eye all at once, with a concerted bang.

There's no possibility of entering the portrayed corner space, even by way of imagination. Only certain subtle contrasts of warm and cool hues, pushing and pulling at a viewer's gaze, hint at anything like pictorial depth. Not for Matisse the retention of visually advancing and receding forms, as in the contemporaneous Cubism of his towering frenemy Picasso. (Who wins their lifelong agon? The question is moot. They are like boxing champions who can't tag each other because they're in separate rings.) Even the vaguely Cézanne-esque "Bathers" (1907), picturing a nude couple in a grassy landscape—one of the paintings in "The Red Studio" whose original is on hand for the show—reads democratically. Swift strokes jostle forward in a single, albeit rumpled, optical plane. See if this isn't so, as your gaze segues smoothly across black outlines among greenery, blue water and sky, and orangish flesh.

In 1907, when Picasso painted his insurrectionary touchstone "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," the Spaniard commented acerbically on Matisse's breakthrough canvas from the same year, "Blue Nude (Souvenir of Biskra)": "If he wants to make a woman, let him make a woman. If he wants to make a design, let him make a design." In truth, Matisse did both at once, integrating painting's two primordial functions—illustration and decoration. "Blue Nude" is absent from "The Red Studio" and from the present show, but its spirit persists in the three sculptures on display, which extend, in the round, the painterly touch in Matisse's flat pictorial figuration. They nearly equal, for me, the twentieth-century feats in three dimensions of Brancusi and Giacometti.

The inception of "The Red Studio" came by way of a decorative commission from the Muscovite textile tycoon Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin, a preëminent collector of European innovations, from Impressionist to Post-Impressionist to some on which the paint was barely

"Young Sailor II" (1906) is one of the works Matisse copied in "The Red Studio."

COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

dry. His holdings, which were impounded by the Bolsheviks in 1918, are now glories of the State Hermitage Museum, in St. Petersburg, and the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, in Moscow. They include an absolute stunner of Matisse's, "The Conversation" (1908-12), which I encountered at the Hermitage in 1989. A wry air of domestic comedy inflects the work's dominant, intense blue and ravishing floral window view. The artist, looking mild-mannered and standing in pajamas, confronts his seated wife, the formidable Amélie, whom I can't help but imagine telling him to get his own breakfast. (Matisse is almost never pointedly witty, but a sort of spectral humor, redolent of sheer audacity, flows through just about everything from his hand.) That picture is also not in the present show, but it is tattooed on my memory.

Shchukin's lavish patronage of Matisse, which began in 1906, relieved the artist and his family from years of penury. It enabled a move to a comfortable home in Issy-les-Moulineaux, four miles outside Paris, and the construction there, in 1909, of the spacious studio that became the site and ofttimes subject of nearly all of Matisse's works until he decamped to Nice, in 1917. In January, 1911, the collector requested a trio of same-sized paintings, each about six by seven feet, leaving their subject matter up to Matisse. Shchukin acquired the first, the relatively sedate "Pink Studio," but, on receiving a watercolor copy of what Matisse entitled "Red Panel," he politely declined the design.

Shchukin explained that he preferred pictures with people in them, ignoring the presence of figures aplenty in the visual citation of previous works, such as the robustly appealing "Young Sailor II" (1906), the original of which is on loan for the show from the Metropolitan Museum, and the violently bold "Nude with White Scarf" (1909), provided by the National Gallery of Denmark. Or did even the gamely indulgent Russian, though too tactful to say so, balk at the image's molten energy? Matisse remained singularly controversial in art circles at that time, even as Picasso's preternatural draftsmanship disarmed many.

Still called "Red Panel," the work appeared in 1912 in the Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition, in London, and the next year in the Armory Show, in New York and Chicago, yet neither it nor anything else by Matisse sold. (In a *Times* interview with the artist in France, in March, 1913, the critic Clara T. MacChesney bristled with condescending resistance in face of gracious comments from Matisse, who was at pains to convey that he was a "normal" family man rather than the unkempt holy terror whom she had anticipated.) The painting then remained in the artist's possession and out of public sight until it was bought, in 1927, as a chic bibelot for a swanky members-only social club in London. After a spell of private ownership, it was purchased, enthusiastically, by MOMA, in 1949—right on time for its charismatic relevance to artists in New York and ultimately around the world.

In my opinion, there are three differently instructive failures among the works in the present show. "Le Luxe II" (1907-08) depicts three monumental seaside nudes, oddly rendered in distemper (rabbit-skin glue) rather than in sensuous oils, to a dryly static effect. But it was plainly worth the try for Matisse and takes its place in "The Red Studio." Nostalgia may have motivated him to incorporate a diminutive clunker, "Corsica, the Old Mill," painted in 1898, when he was twenty-eight years old, fresh out of art school and newly married. Its conventional motif displays an irresolute miscellany of Post-Impressionist and incipiently Fauvist techniques—a ticking time bomb, as it would turn out.

It took me a while to cool on the initially impressive "Large Red Interior" (1948), which closes the show as a bookend to "The Red Studio." Extravagantly praised at the time by the formalist critic Clement Greenberg, it is masterly, to be sure, with virtuosic representations of previous pictures and lots of flowers in vases. But I find the work vitiated by a quality—tastefulness—that Matisse had sometimes risked but reliably sidestepped throughout most of his career. It feels *unmeant*—passionless, strictly professional. Soon after completing that work, Matisse, ever self-aware, put down his brushes, picked up a pair of scissors, and commenced the sensational improvisations in cut colored paper that absorbed him until his death, in 1954. Yet again, he found his way to an inward imperative that, with typical nonchalance, precipitated deathless outward consequences. ♦



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THE CURRENT CINEMA

FOR THOSE IN PERIL

"Happening" and "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The heroine of "Happening" is Anne (Anamaria Vartolomei), who is clever, young, industrious, and French. The year is 1963, and she is studying literature, in the city of Angoulême. In her path stand difficult exams, though Anne is expected to ace them; in the company of her friends Hélène (Luàna Bajrami) and Brigitte (Louise Orry Diquero), she conjugates a Latin verb while lying on a *beach*. Thus are two of the prime national objectives, rigor and pleasure, compacted by the film's director, Audrey Diwan, into a single scene.



Anamaria Vartolomei stars in Audrey Diwan's film, set in 1963, about abortion.

Sensing that warmth, and listening to Brigitte's dreamy boast that "if I were a man, I'd make love to me," one might think that we're heading into traditional summertime territory—the kind staked out by Éric Rohmer's "The Collector" (1971) and "Pauline at the Beach" (1983), in which the characters muse upon whom to sleep with and whether or not they should dare to lose their hearts. What such movies, lithe and observant as they are, rarely bother (or can't bring themselves) to confront is the practical risk that attends these casual adventures. Diwan, by contrast, is a confronter. You can't imagine Rohmer's Pauline, for example, inspecting her underwear and fretting that her period is late. But that is what Anne does, and, when she almost faints on a sunlit walk, it's not because of the glorious heat or the blaze of her desires. It's because she's pregnant.

In a sly stroke, we are never shown the encounter that led to Anne's condition. In truth, so maidenly does she appear that, when a doctor examines her and gives her the news, she sits bolt upright in shock and declares, "It's not possible." But we are not watching Godard's "Hail Mary" (1985), and there will be no virgin birth. As far as Anne is concerned, indeed, there will be no birth at all. "Do something," she says to the doctor. Now it's his turn to be shocked. "You can't ask me that," he replies, and adds, "The law is unsparing. Anyone who helps you can end up in jail. You, too." (Abortion was a crime in France in 1963, and remained so until 1975.) Another doctor, with whom she pleads for assistance, fixes her with an unblinking gaze and tells her, "Leave. We have nothing to discuss." Even her friends shy away. Brigitte, informed of the pregnancy, says to the more sympathetic Hélène, "It's not our problem. You want to go to prison with her?"

Notice the tenor of these reactions. Nobody is moved to ruminate on the rights and wrongs of the situation. Not for a second do ethical or spiritual arguments of a higher order—what we now refer to as "pro-choice" and "pro-life" stances—impinge. The morality of "Happening" is wholly pragmatic, grounded in a universal terror of breaking the law. For Anne, there is a further fear: that, without a termination, she will be unable to continue her studies and, by extension, her tough ascent of the social and professional ladder. This would be a calamity, not least for her parents, who run a bar, and who are proud of their daughter's brain. "Don't get sick on us now. Lousy timing," her mother says. Unaware of the pregnancy, she thinks only of Anne's exams.

The mother is played by Sandrine Bonnaire—inspired casting, for she found fame as a wild child, in "À Nos Amours" (1984), and as a pungent hobo, in "Vagabond" (1986). Compare those portraits of early waywardness with Anne, a model youth whose one indiscretion portends a fall from grace. There's barely a flicker of wildness in her, still less a will to escape. The camera crowds her space and refuses to let her go; at times, it seems to be perched on her shoulder, like a pirate's parrot. Prepare to flinch as Anne, in desperation, seeks a solution to her plight: first, the nocturnal horror with the heated knitting needle and the hand mirror; then the visit to a backstreet abortionist (Anna Mouglalis), who delivers the sternest of cautions—"Not a sound, not a shout, or I'll stop." We see her at work, framed between Anne's spread legs. Still to come, I must warn you, is a sequence with scissors.

It is the loneliness of this ordeal, as much as the pain, that makes "Happening" hard to endure, and distinguishes it from a film like Cristian Mungiu's "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days." (Both works were crowned with festival prizes: Mungiu's at Cannes, in 2007, and Diwan's at Venice last year.) The protagonist of that movie, Otilia, is bent on an Anne-like quest for an abortion—not

ILLUSTRATION BY SALLY DENG

for herself but for her less resourceful roommate. The setting is provincial Romania, in the grimy twilight of Communist rule; whereas Diwan is addressing a specific flaw within an otherwise free society, Mungiu is exposing the malfunction of an entire system, right down to the use of cigarettes as currency. What everyone remembers from "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days" is the face of Otilia, as she sits at a dinner party, among chattering adults, and worries about her friend, who is lying in a hotel room and waiting to lose her baby. The loss of a life that never was, for Otilia's generation, takes its place in a wider, dying world. For Anne, in "Happening," it is a terrible and solitary woe.

That may be why so much of this story, despite the dedication of Vartolomei in the leading role, feels punitive and pinched. Affording us no possible leeway with which to dispute its point of view, the film is determined to indict the past on a charge of being the past. (There's not much we can *do* about that.) Far more valuable is the urgency with which the movie stares ahead, as it were, at any future legislation that would incite women to take such dire measures once again. In fact, with a timeliness that even Diwan could not have predicted, the U.S. release of "Happening" has been both overtaken and fortified by events. It's difficult to know exactly what relation the draft opinion that was leaked from the Supreme Court on May 2nd, indicating a decision to overturn Roe v. Wade, will bear to the Court's final judgment; nonetheless, the leak was enough to bring protesters into the streets. What they foresee, one might say, is a multitude of Annes, often poorer and less educated than Anne, who may be driven to commit an act that, in many states, could make them criminals. If you find "Happening" too distressing for words, think of "Happening" writ large.

At the preview of "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" that I was fortunate to attend, the audience was implored, by a prefatory message onscreen, not to reveal "character developments and detailed story points." That's like being asked to keep quiet about particular peas in a Russian salad. The movie, directed by Sam Raimi, is the latest mega-mess from Marvel Studios, and none of the characters do anything as suburban as developing. They roll up, intone some gnomic poppycock, and fight. As for "story points," I saw nothing that answers to that description. All we get is a grab bag of oddments. The giant monocular octopus that invades New York. The blossoming orchard laid waste with a wave of the hand. The remote fortress, where wannabe magi are taught to engender what seem to be Frisbees of fire.

Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), you will not need reminding, is a surgeon with unearthly powers and a dashing red cloak—endowed with powers of its own, like the rug in Disney's "Aladdin." He meets a young woman who can scoot from one universe to the next, and who bears the name America (Xochitl Gomez). Cue various tasty nuggets of dialogue, including "America doesn't have long" and "Is America O.K.?" Good question. Her long-range travel pass is the envy of Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen), better known as the Scarlet Witch, who dreams of an alternative reality in which she is the mother of two boys—annoying little tykes, if you ask me, but Wanda, for whatever reason, is willing to breed infinite squalls of destruction in order to make that reality real.

The movie may do temporary damage to your central nervous system, yet it's not unenlightening. For one thing, it clarifies the purpose of a multiverse. (I was startled to find the word being used by the poet and critic Allen Tate almost a century ago, in 1923: "I suppose Keats was insincere in his letters because he exposes a multiverse." Don't tell the Scarlet Witch.) This has nothing to do with astrophysical speculation and plenty to do with the special-effects teams, for whom the multiverse means party time. It gives them carte blanche—which never bodes well—to dish up anything they fancy. The one smidgen of wit, as opposed to visual overkill, is the sight of a storm in an actual teacup, complete with raging waves.

Raimi's movie could also be of interest to sociologists. What stirred the fans around me, causing them to levitate in their seats, was not the film's emotional sway (for it has none) but the miraculous visitation of characters from other Marvel flicks, many of them played by embarrassed-looking British actors, whose every entrance was met with ejaculations of joy. The cinema, at such moments, becomes a place of worship. I sat there, strewn with popcorn rubble, lost in the liturgy, jealous of the true believers, and baffled by their incomprehensible gods. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Ellis Rosen, must be received by Sunday, May 15th. The finalists in the April 25th & May 2nd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 30th 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



"I don't think you understand fantasy baseball."
Amir Agoora, Southington, Conn.

"Now they'll never know who's on first."
Jane Stosberg, Louisville, Ky.

"How did they find this guy?
J. A. Onorato, Erie, Pa.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Don't worry, you'll be running in no time."
Tony Bittner, Pittsburgh, Pa.

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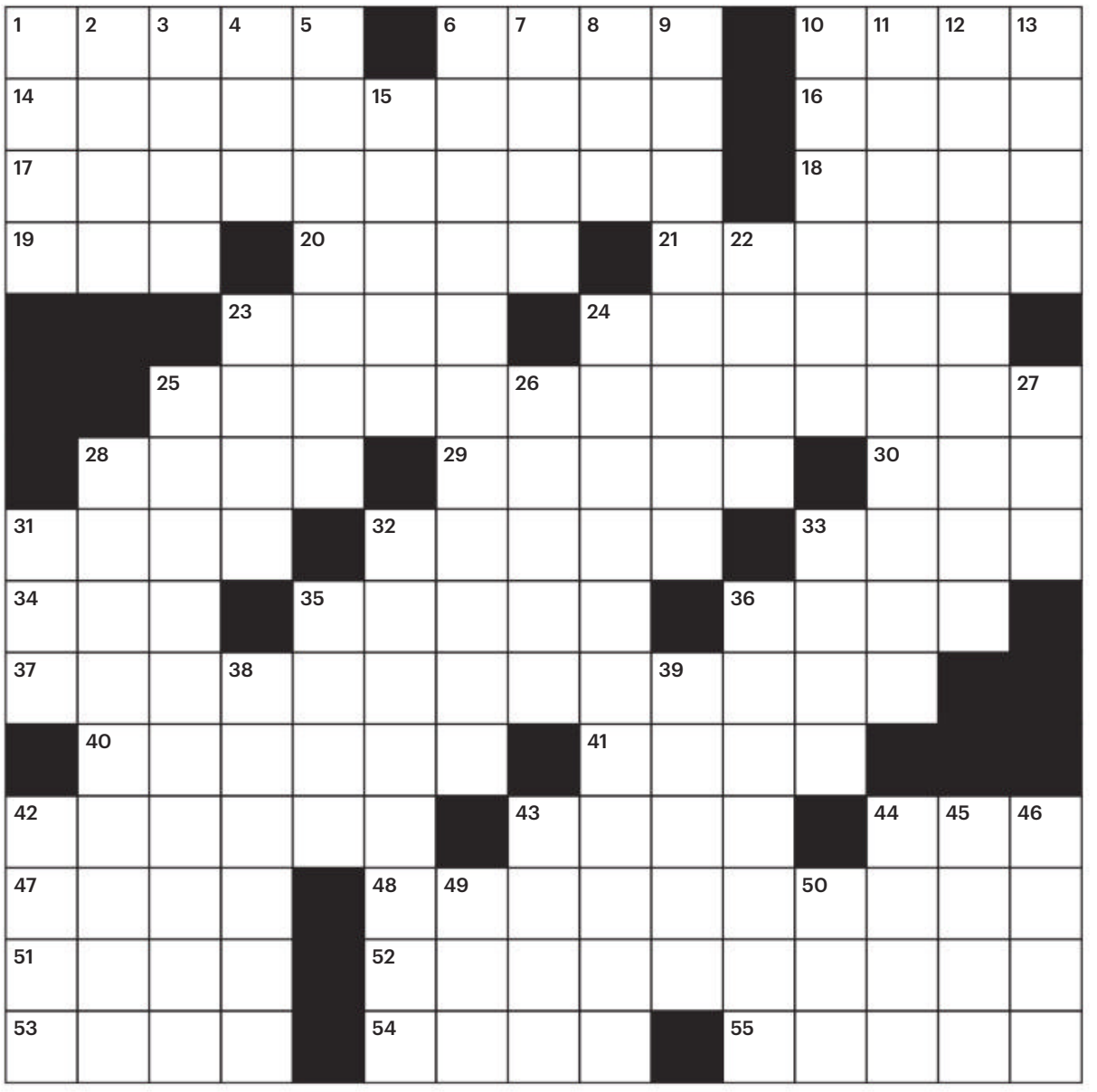
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PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A challenging puzzle.

BY KAMERON AUSTIN COLLINS



ACROSS

1 Assume
6 Title in Tyrol
10 Site that acquired Depop in 2021 for $1.6 billion
14 Comic going after big bucks?
16 El Pollo ___ (restaurant chain)
17 Charges for parties
18 Self-appointed tastemaker
19 Crew cutter?
20 Social circles
21 See 3-Down
23 Cookout staple
24 Like some marches, tonally
25 What makes a grasshopper green
28 Judge in the Book of Judges
29 Succumbs
30 Morning ___
31 Stage name of the rapper Tracy Marrow
32 Like 26-Down's demeanor
33 Flew
34 "Found you!"
35 Studio 54, once
36 Secures a weave, say
37 "Do I look like I have time for this nonsense?"
40 *Fútbol* icon Messi
41 Stinks
42 Mimicked a hot dog
43 Minderbinder of "Catch-22"
44 Sweeping shot
47 "Quantum of Solace" actress Kurylenko
48 Lack of finesse
51 One bowed in a Renaissance ensemble
52 "Meh," for one
53 Comic ___
54 Symbol used to represent the reduced Planck constant
55 Forwards, say

DOWN

1 Film with the tagline "The movie was fake. The mission was real"
2 Onscreen explorer
3 With 21-Across, brand that sells Stink Stoppers spray
4 Bit of French?
5 No. 1
6 Hard no
7 Breaks down
8 Cowed feeling
9 Improper
10 Howard who became the Yankees' first Black player, in 1955
11 "You're doing way too much right now"
12 Dog days
13 Brixton hooligans
15 "America's Only Rock 'n' Roll Magazine," per a 2019 documentary
22 Mars, to some
23 Art ___ (French term for so-called outsider works)
24 "Well, ahoy there"
25 Betraying, in a way
26 Character whose first name, Fitzwilliam, is used only twice in the classic novel in which he appears
27 Language spoken by millions of Ghanaians
28 Resounding phenomenon?
31 Nepomniachtchi who squared off against Magnus Carlsen at the 2021 World Chess Championship
32 Course companion?
33 "High" occasions
35 *Finito*
36 "I Wanna Be Your Dog" rockers, with "the"
38 Wrecks
39 Irene played by Lara Pulver on "Sherlock"
42 GoPro perspectives, for short
43 Flat earth?
44 Novel for which Nabokov nabbed his first of seven National Book Award nominations
45 Served well
46 Tab on Twitter's Explore page
49 Head, slangily
50 Manhattan's Fifth, e.g.

Solution to the previous puzzle:

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

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