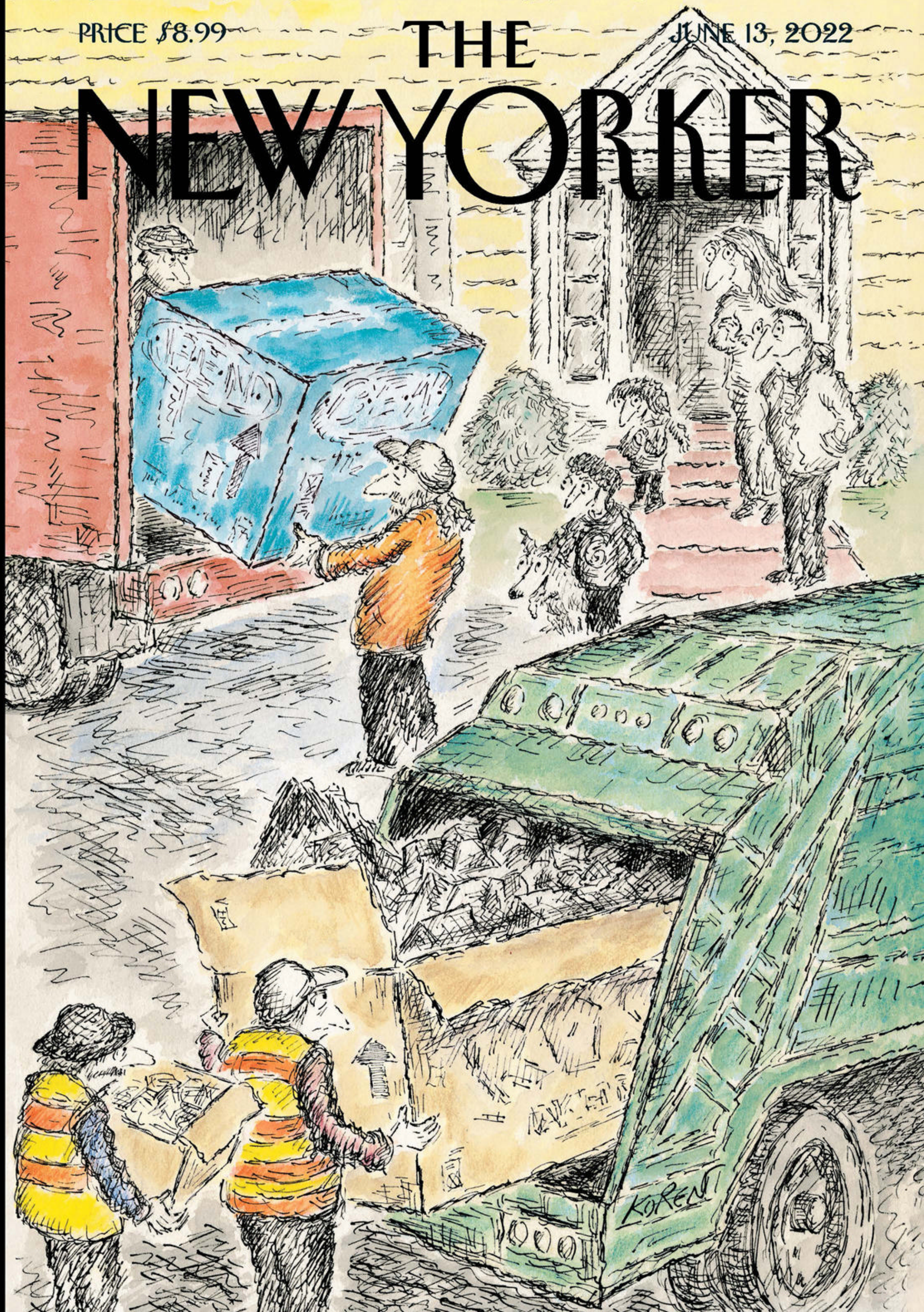
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# THE NEW YORKER

JUNE 13, 2022



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JUNE 13, 2022


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# WHAT A LIFE

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When he was 18 he took it for a joyride.





He guzzled his first beer at age six.

He was at Woodstock. He got wet, muddy, and high.



His dad grew up in a poorhouse.

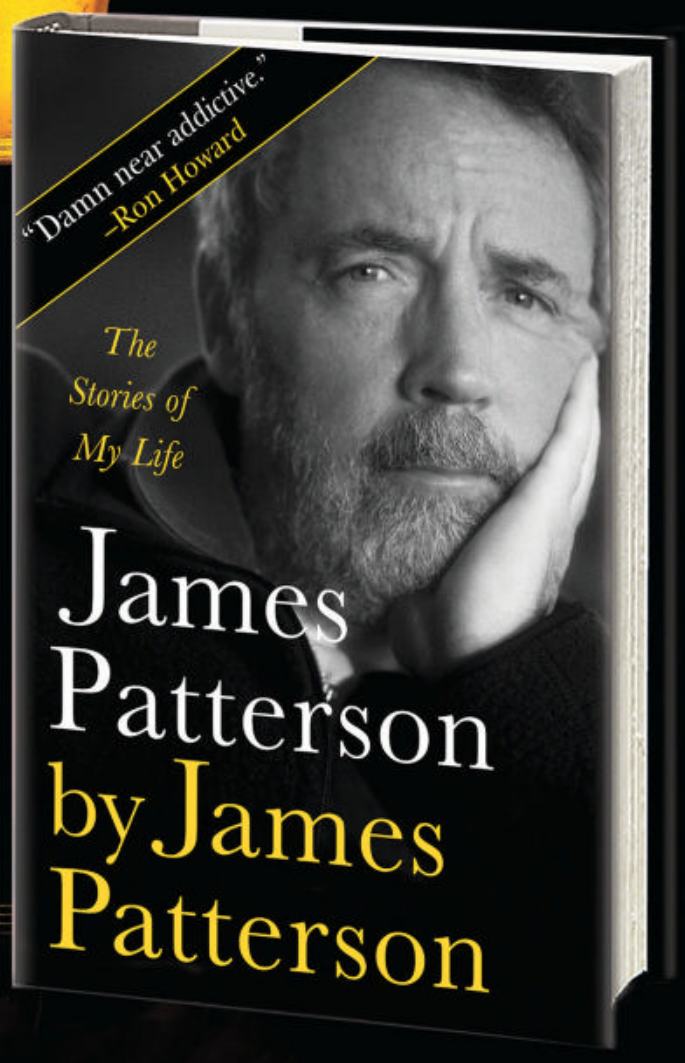


"I felt I was interviewing him under the highest permissible dose of sodium pentothal, the truth serum, for hours—

**he spilled the whole story of his truly astonishing life."**

Bob Woodward

*New York Times* bestselling author



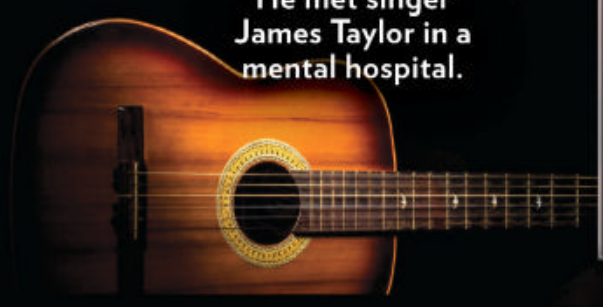

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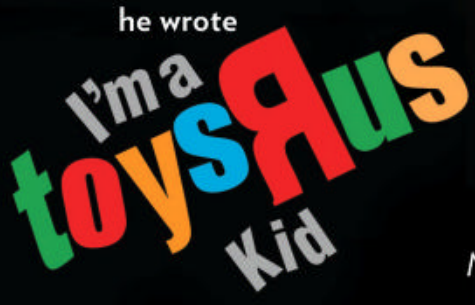
He met singer James Taylor in a mental hospital.






He's done over a dozen ride-alongs with the police.

When he was a "Mad Man" he wrote




**"A tour de force** that I recommend to everyone."

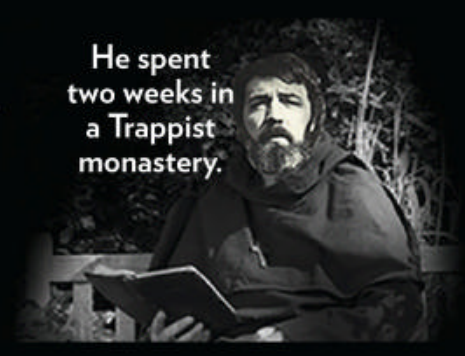
Patricia Cornwell

*New York Times* bestselling author

In his first draft, Alex Cross was a woman.



He spent two weeks in a Trappist monastery.



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# CONTRIBUTORS

Patrick Radden Keefe (*"King Josh," p. 34*), a staff writer, is the author of "Say Nothing" and "Empire of Pain." His new book, "Rogues: True Stories of Grifters, Killers, Rebels and Crooks," is out this month.

Elizabeth Kolbert (*"Contact," p. 22*) became a staff writer in 1999. Her latest book is "Under a White Sky."

Charles Simic (*Poems, p. 38*), a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, will publish a new collection, "No Land in Sight," in July.

Joan Acocella (*A Critic at Large, p. 62*) has been a staff writer since 1995. Her most recent book is "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints."

Edward Koren (*Cover*) began contributing to *The New Yorker* in 1962. His exhibition "Down to the Bone" is on display at the Peabody Essex Museum, in Salem, Massachusetts, through February 5, 2023.

Hannah Goldfield (*Tables for Two, p. 15*) is the magazine's food critic.

Rebecca Mead (*The Talk of the Town, p. 19; "A Hamlet for Our Time," p. 28*) has been a staff writer since 1997. She most recently published "Home/Land."

Jon Lee Anderson (*"New Man," p. 48*), a staff writer, began contributing to the magazine in 1998. His books include "Che Guevara" and "Guerrillas."

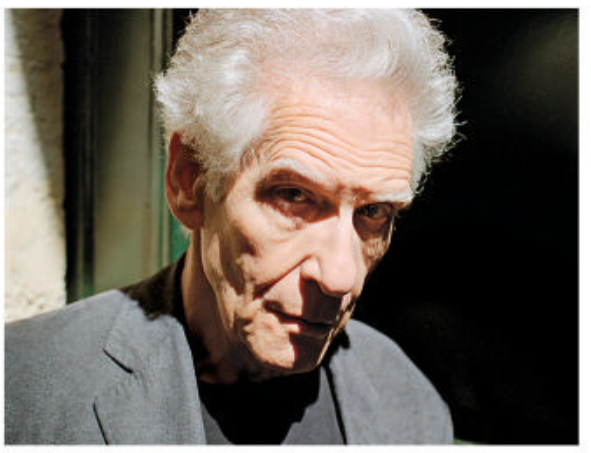
Souvankham Thammavongsa (*Fiction, p. 58*) won the 2020 Scotiabank Giller Prize for her short-story collection, "How to Pronounce Knife."

Saeed Jones (*Poem, p. 55*) is the author of the memoir "How We Fight for Our Lives" and the poetry collection "Prelude to Bruise." His new book, "Alive at the End of the World: Poems," is forthcoming in September.

Dana Goodyear (*The Talk of the Town, p. 21*) is a staff writer and the host of the podcast "Lost Hills."

Garth Greenwell (*Books, p. 69*) has published "What Belongs to You" and "Cleanness."

## THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



### PERSONS OF INTEREST
Adam Nayman looks back on David Cronenberg's career upon the release of the director's latest film.



### PERSONAL HISTORY
Keith Gessen writes about the home birth of his first child and his introduction to parenting.

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LEFT: YANN STOFER; RIGHT: ALICE PROUJANSKY

# THE MAIL

## IN OUR GENES

As professionals in the field of genealogy, we read with interest Maya Jasanoff's article on the subject (A Critic at Large, May 9th). We cannot dispute Jasanoff's synopsis of the history of genealogy, or that it has played a role in reinforcing notions of superiority and power. However, we wish to offer a more optimistic viewpoint. Although some people do use genealogy to nefarious ends, many of today's genealogists, professionals and hobbyists alike, strive to provide a voice for the voiceless. The beauty of genealogy is that it can show us the bigger picture of history by focussing on marginalized individuals and their lives.

Professional genealogists can reconstruct social histories of communities neglected by schoolbooks, and give solace to families who have endured generational trauma. We use crowdsourcing techniques to gather information about enslaved people whose names are barely recorded. We help adoptees learn about their health and personal history. We aid the descendants of Holocaust victims and survivors in discovering the fates of their families and reclaiming citizenships taken from them. We assist in the repatriation of the remains of soldiers killed in action.

Family stories can be messy, and racism and inequality run through them just as they do through our broader cultural history. Although our discipline is imperfect, it is popular for good reason. In our experience, the quest for ancestral identity is less often rooted in a yearning for superiority than in the desire for a deeper understanding of the struggles and the sacrifices of those who came before us.

*Board of Directors*
*Association of Professional Genealogists*
*Wheat Ridge, Colo.*

## LEAVE IT TO THE STATES

Jeannie Suk Gersen, in her piece about the implications of overturning Roe v. Wade, observes that this may not be the ultimate goal of today's anti-abortion movement, and concludes that "liberals may one day find themselves advocating for leaving the matter to the states" (Comment, May 9th). In my book "Break It Up," I offer several examples of historical secessionist movements in the United States, including some with what we would now call a progressive bent. One possibly salient story is that of the anti-slavery Northerners who, in the eighteen-fifties, supported the defiance or the abrogation of federal laws, such as the Fugitive Slave Act and the Dred Scott decision, despite otherwise favoring a strong central government. Slavery's domination of American political institutions appeared to be so unbreakable that states' rights—or, for some, secession from the Union—seemed to be the only hope for insuring a refuge for freedom.

*Richard Kreitner*
*Beacon, N.Y.*

## PHOTO REALISM

I was moved by James Nachtwey's photo portfolio of the war in Ukraine, and impressed by the fact, noted by David Remnick in the introduction, that he entered the fray at the age of seventy-four ("A Harrowed Land," May 9th). I hope that, in addition to recognizing the accomplishments of older male war photographers, we can honor the women who recorded scenes of war. Gerda Taro and Lee Miller are just as excellent examples of war photographers from the past as the usual suspects Robert Capa (to whom some of Taro's photos were credited) and Mathew Brady (whose Civil War images were often taken by others). As a former TV-news video journalist who sometimes worked in war zones, I frequently felt like an anomaly; discovering these women war photographers made me realize that was not the case.

*Lisa Seidenberg*
*Westport, Conn.*

•

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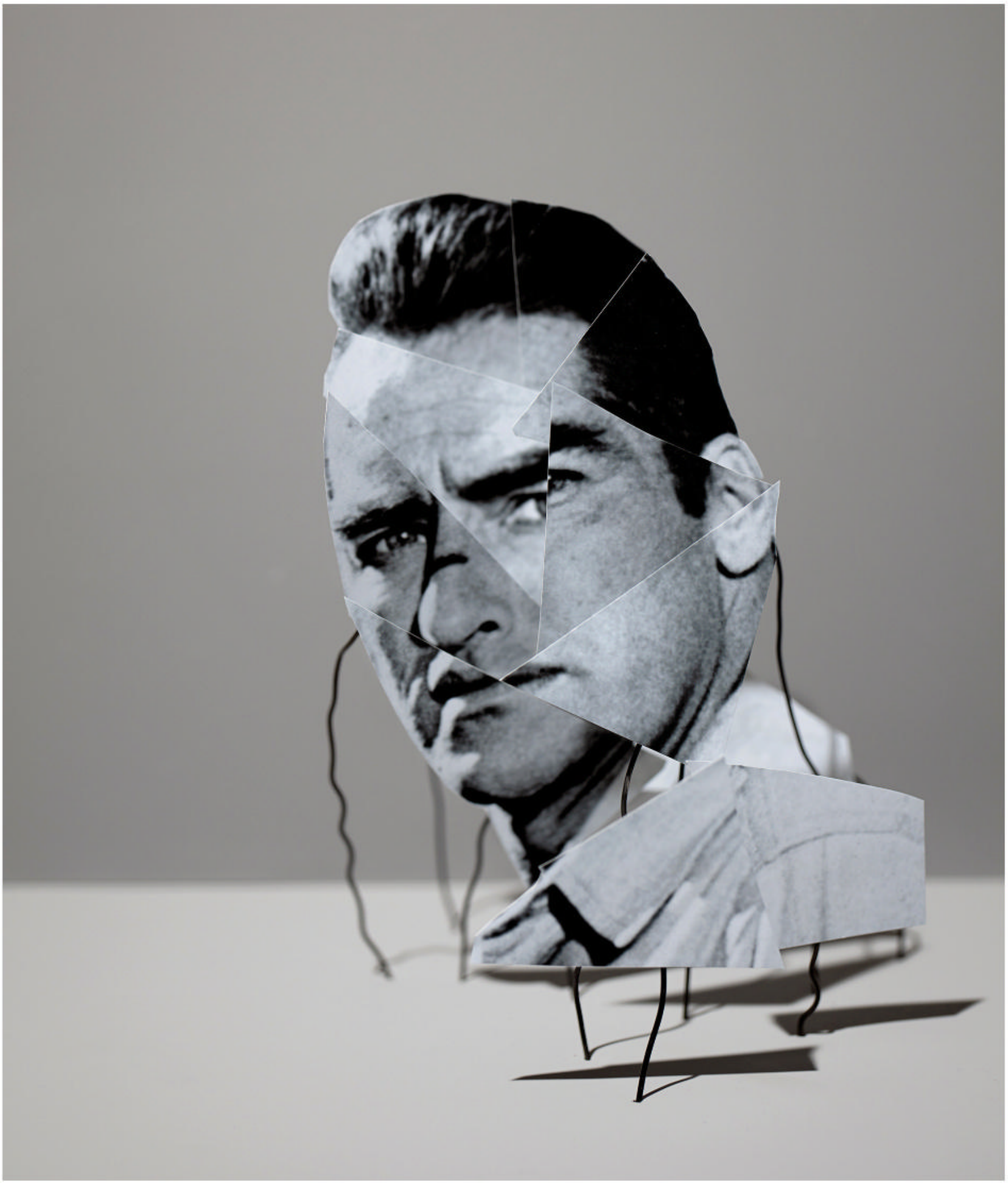
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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



**Montgomery Clift** changed everything. With his matinée-idol looks and his brilliant understanding of Method acting, the Omaha, Nebraska, native created complicated characters at a time when the American male was supposed to be anything but. Clift paved the way for Brando and Dean, and the purity of his art is on full display in a retrospective at Film Forum (through June 16), which includes John Huston's haunting "The Misfits" and George Stevens's unsurpassable "A Place in the Sun," co-starring Clift's great friend Elizabeth Taylor.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIEL ZIMMER

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

## MUSIC

### Answer Code Request and Silent Servant

**ELECTRONIC** The Berlin techno producer and d.j. Answer Code Request plays regularly at the techno temple Berghain, but his new four-song EP, "Shattering," shows a fetchingly light touch: its production, built on breakbeats as much as kick drums, is spare, almost aerated. This approach should make a cunning contrast with the Los Angeles native Silent Servant, whose drums and bass lines tend to wallop. That's been especially true in the last half decade, as the latter producer began to foreground an industrial tinge, turbocharging his d.j. sets, particularly in person.—*Michaelangelo Matos (BASEMENT; June 10.)*

### Irreversible Entanglements

**JAZZ** To see the free-jazz and poetry quintet Irreversible Entanglements perform is to witness an act of galvanic discovery—or, to quote the group's vocalist Camae Ayewa, a.k.a. Moor Mother, "energy time." Ayewa and the band's other members—the bassist Luke Stewart, the drummer Tcheser Holmes, the saxophonist Keir Neuringer, and the trumpeter Aquiles Navarro—met seven years ago, at a Music Against Police Brutality event in Brooklyn. They have since issued three liberationist LPs of Afrofuturist creative music, including this past year's "Open the Gates," released through the Chicago avant-garde-jazz outpost International Anthem and the New Jersey punk-rock label Don Giovanni; the group's incendiary improvisations, which, on this new album, also feature galactic synthesizers and tolling bells, evoke the defiant contexts of both imprints.—*Jenn Pelly (National Sawdust; June 11.)*

### Eiko Ishibashi

**EXPERIMENTAL POP** Hatched in the avant-garde but indebted to nobody's stylistic rule book, the Japanese musician Eiko Ishibashi has released haunted ambient pieces, crisp instrumental works suggestive of jazz, and albums at the periphery of art pop. Ishibashi's recent album, "For McCoy," employs drones and musique concrète to honor a certain Jack McCoy—not some esoteric composer but, rather, Sam Waterston's "Law & Order" character, a bona-fide middlebrow god. Through a decade and a half of issuing a steady drip of records, culminating in her mournful score for the art-house hit "Drive My Car," Ishibashi, incredibly, has never performed Stateside. She amends this oversight with two solo performances, which feature the sound artist Michael J. Schumacher and the guitar adventurer Loren Connors in opening spots.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Artists Space; June 8-9.)*

### New York Philharmonic

**CLASSICAL** "Shout, shout, up with your song!" the British composer Ethel Smyth's suffragist anthem "The March of the Women," from 1910, begins. The composer Sarah Kirkland Snider interpolates a recording of the poised battle cry into her piece "Forward Into Light," which she wrote for the New York Philharmonic's multiyear series commemorating the centennial of women's voting rights in the United States. The Philharmonic gives the work's world première, alongside Mahler's eloquently expansive Symphony No. 1 and Hilary Hahn's rendition of Barber's Violin Concerto, a piece that swings from sweet airs to a finale of buzzing agitation.—*Oussama Zahr (Carnegie Hall; June 10.)*

### Linda May Han Oh

**JAZZ** In the late fifties, an album like Linda May Han Oh's "Aventurine," which mates a jazz ensemble with a collaborative string quartet, might have been classified as Third Stream music, a short-lived jazz-classical hybrid. These days, this venturesome yet distinctly lyrical recording is just another example of the all-embracing eclecticism that is part and parcel of millennial jazz. Though Oh's arresting compositions and arrangements have the upper hand throughout the album, a quintet showing at the Village Vanguard allows the leader's superb bass playing (heard, to great effect, when alongside Pat Metheny and Vijay Iyer) to shine as well.—*Steve Futterman (Village Vanguard; June 7-12.)*

### Omar-S, Egyptian Lover, DJ Godfather, and SHYBOI

**ELECTRONIC** This is the definition of a stacked d.j. lineup, with skittish hi-hat programming its most obvious common denominator. Omar-S and DJ Godfather are both from Detroit; the latter has long specialized in fast-and-nasty ghettotech, whereas the former typically plies his trade at slower house tempos. Both are appealingly ostentatious as producers and as d.j.s. The L.A. electro pioneer Egyptian Lover is a perfect bridge between the two, and the evening's early arrivers have an additional advantage: SHYBOI is seldom predictable, and setting the table for the others should bring out the best in this learned Brooklyn d.j.—*M.M. (Knockdown Center; June 12.)*

## ART

### Dana Hoey and Caitlin Cherry

Since the nineteen-nineties, Hoey, a photographer, has depicted women in staged scenes of physical conflict, making visible the often hidden tensions of female relationships, and challenging stereotypes of gendered power dynamics. Her new pictures take aim at the Wild West

## AMBIENT MUSIC



A solitary brand of ambient Muzak has become big business for wellness companies selling increased productivity through sonic curation. This idle music is designed to recalibrate the brain—to help the listener focus better, sleep better, live better. These aims guide the electronic singer-songwriter James Blake's new album of soundscapes, created in collaboration with the A.I.-powered app Endel, as part of its selection of real-time, personalized sonic environments. **"Wind Down"** is music for decompression, designed to ready the listener for bed. Composed entirely of chiming keys, airy synths, and disembodied vocals, the record is soothing, winding, and trippy, like navigating the gorgeous, uncanny architecture of the smartphone game Monument Valley. As an aural relaxant, it is nearly hypnotic, a balm that imitates the ocean and the sky; as an album, it can feel like the soul has been separated from the machine and is drifting off on its own.—*Sheldon Pearce*

OPPOSITE: SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM FILM FORUM; RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY YIMIAO LIU



The three-year-old project space Mister Fahrenheit isn't clandestine, per se. Unlike Manhattan's strictly word-of-mouth galleries (Fulton Ryder, Club Rhubarb), its address is on the record: 234 West Tenth Street. From noon to five, Mondays through Wednesdays, visitors to a busy West Village block—lined with town houses, coffee shops, thrift stores, and the N.Y.P.D.'s Sixth Precinct station—are buzzed through a discreetly marked gate to discover a garden-level refuge from the commercial grind of contemporary art's big-box mainstream. It's hard to imagine an artist better suited to the liminal charms of Mister Fahrenheit than **Gedi Sibony,** a mid-career New York sculptor acclaimed for his alchemical way with salvaged materials, in which concealment often plays a key role. The dramatic centerpiece of his exhibition, a quintet of recent works on view through June 22, is a twenty-six-foot-long ochre curtain that cascades from the ceiling, draped so that it appears to envelop the space when seen from above while opening a narrow passageway at ground level. Sibony's repertoire also includes tenderly retouched found canvases, one of which is included here. But painting materializes most surprisingly in a cast-off cupboard, which, in Sibony's hands, becomes a floating homage to Matisse.—*Andrea K. Scott*

archetype of the trailblazing male rebel. Cherry, a painter in her mid-thirties, considers images and fantasies of Black femininity and celebrity, inspired by the fever dream of the Internet; in the works on view here, Cardi B, Lil' Kim, Naomi Campbell, and other stars sport cowboy hats in glam deployments of a rodeo aesthetic. The figures appear against meticulously rendered backdrops that suggest psychedelic screen savers. By contrast, Hoey's photos are set in stark desert-prairie landscapes. They include a riff on the Marlboro Man, with a white woman in the rugged hero's place, and a mid-tussle shot of a showdown that upends the sexist trope of the so-called catfight. Deftly, and very differently, these two artists explore an ever-potent American mythos, imagining for it a new cast of characters.—*Johanna Fateman (Petzel; through June 25.)*

## Vasily Kandinsky

Some eighty paintings, drawings, and woodcuts by Kandinsky, the Russian hierophant of abstraction, line the upper three-fifths of the Guggenheim's ramp, in the retrospective "Around the Circle." The show's curator, Megan Fontanella, recommends starting at the bottom, with the overwrought works of the artist's final phase, and proceeding upward, back to the simpler Expressionist landscapes and horsemen of his early career. This course is canny in terms of your enjoyment, which increases as you go. The teeming complexities that mark Kandinsky's late phase are numbingly hermetic. A middle range, from about 1910 to the early twenties, seethes with the artist's excitement as he abandons figuration to let spontaneously symphonic forms, intended as visual equivalents of music, enthrall on their own. Finally, we are engulfed in cadenzas of hue that may be the strongest art of their kind and their time, relatively crude but more vigorous than the contemporaneous feats of Matisse, Derain, Braque, and other Parisians whose Fauvism anchors standard accounts of modernism.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Guggenheim Museum; through Sept. 5.)*

## Karla Knight

"Road Trip" is a somewhat misleading title for this American painter's new show: her mind is on intergalactic, not cross-country, travel. (That being said, stretches of empty roads do seem to attract U.F.O. sightings.) Knight's vibrant, mandalic drawings, paintings, and tapestries reflect her fascination with the paranormal, at least as an organizing principle. They incorporate an extraterrestrial language of her own invention, which evokes both ancient writing systems and modern sci-fi symbology. Hilma af Klint's ecstatic representations of spiritual dimensions loom large in Knight's work, and the two women share an interest in the conceit of artist-as-channeller. Knight's "Wheel," from 2022—with its pastel palette, orrery-like structure, and central golden orb—is especially af Klintian, imbued with a kindred creative passion. On a rough surface of vintage cotton seed bags, Knight pairs embroidered lines with richly pigmented areas, achieving a weathered and handwrought effect that is every bit as compelling as her more hard-edged imagery.—*J.F. (Edlin; through July 1.)*

# DANCE

## American Ballet Theatre

For the first time since the start of the pandemic, American Ballet Theatre takes up residence at the Met. The five-week season begins with "Don Quixote" (June 13-18), a barn-raiser of a ballet overflowing with bravura displays and lively Iberian-flavored music. The company fields no fewer than five different casts, including a début in the role of Kitri for one of its newest principal dancers, Skylar Brandt (June 14 and June 18 matinée), an impeccable technician, and for the rising soloist Catherine Hurlin (June 15 evening), a daredevil and a natural comedian, who seems particularly suited to the role.—*Marina Harss (Metropolitan Opera House; through July 16.)*

## Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Dance Company

"Curriculum II" continues a series of works that juxtapose dance phrases from Jones's archive with topical and philosophical subjects—in this case, ideas about race and technology—conveyed through spoken text and song. What do the words and ideas have to do with the physical forms and patterns? That's the question "Curriculum II" asks. Commissioned earlier in the pandemic as a film, it's been reimagined as a stage work, premièring at Peak Performances, in Montclair, N.J., where much of the audience is seated onstage, close to the instruction.—*Brian Seibert (Alexander Kasser Theatre; June 9-12.)*

## mayfield brooks

Closing out Platform 2022: The Dream of the Audience (Part II) and continuing the program's theme of processing grief, brooks's "Sensoria: An Opera Strange" is an extension of the artist and improviser's "Whale Fall" film, released this past year. Like that work, "Sensoria" considers how a dead whale's body decomposes as it descends to the ocean floor. This time, though, the emphasis is auditory:

ILLUSTRATION BY EVE LIU

brooks's movement is accompanied by laments, chants, and other sounds inspired by whale song, created in collaboration with Anya Yermakova, a composer versed in underwater music.—*B.S. (Danspace Project; June 9-11.)*

## English National Ballet

This company's much celebrated "Giselle," which premièred in 2016, is not your typical Romantic-era staple—no long gauzy tutus or spirited village dances here. The contemporary-dance choreographer Akram Khan translates the ballet's dramatic situation—a young woman is betrayed by a nobleman in disguise—to reflect modern themes: displacement, alienation, the abuse of the powerless, and the desire for vengeful justice. On June 8 and on the evening of June 11, the role of Giselle is performed by Tamara Rojo, for whom this version was created.—*M.H. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House; June 8-11.)*

## Hudson River Dance Festival

Returning to the Pier 63 lawn, this year's free festival features an especially strong lineup. The Martha Graham Dance Company brings the choreographer's great psychodrama "Errand Into the Maze," from 1947. Ronald K. Brown's EVIDENCE, a Dance Company performs part of his soul-lifting classic "Grace." The inventive hoofers of Dorrance Dance build up the rhythms of the aptly titled "Boards & Chains." And the delightful Calpulli Mexican Dance Company presents excerpts of "Boda Mexicana" and "Puebla: The Story of Cinco de Mayo."—*B.S. (Pier 63 at Hudson River Park, near 23rd St.; June 9-10.)*

## Okwui Okpokwasili & Peter Born

On display as part of L.M.C.C.'s River to River Festival, "repose without rest without end" is mainly a video-and-sound installation. Like Okpokwasili and Born's "Adaku's Revolt," about a girl who rejects chemical straighteners and hot combs, the new work is concerned with hair: the piece connects Adaku's story to seeds that were carried in the hair of Black people as they escaped from slavery, and to the root systems of trees. On June 13 and June 20, performances bring the installation to embodied life.—*B.S. (Amphitheatre at 28 Liberty; June 12-26.)*

# THE THEATRE

## ¡Americano!

Inspired by 9/11, the teen-age Tony (Sean Ewing) dreams of becoming a Marine, but he doesn't know that he's a capital-"D" Dreamer: his parents never told him that he was born in Mexico. And so he learns from a military recruiter that he's been living in the U.S. without documentation for the past sixteen years. Directed by Michael Barnard, who wrote the book with Jonathan Rosenberg and Fernanda Santos, this relentlessly patriotic musical insists on America's greatness and goodness so vehemently and unvaryingly that it starts to seem deranged. It's fortunate, then, that Carrie Rodriguez's songs are so muscular and appealing, that Sergio Mejia's choreography is so joyful and precise, and that the eighteen-member ensemble attacks both with such verve.—*Rollo Romig (New World Stages; through June 19.)*

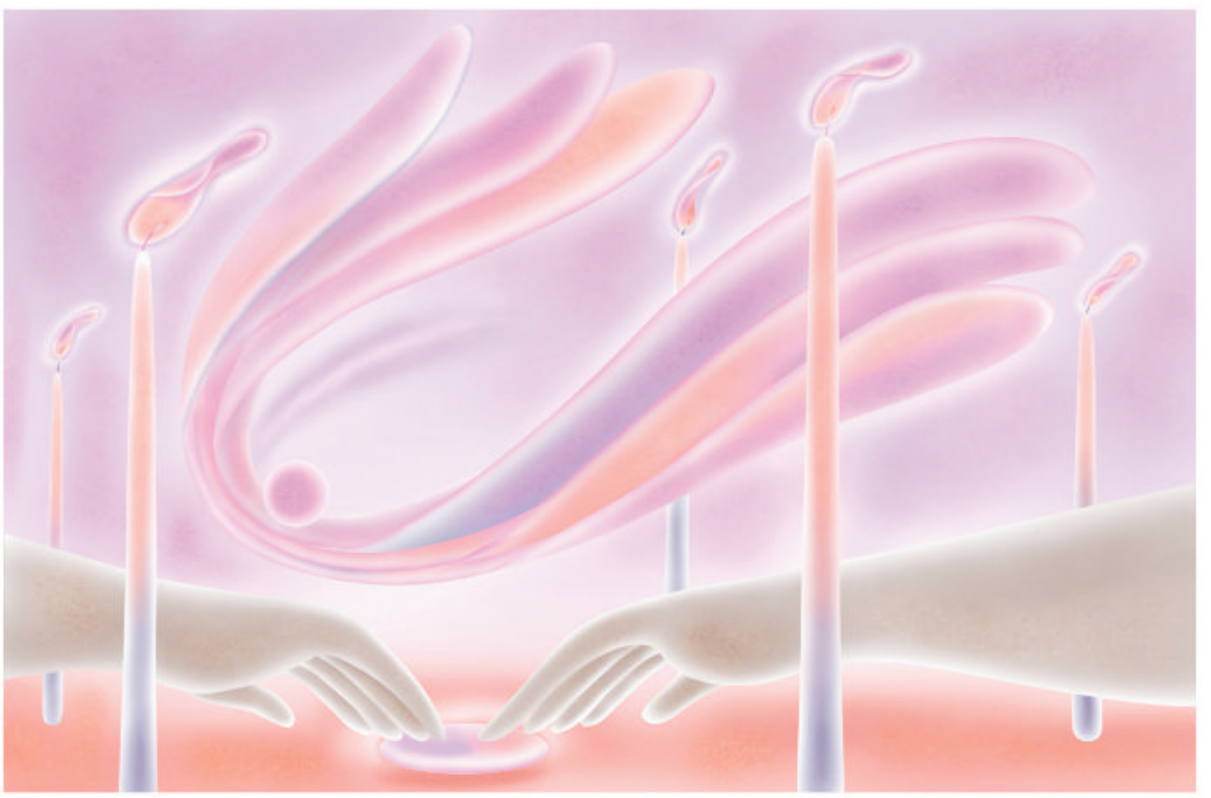
## Dreaming Zenzile

This jam-packed concert-play—at New York Theatre Workshop, in a co-production with the National Black Theatre—celebrates and poetically retells the life of the legendary South African singer, songwriter, and activist Miriam Makeba. Makeba died in Italy, in 2008, after a concert organized in support of the writer Roberto Saviano. "Dreaming Zenzile" takes place at that final concert, where Miriam—the thrillingly talented Somi Kakoma, who also wrote the script—is an elder statesperson, outwardly optimistic about the election of Barack Obama, gamely ready to put on a show. But she's interrupted by spirits—a knockout singing-and-dancing ensemble consisting of Aaron Marcellus, Naledi Masilo, Phumzile Sojola, and Phindi Wilson—who come bearing a life's quantity of swiftly moving memories. So much biography insures some clunky moments, but the director Lileana Blain-Cruz, a master of high-concept onstage fun, helps Kakoma, the rest of the singers, and a wonderful jazz band create a heartening, haunting spectacle.—*Vinson Cunningham (New York Theatre Workshop; through June 26.)*

## Notes on Killing Seven Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Board Members

Early in Mara Vélez Meléndez's upbeat, occasionally uneven, drag-fuelled disquisition on colonialism, nationalism, and authenticity—directed by David Mendizábal—Lolita (the charismatic Christine Carmela), one of the play's two characters, asks the audience an itchy question: Why do we "hesitate to kill our leaders"? What follows deepens rather than answers the question. Lolita, a Puerto Rican trans woman, visits the offices of PROMESA ("promise" in Spanish)—a sunny-sounding agency tasked with overseeing Puerto Rico's ever-mounting debt to the U.S. government—hellbent on offing its members. Instead, she meets the board's Nuyorican

# PODCAST DEPT.



The comedian and podcaster Jamie Loftus's unique mix of reporting, humor, and lyrical writing lends her shows an essayistic, exploratory intimacy, making her one of the most interesting voices in podcasting. Her first show, "My Year in Mensa," took listeners through the process of applying for—and embedding within—the high-I.Q. society, with hilarious results. In "Lolita Podcast," she tackled Nabokov's controversial novel, grappling with the disconnect between her love for the book's prose and its disturbing depiction of child abuse. "Aack Cast" was a deep dive into the world of Cathy Guisewite, the "Cathy" comic-strip creator, and her enduring, if hotly debated, feminist legacy. Now Loftus has turned her attention to a more mystical sphere—American spiritualism. In her new series, **"Ghost Church,"** Loftus traces the history of people who believe that they can commune with the dead, interspersing archival findings with a trip to one of the last spiritualism camps in the country. She approaches her subject with a sideways glance and yet never makes a mockery of those who swear that séances work. It is Loftus's probing curiosity that is her greatest asset, and she brings it to "Ghost Church" in full force.—*Rachel Syme*

ILLUSTRATION BY HOI CHAN

receptionist (Samora la Perdida), who has found an identity not in one gender expression or another but in the shape-shifting act of drag. The receptionist comes up with drag personas for each of PROMESA's members, creating a kind of campy exorcism. The highs are deliriously fun, but repetition makes the show drag, and not in the good way.—*V.C. (Soho Rep; through June 19.)*

## MOVIES

### Another Earth

A young woman, Rhoda (Brit Marling), who caused the deaths of others in a car crash, tries to make amends. She goes to work for a man who suffered in the crash (William Mapother), without telling him who she is, or what she did, and they become uneasy friends. This is not the most believable setup in the world, but then the world itself, in Mike Cahill's grave, ambitious, and sometimes ridiculous 2011 film, is no longer quite what we believed at the start, since another one—an alternative planet, just like ours, apparently filled with the same people—has turned up in the sky. There is barely a murmur of science here: anyone expecting talk of wormholes, or of gashes in the space-time continuum, will be disappointed. But the movie, which Cahill and Marling wrote, is suitably obsessed with second chances, and with the roads that could have been—or might yet be—followed. Anyone who can explain the final shot deserves a refund.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 8/15/11.) (Streaming on Hulu, Prime Video, and other services.)*

### Neptune Frost

This ardently imaginative science-fiction musical is set in an unspecified African police state that censors media, suppresses protest, and nourishes its kleptocracy via murderously authoritarian management of its coltan mines. A young miner named Matalusa (Bertrand Ninteretse), after the killing of his brother, flees the capital for an encampment of technocentric revolutionaries. There, he joins forces with a gender-fluid character named Neptune, who's played by both a male actor (Elvis Ngabo) and a female one (Cheryl Isheja). Neptune, with a metaphysical connection to the precious coltan, enables the group to take over the Internet and, under the name of Martyr Loser King, broadcast the protesters' message to the world. The directors, Saul Williams (who also wrote the script and the music) and Anisia Uzeyman (who also did the cinematography), conjure this fantasy world with fluorescent costumes, extravagant special effects, and boldly choreographed production numbers that match the enthusiastic music. Yet for all its defiant energy, the movie is far from utopian; the filmmakers' visionary speculations are balanced by a chilling realism and a sense of political tragedy.—*Richard Brody (In theatrical release.)*

### Orlando

Sally Potter's 1992 adaptation of the novel by Virginia Woolf provides a sumptuous framework for Tilda Swinton's ethereal virtuosity. The drama, spanning four centuries, shows the twists and turns of one fantastic private life that's formed and deformed by the prerogatives of royal power. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I—played with quietly gleeful ferocity by Quentin Crisp—elevates the androgynous young man Orlando to a place by her side. Orlando makes his way through the pressure cookers of the seventeenth century's absolute rule and, in 1700, gets an ambassadorial posting to Constantinople. Lurching ahead by decades and centuries, Orlando never ages but nonetheless changes: emerging as a woman in the eighteenth century, she confronts a new age of aristocratic authority and persecution; brought up to speed in London in the late twentieth century, she still faces the pomp and cultural primacy of the same damned monarchy. Potter's ironies veer between the blunt and the exquisite, the oblique and the confrontational, exposing the cruel hazards of nature and the perversities of culture alike.—*R.B. (Streaming on Freevee and iTunes.)*

### La Ricotta

In 1962, the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini took a flying leap into hectic modernity with this short apocalyptic screed against the film business and the un-Christian coldness of contemporary Christendom. Orson Welles plays a director who is filming the Passion on a hillside near Rome. Stracci (Mario Cipriani), an extra who plays the repentant thief, craves ricotta for his meagre sustenance but can't afford it; to get it he becomes, in real life, a thief. The on-set sequences are savagely satirical, as when a diva feeds her dog caviar while Stracci looks on, and when crew members call out for the crown of thorns as if it were hardware. Interviewed by a visiting journalist, Welles gives voice to Pasolini's own creed of Catholic Marxism; Stracci suffers a scourging of Biblical proportions as he awaits his scene while bound to a cross. Intercutting color and black-and-white footage, parodying silent-film antics, and inserting scenes of youths dancing the twist, Pasolini both affirms the classical grandeur of cinematic modernism and conveys his sense of a time out of joint. In Italian.—*R.B. (Streaming on the Criterion Channel, MUBI, and other services.)*

## ON THE BIG SCREEN

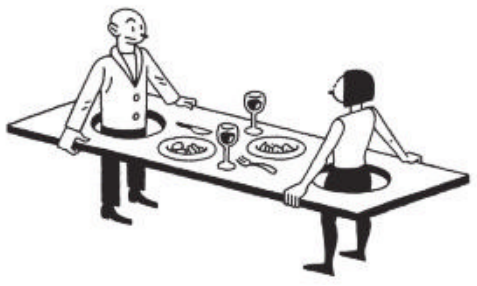



EVERETT

Plunging into the maelstrom of American politics, the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni emerged with a daring and flamboyant blend of fiction and documentary in **"Zabriskie Point,"** from 1970, which screens on June 12 at Metrograph, in a series programmed by the photographer and filmmaker Cindy Sherman. A student activist named Mark (Mark Frechette)—who's implicated in the shooting of an officer at a campus strike, in Los Angeles, where police killed a protester—steals a small plane and escapes to the Mojave Desert. There, in a duet for airplane and automobile that resembles a balletic pas de deux, he encounters a young secretary named Daria (Daria Halprin), who is driving to a corporate conference. What ensues, amid the encroaching development that they find there, is an orgy of destruction, along with an actual orgy that eroticizes the craggy and forbidding landscape. For all the righteous outrage, government violence, and industrial corruption that Antonioni depicts, he also exults in the ornamental extravagance of mass culture. By way of wide-screen images filled with the giddy illusions and gaudy forms of American advertising, architecture, and technology, he realizes his freest, wildest aesthetic adventure.—*Richard Brody*

**For more reviews, visit**
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TABLES FOR TWO

## WoodSpoon

The other night, using a delivery platform called WoodSpoon, which offers meals cooked in the homes of neighborhood chefs, I ordered what seemed to be a reasonable amount of Lebanese food for dinner. What arrived was more like catering for a small but festive affair—enough for days—in containers densely packed with lacy, crisp-edged zucchini fritters, layered carefully between sheets of parchment and strewn with arugula, pine nuts, and pomegranate seeds, glistening like jewels; garlicky sautéed dandelion greens, luscious with olive oil and garnished with radishes carved into roses; neatly cut wedges of *kibbeh saynieh,* a tray-baked loaf of ground beef, cracked wheat, onion, pomegranate syrup, and spices and herbs including cinnamon and marjoram.

I was surprised not only by the generous portions but also by the add-ons and flourishes: cups of sumac, za'atar, and olive oil; fresh pita and lush green salads; whipped baba ghanoush and hummus, dotted with more pomegranate seeds, sprigs of mint, and scallions; a zesty yogurt sauce thick with chopped cucumber. Everything had been prepared by a woman named Raghida Haddad (WoodSpoon profile: Tate's Kitchen), who was born in Beirut, spent years working for the New York City mayor's office, and lives in Brooklyn. When I spoke to her later, the reason for the above-and-beyond bounty became clear: she simply couldn't help herself. "I have witnessed my mom, my grandmother, every woman in my family offering food, so I give so much food!" she told me. "It's not that I'm not a good businesswoman, it's just—it's in my DNA."

The crux of some of WoodSpoon's subway ads is that the company proffers comfort through food without the hassles of human interaction, let alone the obligations of family: "It's like getting Grandma's soup, without questions about your love life," one poster declares. This is a common trope in branding that targets millennial and Gen Z city dwellers, who are often cynically imagined as anxiety-ridden and antisocial. But this undercuts WoodSpoon's true appeal, as well as the company's compelling origin story. Pre-pandemic, Oren Saar, a young Israeli immigrant living in New York, was introduced to a fellow-expat who had a side hustle making and selling Israeli food. Saar loved to cook himself but didn't have time to make certain labor-intensive dishes that he missed from home, such as *jachnun,* a Yemenite Jewish pastry that's traditionally baked overnight. After Saar's wife requested the acquaintance's *jachnun* while in labor, a startup was born: a marketplace of culinary side hustles.

What delighted me about WoodSpoon was the sense of connection it gave me, and the curiosity it fulfilled; it really did feel like being invited into my neighbors' (carefully vetted) kitchens. On a given day, I could order Guyanese curry chicken, dim-sum-style turnip cakes, and Peruvian *alfajores*. The food was comforting but also stimulating and educational. My order from Haddad came with a handwritten note: "I loved the dishes you chose as they seem to be a culinary bridge between the East & the West."

I got a similar card from Yuhe Su (WoodSpoon profile: Daddy's Got Chopsticks), whose menu paints a fascinating, deeply personal portrait. Su, a photographer, grew up in Harbin, in northeast China, before moving to New York to attend Parsons. Of his dishes, the hearty, fragrant lamb-and-sour-cabbage soup, featuring long ruffled noodles, tofu, and star anise, is the most representative of his native region, he explains: "When I was living with my grandma, every year, she would use a gigantic jar to pickle as much cabbage as possible, then make this dish all the time until it ran out."

Su's desserts include flaky Portuguese-style egg tarts—just like the ones he used to eat in Harbin at Kentucky Fried Chicken, which bought a recipe for them from a famous bakery in Macau in 1999, the year in which rule of that city was transferred from Portugal to China. "Oh I miss KFC in China so much!!" Su's description reads. His homesickness is our gain. *(Entrées around $10–$22.)*

*—Hannah Goldfield*

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# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## COMMENT
### THE TRUMP PRIMARIES

Since late April, citizens nostalgic for Donald Trump's Twitter feed have been able to sate themselves on Truth Social, a platform launched in February by one of Trump's companies. After an initial period of silence, the former President now "truths" and "retruths" multiple times a day for his three million-plus followers. (He had about eighty-nine million followers on Twitter when the company suspended his account permanently after January 6th, for fear that it would inspire further violent acts.) His posts are as replete as ever with lies and rants, served up in his familiar vernacular: "Our Elections are Rigged, Inflation is RAMPANT, gas prices and food costs are 'through the roof,' our Military 'Leadership' is Woke, our Country is going to HELL," he recently mused.

Truth Social is a characteristic Trump business: opaque and unconvincing. Last fall, its parent company announced a planned merger with a "blank check" company—a Wall Street concoction that can sell shares to the public with less scrutiny than other exchange-listed firms. That deal hasn't closed yet; meanwhile, the Securities and Exchange Commission is investigating whether the announcement was on the up-and-up. A recent regulatory filing states that Truth Social's prospects rely heavily on Trump's appeal to his fans, yet Trump himself seems equivocal about his project. According to the filing, once Trump posts something on Truth Social, he is "generally obligated" not to post the same message on other social-media platforms—for six hours. Trump may be keeping his options open because he is reportedly itching to run for President again in 2024, and his forced exile from Twitter and Facebook has clearly sapped his reach. His success on Twitter arose from his capacity to outrage or amuse a global audience of both enemies and acolytes (Arnold Schwarzenegger and Kim Jong Un, as well as your Trumpist cousin across town). On Truth Social, he reprises old hits—the Mueller "witch hunt," weak Democrats—for homogenous loyalists. The vibe so far suggests punk rock on Broadway. Trump appears to be ginning up a celebrity feud with Elon Musk, who has made moves to buy Twitter and has said that he would allow Trump to return. The former President insists that he's not interested. "They want me back so badly," he told a crowd in Wyoming in late May. "And I'm not going back, because we have Truth!"

He was in Wyoming to rally MAGA voters to his revenge campaign against the Republican congresswoman Liz Cheney, one of the ten House Republicans who voted to impeach him in the last days of his Presidency. She is now the vice-chair of the House select committee investigating the January insurrection, which will hold televised hearings beginning this week. Wyoming's Republican primary is on August 16th, and Trump has endorsed Harriet Hageman, a former Never Trumper who now says that she doesn't know who really won in 2020. Hageman has a large polling lead, but Cheney has a formidable campaign war chest. Earlier this year, Trump failed to persuade Wyoming's legislature to rewrite state rules that allow Democrats and Independents to participate in the Republican primary, so crossover votes may help Cheney.



As the self-described "king of endorsements," Trump has drawn an eclectic parade of supplicants to Mar-a-Lago, where he performs a version of his role on "The Apprentice." He has called his record of backing candidates who won primaries held in May "very big and successful," but the lopsided numbers he brags about ("for the 'Cycle,' 100 Wins, 6 Losses") include many nods to unopposed or safe Republican incumbents, whose victories were already assured. In highly contested races, his interventions have had mixed results. His support helped J. D. Vance win Ohio's Republican primary for a U.S. Senate seat. On Friday, his candidate Mehmet Oz was declared the winner of the Senate primary in Pennsylvania, where, also with Trump's blessing, Doug Mastriano, a far-right Christian nationalist who paid for

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

buses to carry protesters to Washington on January 6th, won the Republican nomination for governor. He has said that he had serious doubts about the legitimacy of Joe Biden's victory in 2020; if Mastriano wins in November, he will wield considerable authority over his state's election administration.

Yet Trump failed dramatically to put his men in position for state offices in Georgia, where he tried to oust Brian Kemp, the incumbent Republican governor, by backing David Perdue, a former U.S. senator. (Trump's pick for the Senate, Herschel Walker, did win his primary.) In 2020, Kemp repeatedly withstood Trump's pressure to change Georgia's Presidential-election results. Former Vice-President Mike Pence travelled to the state last month to appear with Kemp, making a show of his estrangement from Trump, a break that became irreparable when Pence declined to overturn Biden's victory in the Electoral College. Kemp crushed Perdue by more than fifty percentage points. Georgia's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, who famously ignored Trump's plea during a phone call to "find" enough votes to tip the state his way, also comfortably defeated a Trump-backed challenger.

An optimistic reading is that Georgia's Republican voters were, at the least, disinterested in Trump's unrelenting obsession with his loss to President Biden. Yet, according to a poll from last year by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, well more than half of Republican voters nationwide believe Trump's Big Lie that Biden's victory was rigged. Trump's grip on Trumpism may be loosening a little, but the malignancy he has seeded in American politics cannot be eradicated anytime soon. His talking points about corrupt elections resound daily across right-wing media. Republican leaders and candidates embrace his isolationism and his mobilization of white-grievance politics. If Mastriano is elected, or if like-minded allies take control of election machinery in other swing states, the stage could be set for another constitutional crisis around voting results in 2024, whether Trump is the Republican Presidential nominee or not.

Trump apparently feels no compunction, as a former President, about questioning the legitimacy of the nation's courts or the rule of law. "Our Legal System is CORRUPT, our Judges (and Justices!) are highly partisan, compromised or just plain scared," he recently wrote on Truth Social. His new platform may look like a cynical way to make money—the regulatory filing warned investors of many potential hazards, citing the examples of Trump Plaza and Trump Castle, among other past failures. But Trump's abuse of Truth as a business brand is trivial compared with his ongoing vandalism in the public square. In November, his name won't be on ballots, but voters will have to decide once more whether to endorse his hold on our faltering democracy.

*—Steve Coll*

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TRADE-IN DEPT.

## BUYBACK



Not long ago, in New York City, a paramedic was shot inside an ambulance by the patient he was transporting to the hospital; a Goldman Sachs employee was killed by a gunman on a subway train that was crossing the Manhattan Bridge; and an eleven-year-old girl, Kyhara Tay, stumbled into a Bronx nail salon covered in blood. "Ow, ow, it hurts," she was heard screaming, having been fatally shot in the stomach. Police said that the suspects were two teen-agers, who were aiming at a thirteen-year-old down the street. Days later, Yuronza Streeter, a tall man in a polo shirt and sunglasses, walked up to Emmanuel Baptist Church, in Brooklyn's Clinton Hill neighborhood, carrying a revolver and a semi-automatic pistol. Then he handed them over to the police. "I don't like guns, even though I'm ex-military," Streeter said. "I know what a gun can do. They don't need to be on the street. I mean for law officials, no problem. But for personal people? Nah." He walked out of the church with four hundred dollars' worth of gift cards and a new iPad Mini.

A few minutes later, someone arrived with a pump-action shotgun wrapped in a garbage bag. Then a football coach from Bed-Stuy drove up in a Jeep and handed over a pistol. "I got it because I needed protection in my neighborhood," he said. "What am I gonna do if a guy breaks into my house and pulls out a 9-millimetre? Pull out a baseball bat?" He added, "The gun was illegal, so I decided to just get rid of it." Someone else turned in an AR-15-style rifle with a sawed-off stock, and a mom arrived to give up her kid's plastic toy gun.

"There're no questions asked," a plainclothes cop, dressed in jeans and white Nike Jordans, said, on the sidewalk outside. "You get a ticket. We process the gun. We get you a gift. Ten minutes!" Inside, another cop said, "They're not swabbed for DNA. Literally, nothing is done to these guns. They're put into a bag, and they're brought to an off-site location, and they're destroyed." (Handguns are melted down at a steel plant in Pennsylvania; rifles and shotguns are shredded at a metal-recycling facility in New Jersey.)

In 2008, the Reverend Joseph Jones gathered a group of pastors in Brooklyn to hold a church-hosted gun buyback. The Kings County District Attorney's office had attempted buybacks before, but people were distrustful. "It wasn't till we said 'Bring them to the church' that it worked," Jones said. "People felt like the pastor or the rabbi or the faith leader would defend them if something came up." That summer, six churches across Brooklyn opened their doors. "I had grandmas bringing weapons. I had aunties and uncles bring shotguns. There were people bringing Desert Eagles from their military days. It was a plethora of weapons," Jones said. They collected almost two thousand firearms. Pastors have since hosted buybacks all over Brooklyn.

The one at Emmanuel Baptist was sponsored by the restaurant Junior's ("The World's Most Fabulous Cheesecake") and the D.A.'s office. "We're not using tax dollars to pay for this. We're using money that's coming from drug dealers," Eric Gonzalez, Brooklyn's D.A., said, inspecting a Smith & Wesson revolver that had just been dropped off in the church hallway, amid walls decorated with children's art. (New York's criminal-

forfeiture statute allows law enforcement to repurpose criminal proceeds.)

A cop dragged a trash can full of long-barrelled guns across the floor of a room lined with picture books. Gonzalez said, "I lost a brother to gun violence. I don't often talk about it. He was my younger brother. He passed when he was twenty-four." Gonzalez said that when he was growing up, in East New York ("the murder capital," he called it), he knew a lot of kids who had guns in their homes. They are tough to get rid of. With the buyback program, he said, "hopefully, we'll reduce the need to put people in jail for illegal possession."

Down the hall, two men who had just got rid of their guns sat waiting in folding chairs. Gonzalez wandered past. "You guys made a good decision," he said. A cop called out, "Ticket No. 66953?" Ticket No. 66953—a bald man wearing a Miles Davis T-shirt—collected his iPad Mini. Grinning, he said, "You serious? *Whaaaaaaat*?"

Outside, a bespectacled man with a graying beard, who introduced himself as Abdul Sadiq, carried a Mitchell electric-guitar box. Inside: a hammydown rifle. "It wasn't an assault weapon or nuthin'. It was in the family for a while, somebody who passed on." Sadiq laughed. "If you got something laying around, why not? I mean, don't give 'em your last gun. It's fucking Saturday night in Brooklyn."

*—Adam Iscoe*

## LONDON POSTCARD
### PLATINUM PUDDING



For Queen Elizabeth's Coronation, in 1953, lampposts along the processional route were painted lilac, pale blue, and white, at the instigation of Sir Hugh Casson, an architect who made his mark with the Festival of Britain, in 1951. The result was so "lively and apt," this magazine's correspondent Mollie Panter-Downes noted at the time, "that they will surely shock to death those diehard Britons who think you can't go wrong with a nice lot of red, white and blue, and a sprinkling of 'Long May She Reign's." A stroll in the center of London a day in advance of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations revealed that today's designers had reverted to tried and true. Along Regent Street, more than a hundred enormous Union Jacks, strung five abreast, fluttered above the streams of buses and pedestrians like a proud if leaky canopy of patriotism.

Seventy years! Who could have imagined just how long Elizabeth II might reign? Only two years more, and she'll best Louis XIV's record as the world's longest-serving monarch—and he was four years old when he became king, so, cheating. After two years of cancelled events and gatherings banned, it was a relief not to have to countenance a Zoombilee. And to what efforts had commercial establishments gone to mark this bright moment amid late-pandemic hardship and a cost-of-living crisis exacerbated by a European war on a scale not seen since just before Her Majesty came to the throne? On Regent Street: hats off to the window dresser for Guess, who had accessorized the store's haughty mannequins with a pair of fake corgis. At Piccadilly Circus, the shimmering L.E.D. screen displayed a message from the retailers John Lewis and Waitrose: "Congratulations Your Majesty." That ad alternated with another, for Estrella Damm beer—maybe a fitting inducement for the British public, who had been granted an extra day off and who never seem to need encouragement to raise a glass, can, or bottle.

Down on the Mall, the avenue that leads from Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace, some of the Queen's subjects had already pitched tents at prime, barricade-side spots for the procession. Rachael Axford, an office worker for a renewable-energy company in Cornwall, had taken the sleeper train from Penzance—though there had been no sleeping, she said, what with all the excitement, and the gin. She had decked her spot with regional bunting, a white cross on a black background, and her yellow-and-blue beach tent—a nod of solidarity to Ukraine—was supplied with folding chairs, sleeping bags, some Union Jack-patterned clothes, and gin. Also: a Shewee urination funnel, for emergencies. "I don't think any other country can touch us for the pageantry," Axford said. She had camped at Harry and Meghan's wedding, in Windsor, in 2018, and already had a game plan for the next big one, the Queen's funeral.



*Queen Elizabeth*

For less prepared Jubilee-ers, serried ranks of portable toilets lined the Mall's sidewalk, in the shadow of the grand mansions of St. James's. Schoolchildren in the crowd debated the important stuff. "The Queen is technically not rich—she just has a lot of expensive things," one middle-school-age boy informed a girl. "The house is priceless," she confirmed. A young man in an ill-fitting black suit with a framed portrait of the Queen circa 1997 jammed under his arm scurried across the street, cell phone to ear. To the clicking of cameras, two Guardsmen in their red tunics and bearskin helmets marched toward the palace, stepping aside to allow an ambulance to pass. A Household Cavalry soldier had been thrown from his horse, it was reported later: one of the Jubilee's first injuries, but surely not the last. The supplies of gin and Estrella had barely been broached.

And so, on to Piccadilly, where, at a café within Fortnum & Mason, those in the know could order, off menu, a serving of Platinum Pudding: a dessert created by an amateur baker named Jemma Melvin, who won a nationwide competition to design a comestible fit for street-party tables up and down the land. Concocted from layers of Swiss roll, lemon curd, citrus jelly, mandarin oranges, custard, amaretti cookies, and shards of "jeweled chocolate bark"—phew—the dessert looked like "summer in a glass," remarked Annalivia




*"Damn it, Bill! Don't tell me you forgot to put the time on the invite."*

• •

Foreman, who was at the café with her daughter Eve. Neither could actually sample the pudding (Eve: nut allergies; Annalivia: gut-reset program), but Annalivia's brother Hugh was game. He wrinkled his nose as he described the flavor as "light," and was skeptical of its colors, which were as subtle as Casson's painted lampposts. "I served my country, and there's nothing patriotic about *that*," Hugh—a onetime captain in the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards—declared. After the family left, however, the pudding glass was scraped clean by a less critical subject, who washed it down with a cup of Platinum Jubilee–Blend Tea. It had been a long morning, and a very, very long reign.

—*Rebecca Mead*

LIFE STORY

## OUT OF THE WOODS



The writer James Patterson is not the type of rich person who refuses to talk about being rich. "Here's the wages of sin," he said the other day, sitting on the patio of his estate in Briarcliff, in a long-sleeved shirt and boat shoes. He smirked a little. It was a pleasant late morning in late spring. Sunshine, birds. He head-nodded toward the Hudson. "I don't think about success," he went on. "I have nothing against people who want to drive Rolls-Royces. It just doesn't interest me. It doesn't interest me to have a big house, per se. But *this*"—the view—"does interest me." He'd been up since five-thirty—*Times*, *Journal*, nine holes at Sleepy Hollow. Later, a nap would probably be in order, and then maybe dinner out with his wife, Sue. They like low-key stuff with friends. "The occasional thing with people like President Clinton and Hillary, which is nice," Patterson said. "We actually saw them Saturday night."

Patterson, who is seventy-five, was resting up for a thirteen-city book tour for his autobiography, which he'd begun as a COVID project: "James Patterson," by James Patterson. The book consists of scores of anecdotes, a page or two long—"dirt poor" childhood, first kiss (Veronica Tabasco), advertising career ("I'm a Toys R Us kid"), hobnobbing with famous folk—sprinkled with the odd sales pitch. He starts a chapter by talking about a forthcoming book of his wife's: "It will be published in the spring of 2023. Don't miss it." The sin that pays the wage.

Why did he become a writer? "I was a lonely kid in the woods," he said. "I just would tell stories to myself. Cowboy stories and war stories and fantasies. Nothing against Newburgh"—his home town, on the other side of the river—"but it was: get me out of here, get me out of this life, get me out of the woods. I found out that the guy who'd owned the *Daily News* was a Patterson. I had this fantasy that he would show up in a big limousine and say, 'I'm your father,' and take me to New York."

His own father had grown up in Newburgh's poorhouse. "There was a little bit of a jealousy between us," Patterson said. Patterson the elder managed to graduate college but wound up in working-class jobs. "Bright guy, driving a bread truck," Patterson said. "And then he went and he sold insurance for Prudential, pretty much door to door. He just didn't have confidence. Almost sounds like 'Portnoy's.'"

Patterson padded into the kitchen. Sue had laid out a spread: handpicked mangoes from their house in West Palm Beach, hummus, homemade cornbread. "It's a tradition that started with Clinton," Patterson said. When he and Clinton co-wrote "The President Is Missing," they did some press interviews at Patterson's house. "We had fruit and cornbread," Patterson said. "Clinton stood here for an hour and a half."

"He ate, like, most of the pan," Sue said.

Patterson took a plate and headed toward his office, upstairs. "I don't even know what the fuck these things are," he said, passing some awards. "I'm just not a trophy person. Legacy means nothing to me. What do I care? I'm dead." In a living room, there was a big photo of an American flag. "We just like the photograph," he said. "We're not Republicans, but it's now almost like Republicans own the flag. Fuck it, we like the flag, too."

Upstairs, he surveyed his bookshelves. An assistant had recently cleared and restocked them with hundreds of Patterson's own works. He keeps a more eclectic collection at his library in Florida: Günter Grass, Cheever, Bulgakov, Laurence Sterne. He likes to surprise people with stories of his youth as a "literary twit." He almost wrote a master's thesis on the metafictionist John Hawkes, who once said, "The true en-

emies of the novel were plot, character, setting, and theme.” “I don’t think I was ever a big snob,” Patterson said. “But, directionally? Yeah.”

Later, he went for a walk around the back yard. “This is Sue’s,” he said, of the pool. He calls it Lake Susan. She was an All-American swimmer at Wisconsin and swims laps every day. “She stays in shape,” Patterson said. “She’s sixty-four now. Just in case you thought I was robbing the cradle.”

He looked out over the river. Somewhere upstream was Mt. Beacon, which he used to stare at from the opposite bank. “In Catholic grammar school, this priest used to come in once a week for religious whatever—you know, ‘You want to go to Hell?’ He goes, ‘You see Mt. Beacon over there? Imagine if a bird, every thousand years, he brought over here as much as he could carry in his beak.’” He went on, “‘When that bird has brought Mt. Beacon over to this side of the river, that would be the beginning of an eternity in Hell.’” Patterson laughed. “You never forget this shit! That’s real good. *That* is a writer.”

*—Zach Helfand*

## L.A. POSTCARD

### MEET-CUTE



Ten years ago, Stephanie Allynne went to an audition for an animated show. In the waiting room, she overheard one of the other actors, a thin woman with delicate features and cropped hair, say, “Whenever a director comes up to give me a note, I say, ‘Before you give me a note, I just have to tell you, I have no range. But go ahead. What were you going to say?’” Allynne thought this was so funny that she went over to the sign-in sheet and found the woman’s name: Tig Notaro.

Notaro, whose given name is Mathilde, is a bone-dry standup from a French family in Mississippi. Her brother dubbed her Tig. When people avoid addressing her by name, she knows why: they’re afraid that her name might be Pig. She and Allynne got married in 2015. Now they co-write, co-direct, co-create, and co-parent. Their sons, Max and Finn, are five; they call Allynne Mom and Notaro Mère. Allynne’s father, who moved in with them during the pandemic, is Papa Grande.

The other day, Notaro and Allynne were at their home, an ivy-covered house in Los Angeles, sitting on a white couch with a giant gray cat, Fluff, between them. (When Notaro uses Instagram, which is not often, it is from the account @therealfluffnotaro.) They had just got home from a Dodgers game. Max and Finn were in the yard with Papa Grande, working on their batting.

Allynne, who has auburn hair and blue eyes, said that, not long after the waiting-room encounter, she and Notaro met for real, on an indie film. “We were kind of funny, small parts in the movie,” Allynne said. Notaro added, “And we played love interests. You should watch it knowing that we later get married, and that I was deathly ill.” Notaro, it turned out, had pneumonia, a severe intestinal infection called *C. difficile*, and bilateral breast cancer; Allynne was twenty-five and straight.

After Notaro was given her diagnosis, she went onstage at Largo, a club where she does a monthly show, and greeted the audience with “Hello. Good evening, hello. I have cancer. How are you?” It was an electrifying set. She later joked about the revenge that her body was taking on her: after so many years of listening to her talk about being flat-chested, she said, her breasts had got sick of it and decided, “Let’s kill her.” She chose not to get reconstructive surgery.

Notaro and Allynne began a text friendship. “I started bringing my phone to the bathtub—I just didn’t want to miss anything,” Notaro said. Then, on Valentine’s Day, Allynne invited Notaro to meet her at a bar. When Notaro got there, she found that she and Allynne were wearing the same type of chunky-wool cardigan. They traded sweaters and spontaneously kissed. “I’ve never just started kissing somebody in such a public place like that—I would never do that!” Notaro said. “And she’d never kissed a woman.”

The next day: confusion. “I had a little mental crisis,” Allynne said. “I wrote Tig the longest e-mail: ‘I really like you, I liked kissing you, but I just want you to know I am not gay.’”

“On and on and on,” Notaro said.

“Tig wrote back, ‘O.K., dyke.’ And I guess that was kind of it.”

On her new album, “Drawn,” Notaro describes how she knew she wanted to spend her life with Allynne. After a gig in Philadelphia, Notaro was hospitalized, with internal bleeding, and had to have stomach surgery. “We had so many times where I was, like, ‘This is the person,’” Notaro says. “But that particular time . . . I’m in my little diaper, crinkle, crinkle, as I’m moving, and this is how I knew, Stephanie, I was, like, ‘Ah, she’s the one.’ She was laughing so hard.”

This spring, Notaro’s stepfather—Cowboy Ric, to her kids—died unexpectedly, of *C. difficile* infection. Max



*Stephanie Allynne and Tig Notaro*

and Finn overheard their mothers talking about burying him next to Notaro’s mother, in the family plot in Mississippi. (Ric inspired a central character in “One Mississippi,” a series that Notaro co-wrote with Allynne and starred in, based on her mother’s sudden death, in 2012.) “I’m neck-deep in grieving,” Notaro said. “And then your child is, like, ‘Wait, we have to bury Cowboy Ric?’ It’s, like, ‘Oh, gosh. Um, yes, we have to bury him.’ ‘Why do we have to bury Cowboy Ric?’ ‘Because he died, and that’s what you do when someone dies, you bury people.’ And he’s, like, ‘In the ground?’ ‘Yeah, in the ground.’ And he’s, like, ‘Well, we can just dig him up whenever we want to, right?’” She paused to consider the ways of kids: “You’re destroyed by your emotions, but you’re also laughing.”

*—Dana Goodyear*

ANNALS OF NATURE

# CONTACT

*Can humans truly learn how animals perceive our shared world?*

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT



*Learning what organisms experience could help explain what they communicate.*

One evening almost sixty years ago, a Tufts University researcher named Roger Payne was working in his lab when he heard a radio report about a whale that had washed up on a beach nearby. Although it was a cold, wet March night, he decided to drive to the shore. When he arrived, he discovered that the animal had been mutilated. Two passersby had carved their initials in its flanks. Someone had hacked off its flukes, and another person, or perhaps the same one, had stuck a cigar butt in its blowhole. Payne stood in the rain for a long time, gazing at the corpse. He had been studying moths; now he decided to switch his attention to cetaceans.

Aside from the dead one, Payne had never actually seen a whale, nor did he know where whales could be observed. At the suggestion of an acquaintance, he made his way to Bermuda. There he met an engineer who had worked for the United States Navy, monitoring Soviet submarines via microphones installed off the coast. While listening for enemy subs, the engineer had chanced upon other undersea sounds. He played a tape of some of them to Payne, who later recalled, "What I heard blew my mind."

Payne took a copy of the tape home with him. The sounds—made, the engineer had determined, by humpback whales—ranged from mournful wails that evoked the call of a shofar to high-pitched cries that resembled the squeals of piglets. Payne found the tape mesmerizing and listened to it hundreds of times. Finally, it dawned on him that what he was listening to had a structure.

With the help of a machine called a sound spectrograph, Payne converted the voices on the tape into a series of squiggle-like notations. The exercise took years, but eventually it confirmed what he had suspected. The humpbacks always made their wails, squeals, and grunts in a particular order—A, B, C, D, E and never A, B, D, C, E, in Payne's formulation. The paper in which he announced his discovery appeared in *Science* in the summer of 1971. "Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) produce a series of beautiful and varied sounds for a period of 7 to 30 minutes and then repeat the same series with considerable precision," Payne wrote. Each series, he argued, qualified as a "song."

While the paper was in the works, Payne arranged to have the humpbacks' songs released as an LP. The album spent several weeks on the Billboard 200 and sold more than a hundred thousand copies. This was a particularly impressive feat, as one commentator noted, for a "work with no musicians, no lyrics, no danceable beats and actually no singers either. (Humpback whales do not possess vocal cords; they make sound by their pushing air out through their nasal cavities.)" The humpbacks inspired many terrestrial performers; Judy Collins incorporated some of their calls into her album "Whales and Nightingales"; Pete Seeger wrote "Song of the World's Last Whale"; and the New York Philharmonic played "And God Created Great Whales," a piece composed by Alan Hovhaness.

In 1977, when NASA launched Voyagers 1 and 2, designed to probe the far reaches of the solar system, the songs of the humpbacks went with them. The agency outfitted each craft with a "golden record" that could be played using a stylus (also included) by any alien who happened to intercept it. The recording featured greetings in fifty-five languages—"Hello from the children of planet Earth," the English speaker said—as well as a sequence from one of Payne's whales.

At the time the Voyagers set out, no



ILLUSTRATION BY JÉRÔME BERTHIER

one knew what, if anything, the humpbacks were trying to convey. Today, the probes are more than ten billion miles from Earth, and still no one knows. But people keep hoping.

Imagine the following scene: You are in a room with an owl, a bat, a mouse, a spider, a mosquito, and a rattlesnake. Suddenly, all the lights go off. Instead of pulling out your phone to call an exterminator, you take a moment to ponder the situation. The bat, you realize, is having no trouble navigating, since it relies on echolocation. The owl has such good hearing that it can find the mouse in the dark. So can the rattlesnake, which detects the heat that the rodent is giving off. The spider is similarly unfazed by the blackout, because it senses the world through vibrations. The mosquito follows the carbon dioxide you're emitting and lands on your shin. You try to swat it away, but because you're so dependent on vision you miss it and instead end up stepping on the rattler.

Ed Yong, a science writer for *The Atlantic*, opens his new book, "An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us" (Random House), with a version of this thought experiment. (His version also includes a robin, an elephant, and a bumblebee, though not the potentially fatal encounter with the snake.) Yong is interested in what animals might communicate to us if they could, which is to say, what they perceive. Humans, he points out, see the world one way. Other species see it through very different eyes, and many don't see it at all. Attempting to exchange one world view—or, to use the term Yong favors, *Umwelt*—for another may be frustrating, but, he argues, that's what makes the effort worthwhile. It reminds us that, "for all our vaunted intelligence," our *Umwelt* is just one among millions.

Consider the scallop. (What's sold at the supermarket fish counter is just the muscle that scallops use to open and close their shells; the entire animal resembles a fried egg.) Some species of scallop have dozens of eyes; others have hundreds. Inside them are mirrors, composed of tiny crystals, that focus light onto the retina—retinas, really, since each eye has two. A scallop's eyes are arrayed around the edge of its body, like spikes on a dog collar.

Our brains combine the information gathered by our two eyes into a single image. With dozens (or hundreds) of eyes, scallops face a steeper challenge. But they don't have much brainpower to devote to the task. (In fact, they don't have brains.) In an effort to figure out what the scallops were doing with all their eyeballs, Daniel Speiser, a biologist at the University of South Carolina, developed an experiment he called Scallop TV. He strapped the animals onto little pedestals, planted them in front of a computer monitor, and forced them to watch images of drifting particles. Scallops are filter feeders, meaning that they consume plankton they strain out of the water. Speiser found that if the computer-generated particles were big enough and were moving slowly enough the scallops would open their shells. "It's wild and creepy to see all of them opening and closing at the same time," he tells Yong. He thinks that their eyes function independently, like motion detectors. When one eye senses something potentially tasty, it sends a signal to investigate. If Speiser is correct, Yong notes, then even though scallops' eyes are both numerous and complex, the animals don't possess what we would think of as vision. They see, he writes, "without scenes."

"An Immense World" is filled with strange creatures like scallops and strange experiments like Scallop TV. Harbor seals have a fringe of vibration-sensitive whiskers jutting from their snouts and eyebrows. To gauge how sensitive the whiskers are, a team of marine biologists at the University of Rostock, in Germany, trained two harbor seals to follow the path of a miniature submarine. Then they blindfolded the animals and plugged their ears. To study how moths elude bats, scientists at Boise State University cut off some moths' tails and fitted out others with fake wing extensions. To ascertain whether hermit crabs experience pain, a pair of researchers at Queen's University Belfast prodded them with electric shocks, and to figure out the same thing for squid a biologist at San Francisco State sliced them with scalpels. When




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*"This should be enough spinach for dinner, but we won't know until we sauté it."*

• • •

I got to the story of Kathy, a bottlenose dolphin who refused to don a sound-blocking mask that researchers wanted her to wear, I silently cheered for her.

The black ghost knifefish is, as its name implies, a nocturnal hunter. By firing a specialized organ in its tail, a knifefish creates an electric field that surrounds it like an aura. Receptors embedded in its skin then enable it to detect anything nearby that conducts electricity, including other organisms. One researcher suggests to Yong that this mode of perception, known as active electrolocation, is analogous to sensing hot and cold. Another posits that it's like touching something, only without making contact. No one can really say, though, since humans lack both electric organs and electroreceptors. "Who knows what it's like for the fish?" Malcolm MacIver, a professor of biomedical engineering at Northwestern, asks.

The most famous iteration of this question comes from the essay "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?," published in 1974 by the philosopher Thomas Nagel. Bats are closely enough related to humans, Nagel noted, that we believe them capable of what we'd call experience. But how can we get inside their furry little heads? The difficulty is not just that they can't tell us. It's that their *Umwelt* is utterly foreign.

One might try to imagine, Nagel wrote, "that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals," or that "one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth." But that wouldn't help much.

"I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat," Nagel insisted. "Yet if I try to imagine this, I am restricted to the resources of my own mind, and those resources are inadequate." The question "What is it like to be a bat?," he concluded, is one that people will never answer; it lies "beyond our ability to conceive."

Yong's response to Nagel, who makes several appearances in his pages, runs along the lines of "Yes, but . . ." Yes, we can never know what it's like for a *bat* to be a bat (or for a *knifefish* to be a knifefish). But we can learn a lot about echolocation and electrolocation and the many other methods that animals use to sense their surroundings. And this experience is, for us, mind-expanding. Yong speaks to Christopher Clark, a Cornell researcher who in the nineteen-seventies worked with Roger Payne, listening for whales. Whale songs lie at the opposite end of the spectrum from bat calls; they are very low frequency and can travel vast distances. If whales are using their songs to communicate with one another, they are doing so not just across space but also across time. A call made by a humpback near Bermuda would take twenty minutes to reach a humpback swimming off the coast of Nova Scotia. If the Canadian whale answered immediately, it would be forty minutes before the Bermuda whale heard back. To imagine what it's like to be a whale, "you have to stretch your thinking to completely different levels of dimension," Clark says.

Meanwhile, you don't have to understand what it's like for a bat to be a bat to appreciate what might mess with a bat's way of being. Yong pays a nighttime visit to Grand Teton National Park with Jesse Barber, a biologist at Boise State University. Barber is concerned about what's become known as "sensory pollution." Even in the Tetons, lights now illuminate the darkness. Insects are drawn to the lights; bats are attracted to the insects; and, the worry is, owls pick off the bats. To test this hypothesis, Barber and his students spend the night tagging bats in a campground parking lot. The lot, Barber complains, is "lit up like a Walmart because no one thought about the implications for wildlife."

Yong wants us to think more about these implications, which can upset entire ecosystems. He offers the example of Woodhouse's scrub jays, which are native to the western United States and central Mexico. The birds are important to the survival of piñon pines because they spread the trees' seeds. But they're bothered by the noise of compressors, so they avoid spots where natural gas is being extracted. Researchers found that, where the jays still find quiet, piñon-pine seedlings are four times more common than in noisy areas the birds have abandoned.

"Through centuries of effort, people have learned much about the sensory worlds of other species," Yong writes. "But in a fraction of the time, we have upended those worlds."

In September, 2015, a British documentary filmmaker named Tom Mustill was vacationing in California with a friend when the two decided to take a kayak trip in Monterey Bay. The aim of the trip was to see whales up close, but Mustill and his friend got

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more than they had bargained for. As they were paddling about, a humpback shot up out of the water just feet from their boat. (Mustill later compared the experience to watching the space shuttle take off.) The whale, which weighed thirty tons, came down more or less on top of them. The two kayakers were sucked under, along with their boat. Mustill thought that he had been torn apart and attributed his lack of pain to being in shock. But he and his friend both resurfaced in one piece. They made it to shore, where the company that had rented them the kayak offered them free hot chocolate.

Mustill continued with his vacation, which included a camping trip in Big Sur. When he got back in cell-phone range, he learned that someone on a nearby boat had captured his whole whale encounter on video, and that the video, posted to YouTube, had gone viral. By the time Mustill returned to London, it had been viewed four million times. The story was picked up around the world. "*Baleia de 40 toneladas quase esmaga casal de canoístas*" ("FORTY-TON WHALE NEARLY CRUSHES COUPLE OF KAYAKERS"), the Cape Verdean newspaper *Expresso das Ilhas* reported. " 'HOW AM I NOT DEAD?' " the headline in the *Daily Mail* ran.

As a result of his newfound fame, Mustill became, in his words, "a lightning conductor for whale fanatics." Everyone, it seemed, had a story about whales. Many involved interspecies communion. A member of the British Navy told him about how whales had sung to him in his submarine. A book publisher told him about how a pregnant dolphin—both dolphins and porpoises belong to the group known as toothed whales—had indicated that she, the publisher, was also pregnant, something she herself had not known at the time. A scientist recounted locking eyes with a gray whale that approached her in a Mexican lagoon and let her rub its enormous tongue.

Mustill himself couldn't shake the experience. A whale researcher told him that the only reason he had survived was that the humpback, upon noticing him and his friend, had purposefully turned its body so that it wouldn't kill them when it landed. Mustill decided to make a documentary, "The Whale Detective," which ran a couple of years ago on PBS. Now he has written "How to Speak Whale: A Voyage Into the Future of Animal Communication" (Grand Central).

Like Yong, Mustill is interested in animals' perceptions. But he wants to push beyond mere *Umwelt*-switching to an exchange of what might, broadly speaking, be called ideas. Early in the book, he goes to visit Payne, who's now eighty-seven. Why, he asks, do humpbacks sing? And what do their songs mean? Payne says he can't say: "I would desperately love to know."

Mustill isn't deterred. He delves into the latest research on animal communication. Many species have been shown to have highly complex systems of conveying information—so complex that they probably deserve to be called languages, though people tend to reserve the word "language" for themselves. Chimpanzees in the Budongo forest of Uganda, for instance, have a repertoire of at least fifty-eight gestures, which they combine in sequence much the way we combine words. Prairie dogs in the American West make distinctive cries to indicate different predators, and they seem to be able to incorporate descriptions into them: a big dog, for example, will elicit one sort of cry; a small dog, another sort. Chestnut-crowned babblers, sweet-looking brown-and-white birds native to Australia, respond differently when elements of their calls are played in different orders, much as we would respond differently when offered, say, a cake pan rather than a pancake.

Owing to advances in recording technologies and artificial intelligence, researchers in the burgeoning field of bioacoustics can now download thousands of hours of animal sounds and leave the work of sifting through them to a computer. This has opened up tantalizing new possibilities, including that of translating animal-communication systems into English—or Arabic, or Xhosa. Six years after Mustill was nearly killed by the humpback, a group of scientists from, among other institutions, Harvard, M.I.T., and Oxford formed the Cetacean Translation Initiative, or CETI, to try to decipher whale communications. (The team is working with sperm whales, which, instead of singing, issue patterns of clicks, known as codas, that have been compared to Morse code.)

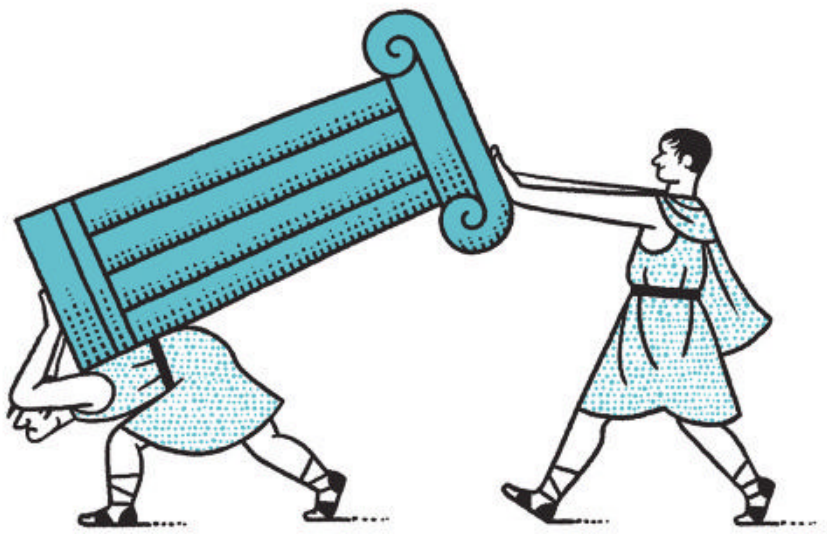
"Is it too much of a leap to think we might someday decode the sperm whale click for 'mother'?" Mustill writes. "For 'pain'? For 'hello'? The answer is, of course, that we cannot know until we try."

No less than "An Immense World," "How to Speak Whale" is dogged by the "what is it like" question. Mustill suggests that decoding whale-speak could finally produce an answer. The problem, or perhaps the paradox, is that to decipher whales' songs or clicks we would need to have access to the experiences they're referring to. And this is precisely what we lack. Wittgenstein was even blunter than Nagel. "If a lion could speak, we could not understand him," he maintains in "Philosophical Investigations."

Mustill never addresses this problem directly. "How to Speak Whale" is borne along by his faith that whales have something intelligible to tell us and his hope that one day soon we'll figure out what that is. "Songs of the Humpback Whale," the album that Payne released in 1970, helped bring about the end of commercial whaling, Mustill notes. Think how transformative it would be if we could chat with whales about their love lives or their sorrows or their thoughts on the philosophy of language. "The more we learn about other animals and discover evidence of their manifold capacities, the more we care, and this alters how we treat them," Mustill writes.

This seems to be true, or at least it seems as if it should be true. And yet every year the outlook for nonhuman species grows grimmer. In the case of marine-mammal species, the International Union for Conservation of Nature now classifies a third as endangered. A recent study by a team of European researchers concluded that even many of those species which seem to be doing all right, such as gray whales, are threatened by climate change. As Mustill himself observes, "To be alive and explore nature now is to read by the light of a library as it burns."

So what message would the world's remaining whales deliver to us if they had the chance? How do you click "What the #@ϟ⚛!"? ♦



# THE HISTORY OF GROUP PROJECTS

BY DENNARD DAYLE

*Dearest Adam:*

I hate to waste bark on an extra note, but I want to make sure we're on the same fig leaf.

In Year Zero, when we divided up duties (or privileges, as the Holy Father calls them), you chose serpent-slaying. In fact, you insisted on it. You promised to "make the first boots" out of anything that slithered past the gate.

That was charming, but I need you to follow through. Not to point fingers, but it's looking a little serpenty around here. Lots of missing mice and shed skin on the ground. To say nothing of the black clouds spelling out "I AM THE GREAT DEVOURING SERPENT." That's trouble.

I love sharing garden duties with you. But it has to be just that: *sharing*. Not me gardening and you chewing hallucinogenic flowers. You know I'm ophidiophobic. I'd probably say or eat anything to get rid of a snake. If you won't do it for God, do it for me.

We're a team. Don't leave me holding the first bag.

*Love, Eve*

*Hey, Paris:*

Hope this scroll finds you well. If not, have the messenger flogged. I know that makes you feel better after a tough battle.

Just a quick reminder that we still have to thoroughly inspect that wooden monstrosity the Greeks dropped off this morning. You have the password, so I can't get past the guards without you.

I'm glad things are going well with Helen, but we were just at war with her ex. Let's bring this thing home.

*Best, Aeneas*

P.S.: Did you see Achilles fight that river? Lunacy. Thank Apollo we're done with that.

*Dear James (Idiot) Longstreet:*

You call this a terrain map? This garbage is the closest I've come to questioning the white man's place in the natural order. Any of your slaves could have done a better job.

This forest full of cover you drew between us and the Yankees? It doesn't exist. I can only assume that you're just trying to practice drawing trees. Very pretty, James. It's a shame any soldier charging that gap will be blasted into nothing.

Perhaps you don't read the papers, but this battle is slightly important. It will determine if Yankee morale survives the summer, along with most of our men. Please pull your weight.

Unfortunately, there's no time to redo these maps. We have to show Lee something. Just remember that, tomorrow night, every dead patriot will be on your head. Woe to the fools sent to eke a victory out of this.

*Scornfully yours, General Pickett*

*Hello, Jonas:*

Beautiful, isn't she? The grandest commercial dirigible the world has ever seen. And, after her second transatlantic tour dazzles the doubters, there are sure to be many more. Jules Verne's race is on, and we'll win it.

All you need to do is watch the pressure gauge.

Easy, right? While officials run around navigating, herding passengers, and checking the water tanks, just keep an eye on a dial. Just give us one active, open, awake eye. Please.

*Yours, Captain Gunther*

*earestday ethelyay:*

ouyay ademay uresay isthay inelay isn't appedtay, ightray?

*estbay, uliusjay*

*Dear Omega D5:*

Everyone screws up. When I joined the Council, I recommended contacting a race of sentient, spacefaring locusts. Believe me, it took centuries to clean up that mess. I still can't sleep without an electrified mosquito net.

But bringing back those humans? A little more than a screwup. Introducing them to our lives has been nothing short of apocalyptic. An apocalypse it was your specific job to prevent.

I know that fact-checking isn't as fun as First Contact. But it would have helped to know if a species was dim enough to fight two world wars. With that kind of planet, we should have taken a wait-and-see attitude. Or vaporized them from orbit.

Now we don't have either option. There are humans in every space station, starting new religions and coughing on endangered sentients. Last week, one of them landed on a Council territory and declared it "New Texas." We vivisected him quickly, but there are certain to be more on the way.

I encourage you to adopt a more fastidious attitude. Get into details. When you find a new species, ask: Did they take fascism seriously? How many genocides per decade do they commit? Are their leaders the loudest, most sociopathic members of their hives? Did they invent nukes before nonstick pans? The galaxy will be better for it.

*Sincerely, Alpha 70-1* ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

# A HAMLET FOR OUR TIME

*The director Robert Icke wrests modern resonances from Shakespeare's words.*

BY REBECCA MEAD



*Icke pores over Shakespeare with a scholar's attention and a dramatist's freedom.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF BROWN

How to be Hamlet? That was the question facing Robert Icke, the theatre director, and Alex Lawther, the actor, when they met recently in London to rehearse the play from which, it has been quipped, everyone knows at least six words. They were in a spacious, light-filled hall at the Bishopsgate Institute, a Victorian-era structure near the Spitalfields Market. How could they make anew a work that was already being celebrated more than four hundred years ago, when its author walked along the streets directly outside the institute? Shakespeare lived for a time in St. Helen's Bishopsgate, a parish so close by that he could nearly have covered the distance in the time that it takes most actors to deliver his most quoted soliloquy. In a few weeks, Lawther would be performing as Hamlet at the Armory, in New York City. In the play, the Prince's dead father reappears as a ghost, but Lawther and Icke were contending with ghosts of their own: the accumulated legacies of performers, directors, critics, and other interpreters who have played Hamlet, or seen "Hamlet." In other words: How not to be Hamlet?

Lawther and Icke were going over the Prince's most famous monologue, about suicide, which falls in the middle of the play. Lawther, trying to summarize his character's emotional state, spoke telegraphically: "Seen Ophelia. Scared her. Has a book." (After the soliloquy, Polonius comes across Hamlet and asks what he is reading.) Slight, in jeans, sneakers, and a dark shirt, Lawther, who is twenty-seven, has a soft voice and a gentle manner.

"Had a bad night of sleep," Icke, who is thirty-five, added. Tall and broad-shouldered, with owlish spectacles, he sat cross-legged on the floor in a black denim jacket and black sweatpants.

Lawther said, "The book thing is mysterious to me still."

"It's odd, isn't it?" Icke said. "It's almost like that's what you *used* to do in the lobby for four hours together." His observations often folded in phrases from the play ("Sometimes he walks four hours together / here in the lobby," Polonius says of Hamlet, when contemplating the source of the Prince's melancholy), but they weren't showy quotations; he was reflexively fitting Elizabethan language into a modern context. Carrying a book around was, Icke suggested, "almost like force of habit—like you're on autopilot."

"Yeah, that's true," Lawther said.

"And then it's a useful shield, isn't it, when you see Polonius?" Icke went on. "Because I can't imagine you are in a fit state to read anything."

Lawther nodded. "So I'm looking at the pages, at the words, not being able to focus on them," he said.

"Maybe you are telling the truth when Polonius says, 'What do you read, my lord?,' and you say, 'Words,' " Icke said, with a laugh. (Hamlet's response is often delivered mockingly.)

Lawther considered Icke's argument. Rocking back and forth on his heels, he ran a hand through his tousled hair. For a moment longer, he was silent. Then he began: "To be. Or—not . . . to be. That is the question."

Icke, one of Europe's boldest theatre directors, is known for restaging, and sometimes rewriting, canonical works in surprising and illuminating ways—often by going back to the page and to first premises, asking questions that performance tradition or textual familiarity can leave unexamined. At the Almeida Theatre, in London, where he was the associate director from 2013 to

2019, he directed his own adaptation of "The Oresteia." His version took bracing liberties with the foundational tenets of Greek tragedy: there was no chorus, and characters died onstage, as they never did for the Greeks. The show received rave reviews: Susannah Clapp wrote in the *Guardian* that "you can almost see the dust flying off the old master." (It will be performed in repertory at the Armory with "Hamlet.") In Icke's production of Schiller's "Mary Stuart," the audience arrived at the theatre not knowing which of two actresses—Juliet Stevenson or Lia Williams—would play the title role and which the role of Queen Elizabeth I. An onstage coin flip decided the casting, a high-stakes and thrillingly theatrical move that underlined the arbitrariness of an unstable monarchy.

Icke first staged "Hamlet" in 2017, also at the Almeida, with Andrew Scott in the lead role; the production transferred to the West End later that year. Scott was then best known for his performance as Moriarty, on "Sherlock"—and later played the "hot priest" on "Fleabag"—and this was his first Shakespearean role onstage. The production, in which Denmark was imagined as a chilling surveillance state, incorporated the use of video to powerful effect—the Ghost is initially observed on grainy security footage—and was heralded for its emotional veracity. Especially praised was the immediacy of Scott's performance; even when speaking the character's most familiar lines, he appeared to be thinking and feeling them for the first time.

To prepare to direct Scott, Icke had delved into the literature of grief, reading C. S. Lewis's 1961 memoir, "A Grief Observed," about the death of his beloved wife, and the work of Thomas Lynch, the contemporary poet who is also an undertaker. Whereas earlier generations have viewed Hamlet as neurotically indecisive or Oedipally compromised, the Hamlet of Icke and Scott is undone by grief. "The grief is present before the Ghost is—maybe the Ghost could even be a product of the grief," Icke told me. "Hamlet's black clothes, constant tears, and general disposition are, he says, only the outside trappings of woe—it's what's inside him that counts."

The production was supposed to come to the Armory in 2020, but the pandemic upended this plan. Scott was unavailable to perform the role in New York, and so Icke cast Lawther, another actor best known for roles in film and television. (He starred in the dark-comedy series "The End of the F***ing World" and anchored a particularly harrowing "Black Mirror" episode, "Shut Up and Dance.") Lawther is nearly twenty years Scott's junior, and though much of the production remains unchanged—with several of the lead actors reprising their roles—the play's gravity has been shifted by the presence of a more youthful Hamlet. "There is no way I can fall back into the version of the play we had, because the version of the play we had was calibrated around an older Hamlet," Icke told me. "For example, in the second scene, when Laertes asks if he can go back to Paris, and Claudius says, 'Of course you can,' and off he goes, Hamlet is sitting there going, 'Great! They are going to let me go back to university—I can't wait, this has been hellish.' And then they say no, and he realizes that he can't get out. I always thought Andrew's Hamlet was doing his Ph.D., or maybe his second Ph.D., and waiting around to be king—and so it's a much bigger deal for *that* Hamlet that Claudius has popped in between the election and his hopes. But the theatrical logic is very different when Hamlet is an undergraduate, and he just wants to go back to Wittenberg to do his finals. That feels like a completely different story."

Hamlet's grief also has a different weight when the role is played by an actor, like Lawther, who still resembles a teen-ager. The portrayal may be particularly powerful for a contemporary audience aware of the alarmingly high incidence of mental-health struggles among young people today. Icke observed, "The loneliness and vulnerability of Hamlet, the isolation of his feelings and his grieving, and the way that seems to crack into something more dangerous than sadness feels especially sharp in the mouth of someone as young as Alex."

Lawther told me, "Working with Rob, there's a real insistence on treating the text like it's a new piece of work. Everything is up for grabs. Rob is really surgical, and precise, about cutting through all of that plastic wrapping and trying to work out what is actually happening in a scene, in a way we can understand today." Watching Shakespeare had often left Lawther feeling frustrated, he said, "because I've not understood, and I *should* have understood." He added, "Hopefully, we are pushing against that. It feels like Rob is trying to make a play that his fifteen-year-old self would have been excited by."

In fact, Icke first read "Hamlet" when he was fifteen, in Stockton-on-Tees, in northeast England. (His speech, which is enthusiastic and often amused, retains a regional accent.) The class analyzed key scenes for weeks. "Hamlet" left Icke cold. "The play never made sense to me emotionally," he told me.

Not until Icke became an undergraduate, at Cambridge, did his engagement with Shakespeare intensify. He began one-on-one tutorials with Anne Barton, the influential critic and scholar, who by then was in her seventies and teaching only a handful of students. "I used to go to her once a week, and write an essay, and argue about text and so on," Icke told me. Barton was married to John Barton, a founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Icke developed relationships with both Bartons that endured long past his time as a student. Anne Barton died in 2013. At her memorial, Icke recalled, "a lot of people said they had had the same experience—that Anne kind of took them under her wing, and took their brain out of their head, and made it smarter, then gave it back."

Among the plays he and Barton discussed was "Hamlet." Barton, he learned, was impatient with the character of Ophelia: in her introduction to the Penguin edition of the play, she called Ophelia "naïve, passive and dependent." Icke told me, "We talked about 'Why isn't Ophelia's story moving? Why do you never care? Why do you never follow that story—and why is it never clear why she's mad?' I always feel like Ophelia is sidelined in productions, and even in the text." Icke proposed a dramaturgical solution, arguing that the play would work much better if two early scenes were transposed, and Polonius




*"She's a Malaysian Longhair, but we don't know what."*

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and his two children—Laertes and Ophelia—were introduced *before* Hamlet is told by his friend Horatio of the sighting of his father's spirit. "I always felt that you were getting Part Two of the more important story before you were getting Part One of the less important story, and that made the less important story feel genuinely irrelevant," Icke explained. "It was always, like, 'That guy's going to see a ghost! And, by the way, here's some advice about your trip to France.' And you think, I don't care about that—there's a *ghost!*"

Icke's Almeida production contains this structural change, so that Hamlet's complex relationship with Ophelia is introduced—in the form of Laertes warning her to deflect any advances from the Prince—before Horatio informs him of the appearance of the Ghost. "I think it makes a huge difference as to how you are invited to take seriously the Ophelia bit of the story—and it gives me a hugely valued excuse to get Hamlet and Ophelia together alone onstage for a moment," Icke said. The revision not only enriches the emotional dynamic between Hamlet and Ophelia; it frames Ophelia's tragedy-within-a-tragedy as the story of a young woman whose family is so uncertain of its social position that it cannot allow her to pursue her own desires. In this context, it becomes piercing when, after Ophelia's suicide, Gertrude expresses a belated wish that Ophelia had been her son's bride. "You're, like—what? Gertrude was fine with it? *Everyone* was fine with it?" Icke said. "That was something Anne Barton said that was really helpful to me—that all the ingredients are there for the match to proceed, and what happens is just about insecurity, and that Ophelia doesn't believe in herself enough. There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. So much of the play is like that."

Altering the text of "Hamlet" is hardly without precedent. Most modern productions depend on judicious excisions: trimming the lengthy, business-filled gravedigger scene, or taking a knife to the entire subplot in which young Fortinbras, the son of the Norwegian ruler who was defeated by the elder Hamlet, sets about reconquering lands that his father had lost. Uncut, "Hamlet" might run to an audience-defeating four hours. Elizabethan practice seems to have been to tear much more speedily through the plays—at the original Globe Theatre, performances began at two in the afternoon, which, in the winter, was only a couple of hours before twilight. The prologue of "Romeo and Juliet" refers to its "two hours' traffic of our stage," but Icke told me that no modern production of the play is over so quickly, "partly because we speak more slowly, and partly because we spend more time on the scenery changes and on the silly dances at the party."

In some respects, Icke takes fewer liberties with "Hamlet" than have some other recent versions. A production at the Globe earlier this year replaced the Player King's gnarly "Hecuba" speech with a more accessible scene from "Romeo and Juliet," and turned the gravedigger scene into a modern-language standup routine. The composer Brett Dean's recent opera of "Hamlet," which opened in May at the Met, in New York, dispenses with most of the fretful monologues, turning the story into a sleek potboiler. The casting of a female Hamlet—as happened at the Young Vic last year, in the person of Cush Jumbo—is now conventional enough not to raise eyebrows. Last year also introduced an octogenarian Hamlet: Sir Ian McKellen played the lead in an age-blind production, fifty years after he last had a crack at the role.

Directors and scholars of "Hamlet" have long had to confront the fact that there is no authoritative version of the play. In the early seventeenth century, three different versions were printed: the First Quarto (1603), the Second Quarto (1605), and the First Folio (1623). There are radical differences among them. The First Quarto—sometimes called the Bad Quarto—seems to have been transcribed from the memory of an actor who played the minor role of Marcellus, one of the watchmen. (Scholars have noted that the lines spoken by Marcellus are unusually consistent with later versions.) The Second Quarto is roughly twice the length of the First Quarto and differs from it in about a thousand, sometimes very small, instances. In the "Hamlet" that appears in the First Folio—the first collected works of Shakespeare, posthumously printed in 1623—more than two hundred lines of the Second Quarto have been cut, and seventy lines have been added. In one of the First Quarto's most notable differences, Hamlet's most in-

delible six words are followed by "Ay, there's the point"—a variation that, on the very rare occasions it is staged, can leave audiences befuddled, as if the actor playing the Prince had forgotten some of the most famous lines in the canon.

For scholars, the differences in the various "Hamlet"s offer a puzzle to unlock: what do they tell us about Shakespeare's revision process, Elizabethan performance practices, and the fallibility of scribes and compositors? In "1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare," James Shapiro, a professor of English at Columbia, gives a close reading of one such discrepancy. In Claudius's confession scene, which appears immediately after the play-within-a-play, Hamlet happens upon the King, who is apparently at prayer, and considers killing him on the spot. In the Second Quarto, Hamlet says, "Now might I do it, but now 'a is a-praying"; the First Folio version reads, "Now might I do it pat, now he is praying." Shapiro writes of this minute textual divergence: "In the earlier version, a more hesitant Hamlet can't take revenge because Claudius is praying. In the revised version, a more opportunistic Hamlet can act precisely because he has caught his adversary off guard but won't, because to do so would mean sending a shriven Claudius to heaven." Shapiro argues reprovingly that modern editors, by combining different bits and pieces from the three versions, have "cobbled together a 'Hamlet' that Shakespeare neither wrote nor imagined."

A theatre director need not observe a scholar's rigor. Although Icke's "Hamlet" hews most closely to the Second Quarto, it incorporates variations from the other versions and modernizes the language at different points. When Icke's Laertes warns Ophelia to ignore Hamlet's overtures, she reminds him not to behave like "a puffed and reckless libertine" who "ignores his own advice"—rather than, as the Second Quarto and the First Folio have it, "recks not his own rede." Icke's textual choices and adjustments have been collated in a new edition of the play, which was edited by Ilinca Radulian, an associate director on the Almeida production. Icke's version also dispenses with the traditional Act and Scene divisions, which were imposed by an editor in the late seventeenth century. It omits punctuation, too, partly because nobody actually knows how—or if—Shakespeare punctuated his manuscripts. Icke writes in an introduction that his broader aim is "to strip away from the play its weighty literary inheritance, the heavy sense of dusty rules, the clutter of technical terminology, and to return it simply to being sheet music for actors to act."

Among Icke's most consequential textual choices is the inclusion of a scene, from the First Quarto, in which Horatio informs Gertrude that Claudius has plotted to have Hamlet killed on his voyage to England. This has the effect of deepening and complicating the character of Gertrude, whose trajectory through the play, in Icke's hands, involves a gradual realization of the ways in which her own choices—starting with her insistence that Hamlet go not to Wittenberg—have helped bring about the tragic conclusion. (In New York, Jennifer Ehle will play the role.) "If only Hamlet went to Wittenberg, and came back home at Christmas—I always think that would be the ideal outcome," Icke said. "Let him calm down a bit—let him go visit his mates and do his plays. And then you can have a grownup chat with him, and maybe apologize a bit about the speediness of the marriage."

Icke's Claudius—played both in London and in New York by Angus Wright—is a more sympathetic character than is usually portrayed. The production even raises doubts about whether Claudius has in fact committed the murderous deed of which the Ghost accuses him. Icke frames Claudius's confession—"Oh, my offense is rank it smells to heaven / it hath the primal eldest curse upon't / A brother's murder"—as possibly just a product of Hamlet's fevered brain. The scene is normally staged as a scene of prayer, with Hamlet eavesdropping on the King's tormented mutterings. In Icke's version, the Prince hears these words while brandishing a gun at the King. "The deeper you go into that play, in terms of travelling in it through time as an audience, the more you are invited to be suspicious about what Hamlet is seeing," Icke told me. "I don't think you are invited to endorse his perspective. I don't think it's a play about a corrupt world and the one truthful individual in it."



A play as rich as "Hamlet" resists being summed up by any single theme, Icke acknowledged. But exploring the literature on grief—and how the emotion can sometimes become debilitating—helped him find a fresh way of looking at Hamlet's predicament. The Prince, Icke realized, is so paralyzed with grief that he has become a bystander to his own life. Seen in this light, the Ghost's final words to his son—"Remember me"—seemed less like a plea than like an oppressive command. And Claudius's first speech as king, in which he declares that it is "wisest sorrow" to think on his departed brother "together with remembrance of ourselves," struck Icke as emotionally mature. Icke went on, "When do you stop mourning and resume life? When do you stop thinking about your dad and think about yourself? How can a child follow all of his father's advice, about thoughts and clothes and manners, and at the same time 'to thine own self be true'? When does remembering the past start to ruin the future?"

Not every critic has been enthusiastic about the way Icke interrogates canonical works. Michael Billington, the lead drama critic for the *Guardian* for nearly fifty years, until his retirement from the role in 2019, called Icke's "Hamlet" production "chic yet dotty." Among the decisions that puzzled him was the staging of Claudius's confession scene. "Why, if the king came clean, wouldn't his nephew shoot him?" he wrote. Billington had been even more skeptical of a 2016 Almeida production of "Uncle Vanya," which Icke had set in the contemporary English countryside. "Icke is fighting with phantoms if he assumes that only a radical approach can get

to the heart of the play," he thundered.

Icke was unfazed. "I think those arguments are so silly—when people say, 'This is not meant to be done this way.'" he told me. "With Chekhov, it's *meant* to be done in Russian, with an interval between every one of its four acts." Claims about tradition are even more questionable when applied to the works of Shakespeare, the original performances of which there is very little documentary evidence.

In 2018, Icke was invited to work at the Internationaal Theatre Amsterdam, the company co-founded by the experimental Belgian director Ivo van Hove. Icke is now an artist-in-residence there. In Amsterdam, he has directed a tense production of "Oedipus" in which the titular figure is portrayed as a modern-day politician anxiously awaiting election results in a "war room" with a large countdown clock. (The critic Mark Fisher said that "the narrative exercises a thriller-like grip, the countdown clock marking time, not only until the election results, but before the secrets of the past explode into the present.") In April, the Amsterdam theatre premièred "Judas," a new play, written and directed by Icke, which explores textual variations among the four Gospels and all the Apocrypha in order to complicate the story of the Biblical traitor.

The downside of his newfound creative freedom, Icke said, is having to make work in Dutch rather than in English. In Amsterdam, he told me with regret, mounting a new Shakespeare production is off the table, at least for now. Though some critics may disapprove of Icke's approach to Shakespeare, it is far from iconoclastic: the depth of his attention to the plays is an indicator of the depth of his appreciation of Shakespeare's art. Icke said of the Bard, "He's astonishingly, humblingly great. He really is as good as he's cracked up to be. He writes great parts for actors. The plays themselves are deep and resonant and beautiful and moving. And funny! There is a particular relief-pleasure in coming back to works of art which are so profoundly graceful and achieved and full. It reminds you that it's possible." He is, though, impatient with the sometimes calcified performance tradition of Shakespeare, and with any approach to the plays which assumes that their meaning is settled. "Like, where's the hard proof that Desdemona *didn't* cheat?" he asked me during one of our conversations. "It's always cast really wimpy—like she's twelve and Victorian. But she left her house in the middle of the night to get married! I've never seen a production where the insecurity is plausible. You always think the jealousy makes Othello look like an idiot, because there's obviously not been any infidelity. I think you want to set the pieces up so that it's very plausible, so that by the time you hit the end, and Iago says, 'What you know, you know,' you're, like, 'What do I know, mate? I don't know anything.'"

At its best, Icke's method—poring over the text with a scholar's meticulousness but with a dramatist's freedom—has the rare effect of reshaping viewers' experience of a play with which they might have believed themselves familiar. Our understanding of Shakespeare's works has been formed as much by performance tradition as by the words on the page. In one of our conversations, Icke drew on the example of the so-called balcony scene in "Romeo and Juliet," which—as other observers have noted—makes no reference to a balcony at all. The tradition of positioning Juliet on one didn't begin until the eighteenth century. Icke told me, "As soon as you see a balcony, you're dealing with a production that probably hasn't read the play very carefully. To be faithful that way is to be profoundly unfaithful. I want that scene *super*-teen-age—set in her bedroom—and I want him in through the window, and she locks the door, and there's a bed. That's a much better scene. It's a much more 'Oh, God, are we really going to do this?' scene. They are both so anxious about it—are they married, and are the vows the right vows, and should he get out or should he come in? And it's only at the end of the scene that they get around to admitting that they love each other, because they are being so angsty."

The performance tradition of "Romeo and Juliet" is so strong, Icke asserted, that it drains the scene of any narrative or surprise: "You're just, like, 'Oh, here is the famous bit.'" Given that "Hamlet" is composed almost entirely of famous bits, reëxamining what's actually on the page can be all the more unexpected. When I got home one evening from talking with Icke, and found my sixteen-year-old son writing a paper on




*"I thought I'd drop by and see how you were enjoying your alone time."*

"Hamlet" for English class, I e-mailed Icke the essay prompt: " 'The usurping king is no simple villain but a complex, compelling figure.' " Icke wrote back, "Great question—but tell your son from me that there is no usurping king in Hamlet. . . . Claudius seems to have been voted in fair and square (it is, after all, an elective monarchy)."

When weighing the question of how his "Hamlet" should be, Icke told me, he found a key insight in the advice that the Prince—who is himself a director and playwright, of sorts—offers to the Players: "Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue." Icke told me, "British theatre has interpreted that as a line meaning 'Speak the speech as I pronounced it to you before, in an unseen scene.' And it seems to me to be much more simple—that he is saying, 'Speak it to me as I was speaking to you. Just say it *normally*.' " Icke went on, "So much of Hamlet's advice to the Players is him going, 'Stop overacting. Just make it really conversational.' He says nothing about verse. He says nothing about rhyming couplets—even though the play he is talking about is incredibly formal in its verse, and really punches its rhymes at you, in a fairly medieval way. I had a strong sense that you could find all the beauty and emotional intricacy in the dialogue while making it feel like they talk like that all the time. It didn't have to be this ridiculous overdone exercise, like you're talking to some children who aren't listening."

There are dimensions of "Hamlet" that have ceased to be perceptible to a modern audience—that couldn't be conveyed at the most drearily pedagogical speed—but would have been rivetingly present to Shakespeare's contemporaries. Hamlet's speculation about whether the Ghost is truly his father's spirit returned from the dead, or whether it is an emanation of the Devil, sent to tempt him into evil, would have made a very different impression in a world in which the Church had, only a few decades earlier, written the medieval concept of purgatory out of its theology. "Different parts of the play light up at different times," Icke said. "And others go dark." In Hamlet's final soliloquy, he disparages his own inaction compared with the martial maneuvers of young Fortinbras, who commands an army to battle over a worthless patch of ground in Poland—"to my shame I see / the imminent death of twenty thousand men / that for a fantasy and trick of fame / go to their graves like beds." This moment has taken on a new resonance since the twenty-fourth of February, 2022.

"You try to be as honest as you can," Icke told me. "I am not making it for an audience in the fifteen-nineties. Even if it was one hundred per cent authentic, in terms of every stitch on every actor's body, and every intonation, what you can't change is the landscape inside my head. I am not thinking about Henry VIII making his own church. It is not what I bring into the theatre with me. It is not what I read on my phone before I switch it off for the play. There's a dishonesty, I think, in pretending that is possible. Because the most authentic thing that exists is the relationship between the actor and the audience."



Before there is an audience, though, there is just an actor and a director, together in a rehearsal room, working out in conversation how to speak the speech. At the Bishopsgate Institute, after Lawther had run through the soliloquy, Icke backed up to the lines "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause." The final words, Icke suggested, were a kind of self-command: " 'Must give us pause'—you're using it to stop the thought, and go, 'O.K. Think about *that*.' " Icke went on, "But it could also be it connects to what goes just before it—'What dreams may come?' It sounds almost threatening—like the *dreams* are going to come and stop you in your tracks. The problem is that death-sleep I've been talking about—what dreams are going to show up after we have fallen off the end of the universe?"

Lawther's expression was serious, concentrated, vulnerable. His face seemed haunted by Hamlet's knotty intellection as he turned his own ideas over in his mind. " 'What dreams may come / when we have shuffled off this mortal coil / must give us pause,' " he repeated.

"It's that 'pause' that stops the image," Icke suggested. "You go, 'Yeah, *that's* what I'm talking about. *That's* why people don't just kill themselves.' "

"It feels like the videotape suddenly runs backwards," Lawther said.

"Exactly," said Icke. "And it's also clear now, in a way that it wasn't before, that you aren't really talking about killing Claudius in any direct way. Because when you say 'take arms,' I think you are going to say, 'Take arms against Claudius,' and then it doesn't go that way."

"'Take arms against Claudius and, by opposing, end him,' " Lawther said, his voice ironic.

"But that's kind of what you *should* be saying," Icke said.

"It *is* what I should be saying," Lawther agreed.

"This speech feels like it's got more to do with the first soliloquy than anything that happened to you last night in Elsinore," Icke said. "It feels like it picks up on 'If only the everlasting had not fixed / His canon against self-slaughter'—and it just unpacks that thought." He went on, "It's also weird because you don't go, 'Look, I know you are wondering whether I am going to kill my uncle.' You very much take the lead in what we are all going to think about. You don't seem at all embarrassed by going, 'O.K., guys—I've been thinking about suicide.' You don't project any shame."

"That's right," Lawther said. "Not yet."

"It's *so* weird, this play," Icke said. He reminded Lawther that this speech takes place just one day after Hamlet has seen his father's ghost. But the Prince is lost in his own plot. "None of what's coming next—Polonius, and then 'Oh, my God, Guildenstern! Hi, Rosencrantz!,' and then the Players—none of that takes any real account of the fact that you're supposed to be killing Claudius."

Lawther laughed softly.

So did Icke, who added, "It's almost like you're having the day you would have had anyway." ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

# KING JOSH

*The surreal case of the disgruntled C.I.A. hacker accused of exposing the agency's digital arsenal.*

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE

Nestled west of Washington, D.C., amid the bland northern Virginia suburbs, are generic-looking office parks that hide secret government installations in plain sight. Employees in civilian dress get out of their cars, clutching their Starbucks, and disappear into the buildings. To the casual observer, they resemble anonymous corporate drones. In fact, they hold Top Secret clearances and work in defense and intelligence. One of these buildings, at an address that is itself a secret, houses the cyberintelligence division of the Central Intelligence Agency. The facility is surrounded by a high fence and monitored by guards armed with military-grade weapons. When employees enter the building, they must badge in and pass through a full-body turnstile. Inside, on the ninth floor, through another door that requires badge access, is a C.I.A. office with an ostentatiously bland name: the Operations Support Branch. It is the agency's secret hacker unit, in which a cadre of élite engineers create cyberweapons.

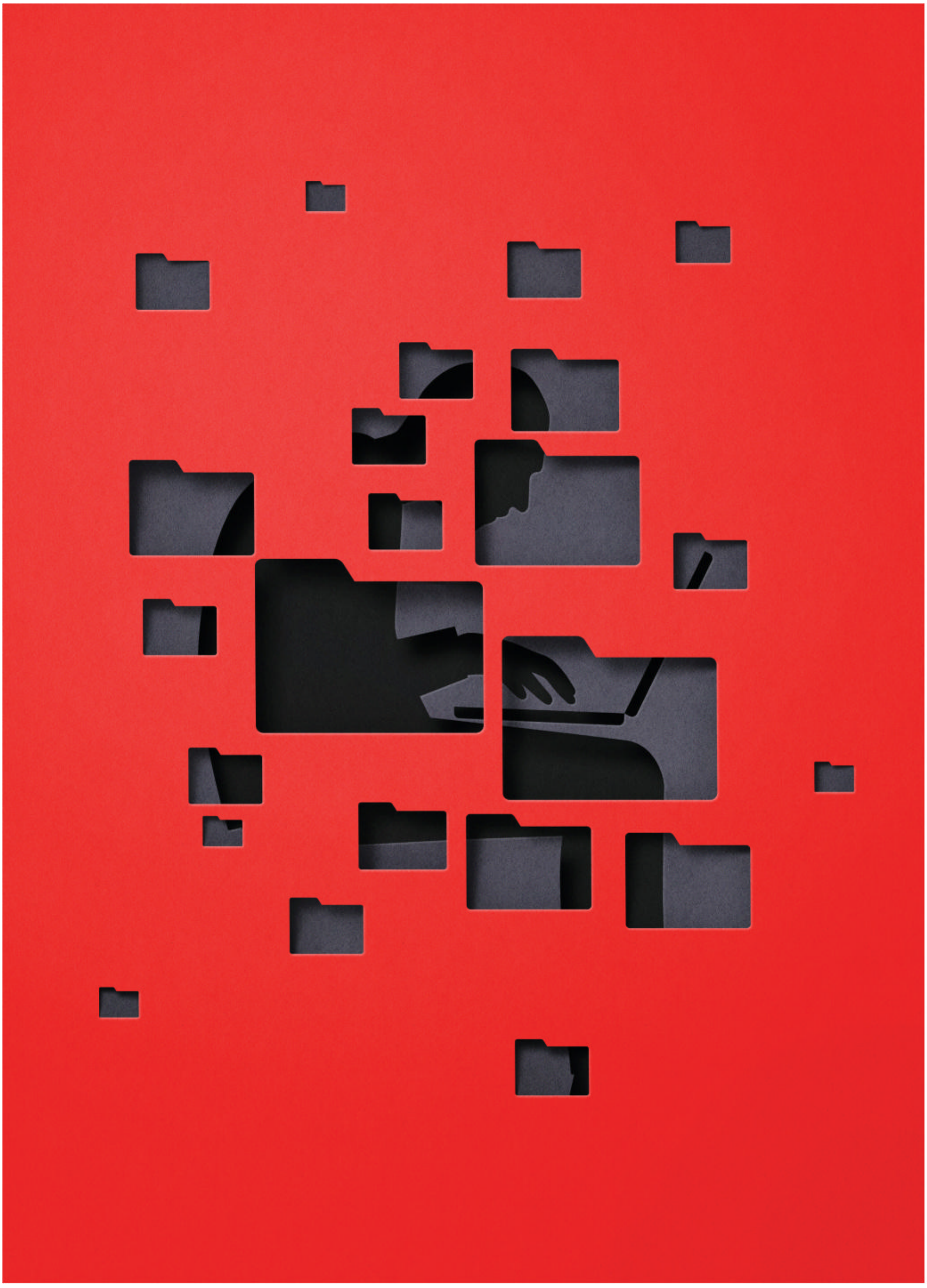
"O.S.B. was focussed on what we referred to as 'physical-access operations,'" a senior developer from the unit, Jeremy Weber—a pseudonym—explained. This is not dragnet mass surveillance of the kind more often associated with the National Security Agency. These are hacks, or "exploits," designed for individual targets. Sometimes a foreign terrorist or a finance minister is too sophisticated to be hacked remotely, and so the agency is obliged to seek "physical access" to that person's devices. Such operations are incredibly dangerous: a C.I.A. officer or an asset recruited to work secretly for the agency—a courier for the terrorist; the finance minister's personal chef—must surreptitiously implant the malware by hand. "It could be somebody who was willing to type on a keyboard for us," Weber said. "It often was somebody who was willing to plug a thumb drive into the machine." In this manner, human spies, armed with the secret digital payloads designed by the Operations Support Branch, have been able to compromise smartphones, laptops, tablets, and even TVs: when Samsung developed a set that responded to voice commands, the wizards at the O.S.B. exploited a software vulnerability that turned it into a listening device.

The members of the O.S.B. "built quick-reaction tools," Anthony Leonis, the chief of another cyberintelligence unit of the C.I.A., said. "That branch was really good at taking ideas and prototypes and turning them into tools that could be used in the mission, very quickly." According to the man who supervised the O.S.B., Sean, the unit could be "a high-stress environment," because it was supporting life-or-death operations. (With a few exceptions, this piece refers to agency employees by pseudonyms or by their first names.)

But, while these jobs were cutting edge and—at least vicariously—dangerous, the O.S.B. was, in other respects, just like any office. There was a bullpen of cubicle workstations. A dozen or so people clocked in every day. "We were kind of known as the social branch," another O.S.B. employee, Frank Stedman, recalled. The experience of O.S.B. engineers bore some resemblance to the Apple TV+ drama "Severance," in that each morning they entered a milieu with its own customs and camaraderie—one sealed off from the rest of their lives. Because of national-security concerns, they couldn't take work home, or talk with anyone on the outside about what they did all day. Their office was a classified sanctum, a locked vault. Like the crew of a submarine, they forged strong bonds—and strong antagonisms.

There was banter, plenty of it, much of it jocular, some of it juvenile. The coders were mostly young men, and they came up with nicknames for one another. One unit member, who got braces as an adult, became known as Train Tracks. When another brought food into the office one day, but didn't share it with some members of the team, his colleagues bestowed a new handle: Dick Move. The group's ultimate manager was a more senior C.I.A. official, named Karen, who acknowledged that the members could get "boisterous," adding, "Folks could get a little loud, a little bit back and forth." Some O.S.B. guys brought Nerf guns to work—not mere pistols but big, colorful machine guns—and they would occasionally shoot darts at one another from their desks. Sometimes people got carried away, and work was paused for some sustained bombardment. But Silicon Valley was known for tricking out offices with foosball tables and climbing walls, and it's likely that the C.I.A. wanted to foster a loose culture on the hacking team, to help engineers remain innovative and, when necessary, blow off steam.

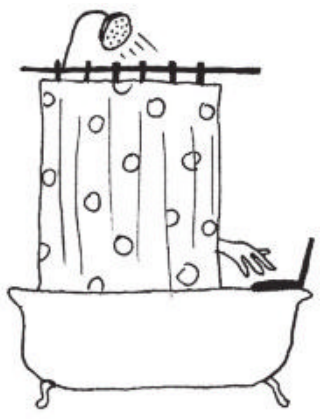
One of the Nerf gunfighters was Joshua Schulte—his real name. A skinny Texan in his twenties, he had a goatee and a shaved head. In what may have been a preëmptive gambit, Schulte gave himself the nickname Bad Ass, going so far as to make a fake nameplate and stick it on his cubicle. But others in the office called him Voldemort—a reference to the hairless villain in the Harry Potter books. Schulte and his colleagues worked on sophisticated malware with such code names as AngerQuake and Brutal Kangaroo. The hackers christened their exploits with names that reflected personal enthusiasms. Several programs were named for brands of whiskey: there was Wild Turkey, and Ardbeg, and Laphroaig. One was called McNugget. Though there was something dissonantly adolescent about



*At the C.I.A., Joshua Schulte became so known for his temper that his colleagues gave him a nickname: the Nuclear Option.*

ILLUSTRATION BY EIKO OJALA

naming highly classified digital hacking tools in such a fashion, it seemed harmless enough: if the tools worked as planned, none of the code would ever be detected. And, if the target of an operation *did* discover that some nasty bit of malware had infiltrated her device, a silly name would offer no clue that it had been created by the United States government. Deniability was central to what the O.S.B. did.



On March 7, 2017, the Web site WikiLeaks launched a series of disclosures that were catastrophic for the C.I.A. As much as thirty-four terabytes of data—more than two billion pages' worth—had been stolen from the agency. The trove, billed as Vault 7, represented the single largest leak of classified information in the agency's history. Along with a subsequent installment known as Vault 8, it exposed the C.I.A.'s hacking methods, including the tools that had been developed in secret by the O.S.B., complete with some of the source code. "This extraordinary collection . . . gives its possessor the entire hacking capacity of the C.I.A.," WikiLeaks announced. The leak dumped out the C.I.A.'s toolbox: the custom-made techniques that it had used to compromise Wi-Fi networks, Skype, antivirus software. It exposed Brutal Kangaroo and AngerQuake. It even exposed McNugget.

In the days after this colossal breach became public, the C.I.A. declined to comment on the "authenticity or content of purported intelligence documents." Internally, however, there was a grim realization that the agency's secrets had been laid bare. "I was sick to my stomach," Karen, the O.S.B. supervisor, later recalled. "That information getting out into a forum like that can hurt people and impact our mission. It's a huge loss to the organization." Malicious code that had originated at the C.I.A. could now be attributed to the agency. And the potential fallout extended beyond the digital realm: a foreign target who had been hacked might now be able to identify the malware, determine when it had been placed on a device, and even deduce which trusted member of the inner circle had engaged in betrayal. In the estimation of another senior C.I.A. official, Sean Roche, the leak amounted to "a digital Pearl Harbor."

But who could have stolen the data? In a statement, WikiLeaks suggested that the person who shared the intelligence wished "to initiate a public debate" about the use of cyberweapons. But WikiLeaks had also shown, quite recently, a willingness to be a mouthpiece for foreign intelligence services: in 2016, the site had released e-mails from the Democratic National Committee which had been stolen by hackers working on behalf of the Kremlin. Vault 7, some observers speculated, might also be the work of a hostile government. James Lewis, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told the *Times*, "A foreign power is much more likely the source of these documents than a conscience-stricken C.I.A. whistleblower." Perhaps Russia was again the culprit. Or might it be Iran?

Given that the software exposed in Vault 7 had been maintained on a proprietary C.I.A. computer network that was not connected to the Internet, the spectre of espionage raised another alarming possibility. Might a foreign adversary have obtained "physical access"—smuggling a tainted thumb drive into the C.I.A.? Had the agency's own modus operandi been used against it?

As the intelligence community mobilized to identify the source of the leak, the federal government found itself in an awkward position—because Donald Trump, shortly before being elected President, had celebrated the hacking of Democratic officials, declaring, "I love WikiLeaks." Nevertheless, this new breach was perceived as such an egregious affront to U.S. national security that the Administration was determined to get to the bottom of it. The F.B.I. began an investigation, and agents worked around the clock. But an atmosphere of paranoia enshrouded the inquiry. One F.B.I. agent described how a C.I.A. officer who was approached for an interview reacted with reflexive suspicion, pointing out that anyone "can say they're an F.B.I. agent."

The Bureau was pursuing what it calls an "unsub"—or "unknown subject"—investigation. "A crime had been committed; we didn't yet know who had committed it," one of the lead investigators, Richard Evanchec, later testified. Fairly quickly, the agents ruled out a foreign power as the culprit, deciding that the unsub must be a C.I.A. insider. They zeroed in on the classified computer network from which the data had been stolen—and on the agency employees who had access to that network. Among those who did were the O.S.B. hackers on the ninth floor of the agency's secret cyber installation in Virginia.

This was a befuddling prospect: the O.S.B. engineers devoted their professional lives to concocting clandestine digital weapons. Making public the source code would render their inventions useless. Why destroy your own work? As the F.B.I. interviewed members of the team, a suspect came into focus: Joshua Schulte. Voldemort. He had left the agency in November, 2016, and was said to have been disgruntled. He now lived in Manhattan, where he worked as a software engineer at Bloomberg. As Schulte was leaving the office one evening, Evanchec and another F.B.I. agent intercepted him. When they explained that they were investigating the leak, he agreed to talk. They went to a nearby restaurant, Pershing Square, opposite Grand Central Terminal. Schulte may not have realized it, but the other patrons seated around them were actually plainclothes F.B.I. agents, who were there to monitor the situation—and to intervene if he made any sudden moves. Schulte was amiable and chatty. But, when Evanchec looked down, he noticed that Schulte's hands were shaking.

Schulte was born in 1988 and grew up in Lubbock, Texas. He was the oldest of four boys; his father, Roger, is a financial adviser; his mother, Deanna, is a high-school guidance counsellor. Schulte was a bright child, and in elementary school he was fascinated when one of his teachers took apart a computer in front of the class. By the time he was in high school, his parents told me, he was building computers himself. "Some people are born with certain

talents," Deanna said. While Schulte was studying engineering at the University of Texas at Austin, he did an internship at I.B.M., and another at the N.S.A. On a blog that he maintained in college, he espoused libertarian views. He was a devotee of Ayn Rand, and came to believe that, as he put it, "there is nothing evil about rational selfishness." He also had a certain intellectual arrogance. "Most Americans, most people in general, are idiots," he wrote in 2008.

"I don't want a 'Big Brother' constantly looking over my shoulder," Schulte once wrote, and his libertarianism might have seemed difficult to square with a career in intelligence. Kavi Patel, who knew Schulte in junior high and became close friends with him in high school, recalled, "He was always a huge Ron Paul guy," adding that Schulte was drawn to "the people who say the government is infringing on our rights." Nevertheless, according to Schulte's parents, his dream was to work for the government. "He never talked about the private sector at all," Deanna told me, explaining that he was motivated by patriotism. "I think he was very proud to serve his country." In a blog post, Schulte argued that "privacy and individual security are antithetical," and that "increasing one ultimately decreases the other." By the time he finished college, in 2011, he had been hired by the C.I.A. Many people regarded the N.S.A. as the premier government employer for coders and hackers, but the C.I.A.'s hacking unit may have offered more palpable proximity to exciting operations on foreign soil. Schulte wanted to fight terrorists.

Like drone pilots who destroy villages in Afghanistan from an air-conditioned trailer in Nevada, the engineers of the O.S.B. experienced an uncanny incongruity between the safety of their surroundings and the knowledge that their work supported high-stakes covert operations abroad. "We were very mission-focussed," Jeremy Weber recalled. "But, you know, we had fun at work, too." Schulte proved to be a capable programmer, and in 2015 he was granted a special distinction when he was made a system administrator for the C.I.A.'s developer network, or DevLAN. Now he could control which employees had access to the network that held the source code for the group's many projects. Being a system administrator was regarded, Weber said, as "a privileged position." Schulte made good friends at work; he became particularly close with another member of the O.S.B. team, named Michael. They played video games together after hours, or went to the gym.

But Schulte could also be abrasive. "Josh was very opinionated on the way things should be done," Weber observed. "So he had some rough edges." In particular, if Schulte felt wronged in some way, he had a pronounced tendency to overreact. One day at work, he shot a rubber band at Michael, and Michael returned fire. "This went back and forth until late at night," Michael recalled. "He trashed my desk, I trashed his desk." The conflict escalated until both men were throwing punches.

Schulte could get "a little off the hinge," Sean remembered. At one point, agency officials decided to assign a contractor a project, Almost Meat, that was based in part on Schulte's code. "Josh was offended," Weber recalled. He protested that his hard work would be handed to a third party, then sold back to the government at a markup. He threatened to file a complaint with the C.I.A.'s inspector general, claiming "fraud, waste, and abuse." Frank Stedman, who worked on Almost Meat, felt that the episode illustrated Schulte's tendency to react with a "disproportionate response." The man known as Bad Ass and Voldemort accrued another office nickname: the Nuclear Option.

Schulte had been on the job for about three years when a new programmer named Amol joined the O.S.B. He sat near Schulte, and they were partnered on a project code-named Drifting Deadline. According to Weber, Amol and Schulte "didn't get along, and from the get-go." Initially, people ribbed Amol because he behaved in a professional manner that was at odds with the prevailing frat-house vibe. Schulte liked to shoot Amol with his Nerf gun. As Amol grew more accustomed to the O.S.B.'s raucous culture, he started fighting back. He would collect Schulte's Nerf darts and stash them behind his desk. He began trolling others in the office, maligning their skills as coders and devising his own cruel nicknames. He referred to Schulte as Bald Asshole. Amol was heavy, and Schulte reciprocated by




*"We just have a few more tragedies to report before we can get to the fun stuff."*

## SIX POEMS

### MY DOUBLE

Eyebrows raised in surprise,
He got into the habit
Of talking to himself
And answering his own questions
In a loud and angry voice.

### A TREE OF DIGNIFIED APPEARANCE

Fed up with its noisy leaves
And its chirping little birds,
Plus that young woodpecker
Drilling himself a new home.

### WHERE DO MY GALLOWS STAND?

Outside the window
I looked out of as a child
In an occupied city
Quiet as a graveyard.

### MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

You lifted our low-down mood
This dark autumn evening,
Playing that sweet old song
With a comb and toilet paper.

### MY MOTHER HOPED

To take her sewing machine
Down into her grave,
And I believe she did that,
'Cause every now and then
It keeps me awake at night.

### FOR RENT

A large clean room
With plenty of sunlight
And one cockroach
To tell your troubles to.

*—Charles Simic*

making fun of his weight. Their bickering intensified.

In October, 2015, Amol complained to Sean, the hacking-unit supervisor. "I have had enough of Schulte and his childish behavior," he wrote. "Last night, he shot me in the face with his nerf gun and it could have easily hit me in the eye." Schulte also wrote to Sean, saying that Amol was "very derogatory and abusive to everyone." According to Schulte, Amol had told him, "I wish you were dead," "I want to piss on your grave," and "I wish you'd die in a fiery car crash." Such rhetoric, Schulte noted, "does little to foster collaboration."

Weber subsequently confirmed that Amol had indeed said some of these things. But he pointed out that Amol had done so only after protracted arguments with Schulte, and that the attritional verbal combat Schulte seemed to favor could "exhaust" a person. In March, 2016, the discord between the two hackers reached a new level, when Schulte lodged a formal complaint with security officials at the C.I.A., reporting that Amol had told him, "I wish you were dead, and that's not a threat, it's a fucking promise." Schulte characterized this as a credible death threat that had left him fearing for his life. He suggested that Amol was "upset and unstable," and possibly bipolar.

Schulte felt that his superiors weren't taking his accusations seriously. He neither liked nor respected Karen, his ultimate boss, referring to her as a "dumb bitch." One C.I.A. security official responded to the dispute by saying that he couldn't play "high school counselor," which only exacerbated Schulte's anger. Schulte escalated the matter by complaining to the director of the cyberintelligence division, Bonnie Stith—an agency veteran who oversaw several thousand employees. One might suppose that she had more pressing matters to contend with, but she offered to sit down with Schulte and Amol and try to broker peace. Initially, Schulte refused, saying that he was afraid to be in the same room with Amol. But she insisted, and at the meeting she urged both men to consider the "honor" of being C.I.A. employees, and to remember their obligations to their country. Amol, she thought, seemed embarrassed to have been hauled before the school principal. Stith decided that the coders should be physically separated. "Our nation depended on us," she pointed out later. "I needed them to be focussed."

Schulte was furious to learn that he had to switch desks. He said that he would relocate only if his managers issued the directive in writing. So they did. Even then, he refused to fully move. He didn't like the new location. It had no window. It was an "intern desk," he scoffed; Amol, meanwhile, had been " 'promoted' to a better desk," leaving Schulte "exposed to questions and ridicule about why I was demoted."

Up to this point, though Schulte could be vexing and obstreperous, he was working within the broad bureaucratic parameters of the agency. Others might have found his vendetta against Amol irrational, but he had confined it to traditional channels, pushing his appeal up the chain of command. Now he embarked on a

more decisive escalation, concluding, as he later explained, that "since the Agency wouldn't help me, perhaps the state would." Citing fears for his safety, Schulte filed for a restraining order against Amol in Virginia state court.

This was a startling departure from normal conduct for the C.I.A. The agency has an estimated twenty thousand employees, and, because of the sensitivity of its work, it enjoys remarkable autonomy within the federal government, sometimes appearing to operate as a self-governing fief. The notion of allowing an internal squabble to spill into the unclassified realm was anathema. "It was *so* unusual to have agency employees in a local court," Stith later said.

Amol was obliged to appear at an open hearing at a Loudoun County courthouse. Inside the agency, a security organ known as the Threat Management Unit was activated, and a decision was made to separate the warring O.S.B. programmers even further, moving Schulte to a different branch altogether, on the eighth floor. Schulte fired off an intemperate e-mail: "I just want to confirm this punishment of removal from my current branch is for reporting to security an incident in which my life was threatened." Of course, it was also possible to read this relocation as a logical bureaucratic response to the restraining order that Schulte had obtained, which compelled Amol to avoid any contact with him—even crossing paths in the hallway.

Leonard Small, an official from the agency's Office of Security, later said that "Josh's escalating behavior" kept "going on and on." In an e-mail to Small, Schulte threatened to go public, saying that a lawyer he had spoken to had suggested, "An article titled 'C.I.A. PUNISHES EMPLOYEE FOR REPORTING OFFICE DEATH THREATS' would be an article that the media would be very interested in." Schulte hadn't yet "proceeded with this option," he said, because he was "hoping there is an alternative."

Others in the O.S.B. expressed frustration with Schulte's refusal to drop the matter. At one point, Stedman observed, "The boy needs to learn how to take his medicine." Nobody believed that Amol had posed a genuine threat to Schulte's life. Stedman later declared that "the whole writeup is bullshit and exaggerated," and read like "a fictional narrative." As an intelligence professional trained in the art of threat assessment, he considered it "insulting" that Schulte thought any of them might fall for such a ruse.

Next, Schulte appealed to several of the most senior officials at the C.I.A., including Meroë Park, the executive director. "I know you don't deal with personnel issues and likely won't spend much time on this, but management's abuse of power and consistent retaliation against me has forced me to resign," he wrote, on June 28, 2016. Schulte hung on a little longer, but by November he was gone. At Bloomberg, he would make more than two hundred thousand dollars a year—a significant increase from his government salary. Though he was legally bound to protect the confidentiality of his C.I.A. work, he could tell people he had been at the agency, and he discovered that in the private sector this conferred a certain cachet. Reflecting on Schulte's good fortune, Stedman noted that sometimes "good things happen to bad people."

Before Schulte's departure, there had been one final fracas. Schulte was, in his own telling, trying "to make the best of my situation and move forward," but after relocating to the eighth floor he attempted to work on Brutal Kangaroo—only to find that his access had been denied. "Imagine my shock," he



later recalled, noting that Brutal Kangaroo had been *his* project; he felt a huge proprietary investment in the program. Schulte consulted the audit logs on the system, and determined that Weber had stripped him of his access. Weber later explained that his reasoning had been simple: in Schulte's new branch, he "was going to be working on new projects," and therefore wouldn't need access to the old ones. But Schulte saw it as retribution. He had developed a special resentment for Weber. At the Loudoun County court hearing on the restraining order, Weber had shown up—as a show of solidarity with Amol. Schulte regarded Weber as a bureaucratic toady, Karen's "loyal pawn." Weber, he felt, "had played politics to overthrow me from my own project."

And so Schulte, without asking for authorization, reassigned himself access to his old project. When his managers learned of this, they were so alarmed that they stripped Schulte of his administrator privileges. Weber later said of Schulte's transgression, "The agency exists in a world of trust. We are granted access to classified information, and we are trusted to only use that information for the expressed reasons we're given access to it." If you can't "trust the person that you're working with," he pointed out, you're in trouble. (Schulte has disputed Weber's account of these events.)

Official secrecy is a slippery phenomenon. Organizations such as WikiLeaks espouse an absolutist commitment to transparency, but, in a world where genuinely bad actors exist and the interests of nation-states don't always align, most Americans would acknowledge the need for some degree of secrecy, as a prerogative of statecraft and national defense. Nevertheless, the U.S. system of classification has grown wildly out of control. In 1989, Erwin Griswold, who had argued the Pentagon Papers case on behalf of the government—and was therefore hardly a friend to leakers—published an op-ed in the Washington *Post* in which he maintained that there were *too many* state secrets. Classification had evolved into a bureaucratic reflex, he pointed out, and "the principal concern of the classifiers is not with national security, but rather with governmental embarrassment." More recently, the 9/11 Commission concluded that overclassification, far from keeping the country safer, actually jeopardizes national security, by inhibiting the sharing of information among government agencies.

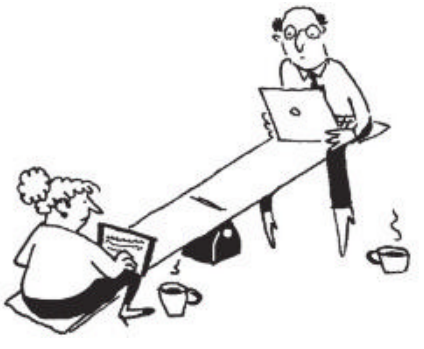
Before Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers, in 1971, he had photocopied seven thousand pages by hand. (He enlisted his teen-age son to help.) Digital technology has allowed such leakers as Edward Snowden and

Chelsea Manning to purloin much vaster reams of data with significantly greater ease. "I would come in with music on a CD-RW labelled with something like 'Lady Gaga,' erase the music then write a compressed split file," Manning once boasted, recalling how she lip-synched to Gaga's "Telephone" while "exfiltrating possibly the largest data spillage in American history."

Snowden and Manning were not seeking to blow the whistle on any one particular policy, in the manner that Ellsberg was; theirs was a more generalized disaffection, and the troves of data that they exposed were indiscriminate, comprising not just instances in which U.S. authorities had engaged in appalling, illegal conduct but also instances in which they had behaved appropriately. One could debate whether the term "whistle-blower" is adequate to describe someone who leaks gigabytes of data. But it's clear that these wholesale digital disclosures are themselves an unintended consequence of overclassification. The number of Americans who possess a security clearance has swelled to more than five million, because classification has swathed in secrecy so many functions of defense and intelligence work. Given the expanding universe of classified documents, the widening pool of professionals with access to them, and the increasing ease with which data can be downloaded and filched, further jumbo leaks appear inevitable.

Unlike other prominent digital leakers, Schulte did not seem like an ideological whistle-blower. Ayn Rand fanboys are not exactly famous for their doctrinal consistency, and Schulte's concerns about "Big Brother" don't appear to have occasioned much soul-searching in the years he spent building surveillance weapons for a spy agency. On an anonymous Twitter account that Schulte maintained, he reportedly expressed the view (in a since-deleted tweet) that Chelsea Manning should be executed. Weber recalled Schulte saying that Snowden deserved the same. Could it be that Schulte had leaked the C.I.A.'s digital arsenal not because of any principled opposition to the policies of the U.S. government but because he was pissed off at his colleagues? There are prior examples of C.I.A. employees who have been driven to betray their country out of a sense of professional grievance: after an agency officer named Edward Lee Howard was fired, in 1983, because he had lied about drug use and other minor transgressions during a polygraph exam, he began feeding the K.G.B. sensitive intelligence; when the agency discovered the breach, Howard fled to Russia, where he lived until his death, in 2002. After Ellsberg made the moral decision to leak the Pentagon Papers, it took him weeks of complicated work to make good on that objective. But with digital technology the window between impulse and consummation shrinks considerably, and, as everyone who worked with Josh Schulte knew all too well, when he was mad he had poor impulse control.

Even as F.B.I. investigators pinpointed Schulte as the prime suspect, their work was frustrated by the pageantry of overclassification. WikiLeaks had posted the Vault 7 tools on the Web, where anyone could see them, but officially the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. maintained that the documents remained classified. As a result, only investigators who held the necessary security clearances were permitted even to access WikiLeaks to see what had been stolen. F.B.I. officials were so nervous about visiting the Web site using Bureau computers or Internet connections (thereby possibly exposing their *own* networks to a cyber intrusion) that they dispatched an agent to purchase a new laptop and visit the Web site from the



safety of a Starbucks. Once the Vault 7 materials had been downloaded from the Internet, the laptop itself became officially classified, and had to be stored in a secure location. But the evidence locker normally used by agents, which held drugs and other seized evidence, wouldn't do, because it was classified only up to the Secret level. Instead, the investigators stored the laptop in a supervisor's office, in a special safe that had been certified to hold Top Secret documents—even though anyone could go to the Internet to see the materials that were on it.

Soon after the F.B.I. began its investigation, agents placed Schulte under surveillance, and they learned that he was about to leave for Mexico. Edward Snowden had fled to Hong Kong and then to Russia, where he remains, beyond the reach of U.S. authorities. Faced with the possibility that Schulte might abscond in similar fashion, investigators made their move, with Agent Evanchec stopping him as he left work at Bloomberg and taking him to Pershing Square. It had emerged that when Schulte left the C.I.A. he had not returned his special black government passport, which assured the holder official status when travelling abroad. Schulte eventually acknowledged that he still had the passport, but maintained that the trip to Mexico was simply a spring-break excursion with his brother. (Roger Schulte told me that the brothers had purchased round-trip tickets for a short visit to Cancún.)

The investigators had a warrant to search Schulte's apartment, so they all went together to his building, on Thirty-ninth Street. It was full of computer equipment. When F.B.I. agents obtained a warrant for Schulte's search history from Google, they discovered that, starting in August, 2016—when he was preparing to leave the C.I.A.—he had conducted thirty-nine searches related to WikiLeaks. In the hours after WikiLeaks posted Vault 7, he searched for "F.B.I.," and read articles with such titles as "F.B.I. Joins C.I.A. in Hunt for Leaker." For a guy who was a supposed expert in information warfare, Schulte seemed shockingly sloppy when it came to his own operational security. Even so, the F.B.I. hadn't found a smoking gun. It had amassed circumstantial evidence tying Schulte to the Vault 7 leak, but it hadn't found any record of him transmitting data to WikiLeaks—or, indeed, any proof that the secret files had ever been in his possession.

Schulte was not under arrest, so he got a room at a hotel while the search of his apartment continued. The F.B.I. seized his computer hardware, for forensic analysis. When computer scientists at the Bureau examined Schulte's desk-

top, they discovered a "virtual machine"—an entire operating system nested within the computer's standard operating system. The virtual machine was locked with strong encryption, meaning that, unless they could break the code or get the key from Schulte—both of which seemed unlikely—they couldn't access it. But they also had Schulte's cell phone, and when they checked it they discovered another startling lapse in operational security: he had stored a bunch of passwords on his phone.

One of the passwords let the investigators bypass the encryption on the virtual machine. Inside, they found a home directory—also encrypted. They consulted Schulte's phone again, and, sure enough, another stored password unlocked the directory. Next, they found an encrypted digital lockbox—a third line of defense. But, using encryption software and the same password that had unlocked the virtual machine, they managed to access the contents. Inside was a series of folders. When the investigators opened them, they found an enormous trove of child pornography.




*"Oh, yeah? Would a 'never spontaneous' person order two pairs of final-sale chinos online?"*

When the news broke that Schulte was a suspect in the Vault 7 leak, Chrissy Covington, a d.j. and a radio personality in Lubbock who had attended junior high school with him, took to Facebook to express her surprise. "The gravity of his crimes? OMG. Y'all," she wrote, in a group chat with several classmates who had also known Schulte. Covington and Schulte had been friendly; as teen-agers, they chatted on AOL Instant Messenger. She was surprised to learn not only that he might be the leaker but also that the C.I.A. had given him a job in the first place. "How could you hire *Josh Schulte*?" she said when I spoke to her recently. "007 he's not." Schulte had always struck Covington as an "oddball," but mostly harmless. On Facebook, however, she started to hear from classmates who shared unpleasant memories of Schulte crossing boundaries and making others uncomfortable. Several former classmates recalled to me that Schulte was infamous for drawing swastikas in school, and that, on at least one occasion, he did so on the yearbook of a Jewish student.

Other classmates recalled sexually inappropriate behavior. One woman told me that he had repeatedly exposed his penis to students when they were both in the junior-high band. "He would try and touch people, or get people to touch him—that was a daily occurrence," she said. She loved music, but she was so intent on getting away from Schulte that she asked her parents to let her quit the band. She was too uncomfortable to explain to her parents exactly what had transpired. "It's hard to put it into words," she recalled. "You're twelve. It's just 'Hey, this kid is super gross, and it makes me want to not be part of this school right now.'" Her parents, not grasping the gravity of what had happened, insisted that she remain in the band. "I was traumatized," she told me. I also spoke to a friend of the woman, who remembered her recounting this behavior by Schulte at the time. A third woman told me that Schulte and some of his friends got in trouble at school after trying to stick their hands into her pants while she slept on the bus during a field trip. Schulte, she said, took revenge by sending her an AOL message loaded with a virus, destroying her computer. He boasted about the hack afterward, the woman said.

Schulte's friend Kavi Patel acknowledged that Schulte would "draw swastikas all over the place." He wasn't anti-Semitic, Patel contended; he just relished getting a rise out of people. He recalled Schulte telling him, "I don't really care one way or the other, but it's fun to see the shock on people's faces." Patel was also in the junior-high band. When I asked him if he remembered Schulte exposing himself, he said that he never witnessed it, but had heard about it happening "two or three times." According to Patel, Schulte seemed to confirm it to him on one occasion: "I was, like, 'Dude, did you do this?' And he was, like, 'Heh, heh.'" Patel added, "It's not something that's out of his character. At all." (Presented with these allegations, several attorneys who have represented Schulte had no comment. Deanna recalled learning that Joshua had drawn a swastika in his notes for a lesson on the Second World War, but she and Roger said that they were not




*"I'll be back at the end of the year with a 1099."*

• •

aware of other incidents involving swastikas or the junior-high band. They dispute the classmate's recollection of the incident on the school bus.)

When Schulte was in college, he argued on his blog that pornography is a form of free expression which "is not degrading to women" and "does not incite violence." He went on, "Porn stars obviously enjoy what they do, and they make quite a bit of money off it." Of course, some women are coerced into pornography, and if you mistake the simulated enjoyment in a porn performance for the real thing then you don't understand much about the industry. But more to the point: child pornography is not free expression; it's a crime. After Schulte realized that the illicit archive had been discovered, he claimed that the collection—more than ten thousand images and videos—didn't belong to him. In college, he had maintained a server on which friends and acquaintances could store whatever they wanted. Unbeknownst to him, he contended, people had used the server to hide contraband. He "had so many people accessing it he didn't care what people put on it," Roger Schulte told the *Times*.

But, according to the F.B.I., as agents gathered more evidence they unearthed chat logs in which Schulte conversed about child pornography with fellow-enthusiasts. "Where does one get kiddie porn anyways?" Schulte asked, in a 2009 exchange. This was another instance in which Schulte seemed recklessly disinclined to cover his tracks. His Google search history revealed numerous queries about images of underage sex. In the chat logs, people seeking or discussing child pornography tended to use pseudonyms. One person Schulte interacted with went by "hbp." Another went by "Sturm." Josh's username was "Josh." At one point, he volunteered to grant his new friends access to the child-porn archive on his server. He had titled it /home/josh/http/porn. Sturm, taken aback, warned Schulte to "rename these things for god's sake."

When F.B.I. investigators searched Schulte's phone, they found something especially alarming: a photograph that looked as though it had been taken inside the house in Sterling, Virginia, where he had lived while working for the C.I.A. The photograph was of a woman who looked like she was passed out on the bathroom floor. Her underwear appeared to have been removed and the hand of an unseen person was touching her genitals. State investigators in Loudoun County subsequently identified the woman and interviewed her. She has not been publicly named, but she told them that she had been Schulte's roommate and had passed out one night, with no memory of what had happened. The encounter in the photograph was not consensual, she assured them. According to subsequent legal filings, the investigators concluded, after consulting the victim, that the hand in the photograph belonged to Schulte.

On August 24, 2017, at 5:30 A.M., a dozen armed federal agents hammered on the door of his apartment in Manhattan, startling him awake. Once inside, they bellowed, "Turn around and put your hands behind your back!" According to an account written by Schulte, he was led "like a prized dog" into the federal courthouse in lower Manhattan, where he was cuffed and shackled, then turned over to the U.S. Marshals. At this point, the F.B.I. and federal prosecutors had been investigating Schulte's possible role in the Vault 7 leak for five months, but they still hadn't indicted him. Instead, they now charged him with "receipt, possession, and transportation" of child pornography. Schulte pleaded not guilty. When he heard that the government was pushing to keep him detained pending trial, his stomach dropped. "The crime I am charged with is in fact a non-violent, victimless crime," he objected, displaying an obdurate heedlessness when it comes to how child pornography is made. (In a recent court filing, Schulte asserted that he has been "falsely accused" of acquiring child pornography.)

A judge ultimately ruled that Schulte could be released on bail, on the ground

that he posed no immediate threat to society. But his release came with stringent conditions. He would be under house arrest, unable to leave his apartment except for court dates. And he could not access the Internet. Schulte bridled at this, observing, "Today, everything is done online so it's incredibly difficult." Never one to meekly adhere to a directive that he found objectionable, Schulte chose to ignore the condition. In December, the government presented evidence that he had defied court orders by going online, and on several occasions had even logged on to the Internet using Tor—a system that enables users to access Web sites anonymously. Meanwhile, authorities in Virginia charged him with sexual assault, citing as evidence the photograph discovered on his phone. Schulte was taken into custody once again and locked up at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, in Manhattan. He was still there in the summer of 2018, when the government filed a superseding indictment with ten new counts and charged him with leaking Vault 7.

"I finally meet my new celly," Schulte wrote, in a prison diary. "He's in for bankruptcy. He's a nice guy who is on medication for a mental illness." Schulte hated confinement ("If you try to shower without purchasing shower shoes then you will almost certainly contract MRSA or some other skin-eating staph bacteria"), but he appears to have found ways to keep his temper under control, having observed that it was necessary to exercise basic diplomacy, given that some members of his new cohort were convicted murderers. He was fascinated by the innovative ways that inmates gamed prison regulations, noticing that many people "claim to be Muslim or Jewish" because doing so entitled them to supposedly better food. And he made some friends on the floor where he was housed, including Omar Amanat, a Wharton-educated financier who was facing charges related to conspiracy to commit securities fraud, and Carlos Luna, a seasoned drug trafficker. Schulte reflected, "I've lost my job, health insurance, friends, my reputation, and an entire year of my life—and this is only the beginning." But he vowed to go down swinging and "bring this 'justice' system crumbling to its knees."

First, he would need a phone. At the prison, he could make calls on pay phones—but they were monitored and did not offer Internet access. Luckily, black-market smartphones were easy to come by: Luna had a sideline in smuggling them into the facility. According to a former inmate who did time at the M.C.C. alongside Schulte, the going rate there for a contraband smartphone was several thousand dollars. Schulte figured out a way to hotwire a light switch in his cell so that it worked as a cell-phone charger. (The person who knew Schulte during this period praised his innovation, saying, "After that, all M.C.C. phones were charged that way.") Schulte and Amanat, who had also obtained a phone, would meet in the cell of a guy named Chino, and Luna would serve as lookout while the others used their clandestine devices. On an encrypted Samsung phone, Schulte created an anonymous Facebook page called John Galt's Legal Defense Fund and posted some of his prison writings. He set up a Twitter account, @FreeJasonBourne, and, in a drafts folder, he saved a tweet that said, "The @Department of Justice arrested the wrong man for Vault 7. I personally know exactly what happened, as do many others. Why are they covering it up?" Schulte also contacted Shane Harris, a journalist at the Washington *Post*. In messages to Harris, Schulte pretended to be other people—a cousin, or one of his three brothers—and promised to share explosive information. In this sock-puppet guise, he sent Harris what the government alleges was classified information about his case.

Astonishingly, it appears that Schulte may have even made contact with WikiLeaks during this period. In a Twitter post on June 19, 2018, WikiLeaks released seven installments of Schulte's prison writings, billing them as an account in which the "Alleged CIA #Vault7 whistleblower" would finally speak out in "his own words." Schulte seems to have envisaged these essays, which combined diaristic accounts of prison life with a broader critique of the criminal-justice system, as a sort of "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." He titled them "Presumption of Innocence." Perhaps WikiLeaks simply stumbled on the Facebook page where these essays appeared—or perhaps it was in touch with Schulte. If indeed Schulte managed to contact WikiLeaks from prison, he was adopting a curious strategy: it would be pathologically self-sabotaging to counter allegations that he had shared a set of documents with WikiLeaks by sharing another set of documents with WikiLeaks.

In one of these jailhouse meditations, Schulte wrote that, in prison, it is prudent not to discuss your case with anyone, because "people are vultures and will do anything to help their own situation"—including barter your information for a better deal. "Any scenario that encourages disloyalty, dissention, and 'snitching' is a powerful psychological tool," he warned. But Schulte may not have appreciated quite how true this was, because at a certain point his trusty lookout, Carlos Luna, informed prison authorities that Schulte had a cell phone.

When this news reached the F.B.I., officials panicked: if Schulte could surreptitiously make calls and access the Internet, there was a danger that he was continuing to leak. "There was a great deal of urgency to find the phone," one Bureau official later acknowledged. One day in October, 2018, no fewer than fifty agents descended on the Metropolitan Correctional Center, accompanied by a cell-phone-sniffing dog. After they recovered the device, investigators found that it was encrypted—but also that Schulte, true to form, had written the password down in one of his notebooks. He was placed in solitary confinement.

The criminal trial of Joshua Schulte, which commenced on February 4, 2020, at the federal courthouse in Manhattan, was unlike any other in U.S. history. A decision had been made to postpone the child-pornography indictment and the Virginia sexual-assault charge; both cases could be pursued at a later date. For now, the government focussed on Vault 7, issuing ten charges, ranging from lying to the F.B.I. to illegal transmission of classified information. It had taken federal prosecutors three years to assemble the evidence that they would

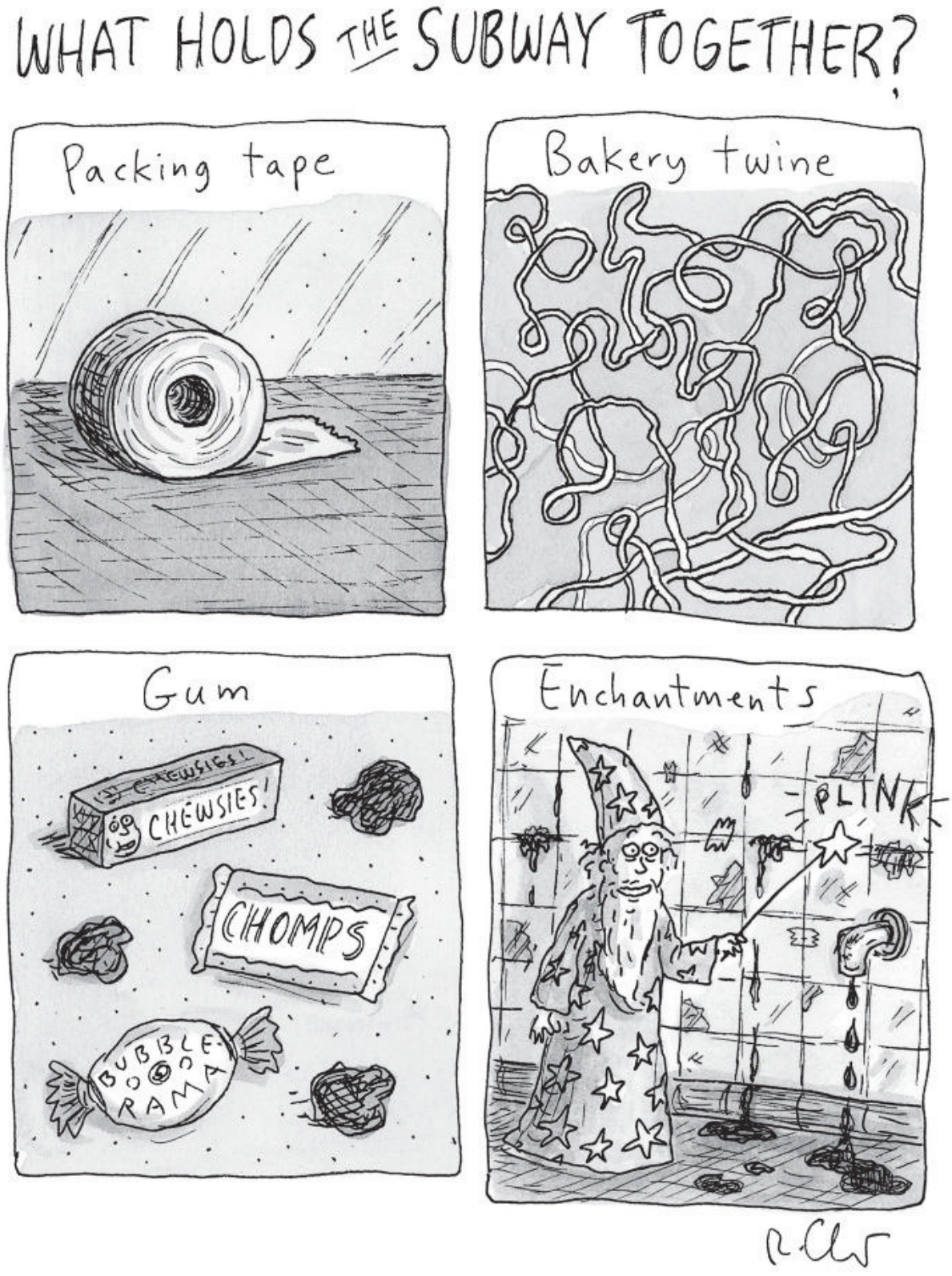
present in court, in part because of the official secrecy involved and in part because they intended to summon more than a dozen C.I.A. officers to testify, under oath, about Schulte's tenure at the O.S.B. This was a delicate and highly unusual strategy. To speak in public about what happens on the job is to violate one of the signature prohibitions of an agency career. It was an indication of how seriously C.I.A. officials took Schulte's alleged offenses that they were prepared to forgo this traditional reticence for the purposes of a trial.

As the proceedings got under way, the theatre of secrecy was conspicuous: most of the C.I.A. witnesses would appear using pseudonyms, or would be identified only by their first names. (The agency declined to comment for this story, or to make any of the relevant officials available; much of this account is drawn from their trial testimony.) Agency witnesses further avoided scrutiny by using a special elevator; during their testimony, the courtroom was closed to the public. These precautions seemed somewhat excessive. After all, the witnesses were not covert operatives with assumed names, or highly placed U.S. assets in treacherous circumstances abroad. They were, by and large, just like Josh Schulte: E-ZPass warriors who lived in the D.C. suburbs and commuted to an office park. It was a stretch to suggest that the very fact of their employment at the C.I.A. amounted to a grand state secret.

One member of Schulte's defense team was Sabrina Shroff, a feisty and tenacious federal public defender who grew up in Islamabad. "You're going to have to take this as a given—I don't dwell on Mr. Schulte's shortcomings," she said, when I asked her about his volatility. "He's my client." We met at a coffee shop near Gramercy Park. Shroff is diminutive and intense, and quick to chuckle at the Kafkaesque predicaments of this case. But she was also severely constrained in what she could say to me. "We don't have the ability to cross-examine the classification authority," she pointed out; when the government designates something Secret, she cannot appeal the decision. Before the trial began, Shroff already possessed a Top Secret security clearance—she had needed one to defend other clients facing national-security charges—but in order to represent Schulte she had to be "read in" to even higher levels of fetishistically compartmentalized secrecy. All the classified material she would need to consult could be accessed only in a room on the ninth floor of the courthouse—a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, or SCIF, designed to house classified information. The defense team felt hamstrung in its efforts to represent its client. Normally, defense attorneys receive the names of prosecution witnesses in advance, and can research their backgrounds while preparing for cross-examination. When Shroff and her fellow-attorneys got the names, however, they were prohibited from performing any Google searches that might in any way link these individuals to the C.I.A. Because some witnesses had common names, and Shroff and her team could not add the letters "C.I.A." to their search terms, it was occasionally impossible to gather any information. "These are *shadows* to us," one of Shroff's partners, Edward Zas, protested to the judge in the case, Paul Crotty. "We are completely blind."

Every day of the trial, a small posse of blond women in professional garb arrived and sat together, observing. They kept to themselves and didn't speak to anyone else, but it was generally understood that they were lawyers or officials from the C.I.A. Their facial expressions uniformly unrevealing, they came and went in lockstep, like Stepford Wives, but they radiated muted power.

The parade of witnesses from the C.I.A. offered a rare glimpse of the office dynamics in a Top Secret unit. It was

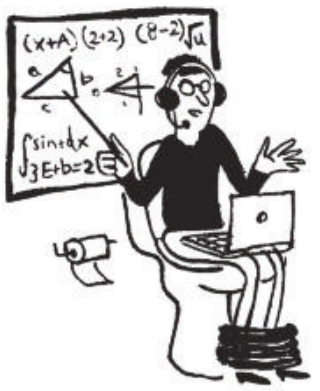


sobering. The descriptions of Schulte's workplace called to mind not the steely competence of "The Bourne Identity" but, rather, the tiresome high jinks and petty scheming of "Office Space." This was the paradox of the proceedings: there was no way for the C.I.A. to exact retribution against Schulte without, in the process, revealing a great deal of unflattering information about itself. Jurors would be told the story of an élite national-security division that had become consumed by juvenile name-calling and recrimination; senior C.I.A. officials would have to submit to cross-examination about the frequency and the severity of Nerf-gun fights, or about the lax security that had made the breach possible. Schulte's former colleagues portrayed him as thin-skinned and volcanically malicious, and this proved to be the core of the government's case. "He's not some kind of whistle-blower," one of the prosecutors, David Denton, told the jury. "He did it out of spite. He did it because he was angry and disgruntled at work."

But Shroff's defense strategy rested on a sly pivot: she readily conceded that Schulte was an asshole. "He antagonized his colleagues," she said. "He antagonized management. He really was a difficult employee." Nevertheless, she added, "being a difficult employee does not make you a criminal."

Shroff further suggested that the story of Vault 7 was a parable not about the rash decision of one traitor but about the systemic ineptitude of the C.I.A. The agency didn't even realize that it had been robbed, she pointed out, until WikiLeaks began posting the disclosures. "For God's sakes," Shroff said in court. "They went a whole year without knowing that their super-secure system had been hacked." Then the agency embarked on a witch hunt, she continued, and quickly settled on an "easy target": Schulte. Within this narrative, the string of prosecution witnesses recounting horror stories about Schulte's workplace behavior almost seemed to play in Shroff's favor. Her client was a scapegoat, she insisted—the guy nobody liked.

The government had amassed a powerful case indicating that Schulte was the leaker. It was abundantly clear that he had motivations for taking revenge on the C.I.A. The professional biography that emerged at trial was so damning that a decision to leak terabytes of classified data seemed almost like a logical dénouement: the final explosion of a man whose nickname was literally the Nuclear Option. Schulte's incriminating Google searches further deepened his appearance of guilt. And, on the sixth day of the trial, prosecutors laid out what they regarded as a coup de grâce—the digital equivalent of fingerprints at a crime scene. Even after Schulte was stripped of his administrative privileges, he had secretly retained the ability to access the O.S.B. network through a back door, by using a special key that he had set up. The password was KingJosh3000.



The government contended that on April 20, 2016, Schulte had used his key to enter the system. The files were backed up every day, and while he was logged on Schulte accessed one particular backup—not from that day but from six weeks earlier, on March 3rd. The O.S.B. files released by WikiLeaks were identical to the backup from March 3, 2016. As Denton told the jurors, it was the "exact backup, the exact secrets, put out by WikiLeaks."

But all this was quite a complex fact pattern to present to a jury, involving virtual machines and administrative privileges and backups and logs; much of the expert testimony presented by the prosecutors was bewilderingly technical. Shroff, meanwhile, insisted that Schulte hadn't stolen the data. Perhaps someone else in the office—or at the agency—had done it. The real outrage was that a crucial C.I.A. computer network, DevLAN, had been unprotected. Hundreds of people had access to DevLAN, including not just C.I.A. employees but contractors. The C.I.A.'s hackers appear to have disregarded even the kinds of elementary information-security protocols that any civilian worker bee can recite from mandatory corporate training. Coders exchanged passwords with one another, and sometimes shared sensitive details on Post-it notes. They used passwords that were laughably weak, including 123ABCdef. (A classified damage assessment conducted by the C.I.A. after the Vault 7 exposure concluded that security procedures had indeed been "woefully lax," and that the agency's hackers "prioritized building cyber weapons at the expense of securing their own systems.")

Nevertheless, the prosecutors presented striking circumstantial evidence indicating that Schulte had probably transmitted the material to WikiLeaks. On April 24th, he downloaded Tails, an operating system that WikiLeaks recommends for submitting data to the organization; on April 30th, he stayed up all night, frequently checking his computer, and at 3:21 A.M. he consulted a Web page that offered guidance on how to make sure that a terabyte of data has been "transferred correctly." That evening, he also searched for tips on how to wipe a device of its contents. What the government could not prove was any direct communication between Schulte and WikiLeaks.

Hovering over the proceedings was a dark question: how much harm had been caused by the leak? When Shroff cross-examined Sean Roche, the C.I.A. official who described Vault 7 as a "digital Pearl Harbor," she asked, "How many people died in Pearl Harbor?"

"More than three thousand," Roche replied.

How many people died as a result of Vault 7? she asked.

"I don't have an answer to that," Roche said.

"In fact, none, correct?" Shroff said.

Roche was probably being hyperbolic. But this may have been an instance in which the secrecy surrounding the case put the *government* at a disadvantage. After China uncovered a network of U.S. intelligence assets operating inside its borders in 2010, authorities in Beijing systematically rounded up a dozen people who had secretly been working for the C.I.A. and murdered them, crippling American espionage efforts in the country for years to come. That deadly purge did not become public knowledge until it was reported in the press, in 2017. Given that the O.S.B. hacks often required human assistance to install, it seems

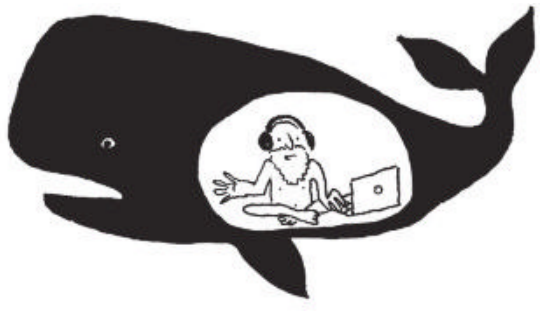
possible that foreign powers penetrated by such exploits could have leveraged the leak to identify American assets and seek retribution in a manner similar to what occurred in China. If any countries did—or if they do so in the future—that is information that the C.I.A. would be unlikely to publicize.

One morning in March, 2020, the jurors in the Schulte case entered the courtroom to discover a giant bottle of Purell on a table. The attorneys had been so consumed by the case that they had hardly noticed the pandemic barrelling toward them. Meanwhile, one of the jurors ended up being removed from the case, because, much like Schulte himself, she couldn't stay off the Internet. (The normal prohibition on jurors reading press coverage was particularly acute in this instance, because, if the jury knew that Schulte had also been charged with sexual assault and possession of child pornography, it could prejudice the verdict.) The juror seemed only too happy to be cut loose, telling the *Post*, "Sitting in that chair for five weeks was like punishment for my ass." After Shroff delivered an emphatic closing argument in the case, she visited the bathroom, where she crossed paths with one of the Stepford Wives. Up to this point, none of these C.I.A. women had uttered a word to her. "Nice job," the woman said, crisply, and walked out.

As the jurors began deliberations, they sent out a series of notes with questions that seemed to indicate some genuine confusion about the technical aspects of the government's case. On March 9th, they convicted Schulte of two lesser charges—contempt of court and lying to the F.B.I.—but hung on the eight more serious counts, including those accusing him of transmitting national-security secrets to WikiLeaks. Judge Crotty declared a mistrial.

The prosecution had clearly blundered by getting so mired in technical minutiae, and Shroff had ably defended her client. But it was also tempting to wonder whether in the years since WikiLeaks was established, in 2006, public attitudes toward both the intelligence community and the act of leaking itself might have shifted. Endless revelations concerning warrantless wiretapping, the use of torture, and extrajudicial killing have done little to enhance the prestige or the moral standing of America's defense and intelligence establishment. And many people consider Snowden and Manning, along with Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, to be heroes. Of course, in Schulte's case there did not appear to be any moral imperative driving the leak. If he did it, he wasn't blowing the whistle but seeking payback. And he continued to deny that he did it. Edward Lee Howard, the disgruntled C.I.A. officer who handed secrets to the Soviets, went to his death denying that he had done so. The person who served time with Schulte in the M.C.C. said, "What Josh told me is that he thinks Amol set him up."

The mistrial was a devastating turn for the government, but Schulte's father, who came from Texas with Deanna to attend the proceedings and staunchly believed in his innocence, was disappointed. Roger Schulte, who didn't know what a hung jury was, asked Shroff, "You mean he wasn't acquitted?" The child-pornography and sexual-assault cases have still not been resolved. When I asked Roger and Deanna about those charges, they said that, though they believe in Josh's innocence, they haven't spoken to him about the particulars of either case, or examined the available evidence themselves, so they were not in a position to offer any preview of his



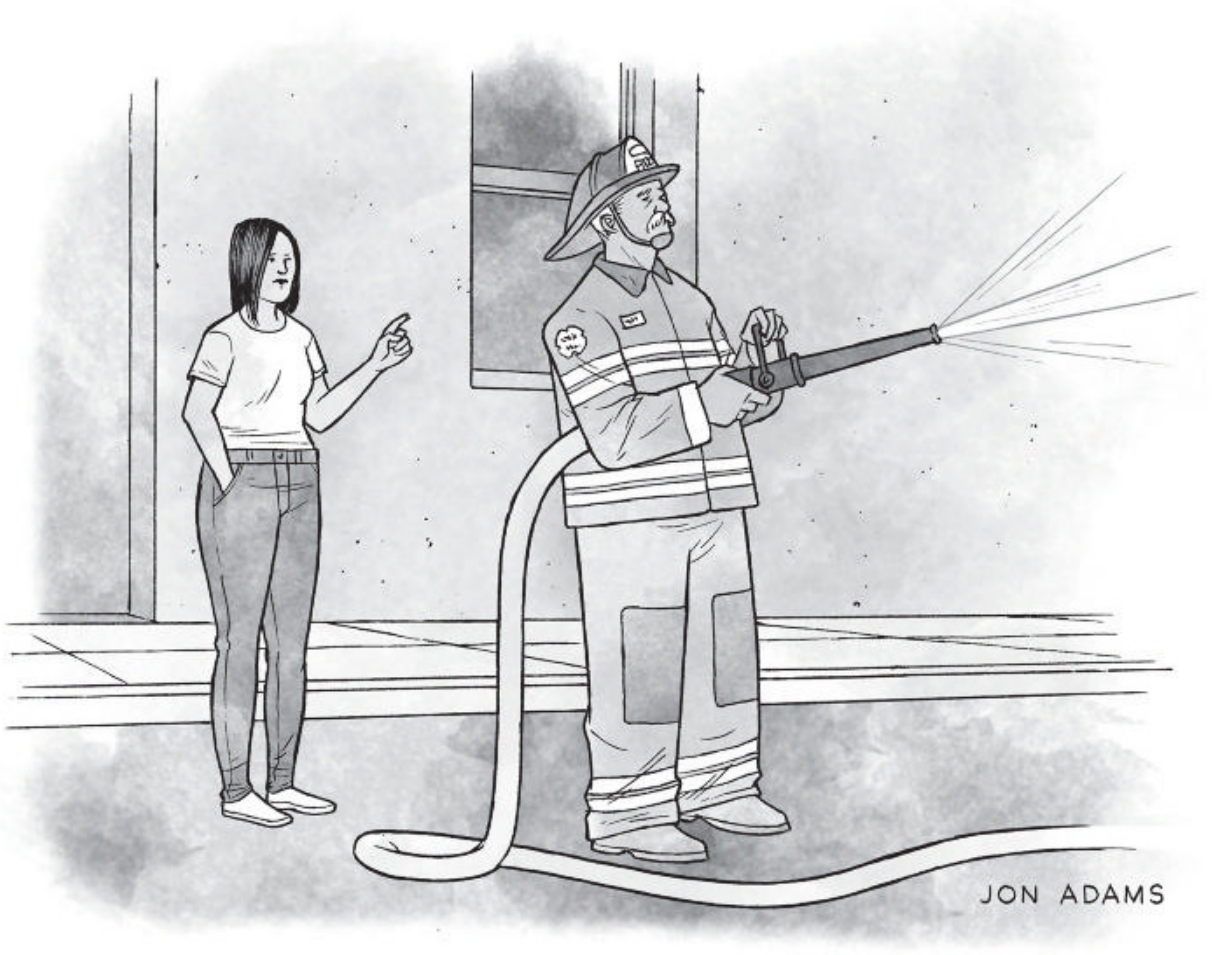
defense. But the U.S. government, rather than push forward with these other cases—which might have resulted in an easier conviction—instead announced that it would put Schulte on trial again for Vault 7.

Schulte currently resides at the Metropolitan Detention Center, in Brooklyn, where he has been preparing for his new trial. Most observers of the case agree that Schulte is fortunate to have a lawyer like Shroff, but he doesn't necessarily share this view; after the government announced that it would retry him, he dismissed her and opted to represent himself. Shroff has stayed on, however, as standby counsel. "I've been with Mr. Schulte for five years," she said. "We went through a pandemic together, we went through a trial together—most marriages don't survive this kind of trauma." Shroff told me that she and Schulte spend hours on end in the SCIF, where he is formulating his new defense, along with another lawyer, Deborah Colson, and a paralegal. For security reasons, they can't take garbage out of the room, so trash accumulates among the boxes of highly classified documents. The lawyers used to bring Schulte snacks (gummy bears, Dr Pepper) before the Marshals banned food in the SCIF. "He's such a persnickety eater," Shroff said, with affectionate exasperation. "If I go to Chipotle, it has to be white rice and only black beans." In prison, Schulte has grown an impressive beard.

To nobody's surprise, Schulte has tangled with his prison guards, and in repeated filings to the new judge in his case, Jesse M. Furman, he has singled out individual guards and suggested that *they* should be facing criminal charges. Schulte has filed more than sixty official challenges to the conditions of his confinement. In prolix memos, many of them handwritten, he has condemned the Justice Department, the C.I.A., the F.B.I., and the Bureau of Prisons. He refers to his cell as a "torture cage," and maintains that his living conditions are "below that of impoverished persons living in third world countries." One of his complaints is that the guards do not give him adequate bathroom breaks during the hours he spends preparing his case in the prison law library. And so, lately, Schulte has taken to urinating in the law library. He has also converted to Islam. When I mentioned this to Kavi Patel, he burst out laughing. "He's manipulative," Patel said. "I don't know how else to say it." One might question whether this conversion is simply a ploy to get better food. But many people discover faith behind bars, and Schulte recently ob-

served a month of daytime fasting during Ramadan.

The new trial is scheduled to begin on June 13th. The government seems unlikely to present quite as much evidence of Schulte's antisocial behavior this time. It may abbreviate the technical evidence, too. The proceedings, however, will remain blanketed in secrecy: Matthew Russell Lee, an independent journalist who covered the first trial, recently filed an objection to the government's motion to seal the courtroom during testimony from C.I.A. officers, but it appears that that condition will again apply. Schulte, meanwhile, has sought to call no fewer than forty-eight current or former C.I.A. employees as witnesses. One of the people he has tried to summon is Amol. At a recent hearing, Schulte suggested that, if the evidence he requests is too sensitive to transport to the SCIF, perhaps "they should take *me* to the C.I.A." Judge Furman responded flatly, "You are not going to the C.I.A."




*"Can you try to get my plants on the fire escape?"*

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We live in an era that has been profoundly warped by the headstrong impulses of men who are technically sophisticated but emotionally immature. From the whoopie-cushion antics of Elon Musk to the Panglossian implacability of Mark Zuckerberg, a particular personality profile dominates these times: the boy emperor. While reporting this article, I often wondered how the C.I.A. could have missed the obvious combustibility of this profile when it hired Schulte and gave him a security clearance. In order to get an agency job, Schulte had been subjected to a battery of tests—but, when his lawyers tried to obtain the psychological profile that the agency had produced on him, the C.I.A. would not turn it over. Perhaps, as the agency took up digital spying and sought to bolster its hacking capability, it deëmphasized qualities like emotional stability and sang-froid, and turned a blind eye to the sorts of erratic or antisocial tendencies that are widely accepted in Silicon Valley (and even embraced as the price of genius). The agency may have been blinkered about Schulte's destructive potential because it had concluded that this was simply how coders behave. I sometimes found myself wondering whether Schulte was more idiot or savant.

When you consider the powerful forces arrayed against him—and the balance of probabilities that he is guilty—Schulte's decision to represent himself seems reckless. But, for the C.I.A. and the Justice Department, he remains a formidable adversary, because he is bent on destroying them, he has little to lose, and his head is full of classified information. "Lawyers are bound," Shroff told me. "There are certain things we can't argue, certain arguments we can't make. But if you're *pro se*"—representing yourself—"you can make all the motions you want. You can really try your case."

The government does not bring a lawsuit every time it identifies somebody who has inappropriately leaked classified information. On the contrary, a decision is often made to settle the matter quietly, rather than risk further exposure of secrets in a public trial. Schulte might well attempt to force the disclosure of so many secrets that the authorities will feel compelled to drop the charges against him or to offer an attractive plea deal. There may be some threshold of disclosure beyond which the C.I.A. will not venture. Deanna Schulte told me that one reason her son had elected to serve as his own counsel is that he wants to "put it all out there."

In a June 2nd court filing, Schulte suggested, with a menacing flourish, that if the government goes to trial with the child-pornography charges he plans to make it maximally painful for the C.I.A. His defense, he promised, will incorporate extensive testimony about agency "operations and assets," and will potentially require courtroom appearances from "9 covert officers, 17 overt officers, and at least 1 asset."

In a contest between the dictates of official secrecy and the imperatives of justice, odds are that secrecy will win. Schulte knows this, and that may be his greatest advantage. He has said of the Vault 7 case, "I expect a not guilty verdict on all counts, and anything less will be an utter failure." Shroff told me of her client, "He's hopeful now." Roger Schulte said the same thing, assuring me that Josh has learned a lot about the legal process, and that he isn't giving up. "He seems to be holding pretty strong," Roger said. "He's a fighter." ♦

LETTER FROM SANTIAGO

# NEW MAN

*Can Chile's young President reimagine the Latin American left?*

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

February in Santiago, the capital of Chile, is like August in Paris: the end of summer, when everyone who can afford a vacation escapes for a last gasp of freedom. Many *santiaguinos* go to the nearby Pacific beaches, or to the chilly lakes in the south. After two months of frenetic activity that followed the election of December 19th, Gabriel Boric, the country's President-elect, was also planning to take a break.

At a back-yard barbecue, a few weeks before his inauguration, Boric explained that he and his partner were heading to the Juan Fernández archipelago, four hundred miles off the coast. Their destination was the island where the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk was marooned in the eighteenth century, helping inspire Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe." Boric planned to swim and fish, and also to read through a pile of books: the Defoe classic, biographies of Chilean Presidents, a history of Eastern Europe by Timothy Snyder. He felt that he had some catching up to do on geopolitics, since he was already being courted by superpowers.

After Boric's victory, President Joe Biden had called to offer congratulations, and to invite him to a summit of hemispheric leaders in Los Angeles. Chile, with its four thousand miles of coastline, is a tactical outpost in Latin America—a region where Biden has been trying, intermittently, to increase his outreach. The trip would be complicated for Boric; he had won office at the head of a left-wing coalition that included Chile's Communist Party, which tends to regard the United States as an imperialist aggressor. But, he told me, the summit wasn't for several months, and "Biden said I didn't have to decide right away."

The Chinese Embassy had hand-delivered a letter from Xi Jinping, in which he courteously reminded Boric that the People's Republic of China was Chile's biggest trading partner. Chile is the world's largest producer of copper and its second-largest of lithium; China's supply of batteries and cell phones depends on the trade.

Boric had also heard that Vladimir Putin was considering a visit to Argentina, and wondered if he'd want to add Chile to his itinerary. He grimaced as he thought about it. Some on Chile's hard left see Russia as an ally against American "hegemony," but Boric didn't want Putin in his country.

Boric is thirty-six—a year older than the minimum age for a Chilean President—with a stocky build, a round, bearded face, and a mop of brown hair. He described these developments with an air of thrilled complicity; they were among the most important moments of his life so far. He was not yet officially President, but he had been given a car and bodyguards, and was briefed daily by the outgoing administration. He had declared that his government would be feminist, and that his cabinet, in a first for Latin America, would be predominately female; fourteen out of twenty-four ministers would be women, including the secretaries of defense and the interior. Two ministers were openly gay. Many of Boric's officials were young leftists, like himself.

His partner, Irina Karamanos, also represented a break with the past. A thirty-two-year-old of Greek and German descent, she speaks five languages, has degrees in anthropology and education, and is regarded as a leader in feminist politics. She had already managed to pique some Chileans by declaring that she would "reformulate" the role of First Lady, because she was "neither first nor a lady."

Boric's opponent in the election was José Antonio Kast, an ultraconservative Catholic with nine children. An admirer of Brazil's far-right Jair Bolsonaro, Kast had promised a pro-business, law-and-order government that would keep out



*Gabriel Boric, who is thirty-six, campaigned*



*on a revolutionary-sounding slogan: "If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave."*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOMÁS MUNITA

unwanted immigrants and oppose abortion and same-sex marriage. He was the son of an officer in Hitler's Wehrmacht who had immigrated to Chile after the war and built a fortune selling Bavarian-style meats. Echoing Donald Trump, Kast urged voters to "dare to make Chile a great country."

In the end, Boric beat Kast by twelve percentage points, garnering the largest number of votes ever cast for a candidate in Chile. He represented the most left-wing government since the ill-fated Presidency of Salvador Allende, a socialist who won power in 1970, only to be overthrown three years later in a bloody military coup, after which General Augusto Pinochet ruled as a right-wing dictator for seventeen years.

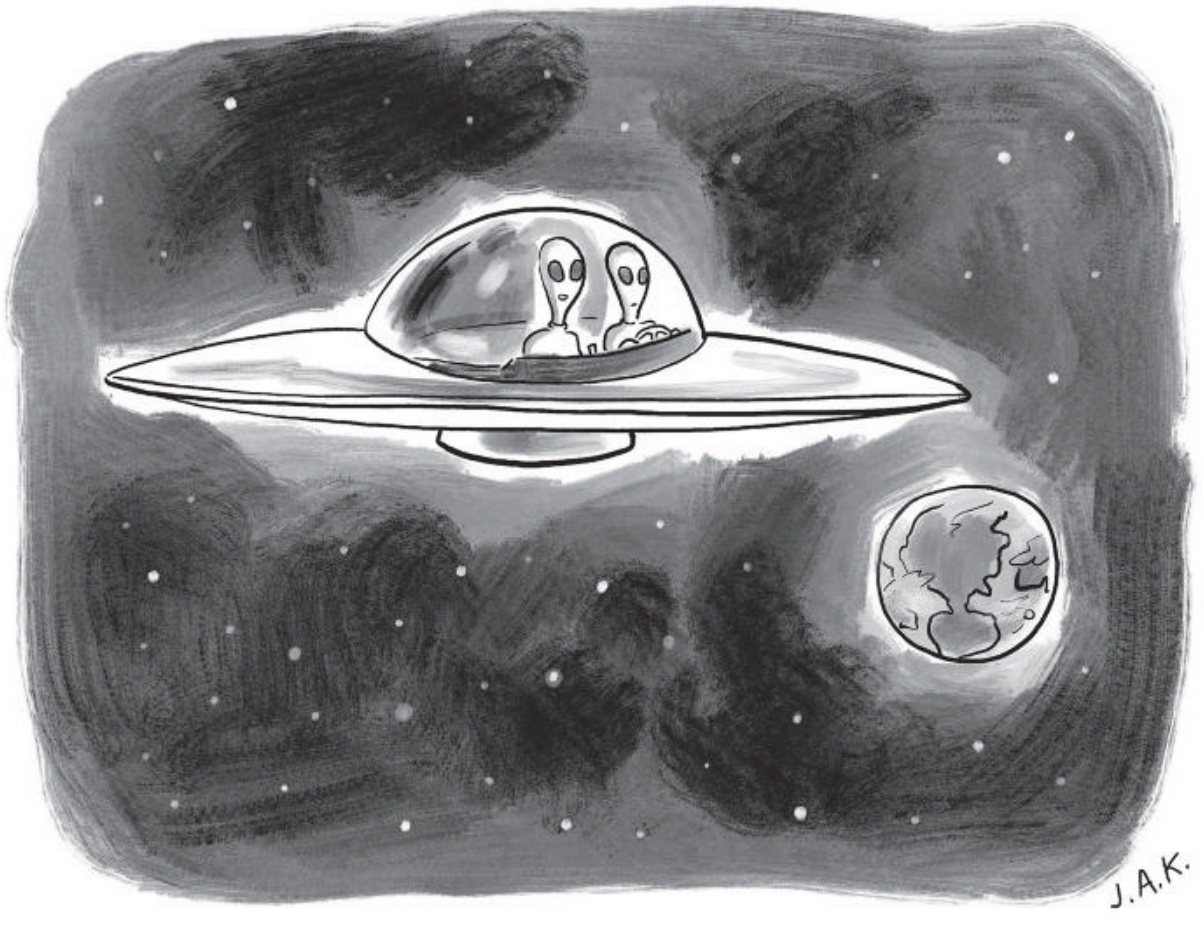
To run the economy, Pinochet brought in a group that became known as the Chicago Boys, economists who had studied at the University of Chicago under the libertarians Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger. (Kast's older brother led Chile's central bank.) The country became a proving ground for Latin American *neoliberalismo*, with wholesale deregulation and the privatization of state-controlled companies, education, health care, and pensions.

After democracy was restored, in 1990, Chile's governments avoided extremes. For two decades, a center-left coalition known as the Concertación held power in a series of administrations; for another twelve years, control of the country alternated from the center right to the center left. Chile established itself as a stable, upwardly mobile nation amid volatile, poorer neighbors. But the economic policies installed under Pinochet didn't fundamentally change. Inequities grew more severe.

By 2019, the World Inequality Report placed Chile near the bottom of its rankings, among such states as the Central African Republic and Mozambique; one per cent of the country's population held twenty-seven per cent of its income. That October, everything burst. High-school students took to the streets, protesting a government-mandated subway-fare hike, but this was only a symbol of deeper frustrations. As one slogan put it, "It's not the thirty pesos, it's the thirty years of indifference." The protests grew into mass demonstrations, in which as many as a million Chileans marched, demanding change of every kind—it was a sometimes cathartic, sometimes bloody episode known as the *estallido social*, or social explosion.

In November, 2019, after weeks of growing violence, Chile's political parties negotiated a historic pact. Grandiloquently named the Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution, it called for a new constitutional process, in which everyone's voice would be heard. On the left, the most notable signatory was Gabriel Boric.

Boric's efforts to defuse the unrest helped make him a viable candidate for President. During his campaign, he promised Chileans "a better life." He would create a national health-care system, implement government-subsidized pensions, and eliminate student debt. He would alleviate poverty by creating half a million new jobs, funding his proposals by raising taxes on mining corporations. He adopted a revolutionary-sounding slogan: "If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave."




*"We come in peace, we schmooze for a reasonable amount of time, and then we can leave."*

The day before I arrived in Chile, Boric had celebrated his birthday with Karamanos and a few close friends. They carried on the next night, and I joined them as they bantered over wine and *piscola*, a head-spinning concoction of pisco, a grape-based liquor, and Coca-Cola. Every few minutes, Boric got up to tend the fire beneath an *asado patagón*—lamb cooking on an upright iron cross.

The conversation was mostly lighthearted, but it grew serious when it turned to the vagaries of the Chilean left. Even though Boric had emerged as the leading figure, he was vilified by some as *amarillo*, or yellow, for his willingness to engage in dialogue with adversaries. On the far left, to be *amarillo* is tantamount to being a traitor.

During the *estallido*, leftist extremists had engaged in daily street confrontations with police, and had torched churches and public buildings. The conservative government of the billionaire Sebastián Piñera had deployed riot police, who attacked protesters, resulting in some thirty deaths; tear-gas cannisters and rubber bullets caused more than three hundred eye injuries, and a rumor spread that Piñera's men were aiming for the eyes. The police were also accused of rape and other kinds of sexual abuse. A feminist group choreographed a dance protest, called "A Rapist in Your Path," which has been performed by sympathizers around the world.

Protesters adopted as their emblem a fearsome black dog called Negro Matapacos, or Black Cop Killer, and soon

there were stencils of him on buildings everywhere, along with graffiti like "A dead cop doesn't rape." By the time the protests died down, in March, 2020, the resulting damage had cost the country at least three billion dollars, and the economy had slowed. Piñera was forced to apologize for his policies and to fire several cabinet ministers. But many Chileans still felt contempt for law enforcement and for government institutions. Activists heckled officials in restaurants and on the street. In December, 2020, I visited the symbolic heart of the *estallido*, an intersection that protesters had renamed the Plaza de la Dignidad. It remained a free-fire zone, where activists in gas masks waited for riot police to show up and fight. The pavement was scorched from flaming barricades and littered with projectiles, including spent fire extinguishers, that had been hurled at passing cars.

In office, Boric faces huge challenges. His party and its coalition partners are the minority in parliament, and to pass any laws he will have to negotiate agreements with his political rivals. His own coalition—Apruebo Dignidad, or I Choose Dignity—is riven by internal disputes, especially between his closest political allies and the Communist Party. Andrés Scherman, a Chilean political commentator and journalist, told me, "One of the risks of leading such a fragmented and heterogeneous coalition is that Boric ends up as a general without any troops."

Boric has four tattoos, all of which commemorate his birthplace, in Patagonia—Chile's most remote region, known by the romantic name Magallanes and the Chilean Antarctic. During one of our first meetings, he rolled up his sleeves to show them to me. One, on his forearm, depicted a lighthouse above a roiling sea. Another was an intricate map that included the Beagle Channel, where his great-grandfather, an émigré from Croatia, had come in 1887 to search for gold. Boric unbuttoned his shirt to reveal his right shoulder, which was inked with a native lenga tree, a symbol of Patagonia. He smiled and said, "I'm going to be the first President from Magallanes in two hundred years of autonomous Chile."

Magallanes is Chile's Alaska, with some hundred and seventy thousand residents amid a vast wilderness. Three-quarters of them live, as Boric's family does, in Punta Arenas, a windblown town with a frontier spirit. Patagonians are independent-minded, accustomed to wind and rain and cold; they are also accustomed to relatively comfortable livelihoods, often from sheep ranching, tourism, or the oil industry.

Boric's father, Luis Javier Boric Scarpa, from the Croatian side of the family, is a chemical engineer who has spent his entire career with the state petroleum company. Boric's mother, María Soledad Font, of Catalan descent, is a former librarian and a member of a Catholic sect, the Movimiento Apostólico de Schoenstatt. The family home, a sprawling two-story house beside the Strait of Magellan, is decorated with pictures, altars, and votive candles dedicated to the Virgin Mary.



Boric, the oldest of three boys, studied at Punta Arenas's British School before moving to Santiago to attend law school at the University of Chile. He finished classes in 2009, but he never practiced law. Politics, instead, became his abiding interest.

He emerged as a leader during the Chilean Winter, a period of student protests that began in 2011, during the first Presidency of Sebastián Piñera. (For the sixteen years before Boric's election, Piñera traded four-year terms with the Socialist politician Michelle Bachelet, because Chile's Presidents are forbidden to serve two terms in a row.) A previous round of demonstrations, in 2006, had been known as the Penguin Revolution, because it was led by high-school students who often marched in their black-and-white uniforms. The Chilean Winter protests were led by university students, who took up some of the same demands, including greater state support for education and an end to subsidies for private schools—a legacy of the Pinochet years, which had hollowed out public education. Among them were Boric and a handful of other activists who have become prominent: Giorgio Jackson, Camila Vallejo, and Karol Cariola.

In 2009, Boric was elected president of the student union at the law school. Two years later, he became president of the University of Chile's student union, narrowly defeating Vallejo, a geography major whom the *Times Magazine* had dubbed "the world's most glamorous revolutionary." Ambitious, bright, and outspoken, the four activists were friends with differences: Vallejo and Cariola were Communists, Jackson and Boric closer to democratic socialists. In the 2013 elections, all four won parliamentary seats.

In 2018, Boric stepped away from his parliamentary duties to seek treatment for obsessive-compulsive disorder. He announced the news on Instagram, where he had 1.5 million followers, posting a picture of himself with a deep frown. "Hi everyone!" he wrote. "I wanted to tell you that I am taking a break for a couple of weeks. As I have said before, I have had O.C.D., obsessive-compulsive disorder, ever since I was a boy, and based on medical recommendation, I've now agreed to be responsible and to seek treatment."

Boric's O.C.D. first appeared when he was eight, and he often struggled at school. He recalled being unable to finish Anne Frank's "The Diary of a Young Girl" in the assigned time, because his O.C.D. made him go back two lines every time he accidentally skipped a word. There were other tics: he had to blink four times before leaving his bedroom, and when he walked he always started with his left foot.

Discussing his O.C.D. was politically risky; in one debate, Kast used it to insinuate that he wasn't fit for office. But Boric's candor attracted public sympathy. In his Presidential acceptance speech, Boric said that more needed to be done for mental illness in Chile, and the audience responded with a huge round of applause.

Gabriel García Márquez once quipped that Chile was the only place in Latin America where newsboys hawked copies of the country's laws on the street. Democracy and stability are the norm. After winning independence from Spain, in the nineteenth century, Chile had six




*In Chile's estallido social, or social explosion, protests demanding change turned into violent conflicts with police.*

decades of relative political quietude—far longer than most of its neighbors. Later, it developed a multiparty system, and experienced another half century of peaceful democracy before Pinochet seized power.

But alongside Chile's institutional habits runs a current of anarchism and bohemianism. In the years before the coup, the country was shaken by duelling political extremes. When Allende was elected, in 1970, it was the height of the Cold War, and both the U.S. and the Soviet Union saw Chile as a strategic battleground. Although Allende gained power legitimately, he won the popular vote by a razor-thin margin, at the head of a left-wing coalition.

In office, Allende instituted a program that he called the "Chilean path to socialism," nationalizing copper mines and banks, confiscating large landholdings, and increasing social protections for the poor. Radicals and revolutionaries poured in from around the region. Chile's most militant leftists agitated for a sweeping transformation of society. The right launched terror attacks. Fidel Castro came and stayed for three weeks, appearing at rallies and telling Chileans they should prepare to fight to defend their "revolution."

Allende's reforms were nonviolent, in contrast with Castro's advocacy of armed rebellion. He embodied the possibility of a different kind of Latin American socialism, closer to Scandinavia than to the U.S.S.R. Still, his government alarmed Chile's conservative establishment: politicians, the armed forces, the private sector. Corporate interests in the United States were also dismayed, and they urged the White House to do something. The Nixon Administration devised covert plans to unseat Allende, with help from the C.I.A.

In the end, Pinochet and his allies in the military did it for them. The Air Force bombarded the Presidential palace, and on September 11, 1973, Allende killed himself, using an AK-47 that Castro had given him. In the aftermath came an onslaught of repression, in which more than three thousand people were murdered and many more were tortured and imprisoned. Half a century later, Chile has not entirely recovered.

But, as despotic as Pinochet was, even he embodied some of Chile's institutionalist tendencies. After seven years in power, he sought to legitimatize his tenure by drafting a new constitution. In Santiago, Pinochet once explained to me that the old constitution had been a drag on his power. "You have to be able to set the goalposts to be able to act!" he said. "So I set the goalposts."

In 1988, Pinochet held a referendum, hoping to secure eight more years in power. This time, he lost, but he didn't entirely withdraw. He kept command of the armed forces, and had arranged for himself to be named a senator for life, along with nine handpicked associates. He had parliamentary immunity and, through an alliance with right-wing political parties, effective control of the legislature.

Pinochet's grip on Chile was loosened in 1998, by a surprise arrest. As he visited the United Kingdom, the Span-

ish judge Baltasar Garzón had him apprehended on charges of genocide, torture, and terrorism. Pinochet was ultimately allowed to return home, but he was diminished, and spent the rest of his life fighting prosecution. In 2005, he was discovered to have stashed millions of dollars of pilfered government funds in more than a hundred and twenty concealed bank accounts, with help from the U.S.-based Riggs Bank. When Pinochet died, the following year, few Chileans mourned his passing.

After his widow, Lucía Hiriart, died, last December, at the age of ninety-eight, the streets of Santiago filled with crowds drinking champagne and shouting in celebration. One placard read "*Chau vieja CTM*"—a slogan, abbreviating the local epithet *concha tu madre*, that translates roughly as "Bye-bye, you old bitch."

The evening before Boric left for his island vacation, we met at the home of the writer Patricio (Pato) Fernández, in the suburb of Providencia. Fifty-two, with a Teddy-bear build and an easy sense of humor, Fernández is a political commentator and the founder of *The Clinic*, a satirical newspaper that he started in order to poke fun at Pinochet. (The name refers to the British medical facility where Pinochet was recovering from back surgery when he was arrested.) Fernández's paper is generally progressive, but it does not spare the left: one memorable cover depicted Nicolás Maduro, the obstreperous leader of Venezuela, with donkey ears, under the headline "NICOLÁS MABURRO."

At Fernández's house, Boric wore his habitual outfit of jeans, beat-up boots, and a checked flannel shirt. He had brought along pisco and Coca-Cola, and periodically refilled a red plastic cup. He sent his Presidential bodyguards out to buy beef, and then bustled around a grill in the garden.

I had spent an evening with Fernández and Boric in 2015, at a bar near the Punta Arenas waterfront called the Shackleton, for the Anglo-Irish explorer who limped into Chile after his ordeal in Antarctica. It was winter in Patagonia, and a cold wind whipped outside as Boric and Fernández talked intently about Michelle Bachelet's latest travails. Bachelet had staked her Presidency on the promise of education reform, but she had become embroiled in a scandal involving her son and a questionable bank loan.

Boric, in his early days as a parliamentarian, was bright, intense, and ambitious, but new to politics and looking for guidance. Born in 1986, he hardly remembered the Pinochet years and, like others of his generation, he felt impatient with moderate reforms. Fernández had come of age under the dictatorship and had learned to value the freedoms brought about by the Concertación governments. He had his ear to the ground, and could tell Boric things that he wouldn't hear elsewhere.

Since then, the two had built a close friendship, with Boric coming often to Fernández's home for dinner or to play chess with his teen-age son, León. When their conversations ran late, Boric slept on the couch. These days, Fernández likes to tell visitors, "The President has slept where you are sitting."

During the *estallido social*, the two men were drawn into the national debate over how to end the upheaval. In "Sobre la Marcha," a book Fernández wrote about the demonstrations, he argued in favor of the Agreement for Social Peace and a New Constitution, saying that the process could help calm Chile's civil strife and address its endemic social inequities, "so that after leaving behind the time for throwing stones, as Ecclesiastes once said, we can enter the time of gathering them together."

Boric's party, Social Convergence, opposed the agreement, which it saw as an impediment to more foundational reforms. But, Fernández recalled, "I argued strongly in favor. Even though it wasn't a demand of the groups on the street, it seemed like most of their demands could find common cause in a new constitution." In the end, Boric signed—in his own name, rather than as a representative of Social Convergence. The Party suspended him, but the deal went through. As Boric saw it, he'd gambled his political capital in order to get rid of "Pinochet's constitution once and for all."

Social Convergence eventually took Boric back, but he retained some enemies on the street. Soon after signing the agreement, he was sitting in a park when a group of leftists began cursing at him, accusing him of having "sold out the people." As they soaked him with beer and spat on him, Boric stayed seated and quietly stared them down. His calm response was widely praised.

When the proposal for a new constitution was put to a referendum, it was approved overwhelmingly, by seventy-eight per cent of voters. A constitutional congress was elected: a hundred and fifty-five representatives, of whom three-quarters were leftists or independents. They included Fernández, who had run at the urging of friends.

The *convencionales*, as they are known, were given until this July to draft a constitution, which they will submit to a referendum in the fall. In a column after the Presidential election, Fernández wrote, "Gabriel Boric knows perfectly well that the destiny of his Presidency is inextricably linked to that of this constitutional process." But, as the *convencionales* began drafting proposals, the pragmatic spirit that Boric embodied often seemed absent. A veteran Marxist named María Magdalena Rivera solemnly proposed a Soviet-style system in which all state institutions would be replaced by a "Multinational Assembly of Workers and Peoples" that would exclude such "parasitic figures" as senior clergy, the military, and owners of corporations. An environmental commission proposed special protections for fungi. One *convencional*, a tattooed man with a shaved head known as Baldy Vade, was ejected; he had run for office on an inspiring story of surviving cancer, which it turned out he'd never had.

Many of the impractical proposals were rejected. But the media, particularly on the right, have presented a steady drip of news about the more bizarre ideas. If the constitutional congress fails, it would be disastrous for Boric's government, potentially reviving his opponents on both the right and the hard left. Fernández wrote, "Success will require the building of new forms of trust, of a cohesion gained through new civilizing challenges, and the complicity of diverse sectors of Chilean society." He meant that Boric needed to bring together a divided country before it fell apart.

Chile is known as one of Latin America's "poetic countries," the birthplace of Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, and Nicanor Parra. Another poetic country is Nicaragua, the home

of Rubén Darío and also of Gioconda Belli—a poet and writer who has been exiled for fiercely criticizing her country's despotic ruler, Daniel Ortega. Boric invited Belli to represent Nicaragua at his swearing-in. The day after the ceremony, a lunch in her honor was held in the elegant apartment of the writer Carla Guelfenbein.

Among the guests was Chile's de-facto poet laureate, Raúl Zurita, a bearded man of seventy-two. During the Presidential campaign, he had presented Boric with a manifesto of support, signed by more than five hundred Chilean writers, which expressed fear that a Kast government risked "taking us back to the darkest moments in our history." In a less restrained mood, Zurita had told an interviewer that he was "ready to commit suicide rather than vote" for Kast.

At lunch, Zurita was feeling celebratory, as were most of the guests; speeches were interrupted frequently by champagne toasts. Things quieted when Belli spoke about her new life in Madrid, and recalled the death of an old friend who had been jailed on Ortega's orders. Belli's presence at the swearing-in was a coded rebuke: Ortega and his wife and co-leader, Rosario Murillo, were not invited.

For Boric, this kind of intrigue was just a small indicator of the geopolitical problems that he might face. During one of our conversations, he confessed that he wished he'd seen more of the world before becoming President. He had taken his first trip outside the region when he was thirteen, going with his family to Disney World. He threw up his hands and laughed with embarrassment. At seventeen, he'd lived for four months in a village near Nancy, France, but he'd seen little of the country. It was soon after the U.S. invaded Iraq, and his host family was too worried about retaliatory terror attacks to allow him to visit Paris. Instead, Boric stayed close to the village, and the father, a veteran of the Algerian war, regaled him with stories about throwing prisoners from helicopters. A few years later, Boric joined his parents on a Mediterranean tour, but he caught no more than a glimpse of Europe. "Rome, Prague, Cairo, Athens—a day in each place," he said, shrugging.

Later, Boric took a trip to Israel and Palestine. "It was the most brutal thing I've ever experienced," he recalled. He spoke heatedly about the wall dividing the West Bank from Israel, and about what he felt was a policy of "humiliation" of the Palestinians. After the election, Boric's nominee for agriculture minister wrote to say that the Israeli Ambassador had invited them to a presentation about water use. Chile was in the midst of a sustained drought, and the Israelis are renowned for their advances in drip irrigation. The minister assured Boric that the Ambassador was a progressive, raised on a kibbutz. Boric was unconvinced. "We have to have some sort of political discussion first," he told me. "I mean, we cannot normalize this degree of brutalization."

During the Presidential campaign, Boric called Israel a "genocidal, murderous state." In a subsequent interview, he affirmed that statement but noted that he would say the same about Turkey's treatment of Kurds, and China's of Uyghurs. Chile has a significant population of ethnic Palestinians—as many as five hundred thousand, in a country of nineteen million people—and Boric's sentiments caused little controversy. But the Jewish population, about eighteen thousand people, was unsettled. Following the election, Gerardo Gorodischer, who leads a prominent organization called the Jewish Community of Chile, told me that he



looked forward to presenting Boric with "additional viewpoints from the Jewish community, in the hope that some of his past expressions can be toned down."

After the first round of elections, in which Kast took the lead, Boric moved closer to the center. His Communist Party coalition partners continued to support the leftist autocracies in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Boric had taken a contrary position, tweeting, "No matter who it bothers, our government will have total commitment to democracy and human rights, without support for any kind of dictatorship or autocracy." He had already criticized Daniel Ortega's regime for repressing political opponents, and had sharply chastised the Cuban government for cracking down after protests last year. He characterized Nicolás Maduro's tenure in Venezuela as a "failed experiment." In retaliation, Maduro suggested that Boric was a member of a new "cowardly left."

After Boric returned from vacation, his close friend Emiliano Salvo threw another *asado*. Boric arrived wearing a loud Hawaiian shirt and a baseball cap with the name of the Spanish punk band Siniestro Total. The island had been idyllic, he said—raw nature, hardly any other tourists.

Salvo's apartment was in a sixties-era building that looked out toward the Andean foothills. He said that it reminded him of East Berlin, where he lived as a child. His father was a socialist who had been jailed and tortured by Pinochet's regime. In exile, he met Salvo's mother, a German Communist, and they settled in an apartment near Alexanderplatz. Salvo said fondly that his mother was a little nostalgic for the old East Germany, like the mother in the movie "Good Bye Lenin!": "She refuses to see that the world has changed."

Boric and Salvo spoke wistfully about their youthful admiration for the early years of Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. When Hugo Chávez died, in 2013, Boric tweeted, "Much strength to the Venezuelan people. There are many Chileans who are with you. To the deepening of the Bolivarian revolution!" Salvo brought out a gift he'd received in 2017: a windbreaker in the colors of the Venezuelan flag, like the one that Chávez had made iconic. Lamenting the way that things had turned out in Venezuela, Salvo muttered something about the loss of innocence and then put his windbreaker away.

On the balcony, Boric searched on his phone for a poem: "Shocked, Angry," the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti's response to Che Guevara's killing, in 1967. Standing amid friends and aides, he read in a theatrical voice, with a finger held aloft for emphasis: "One finger is / enough to show us the way / to ac-

## A SPELL TO BANISH GRIEF

Only when you wake to a fistful of pulled hair
on the floor beside your bed and, from a glance,
can guess its weight, when you study dried tear
streaks on your cheeks like a farmer figuring out
where the season went wrong, when a friend calls
out your name three or four times before you know
your name is yours, when your name fits like clothes
you've suddenly outgrown, when there is too much
of you, too few of you, too you of you, and the mirrors
wish all of you would just look away, when the clocks
can't feel their hands and the calendars begin to doubt
themselves, when you begin to agree with the glares
from mirrors but your reflection follows you around
the house anyway, when you catch yourself drunk
on memory, candles lit, eyes closed, your head tilted
in the direction of cemetery grass, yellow and balding
above what's left of the body that birthed you, and you
try to remember the sound of laughter in her throat
and fail, only then, orphan, will I take all my selves
and leave.

—*Saeed Jones*

cuse the monster and its firebrands / to pull the triggers again."

Despite Boric's feeling for resonant language, he is wary of the rhetoric of the hard left. He felt that the zero-sum discourse of the past several decades had "served more as a poison than as a fertilizer." Since before Boric was born, Fidel Castro had exercised an outsized influence on the Latin American left, promoting an absolutist approach to power and politics. The leaders who sought to follow Fidel Castro's example most closely had miserable results: Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro, in Venezuela, and Daniel Ortega, in Nicaragua. There are other leftist leaders in the hemisphere, including Andrés Manuel López Obrador, in Mexico, and Alberto Fernández, in Argentina. But, despite their revolutionary pretensions, their political systems often seem most concerned with preserving their hold on power. Of the surviving lions of the left, just two have retained their status: José (Pepe) Mujica, the former guerrilla who was the President of Uruguay a decade ago and has since retired to his farm, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, of Brazil, who may return to power in elections in October.

Boric told me, "We have the opportunity to reimagine the left." But he knows that the crucial dichotomy in the region is less between left and right than between democracy and populist authoritarianism. Boric—young and unburdened by the past—seems likely to be the politician who can best articulate the benefits of a greater freedom from ideology. After the election, he named a much admired establishment economist in his sixties as his finance chief, which helped calm Chile's jittery markets and business community. As Fernández said, "The appointment sent an important signal that Gabriel isn't some crazy revolutionary." Kast, despite the inflammatory rhetoric of his campaign, made clear his willingness to work with the new administration. Soon after the polls closed, he tweeted, "Boric is our President now, and he deserves all of our respect and constructive collaboration. Chile always comes first."

Many of Boric's people, in the U.S. context, would be Bernie Sanders supporters. As his longtime political comrade Giorgio Jackson put it to me, "We're more Allendista than Fidelista. It's like we've been germinated with that democracy seed." Boric himself is closer to the center. When I asked if he had a role model, he said, a little hesitantly, that he had always admired Allende, but that he didn't have "static role models." It wasn't because he was a chameleon, he clarified—it was because he was "continually evolving."

International Women's Day is a huge event in Santiago, and this year some three hundred thousand women marched along one of the main avenues, heading to a rally in the city center. I joined a crowd of women and girls with painted faces and clothes in the feminist colors of purple and green. There were almost no other men in sight, but no one asked me to leave.

Hundreds of women gathered to chant and sing and wave banners at the Plaza de la Dignidad. Situated at a spot where police and protesters had regularly done battle, the plaza contained a stone plinth supporting a bronze statue of a historic Chilean figure, General Baquedano, on horseback. During the *estallido*, authorities had removed the statue, leaving only the plinth, which was now covered in graffiti, as were many nearby buildings, some of which had also been torched.

Women held placards with outraged slogans: "It's a dress, not a yes," "What you call love is just unpaid work," "*Muerte al macho*." One sign read "We're the granddaughters of the witches you weren't able to burn." A nearly naked woman walked past, holding burning torches aloft. With a rope around her waist, she pulled a wagon carrying another woman, dressed in queenly garb. Elsewhere, two women collaborated on a performance: one methodically washed pink panties and pinned them to a clothesline, while another, kneeling, repeatedly dunked her head in the washtub. Not far away, Irina Karamanos marched with several of Boric's female cabinet ministers, holding a banner that read "Democracy in the nation, at home, and in bed."

When I mentioned the Women's Day march to Ricardo Lagos, the President from 2000 to 2006, he seemed delighted. "This used to be a country of gray suits," he said. "But in the past thirty years there has been a huge cultural opening!" A grandfatherly man of eighty-four, he received me in his




*"I'm just sad that because I got cocky and used that condescending tone I ended up losing our argument even though I was right."*

• •

book-filled office at his foundation, Democracy and Development.

As a young man, Lagos had been nominated as Allende's Ambassador to the Soviet Union, and had fled into exile when Pinochet seized power. Returning home a few years later, he became the first prominent Chilean to speak out against Pinochet on live TV. As President, he represented the center-left Concertación coalition. "We opened this country up," Lagos said. "Chile was a different Chile then. There wasn't even a divorce law in this country! In 1993, when I first ran for President, I said that I would pass one, and they didn't elect me. We finally managed it ten years later." He noted that it wasn't until the Presidency of Michelle Bachelet, his fellow-Socialist, that abortion in cases of rape was legalized.

Many leftists insist that Chile's current problems are an inheritance of past governments' failure to create a fairer society. To them, Lagos was a neoliberal. Lagos suggested that the insistence on ideological purity was part of the problem. He and his allies had provided educational opportunities and public housing for the poor. "It wasn't enough," he conceded. But they didn't have the votes to do more, he said; Chile's right-wing legislators had wielded veto power to block reforms. "Our problem has been both figuring how to deal with the ensemble that we inherited from Pinochet and how to create a new ensemble," he said.

In the hope of fostering greater unity, Pato Fernández had introduced Boric to Lagos during the Presidential campaign. Lagos told me, "I can't say we're friends—the generational difference is too great. But I look favorably on him." He added that he had liked Boric's Presidential acceptance speech, saying, "He understands he has to be a statesman." He had especially appreciated Boric's stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the first day of the war, while Boric and Karamanos were still in the Juan Fernández Islands, Boric had tweeted, "From Chile we condemn the invasion of Ukraine, the violation of its sovereignty and the illegitimate use of force. Our solidarity will be with the victims, and our humble efforts will be on behalf of peace." Lagos concluded, "I like his use of the word 'humble.' It shows that he understands his place in the world."

La Moneda, the Presidential palace, was restored after Pinochet's bombing, but Chile's modern Presidents have lived in their own homes. A few days before Boric's inauguration, he and Karamanos moved into a new house: a rambling former clinic in an old section of downtown. Boric said excitedly that it had thirteen rooms, a big step up from the small apartment they'd shared before; he would finally have space for his books.

The neighborhood, Yungay, consisted of two- and three-story homes from around the turn of the twentieth century. I found Boric on the second floor of a low Art Deco building, alone with a huge pile of unpacked boxes. From the window, we could see *carabineros* at a barricade at the end of the block, where a group of curious people were being kept at bay. The area was run-down, known for drug deals and persistent crime, but Boric and Karamanos didn't want to live in one of the *barrios altos*—the posh neighborhoods of Santiago. Boric said that he hoped their presence in Yungay would help make things better.

In one room, Boric had his only piece of furniture, an old-fashioned rolltop desk. He had bought it from a second-hand store, he said, stroking it with pride. His laptop was open, and he explained that he was working on his speech for the inauguration. He was feeling "a bit nervous, finally," he confessed. He'd been distracting himself by dipping into books—one about the twentieth-century Chilean dictator Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, another about libertarian thought.

Boric wanted to greet the people at the barricade, so we walked together, his plainclothes bodyguards fanning out. He stopped at a doorway, where a young man handed him a flag of a Magallanes soccer club. They embraced, and Boric stood for a selfie.

At the barricade, about fifty people had assembled, waving cell phones and calling out to Boric. For ten minutes, he moved along the line, posing for selfies, shaking hands, kissing elderly women, and listening to his new constituents. A woman complained about the state of her mother in a hospital; a man said he was having labor problems at a mine.

Back in the apartment, Boric gestured toward a neglected exercise machine, mentioning that he was feeling out of shape. He said that as President he hoped to take some time for himself every day, but it seemed unlikely

that his duties would allow it. He showed me a gift from a woman in the crowd below: a bearded doll woven to look like him. "That's nothing," he said. Walking over to a stack of boxes, he pulled out a huge plastic bag of gifts that people had pressed upon him: more effigies, and hundreds of notes.

Through the window, I saw a woman waving excitedly from her apartment, across the narrow street. Boric smiled and waved back, but he looked overwhelmed. He murmured, "It's all a bit 'Truman Show,' isn't it?"

On March 11th, Boric was inaugurated, in Valparaíso, an hour's drive from Santiago. The ceremony took place in Chile's congressional building—a concrete behemoth that Pinochet erected near the location of his childhood home. As Boric took his position onstage, he stepped behind Piñera, his predecessor, and executed a curious maneuver involving a complete pirouette; his O.C.D. was flaring up. But the ceremony went smoothly, and at the end Congress rose to applaud. Evidently unsure which gesture best represented him, Boric acknowledged them by placing a hand over his heart, pumping a fist in the air, and clasping his palms together: namaste.

Afterward, Boric was driven through the streets in a 1966 black Ford Galaxie convertible—a gift from Queen Elizabeth II that has been used by Chile's Presidents since Allende. By the time he arrived at the grounds of La Moneda, it was almost sundown. Boric would address the nation from a balcony outside the office where Allende had recorded his final speech, in 1973. Even though the inauguration ceremony was an obligatory ritual, he had told me, he was really looking forward to the address.

Among Boric's obligations was a reception at which he greeted foreign dignitaries. A few days earlier, he had told me that the King of Spain was coming. With a vexed look, he said, "What the fuck do I have to say to a king?"

Most Latin American leftists hold Spain's monarchy in disdain, because of its associations with colonial rule. In 2019, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the Mexican President, wrote to King Felipe demanding an apology for Spain's "abuses" in his country. The King did not reply.

In Chile, the indigenous Mapuche people had resisted Spain's conquistadores, sometimes defeating them in battle. But the Mapuche—afflicted by political marginalization, endemic poverty, and land grabs by outsiders—have remained a restive social force. An unresolved conflict has simmered in their central-Chilean homeland of Araucanía, south of Santiago. The violence has escalated lately, with land takeovers, arson, and occasional killings. Piñera sent in troops on "pacification" missions, which were both brutal and ineffective. Boric had criticized this strategy and vaguely promised a new approach. The Mapuche conflict is one of the more delicate issues facing him as President. (Later, when his interior minister visited Araucanía, shots were fired near her convoy, in an apparent act of intimidation.) Another pressing issue is rising discontent over migrants; as many as 1.5 million of them have flooded into Chile from poorer countries, especially Venezuela, Colombia, and Haiti.

When Boric finally met King Felipe, there was evidently not much to say—just a polite handshake before moving down the line of international guests. Aside from the King, there were few conservatives. Bolsonaro had made a point of boycotting, though he wouldn't have been welcome anyway. The leftist contingent was much stronger, including members of Spain's Podemos movement. The left-leaning Presidents of Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia also came, as did the Colombian Presidential candidate Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla. After the inauguration, Petro and Boric tweeted a selfie of themselves smiling and making heart shapes with their hands.



Before walking the red carpet into La Moneda, Boric veered off to take selfies with well-wishers, hundreds of whom were straining at a police line. Then a military band struck up, and Boric, whose handlers had instructed him to walk in time with the music, headed toward the palace in an awkward half march. Midway there, he stopped for a long moment in front of a bronze statue of Allende, his head reverently bowed.

When Boric appeared on the balcony, he spoke of how rockets had once pierced the building where he stood. Never again, he suggested, would the Chilean state repress its own people. He spoke about the country's burdens: peasants without access to water, students saddled with debt, retirees without adequate pensions, relatives of the disappeared, still waiting for their loved ones. Several times, he said, "Never again," repeating it in his reedy tenor like an incantation.

As a half-moon rose, a rhyming chant broke out in the crowd: "Boric, friend, the people are with you." He called for unity. "We have to embrace one another as a society, to love one another again, to smile again," he said. He referred to "violence in the world, and now a war as well"—an allusion to Ukraine—and said, "Chile will always take the side of human rights, no matter where, no matter what the color of government involved." When he said, "We must heal the wounds of the *estallido social*," the crowd roared its approval. After Boric's speech, Karamanos crossed the balcony, and they kissed. As the audience chanted his name, Boric gripped the railing, gazing out. He seemed aware that there would be no more free applause.

When it was all over, people began to move away from La Moneda, heading home or out to celebrate more. Venders sold beer, along with Boric flags and mugs and T-shirts. The city had a festive, ragged atmosphere, as if a concert had just let out. As I approached the Plaza de la Dignidad, though, the crowds grew sparse, and it was soon clear why. A few blocks ahead, protesters had built barricades across the avenue and set them ablaze. They had strung up a banner across one with a message for Boric: "We won't forget that you made a pact with the enemy, and we won't leave the streets until liberation is complete." ♦




# TRASH

*Souvankham Thammavongsa*

I don't know why I didn't think of someone like Miss Emily. It never occurred to me to imagine her. I guess you could say I lacked imagination. I married her son after knowing him for only five days. A whirlwind romance.

I was the cashier at the local supermarket. Her son came in on Tuesdays to shop, to get discounts. I thought he was someone who didn't spend lavishly even though he could. I could tell he came from good people. He always wore a nice suit, and he had this beautiful coat, the kind of fabric that made you want to reach out and touch.

Of course, I could never do anything like that. I am not that bold. And, anyway, we weren't allowed to behave that way with customers. I wasn't selling clothes. I scanned bar codes. We were instructed only to take the coupons and the cash, or to press the buttons for the credit-card machines. We don't accept personal checks anymore, we were told to say.

The evening I actually met Miss Emily's son, I was finishing up my shift when I saw him come in. He seemed real glamorous, and I hadn't seen someone like that before so close up, looking right back at me. He certainly was not like the kind of people I'd grown up around. The kind who cuss, grab their crotch, belch. If they didn't like you, you'd know about it and they'd say it to your face. There was no pretending.

I helped him carry some things to his car, and we got to talking. I liked talking to him. He was funny and friendly and polite. That's all I really need to know about anyone. I remember now that it snowed. Large, fluffy, soft flakes that made you think of diamonds. That night, I went home with him, and the rest, as they say, is history. We got married.

I met Miss Emily not long after marrying her son, on a Friday evening. She took the earliest flight she could get to come see her son. She thought I was pregnant because of how sudden it was. I was not.

She was so eager to meet me. She made her son drive her to the supermarket, and they waited in the parking lot for two hours until I finished my shift. I had been on my feet for eight hours, so I wasn't looking too hot or feeling that great about myself. But I didn't think of things like that, impressions—first impressions—what they mean and how people don't change their feelings about you even years after.

I was wearing jeans and a pair of old runners, and a sweatshirt several sizes too large. My hair was tied back in a low ponytail. I wasn't wearing any makeup. Like I said, I didn't think of things like that at the time.

I got into the back seat, where Miss Emily was sitting alone. She took my face in, all its details and pores, assessed what kind of skin care or serum I might need, and kept those thoughts to herself. She smiled politely, and told me she was so glad to meet me—the girl her son had married.

I was family now, she said, and it wasn't up to her to say anything about that. Her son was, after all, his own man.

For as long as she could remember, all she ever wanted was a family, too. Her husband had died a few years ago. Heart attack. Sudden. She had married him right after college. Gone to law school, made partner, owned her own practice. Had three children. Bought property. She could afford to travel and take vacations abroad.

She had bettered herself. She'd worked very hard for what she had, she said. She had been—at one point in her life, so she knows these things—what people called trash. She'd improved herself, she said. Moved on up, pulled herself up by her bootstraps, got to work, and no one could use that word to describe her anymore. She made sure of that, she said.

Over dinner that night, at a restaurant, she told me loving stories of her son when he was a child. How he'd wanted to be a grass cutter at a baseball stadium in a big city when he grew up. His first girlfriend, his crushes and heartbreaks. His prom, and his pets. I loved hearing these stories. She made them so vivid and funny.

The bill came, and she paid. I begged her to tell me one more story. She thought for a moment. And then she told one about a pigeon her son had picked up off the road in front of their house when he was about ten years old. She didn't know that what he had there with him was a pigeon. She thought that he had been injured, that there had been an accident somewhere, but he was smiling at her with all that blood on him, and she was relieved to find out that he just had a dead bird. She said her son was always finding things like that—dead animals, caps and bottles, old books—and bringing them home. She said he always asked her to make something out of them.

When her son drove us back to his apartment, she asked me about my family. I said it was just me. My parents weren't around anymore. They died in a car crash. I should have left it at that, but Miss Emily had spent all evening telling me stories, and she was so open and honest that I wanted to say more. My dad had been drinking and really shouldn't have got behind the wheel. He was speeding. Ran a red light. It was raining. The car, a cheap old thing, was totalled.

I was in my last year of high school when all this happened. My parents didn't have life insurance. The car insurance had expired and no one had bothered to renew it. There were no savings or anything like that. So I had to quit school and get a job to pay rent. I wasn't in a position to spend a few weeks or months sending out résumés, going on interviews. I needed a job right away, and the supermarket gave me one.

I didn't want to live with anyone and was proud to find a place I could have all to myself. It was across the street from a park. It had one window. Hardwood floors, a bathtub, toilet, a stove, and a fridge. I wasn't a person who needed much. I put up bookshelves and set a mattress on the floor. An actress, I was told, had lived there. She gave up the place when she got a big break out in Los Angeles. I thought it was good luck to move into that space. Maybe I would catch a big break myself. I didn't know what, exactly, that might be, but it was something to believe in and hope for, too.

I was telling all this to Miss Emily,

ILLUSTRATION BY MARTA MONTEIRO

and when I paused she asked me if I might quit the job at the supermarket, now that I'd married her son. I told her I really loved the supermarket. I felt loyal to the place. I had been there for fifteen years. I'd worked my way up, too.

It was a grand place. All those shelves of food. You didn't have to go very far to get anything. The eggs were near the steaks. You didn't have to spend hours making the perfect cake or rolling thin sheets of dough to make croissants. You didn't have to own any land or take out feed or work up the nerve to kill anything that had a face. Someone somewhere did that work for you, and it was all there on display. Each and every item was given a bar code of its very own, everything was kept track of. The feel of the cash-machine tray as it popped out and hit me on the arm was like an old friend checking in throughout the day.

But Miss Emily didn't see it that way. She wanted me to go back to school, get my diploma, go to college, and look for something better. These kinds of things cost money to have, I thought. I didn't say that to her. I knew she was the type of person who wouldn't use that as an excuse for anything. She just wanted the best for me, she said. It was exactly what my own mother would have wanted for me, if she'd wanted anything for me. I loved Miss Emily right away then. She was so ambitious for me. And who, really, had dreams for you that you didn't even know you could wish for all by yourself?

Miss Emily smelled like fresh roses. She was soft and warm. Miss Emily loved being a mother, and now I was one of hers. That weekend, she took me shopping for clothes. Just us girls, she said. Skirts and blouses, dresses, trousers, a trench coat. These were things I never would have dared to buy for myself. They were in fabric you had to dry-clean. You couldn't throw any of those clothes into a machine to launder. She was so wonderful to me, really. No one had ever taken that kind of time with me or cared so much for me. I was always afraid of troubling the salesgirls at stores like these. And they usually ignored me, knowing that I wouldn't buy anything, anyway.

With Miss Emily, the salesgirl was real attentive and friendly. Miss Emily was so at ease. Talking with the salesgirl, asking her to bring us things in a size that would be a better fit. Asking the salesgirl her opinion about what young professional women wore to the office these days. She told me that, since her son worked in an office, she didn't want me to feel out of place. I would never buy these things for myself, I said. I don't have that kind of money to spend, I told her. She said she would take care of it. She was so happy to be in a position to help, and all that mattered was that I loved the things I picked out.

After getting back to her son's apartment and putting away my new clothes, Miss Emily began finding other ways to be useful. I honestly thought she would be exhausted after all that shopping. We had been at the clothing store for several hours, undressing and dressing me, putting things back, changing our minds, wanting to see things in other colors before deciding. All that sifting, trying, directing, imagining was a lot of work.

Suddenly, what had been her sweet, warm voice turned hoarse and cold. She became frazzled, asking me to do something—anything, really—to clean the house. Pointing a beautifully polished nail at me. "You," she said. "You do something about this."

I didn't know what had upset her so.

She kept saying, "Can't you *see* this?"

I was honest with her. I didn't know what the big deal was, and, truly, I hadn't noticed all this before.

She brought items up to me as if they were dead animals, holding them with two fingers as she shaped her face into disgust. She brought me takeout boxes and containers, beer bottles, soiled clothes, ashtrays. Then she threw a toilet brush my way and said, "Start with this." I hadn't noticed the stains on the outside of the toilet bowl, or inside just around the rim. I didn't know things could get into those kinds of places, at that angle.

She talked about her son as if *she* had been married to him for twenty-five years and was now emotionally spent. She told me all the things that were wrong with him. How his hair needed to be cut, his toenails and fingernails needed to be trimmed, how he hadn't brushed his teeth for days. She said, "He snores at night! How can you not hear that sleeping next to him?" She then began to describe me with words like stupid and dumb. She kept telling me to think, think, *think*. She said her son had never been like *this* when she had him. She said, "What have you done to him?" She took a spray bottle and sprayed surfaces, and scrubbed and scrubbed. She didn't want to look at my face, she said.

I went outside to the front porch and sat on a step. I wondered where her son was. Why he had been gone for most of the day, and when he would be back. I thought about a mother's love. The incredible generosity it required from you. Her son had taken in a stranger, someone else's child, and, whatever this thing was with the two of them, she felt that she, too, had to love and give everything she had, even if she didn't want to. I knew that, whatever she felt about me, it was true to her, and that there was some truth to it. I wasn't good enough for her, and I never would be. But I wanted her love. I guess it was like a child wishing to see a crowd of gold stars next to her name. Proof that she'd done good that day, and that someone had taken the time to see that. There isn't anything like that for you as an adult, and the feeling of wanting one star—any star—never does disappear entirely.

Just then, I saw a creature crawl toward me. I thought it was a lost cat, but this thing looked large and vicious—it was a raccoon. It reached out at the dark between us, at my little face, and when I flinched it stopped and turned back to where it had come from. I don't know what it thought I was, exactly, what it might have mistaken me for, out there, all alone. I wasn't trash. ♦

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Souvankham Thammavongsa on centering a narrator who would usually be in the margins.








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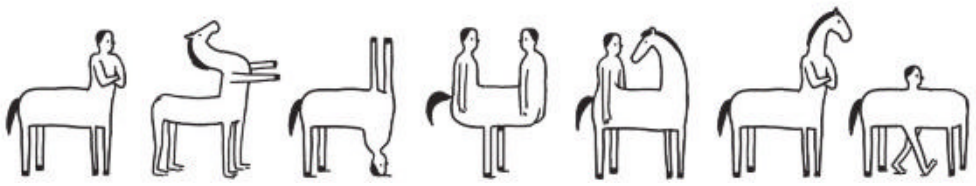



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A CRITIC AT LARGE

# PUPPET REGIME

*The further and further and further adventures of Pinocchio.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Of the half-dozen or so films that turned Walt Disney, in the public's mind, from the father of Mickey Mouse to the creator of the animated fairy-tale feature—thereby making his work a fixture in the imaginative life of almost every American child—"Pinocchio" (1940) feels like the odd one out. Many people say it is their least favorite. It is surely the most frightening. Go to anyone you know who was in grammar school in the nineteen-forties and fifties and ask, What was the Disney movie that scared you the most? Was it "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937), where the evil queen falls off a cliff to her death? (Dr. Benjamin Spock once wrote that all the seats in the vast auditorium of Radio City Music Hall had to be reupholstered because so many children wet their pants while watching the film.) Well, what about "Dumbo" (1941), where the baby elephant has to watch as his mother is whipped and chained, howling for her child? O.K., what about "Bambi" (1942), where the fawn's mother is shot to death a few feet away from him? You can't beat that, can you?

But, for some reason, "Pinocchio" does. Perhaps the answer lies not in any one scene but in the movie's over-all bleakness. Robin Allan, in his beautiful book "Walt Disney and Europe" (1999), reproduces what he calls an "atmosphere sketch" for "Pinocchio," by the Disney artist Gustaf Tenggren, showing the puppet locked in a cage, just after he has been kidnapped by an itinerant puppeteer. Other marionettes hang from the ceiling on strings, as if they had been lynched. Pinocchio alone seems to be alive, but he stares straight ahead, expressionless. At first glance, he looks almost serene. Then you inspect the drawing more closely and realize that the reason his face is blank is that he is numb with fear, like someone in a horror movie. Danger and death surround this small creature throughout the film. As Allan points out, seventy-six of "Pinocchio"'s eighty-eight minutes—that's eighty-six per cent—take place at night or under water.

If the film is unsettling, consider the novel it was based on, Carlo Collodi's "Adventures of Pinocchio" (1883). The tale begins with a lethal weapon: under blows from an axe, the pine log that will become Pinocchio cries out, "Ouch! you've hurt me!" Soon afterward, the woodworker Geppetto starts fashioning the log into a puppet, which he calls Pinocchio: *pino*, in Italian, meaning pine, and *occhio*, meaning eye, one of the first parts of Pinocchio that Geppetto liberates from within the log. Next comes the nose, which, the moment Geppetto has finished it, starts to grow to an enormous length. Geppetto tries to prune it back, "but the more he cut and shortened it, the longer that impudent nose became." This nose will become Pinocchio's trademark feature, and the combined comedy and cruelty that attend its birth can be said to stand for Collodi's novel as a whole: Geppetto got Pinocchio by cutting, and for most of the remainder of the tale Pinocchio cuts him—mocks him, runs away from him.

It's not an even trade, though. Pinocchio, for all his naughtiness, suffers terribly. Early on, at home alone, he lies back in a chair, propping his feet against the room's brazier. He then falls asleep, and as a result his feet are burned off. When Geppetto returns home, he bursts into tears and lifts the puppet to his breast. Pinocchio hangs on for dear life. He can no longer stand up. His legs are smoking stumps. The drawing of this scene (by the excellent Enrico Mazzanti) in the novel's first edition is hard to look at.

Geppetto, in creating Pinocchio, hopes that the puppet will perform in public to support him in his old age, for he is very poor. But when Pinocchio, not long after his creation, is on his way to school, he discovers that a puppet show has come to town, which sounds like more fun. He cannot resist temptation; he lacks a conscience. As veterans of the Disney version know, his conscience is outsourced to the figure of Jiminy Cricket. But in the Collodi novel Pinocchio kills the wise Cricket—throws a mallet at him, mashing his guts against the wall—when the creature tells him that he should go to school. Pinocchio pays for his truancy. After the puppet show, he encounters two scoundrels, the Fox and the Cat, who conspire to steal his money and hang him by the neck from an oak tree.

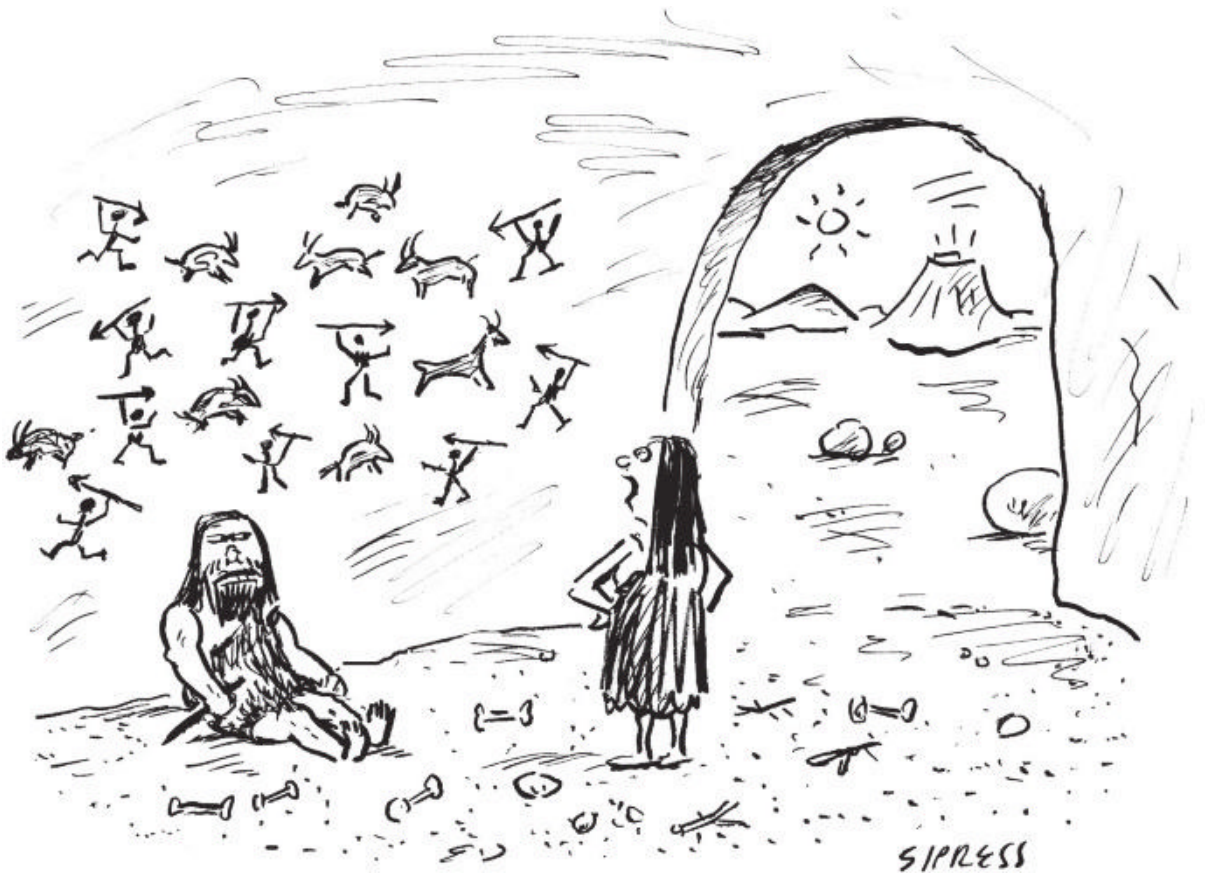
The film's dark side reflects some of the book's outlandish cruelty, but in many other ways Disney transformed the original. For instance, Pinocchio's desire to be a "real boy," so central to the film, emerges only fitfully in the book. The same is true of his nose's habit of growing when he tells a lie, a trait so famous that it's now part of our culture's iconography. (There's a long-nosed emoji for lying, and the Washington *Post's*

ABOVE: CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



*The Pinocchio story that most people know is very different from the one that Carlo Collodi originally wrote.*

ILLUSTRATION BY IRENE RINALDI




*"Here's an idea—paint about gathering."*

• •

fact checker logs the mendacity of politicians' speeches on a scale of "two Pinocchios," "three Pinocchios," and so on.) Collodi's Pinocchio certainly tells a lot of lies, but his nose often grows when he hasn't lied, and he often lies without his nose growing.

"Seldom has a work of literature been so overshadowed by its celluloid adaptation," John Hooper and Anna Kraczyna write in the introduction to their new translation of "The Adventures of Pinocchio" (Penguin Classics). "This is a book with a mission: to rescue Pinocchio," they declare. They want us to see Collodi's work not just as a children's story but also, maybe primarily, as a part of "the corpus of nineteenth-century novels of social denunciation," and they urge us to recognize its puppet hero as being, for Italy, what Don Quixote is for Spain, "one of those rare fictional characters in whom an entire people seem to be able to make out their reflection." But you don't have to be an Italian to identify with Pinocchio. For many audiences worldwide, he is the spirit of disobedience. No sooner is he born than he establishes his independence from his creator, Geppetto. Not long after that, he also, in a sense, parts ways with Collodi, whose original conception was very different from the finished book. Since then, Pinocchio has continually refused to be tied down, roaming freely across the world's visual culture, always different but always recognizably himself.

Carlo Collodi (1826-90) was the eldest of ten children born to a couple—the father a cook, the mother a seamstress—working in the service of a Florentine marquess named Ginori Lisci. The growing brood was apparently too much for them, and the boy lived for a time with his mother's family in the village of Collodi, outside Florence. (It was from that town that, when he was grown, he took his pen name. His given name was Carlo Lorenzini.) His parents' employer took an interest in him, however, and arranged for him to get an education. Carlo first went to a seminary, in preparation for a career in the Church. Then, deciding that he did not have the makings of a priest, he transferred to another good school. At this time, when much of Italy was impoverished and illiterate, it was rare for someone of Collodi's social position, the child of servants, to receive a classical education, and it was this mixed background, both sophisticated and "street," that makes "Pinocchio" so piquant.

In his late teens, Collodi went to work at a respected bookstore in Florence and began to mix with the intelligentsia. In his mid-twenties, he co-founded a satirical daily. In the following decades, he reviewed books, music, and theatre, and produced a lot of political polemics. He also wrote a novel and six comic plays. In other words, he became the sort of literary Jack-of-all-trades that historians are apt to call a "journalist." He was also usually holding down a day job in the civil service. The fact that he never married or had children—he is said to have disliked children—no doubt made it easier for him to do all this.

Collodi was a committed republican. Twice, in 1848 and then in 1859, he signed up to fight for the Risorgimento, the movement that sought to liberate the Italian peninsula from the foreign powers that, for most of his lifetime, ruled it. Like many radicals, however, Collodi was not happy with the outcome of the Risorgimento: a constitutional monarchy with a weak king, Victor Emmanuel II, who cared more about the rich and the middle class than about Italy's millions of poor people. Even though the nation was now nominally ruled by a central government, its many parts did not have shared values, or even a shared language. In his forties, Collodi contributed to an important Italian dictionary, one of the many efforts to get Italians to agree on a single standard language rather than continue speaking local dialects that people fifty miles away might not understand. As reformers sized up the task of educating the populace of this new country, Collodi started writing for children. First, he did a translation of Charles Perrault's fairy tales and a number of instructional storybooks. Then, in 1880, a publisher in Rome persuaded him to contribute to a fledgling newspaper for children, *Giornale per i Bambini*, and he launched what was to be that publication's best-known serial, "La Storia di un Burattino," or "The Story of a Puppet," the puppet being Pinocchio.

It has been suggested that Pinocchio, his newly fashioned parts flapping this way and that, was Collodi's symbol of his homeland—nominally unified but in fact governed locally, not by agreed-upon, let alone just, laws. The book features not a single public official—policeman, jailer, judge—who is

not either stupid or corrupt or both. When Pinocchio complains to the authorities that the Fox and the Cat have stolen his money, the police come and arrest not the Fox and the Cat but Pinocchio. The judge (a gorilla) sends Pinocchio to prison for having been such a fool. An amnesty is later declared in the district, but Pinocchio is told that he alone will not be released, because an amnesty is only for real criminals. Tuscans have a reputation for being rough and gruff, and Collodi—habitually wry, sardonic, iconoclastic—was an excellent representative of his province. It is no surprise that he did not send his hero off into a world of kindness.

The stories appeared, off and on, during the second half of 1881. Taken together, they form less than half the book we now call "Pinocchio"—fifteen chapters out of thirty-six. This section ends when the Fox and the Cat hang Pinocchio:

> A strong north wind had come up, which, blowing and howling furiously, slammed the poor hanged puppet back and forth, causing him to swing violently like the clapper of a joyously ringing bell. And that swinging caused him the sharpest spasms while the slip noose, tightening more and more around his throat, was choking him.
>
> Little by little his eyes grew dim; and although he felt death approaching, he nonetheless still continued to hope that at any moment some compassionate soul would pass by and help him. But when, after waiting and waiting, he saw that nobody showed up, absolutely nobody, then he remembered his poor father again . . . and almost at death's door, he stuttered.
>
> "Oh, dear father! . . . if only you were here!"
>
> And he had no breath to say anything else. He closed his eyes, opened his mouth, stretched out his legs, and, after giving a great shudder, he remained there as though frozen stiff.

That, the earliest fans of the stories must have thought, was the end of Pinocchio.

It wasn't. A great deal of nineteenth-century fiction was published serially, in magazines and newspapers. This was especially common with what, today, we would call popular novels, about who would marry whom or murder whom, and also with children's literature. Such subcategories were products of the great nineteenth-century boom in literacy, and like many new things they were treated more lightly than old things were.

An interesting corollary of serial publication was that it occasionally gave readers a say in how the narrative would develop. A famous example is that of the Sherlock Holmes novels and stories, by Arthur Conan Doyle, the first of which appeared in 1887. Once the stories started running in *The Strand* magazine, in 1891, they became so popular that Conan Doyle had difficulty keeping up with the public demand. As a result, he became very rich, and very sick of Sherlock Holmes. In 1893, after six years on this project, he set out to eliminate his celebrated detective by having him fall into the thundering Reichenbach Falls, in Switzerland, in a death struggle with the criminal mastermind Professor Moriarty. This might have seemed a good ending for the series (Moriarty perished, too), but that was not the view of the English reading public. Twenty thousand people cancelled their subscriptions to *The Strand* in protest. Conan Doyle, no doubt flattered but also annoyed, resisted the pressure for a decade and then gave in. Papering over Holmes's supposed death, Conan Doyle had the detective reveal that he had hidden on a ledge in order to fake his own death and evade his enemies, thus allowing the series to resume.

Much the same thing, on a smaller scale, happened with Carlo Collodi. The Pinocchio stories were an immediate hit, but then Collodi got tired of doing them and decided to kill his hero off. In the *Giornale's* printing of the hang-



ing passage quoted above, the phrase "almost at death's door" does not appear. "Almost at death's door," which was added for the book version, means not quite yet at death's door. Clearly, Collodi, moved by the reactions of outraged readers and also, perhaps, by a need for money, decided to re-start the serial. Like Sherlock Holmes's convenient ledge, this phrase enabled the author to continue the story he thought he had got rid of. Pinocchio refused to die, and that is how we ended up with the story we have today.

Under the circumstances, it is tempting to assume that Part 2 of "Pinocchio" is a reversal, a correction, of Part 1. The ending of Part 2, which shows us Pinocchio as a well-dressed and rather arch young man—no longer a puppet—makes us even more likely to tell ourselves that that's what the book's second half is about. It's not, though, or not until close to the end. Most of Part 2, like Part 1, is a pretty rough-and-tumble affair, and that truculence is probably what children, and their parents, liked so much in "Pinocchio." It was part of their inheritance from the commedia dell'arte and from the puppet shows, descendants of the commedia, that in late-nineteenth-century Italy still travelled from town to town. It is just such a show, with puppets trading insults and clobbering one another over the head, that Pinocchio is enthralled by early on in the story.

Scenes of cheerful brutality were familiar to Collodi and his contemporaries also from other nineteenth-century children's literature: illustrated stories, sometimes newspaper cartoons, in which badly behaved children had popguns rammed down their throats (we see the blood, the broken teeth) or were thrown down the chimney into a bubbling soup pot. If they sucked their thumbs, their thumbs were cut off. (Wilhelm Busch's "Max and Moritz," first put between covers in 1865, is probably the best-known example.)

In addition to the cartoonish violence, another quality that unites the two parts of "Pinocchio" is a long vein of sheer strangeness—alluring, bizarre, and often beautiful strangeness, like something out of Surrealist art. In Chapter 15, Pinocchio meets the Blue-Haired Fairy, who will become a sort of guardian angel to him. Running away from the Fox and the Cat, he spies a little cottage in the distance. Maybe, he thinks, someone in there could save him? He runs to the cottage and bangs on the door. No answer.

> Then there came to the window a beautiful Little Girl with blue hair and a face as white as a wax image who, with eyes closed and hands

crossed over her breast, without moving her lips at all, said in a voice that seemed to come from the world beyond:

"There is nobody in this house. They are all dead."

"Well, then you at least open up for me!" cried Pinocchio, weeping and imploring.

"I am dead, too."

"Dead? But then what are you doing there at the window?"

"I am waiting for the bier to come and take me away."

As soon as she said this, the Little Girl disappeared, and the window closed again without making a sound.

After that, nothing in this book needs to go very far to seem strange, but things do go farther. The Little Girl starts to feel sorry for Pinocchio, and after seeing him hanged she dispatches her neighborhood falcon to sever the rope around his neck and bring him back to her house. There she installs him in a big fluffy bed and calls in three medical specialists: the Owl, the Raven, and the so-called Talking Cricket, who turns out to be the ghost of the cricket that Pinocchio murdered earlier. Each of them delivers a pompous speech diagnosing Pinocchio's ailment, and each diagnosis differs from the others. Having done their duty, the doctors depart, whereupon the Fairy—it is roughly at this point that the Little Girl, without explanation, turns into a full-fledged fairy—mixes a medicine for Pinocchio. When he refuses to drink it, "the door of the room opened wide and in came four rabbits as black as ink, carrying a small coffin on their shoulders." Is this the bier the Little Girl was waiting for, to remove her corpse and the other dead bodies she claimed were in her house? We never find out. All we are told is that Pinocchio, frightened out of his wits that he, too, may die and be carried off by the rabbit pallbearers, drinks down the Fairy's potion and soon feels better.

One of the main dramas that occupy the second portion of the book is a trip to the Land of Toys, a place for boys who like to play children's games—or, in the Disney movie, to smoke cigars and play pool—rather than go to school. Pinocchio is persuaded to go there with a bunch of local juvenile delinquents. He and his friend Lampwick throw themselves into the pleasures offered and, as a result, turn into donkeys. First, they feel something funny on their heads and find, with horror, that they have grown long, hairy asses' ears. They try to laugh this off, but the laughter turns to braying. They run around on all fours and sprout hooves and a tail. Like Midas or Narcissus, the two boys have been transformed into an image of their moral lives.

Unbelievably, things get worse. The donkey Pinocchio, having been purchased by a man who is apparently a leather-goods merchant, is thrown into the ocean with a stone tied to his neck, so that he will drown and his hide alone can be harvested. But, as he is dumped into the sea, a school of fish, sent by the Blue-Haired Fairy, who can't bear to see him suffer, attach themselves to his body and devour all his flesh—hide, tail, guts—slimming him down to the wooden puppet he once was. This is not the only horrible scene at the end of "Pinocchio," but, brief and blunt, it is the most appalling. They are only a donkey and a school of fish, but it somehow feels like cannibalism.

All along, the story has been devolving in another sense. That is, it has been turning into a mess. Arguably, it has been doing so from the beginning. For instance, Pinocchio started off with a completely different wood-carver, Master Cherry, who botched the job and handed the log over to Geppetto. He then disappeared from the tale, never to be seen again. Other perplexities accumulate. We start hearing about people who need to be explained and aren't. Things are supposed to happen, and then they don't. Things are deplored, and we're not told why. Pinocchio's savior, the Blue-Haired Fairy, appears first as a little girl, at a window. Within a short time, she is a beautiful grownup fairy. Sometimes she's dead, sometimes alive. At one point, she turns into a goat, but not for long.

But the most surprising inconsistency—many readers, I think, just try to forget about it—comes at the end. Here Pinocchio has at last, with the help of the Blue-Haired Fairy, become a "real boy," the thing he is said to have wished for from the beginning. (In fact, we don't hear about this wish until Chapter 25.) He looks at himself in the mirror: "He no longer saw the usual image of the wooden marionette reflected there; instead he saw the lively, intelligent image of a handsome boy with chestnut brown hair and light blue eyes, and with a festive air about him that made him seem as happy as a holiday." Really? After having, shortly before, found himself, and Geppetto, in danger of being digested by a shark, in whose cold, slimy innards they were entrapped?

Many a chapter is only a few pages long, and whatever happens in it may well be forgotten by the next chapter. In one, Pinocchio encounters a slavering mastiff; in another, he is menaced by a snake; in another, he converses with a parrot sitting in a tree. Never mind. In a few pages, he/she/it will be gone, often never to be heard from again. That, not just the tale's fidelity to national characteristics, is why "Pinocchio" is often compared to "Don Quixote." It is a picaresque. It goes from episode to episode.

The reader's problem, though, is not with the change of circumstances—this is a fairy tale, after all—but with the change of tone. Before, Pinocchio was always childlike: eager, curious, wondering, blundering. Now he is as smooth and confident, as full of fake cheer as a housewife in a floor-wax commercial. "How funny I was when I was a puppet!" he exclaims. "How glad I am now that I've become a proper boy!" We liked him better the other way, and so, I am sure, did Collodi. Nicolas J. Perella, whose 1986 translation (in a bilingual, annotated edition) remains the best, says in his introduction that Collodi told a friend that he could not remember having written this ending, even though the manuscript shows that he did. Perhaps he was ashamed? Maybe he was drunk when he wrote it?

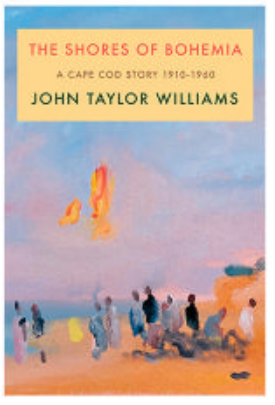
According to Tim Parks, a longtime translator and critic of Italian literature, Collodi was an enthusiastic drinker, gambler, and womanizer. He was also legendarily lazy and hated to revise. The final trait, I think, is the most important. Many of the chapters seem as though they were written in the last half hour before they were due at the printer. At times, Collodi sounds like an oral poet, even a rapper, making it up as he goes along. You can hear his breath, feel his energy rising and falling. A shark? Bring it on! Master Cherry,

forgotten? Who cares! Jump from the luckless Pinocchio to the "real boy," happy as a holiday? Why not? The audience was a bunch of kids. Were they going to notice?

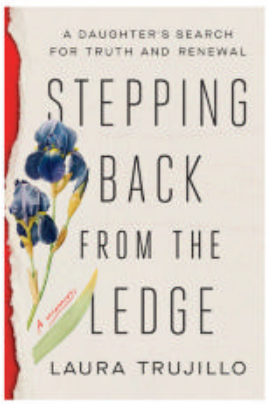
Whatever the book's carelessness, it was fantastically popular, and not just in Italy. According to the editors of the new edition, "Pinocchio" is the second most frequently translated work of fiction in the world. (The first is Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince.") In the United States, its popularity spawned a variety of adaptations, some more moralistic, some more sentimental, and so on. In "Pinocchio Goes Postmodern," a lively account of the puppet's fortunes in America, two "Pinocchio" savants, Richard Wunderlich and Thomas Morrissey, track these versions and show how they fed into the Disney movie and thereby ended up occluding the original. I have conducted an informal poll of Americans I know who are interested in children's literature, and none of them came to Collodi's book until they had seen the Disney movie. The same is true of me.

At Disney, the project was seen as a problem almost from the start. Walt Disney was worried that Collodi's Pinocchio was not sufficiently admirable to be the hero of a movie made by his company. Indeed, at a certain point early in production, he called a halt to work on the film, so that his writers could make changes in the story. (Many of the artists involved moved over to work on "Fantasia," which was being made at the same time.) But, once Disney felt that the film had found its feet, he proceeded confidently. Always a high roller, he filled the movie with dazzlements. Especially amazing was the work of a new, multiplane camera, developed by Disney technicians, that could shoot from three, five, twelve distances simultaneously: the village awakening, the birds circling the church tower, the chef fetching loaves of bread, the children leaving for school. Even today, when the film is more than eighty years old—and we have seen considerable cinematic wizardry in the meantime—these shots take your breath away. Anyone who wants a jolt of patriotic pride should watch "Ponyo" (2008), by Studio Ghibli, Japan's famed animation studio, and note how much its

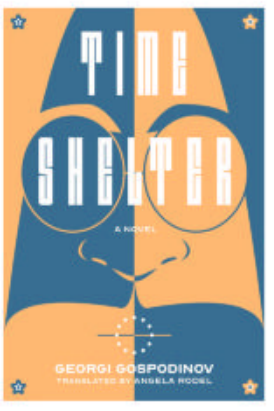
# BRIEFLY NOTED




**The Shores of Bohemia**, *by John Taylor Williams (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. From roughly 1910 to 1960, Cape Cod was a yeasty outpost for lefty artists and intellectuals—"Greenwich Village sunburnt," as the editor Floyd Dell said of Provincetown. Mary McCarthy lived and set her barbed novel "A Charmed Life" on the Cape. Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams felt able to do their best work there. Robert Motherwell wrote of "the radiant summer light of Provincetown that rivals the Greek islands." In this admiring chronicle, the author shows how, across half a century of tippling, rabble-rousing, and bed-hopping on the Cape, "a movement that shaped American art, literature, design, and theater rose and fell like the tides on its shores."




**Stepping Back from the Ledge**, *by Laura Trujillo (Random House)*. The author of this memoir reckons with her mother's suicide, a decade ago in Grand Canyon National Park, and with the agonizing conviction that she was to blame for it. Not long before, Trujillo had told her mother that her stepfather had sexually abused her for years. In unvarnished prose, she conjures the despair that gripped her in the aftermath of the death: "My grandma blamed me, as did my mom's sister and her brother." Later, Trujillo, a journalist, uses park-service reports to reconstruct a time line of her mother's final journey. Hoping thereby to understand her mother's decision, she instead confronts how, in cases of suicide, "only one person 'gets' an ending; the rest of us are left with a story abandoned mid-sentence."




**Time Shelter**, *by Georgi Gospodinov, translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel (Liveright)*. In this antic fantasy of European politics, narrated by a fictionalized version of the author, an enigmatic friend of his designs "a clinic of the past," which soothes Alzheimer's patients with environments from a time they can still remember. As the treatment gains prominence, feverish nostalgia grips the continent. People dress up in national costumes, and there is a Brexit-style referendum to return to the past (though the countries disagree on the era). In the East, there are socialist rallies and even a re-assassination of Franz Ferdinand. "History is still news," Gospodinov writes, cunningly drawing attention to the violence that the past wreaks on the present.




**Acts of Service**, *by Lillian Fishman (Hogarth)*. Having a devoted, dependable girlfriend doesn't stop Eve, the narrator of this début novel, from posting nude selfies online or from becoming involved with a couple, Olivia and Nathan, who respond to the pictures. Olivia is a painter with a day job at a family investment firm, where Nathan is her boss. Eve finds herself intoxicated by Nathan's masculinity, which draws her into "a state of grotesque candor," even as she frets over Olivia's well-being and struggles to reconcile her ideas of gender politics with the discovery of pleasure and abandon. Her adventure, she realizes, presents all the issues that preoccupy her—"desire, sex, gender, attention, intimacy, vanity, and power"—in such a way that she can "study them like fruit in a bowl."

artists, in drawing that movie's tsunami, apparently learned from the violent sea storm set in motion by the whale (Disney's upgrade of Collodi's shark) when he discovers that, contrary to his expectation, Pinocchio and Geppetto are not going to be his dinner.

At the same time, a lot of sophisticated people noticed that Disney had moved "Pinocchio" from poor, dusty old Italy to a clean, sparkling place that looks like Tyrol—Pinocchio wears a little alpine hat with a feather—and that Geppetto's workshop, a small, bare hovel in the Collodi original, had undergone a makeover. Now it was a large, prosperous studio filled with wonderful cuckoo clocks on which, every hour, cunningly carved figures—a mother, a drunk, a barnyard fowl—come out the doors and enact little dramas.

Plenty of moviegoers adored the clocks, but some people began to complain about the movie's embourgeoisement, or Disneyfication, to use a word from the following decade. Foremost on the list of grievances was a change to the hero. No longer was Pinocchio the skinny, weird-looking thing with the pointy hat whom you can see in the early illustrated editions of Collodi's text. Now he was a fat-cheeked little guy who talked like Shirley Temple and never meant to do anybody wrong. Most important, he did not turn into the self-satisfied "real boy" that Collodi produced at the end of his book. He just turned into a cute kindergartener almost identical to the cute puppet he had been before, but with flesh, rather than dowels, holding his legs together. In time, the anti-Disney chorus expanded, but more in the ranks of folklorists than among film historians. Some fairy-tale scholars still see Disney as a kind of public menace—the Marxist critic Jack Zipes has written that Disney treats fairy tales the way that the abusive parents in fairy tales treat children—but many of today's film writers seem to regard the sentimentality and relentless uplift of the Disney films as simply part of the past: dated, but not the enemy of truth.

The influence of the Disney film can be seen in the dozens of Pinocchio versions that have followed. In 1972, there was an Italian miniseries with Gina Lollobrigida as the Blue-Haired Fairy! An American TV movie from 2000 featured Julia Louis-Dreyfus as the Fairy. In 1971, there was a pornographic offering, "The Erotic Adventures of Pinocchio," reportedly a cult classic. Some people say that Steven Spielberg's "A.I.," from 2001, is effectively "Pinocchio," too. The following year saw another live-action version, this one directed by Roberto Benigni, Italy's beloved clown, who also played Pinocchio. Benigni stressed fantasy. Thanks to C.G.I., the carriage in the opening shot was drawn by what looked like five hundred white rats. That wasn't the only special effect. The film is said to have been the most expensive ever made in Italy. But the whole operation was scuttled by Benigni's near-hysterical idea of comic acting, which involves his jerking and gesticulating and hopping around as if someone had set his feet on fire. This movie received some of the worst reviews in the history of film criticism.

That doesn't seem to have discouraged anybody. In 2019, we got the "Pinocchio" of Matteo Garrone, who is known for his unflinching neo-neo-realist films—above all, "Gomorrah," about the Neapolitan Mafia—but who has also made some thrilling fairy-tale films. His live-action "Pinocchio" comes from the latter department of his brain. He told the press that he first story-boarded "Pinocchio" at age six. His film solves the problem, unavoidable in live-action versions, of how to present a hero who is half human and half fabrication. The makers of the 1931 "Frankenstein" faced the same difficulty, but they had Boris Karloff, a veteran actor, whereas Garrone, in casting his Pinocchio, chose a child, Federico Ielapi, who, though he'd had some TV experience, was only eight years old. Ielapi was professional enough, however, to endure the daily three-hour makeup sessions required to make him a cross between a boy and a piece of wood. (Again, think Surrealism.) And he mastered what presumably was Garrone's idea: a face that is normally expressionless but with semi-legible feelings just detectable under the wood. When his Pinocchio lied, his nose grew, but in a way that was visceral, physical, almost painful. And then—again, this hurt, physically—woodpeckers came and landed on his nose and pecked it back to normal length. And the whole time, the small Ielapi rode the razor's edge between human and wooden. Touchingly, Garrone cast Roberto Benigni as an age-appropriate Geppetto, and Benigni was as good as a doting father as he had been bad as a naughty puppet. Ielapi told interviewers how much he liked working with Benigni. Every day on the set, he reported, Benigni showed him tricks and dreamed up ways to keep him entertained.

Thanks to COVID-19, there is more than one new "Pinocchio" sitting on the shelf. The Disney Company has made a live-action-plus-C.G.I. version of its famous cartoon, just as it did with "Beauty and the Beast." Robert Zemeckis ("Back to the Future") directed, with a stellar cast including Keegan-Michael Key, Barack Obama's anger manager, as the Fox, and the gravel-voiced Lorraine Bracco as Sofia the Seagull, a character who isn't in the original story but has been written in apparently just so that Zemeckis could use Bracco. Speaking of which, Zemeckis's Geppetto is Tom Hanks, America's dad. Another "Pinocchio" that is finally on its way is a stop-motion animated musical by the wild-minded Mexican director Guillermo del Toro. Like Garrone, del Toro has said that the story captivated him as a child. There have been rumors of yet another version in the works, directed by Ron Howard and starring Robert Downey, Jr.

Imagine! Three more "Pinocchio"s! One wonders why a skinny, rebarbative marionette should be getting so much attention. But I have been told by film historians that the classic ending of a movie is the making or remaking of a family. Actually, it needn't be a movie. A lot of Shakespeare's plays fit that formula, as do many nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novels. Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, Huck Finn, Ántonia Shimerda—their families start off badly broken. Dead fathers, dead mothers, no house, no dinner. Fiction, with a different kind of love story, comes in to heal life's wound, or tries. ♦

BOOKS

# A MATTER OF TIME

*Andrew Holleran chronicles life after catastrophe.*

BY GARTH GREENWELL



*Holleran's novels, always full of exposition, have become increasingly essayistic.*

In 1978, two novels appeared that covered remarkably similar, and largely unexplored, territory, documenting the drug-addled, sex-crazed circuit of bathhouses, dance clubs, and parties that, in the seventies, shuttled gay men between Manhattan and Fire Island, with occasional forays to San Francisco or the more exotic wilds of Brooklyn and Queens. In both books, men searching for love settle for ever more elaborate sexual scenes—floggings, fistings, crucifixions—and, in both, men throw away their lives: diving from heights on angel dust, sniffing poppers at the bottom of swimming pools, leaping, "like roaches falling from a hot oven," out of upper-floor windows at the Everard Baths, where a fire killed nine men in 1977. Both novels are, finally, morality tales, critiquing a life style that they see as empty, immature, dangerous, doomed; both would later be hailed as prescient from the perspective of communities ravaged by AIDS.

And yet the experience of reading the books could hardly be more different. Larry Kramer's "Faggots" is a manic picaresque, radiating disgust in sentences that are as crazy with jitters as any of the strung-out queens he depicts. Andrew Holleran's "Dancer from the Dance," by contrast, is bathed in melancholy gorgeousness, as attuned as any of its characters to "the animal bliss of being alive." The book is so vivid in its portrayal of lives devoted to pleasure that Holleran has sometimes been charged with glorifying hedonism, or with suggesting that the world he writes about is the only one possible for gay men. In fact, the novel is clear from the start that its subject is "that tiny subspecies of homosexual, the doomed queen, who puts the car in gear and drives right off the cliff!"

"Dancer" is beloved not only for the beauty of its sentences but for the brilliance of one of its central characters. Andrew Sutherland, an erudite, speed-addicted, endlessly lovable Wildean queen, who teaches the book's protagonist the ins and outs of queer life, counts among the glories of postwar American fiction. In a novel characterized by twilit languor and ambered nostalgia—Holleran's clearest influences are Fitzgerald and Proust—Sutherland blazes in hilarious scenes that have remained etched in my memory since I first read the book, as an adolescent. In one, Sutherland interrupts his reading of St. Teresa to lean out a window and impersonate an Italian prostitute; in another, he halts a gay man's maudlin monologue with what still seems to me an excellent remedy for homosexual self-loathing: "For heaven's sake, don't take it so seriously! Just repeat after me: 'My face seats five, my honeypot's on fire.'"

AIDS put an end to the world that the books chronicled. Kramer met the occasion with extraordinary energy: he helped to found Gay Men's Health Crisis and ACT UP, and his play "The Normal Heart," first staged in 1985, is one of the era's enduring works. Holleran, by his own account, was enervated, even paralyzed, and came to question the value of art in the face of overwhelming tragedy. His second novel, "Nights in Aruba," appeared in 1983, as the scope of the epidemic was just becoming clear, and it refers to AIDS only glancingly; another thirteen years passed before he published his third. His literary efforts in the eighties were directed toward essays for the gay magazine *Christopher Street;* they form a real-time account of the early AIDS crisis. A selection of these pieces, gathered in the 1988 volume "Ground Zero," is one of the most important books to emerge from the plague.

AIDS wasn't the only catastrophe that

ILLUSTRATION BY DEREK ABELLA

Holleran confronted. Also in 1983, when he was thirty-nine, his mother broke her neck in a fall and became a quadriplegic. "At times he has to remind himself, She fell, I didn't," Holleran would write in "The Beauty of Men," his third novel. "But it doesn't matter. She fell on him." He cared for her for more than a decade, living in his parents' home, in a small town in northern Florida; his growing alienation from New York City on return visits is a theme of "Ground Zero." Holleran, who never came out to his parents, kept his family life and his gay life separate. (Andrew Holleran is a pen name, taken to protect his family; his real name is Eric Garber.) The bifurcation of his life, and the experience of "two parallel disasters occurring in the separate compartments," is the primary preoccupation of his fiction after "Dancer."



That début remains uniquely novelistic among Holleran's works. His subsequent books, from "Nights in Aruba" to his new novel, "The Kingdom of Sand," can most profitably be read as a sustained study of one man's life. Though the protagonists are sometimes granted different names—Paul in "Nights in Aruba," Lark in "The Beauty of Men"—and minor differences of circumstance, the major facts of their biographies are largely constant, and shared with their author: a devout Catholic childhood on a Caribbean island; military service and initiation into gay life in Heidelberg; young adulthood in New York, where the thrill of sexual freedom competed with anxiety about possibly wasting one's life; then a mostly closeted small-town existence, caring for a disabled parent, and crushing grief after that parent's death. Incidents, scenes, even lines of dialogue drift between the books, and certain events take on a totemic force: a roommate's suicide; a father calling out after suffering a stroke; a mother asking her adult son if he is gay and the son's panicked denial.

The protagonist's mother is the most vivid presence in these books. In "Nights in Aruba," she is a bored, imperious, heavily drinking housewife, who insists that her young son stay with her while she finishes a final drink. "You don't love me," she accuses the boy—one of many instances of mild, commonplace, devastating abuse. And yet he recognizes her, even in this early novel, as "the last faithful love I would have."

His faithfulness never falters. The most moving passages of "The Beauty of Men" take place when Lark visits his mother in her nursing home. "You'll never leave me. Your conscience won't let you," she tells him, a line that first appears in "Beauty" and returns, in memory, in "The Kingdom of Sand." They watch "Murder, She Wrote" and "Jeopardy!" together; he pushes her wheelchair around the facility, or to a nearby mall. "He feels like Jesus, raising Lazarus from the dead," Holleran writes. "It is worth everything else . . . that single, brief moment when he first swims into her vision and she awakens like a flower in some speeded-up film, blossoming before his very eyes."

Time, as much as language, is the novelist's medium, and among the most fundamental decisions a novelist makes is how it should move. Holleran is unusual in his desire, more common with lyric poets, that time not move at all. This creates problems for plot, which he has acknowledged as a challenge. "So much of life is plotless," he has said, "that I would never want to create a plot that was not, I felt, realistic."

Holleran's most successful novels take a particular period—six indistinguishable years in "Dancer," a semester in his 2006 novel, "Grief"—and bottle it, tilting it this way and that, letting time drift and double back. In a novel, exposition typically supplements scene, but Holleran inverts that hierarchy. In "Dancer," we are not shown particular evenings as much as we are told what the baths, clubs, and parties were generally like. Often, there is a sense of torpor that makes scenic action seem impossible. One reason Holleran's extravagant queens are so potent a resource for his work—Sutherland-like characters appear in "Nights in Aruba," "The Beauty of Men," and several of the best stories in his excellent collection, "In September, the Light Changes," from 1999—is that they break this torpor, creating, with their antics and aphorisms, specific, heightened moments.

Holleran's novels have become increasingly essayistic over time. Along with "Dancer," "Grief" is his most tonally and emotionally unified work, its tutelary spirit not Fitzgerald but the German novelist W. G. Sebald. The novel's peripatetic narrator spends a semester teaching in Washington, D.C., floating through days blurred by sadness, musing on the history of the city. Like the narrator of Sebald's "The Rings of Saturn," he counterpoints his own experience with that of historical figures, incorporating long quotations from the letters of another inveterate mourner, Mary Todd Lincoln. The result is one of the most powerful studies of grief and isolation that I know.

"The Kingdom of Sand" is divided into five sections, several of which announce their subjects in their titles. "The Endless Cantaloupe" is about the eating patterns of the narrator's parents as they grew old, and his own attempts to forestall death through neurotically fastidious habits. ("I rarely ate for pleasure, I ate because broccoli had indoles that were thought to deter cancer.") The book's title section details his family's relationship with the small town where he lives: from his parents' decision to retire there to his own situation as an aging single man, inhabiting streets that are as full of ghosts—his parents, their friends and neighbors—as New York during the early AIDS crisis. Throughout the book, paragraphs open with what feel like topic sentences: "Roads are to Florida what syringes are to veins"; "Lightning in the seventies, it seems to me, was more dramatic than it is today."

The book's longest section, "Hurricane Weather," recounts the narrator's relationship with Earl, his only friend in town. They first meet at the local boat ramp, a cruising spot that the narrator of "The Beauty of Men" spends much of his time haunting but which has since been ruined by police surveillance and online personals. They don't have sex—the narrator is youth-obsessed, and Earl is twenty years his senior—but Earl becomes a sort of anchor for the narrator, who, after the death of his mother, feels unmoored. They spend evenings watching movies in Earl's house; they call each other to report on sales at the supermarket, or on an attractive bag boy; they go blueberry picking together.

Earl is sixty-two when he and the narrator meet; he will die twenty-six years later. The transformation of gay life in those decades—by increased visibility, marriage equality, Internet cruising—seems largely to have passed the narrator by, or to have been neutralized by small-town life and the ravages of aging. "Who were we kidding?" the narrator says, refusing to join a social group of older gay men, sure that any hope of "love or even companionship" at his age is absurd. He spends his days watching pornography online, but dismisses dating sites, which he says are full of "panty boys." After viewing a 1919 film about the blackmail of a gay man, he complains to Earl that "nothing had changed, that he and I lived like sex offenders. . . . We had imprisoned ourselves under a sort of voluntary house arrest." "The police aren't keeping me here," Earl responds. "Old age is!"

The long span of "Hurricane Weather" poses difficulties for Holleran's approach to narrative. We lose track of where we are in time, which results in disorienting contradictions and ambiguities. We're told on one page that the narrator has "neither swept nor vacuumed the floor in years," yet two pages later we see him with dustpan in hand. When Earl and the narrator watch "Notorious," or listen to Schubert's "An die Musik," it is often unclear what year, or even what decade, is being described. As with the six years in "Dancer" and the semester in "Grief," Holleran treats the quarter century of the friendship as an unvariegated whole. Such avoidance of narrative tension comes to seem laborious, particularly when the elements of a compelling plot rise into view: Earl begins to depend on a handyman for assistance, and as this man's responsibilities grow—from household repairs to driving and shopping and, eventually, serving Earl his meals and handling his finances—the narrator becomes jealous and, later, concerned about possible exploitation.

There are the makings here of a melodrama like the ones that Earl and the narrator enjoy watching. But these elements remain inert. Narrative is ordinarily created by the disruption of a status quo; Holleran seems to want a novel that is all status quo, no disruption. We are left with what he has called, in an essay, "the actual dull reality of life, its longueurs and nagging angst." Even Earl's death fails to serve as a climax, though it does occasion the book's most beautiful passage:

> The storm was gone, the day was cool and breezy, the light was different. It was a crisp autumn day in North Florida, with the fresh, clean air that a good rain leaves behind. A breeze was blowing; the goldenrod had started to turn yellow; the banana spiders—aka golden orbs—had begun to spin their enormous gilded webs; butterflies sat on the ground when I walked out, folding and unfolding their wings, as if exhausted by summer. So this is the day after death, I thought. This is the day Earl did not witness.

The motionlessness of Holleran's novels mirrors an experience, shared by all his protagonists, of being stuck, unable to begin a responsible, adult life. The narrator of "Dancer" describes himself as "trapped, like a fly in amber"; Paul, in "Nights in Aruba," confesses to a "strange passivity." The protagonist of "The Kingdom of Sand" identifies with tree frogs that get into his house and cannot escape. Releasing them, he thinks of a famous line from Henry James's "The Ambassadors," which Holleran has slightly misquoted multiple times in his career, doubling James's first word: "Live, live all you can, it's a mistake not to!" One morning, the narrator finds one of these frogs, already dead, hanging on the inside of a porch door, "looking out toward the garden it could not reach." "I left it there," he says, "because it so perfectly exemplified my own predicament." The self-mockery strikes a tone of gothic camp which relieves the gloom.

The paralysis portrayed by Holleran is deepened by but predates the dual shocks of AIDS and his mother's accident, and is linked to what both he and his protagonists experience as the catastrophe of homosexuality. In an essay on his undergraduate years at Harvard, Holleran writes of learning about "the six crises Erik Erikson taught were part of the human life cycle ('intimacy'—with a member of the opposite sex—being one I flunked, preventing me from moving on to 'generativity,' i.e., parenthood)." Throughout his books, a meaningful life depends upon the heterosexual family unit. Watching a group of neighbors standing around a bonfire at Christmas, the narrator of "The Kingdom of Sand" sees them as part of "the great Chain of Being," which both excludes him and invalidates his existence. The moment echoes a passage in "The Beauty of Men" that expresses a similarly metaphysical faith in heterosexuality: "People pass their lives in the chain of being. . . . There's a buzz of fertility, like bees on a hive, linked through cellular multiplication and blood. They're never alone." "All extramarital sex is illicit," he writes elsewhere in that novel—still, after everything, the good Catholic child.

Holleran is unusually frank about the continuing toll of queer shame, even in a liberated age. "I've been a flop as a homosexual," Lark says in "The Beauty of Men." "Some final loathing of the condition, some inability to accept my fate, has led me, like so many of my kind, to dissociate sex from everything else in my life, from every other aspect of my character." Rereading Holleran, I kept a list of metaphors that he applies to gay men: they are ghosts, vampires, kamikaze pilots, dune creatures, dogs, buzzards, and, repeatedly, roaches—leaping out of those Everard windows, feeding on the crumbs of "imagined loves," swarming together only to be eradicated, "a problem in pest control." Even as I value Holleran's candor, and his refusal of triumphalist narratives of queer affirmation—sometimes it doesn't get better, or not for everyone—these moments are painful to read. *My face seats five*, *my honeypot's on fire*, I murmured to myself, longing for a Sutherland to snap Holleran's characters out of their self-loathing.

For all the autobiographical details that Holleran's protagonists have in common with their creator, their sense of stasis, of having accomplished nothing with their lives, depends on a crucial omission. We hear about the characters' odd jobs from their New York days (dog walker, proofreader), but only the teacher in "Grief" has a vocation; none describes himself as a writer. Holleran's protagonists can sound like one of Shakespeare's procreation sonnets, as if only children could be a valuable record of one's passage on earth. Thinking of a lover with a daughter from a youthful liaison, Lark muses on "the one ejaculation that had, unlike all of Lark's, consequences; consequences in time." Homosexual life, homosexual love, by contrast, "leaves no impression whatsoever." Nothing in Holleran's work, save the work itself, acknowledges Shakespeare's other remedy for transience: the "living record" of art. ♦

THE ART WORLD

# SCALING UP

*Early modernism at the Whitney and a show by Walter Price.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



*Marsden Hartley's "Forms Abstracted" (1914) is a declaration of independence.*

COURTESY WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

I relish the abundance of relatively—and poignantly—dud paintings in "At the Dawn of a New Age: Early Twentieth-Century American Modernism," at the Whitney Museum. With an emphasis on abstraction, the show features a number of rarely exhibited works, most owned by the museum, that were made during the learning-curve years—at full tilt by 1912—of artists on these shores who strove to absorb the revolutionary innovations that had originated in Europe. Occupying the museum's eighth floor, the array provides a sidelight (or prequel) to the Whitney's selection of touchstone pieces from its collection, dating from 1900 to 1965, on the seventh floor. That long-running installation parades feats by American adepts—Edward Hopper, Alexander Calder, Jacob Lawrence, Willem de Kooning—along various routes, with propitious detours toward world-beating Abstract Expressionism, Pop art, and Minimalism.

"At the Dawn," organized by the curator Barbara Haskell, samples provincial talents who had plenty of moxie but remained shallowly rooted in the dashing radicality with which Europeans eclipsed embedded traditions. The aspiring Americans thrilled to the explosion but tended to be hazy on exactly what, in prior art history, was being blown up. Their frequent ingenuousness tantalizes. It is a fact of the art-loving experience that serious but failed ambitions teach more about the tenor of their times than contemporaneous successes, which freeze us in particular, awed fascination.

When something doesn't quite cohere, you can see what it's made of. Sources and intentions glare from the canvases. Historical museums should incorporate more of such stuff, to contextualize the happy shocks of excellence, which, on the two floors of the Whitney, include hits in almost their initial at-bats by John Marin, Arthur Dove, Stuart Davis, Georgia O'Keeffe, Florine Stettheimer, and the ever-amazing Marsden Hartley, whose powers of emblematic abstraction peaked in 1914 in Berlin, during a sojourn from his native Maine, and persisted sub rosa throughout his later Southwestern and New England landscapes and homoerotic figurations. Those artists promulgated authentic declarations of independence.

The distinguishing test, for me, is scale, irrespective of size: all a work's elements and qualities (even including negative space) must be snugged into its framing edges to consolidate a specific, integral object—present to us, making us present to itself—rather than a more or less diverting handmade picture. Among the painters in "At the Dawn," that sort of resolution eluded the likes of the Chicagoan Manierre Dawson, America's first true abstractionist and a highly promising artist until, in 1914, he withdrew to run a farm in Michigan; the color stylists Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Patrick Henry Bruce, whose lastingly seductive but fitful beauties went pretty much nowhere; and the Russian-born Max Weber, whose extraordinary "Chinese Restaurant" (1915) mashes up, at a go, assorted tactics of Cubism and never fails to beguile me even as it doesn't really work at all.

Sculptures by Elie Nadelman, who was born in Poland, and Gaston Lachaise, who emigrated from France, memorialize a New York-based, sensuously decorative modernist chic. Many other artists in the show were immigrants, too: German, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Japanese,

Chinese, and British (does Canadian count?), flavoring a cosmopolitan melting pot. Works by several of the newcomers are close calls in terms of quality. Visual rhapsodies by the Italian-born Joseph Stella include a game attempt to represent music with the frenetic "Der Rosenkavalier" (1913-14). Plangent landscapes by the German-born Oscar Bluemner, influenced by the Blue Rider movement (which had convened German and Russian avant-gardists in Munich), suffer from a certain cautiousness. A Ukrainian unfamiliar to me, Ben Benn, went native with a creditably sombre abstraction, "Cowboy and Horse" (1917). In general, though, engagements with American subject matter are rare in the show. Imported internationalism reigns.

Of passing reward are stabs at mysticism by lately rediscovered mavericks, including the German-born Californian Agnes Pelton, the subject of a delightful but not entirely convincing retrospective at the Whitney in 2020. Pelton's richly hued, luminous "Ahmi in Egypt" (1931), which depicts a swan beneath cascading abstract symbols against a black ground, anticipates a penchant among some present-day painters for themes of the otherworldly. (This penchant was given a boost in 2018 by a sensational show, at the Guggenheim, of immense proto-abstractions by the early-twentieth-century Swedish spiritualist Hilma af Klint, who had long been all but forgotten.) "Ahmi in Egypt" is lovely but verges, to my eye, on suggesting an overqualified greeting card. Of related relevance is a watercolor with pencil drawing by the chronically underrated Charles Burchfield, "Sunlight in Forest" (1916)—dark trees pierced vertically by a tonguelike shaft of white sunlight—which heralds the soulful idiosyncrasy of Burchfield, a Lutheran mystagogue of small-town and rural epiphanies who was close friends with Hopper. His enraptured art keeps looking stronger, in hindsight.

In addition, room is made for excitingly Expressionist woodcuts from the mid-twenties by the Black artist Aaron Douglas, which include a jagged response to Paul Robeson's performance in the Eugene O'Neill play "The Emperor Jones," and for a piquantly symbolist tarot deck that was designed by the American-educated British illustrator Pamela Colman Smith in 1909 but that remained unpublished until more than a decade later. Such items plunge us into a bygone cultural ferment whose paladins may have sputtered in their aims but who pitched into them enthusiastically. Though they were only sometimes personally allied, they evoke, en masse, a national team effort.

The show occasions time-travelling connoisseurship, to sort out instances of brilliance from more prevalent disappointments. You are there, immersed in peaks and valleys of an effervescent day and age. I don't expect your judgments to match mine. I recommend attending with an argumentative companion. The very unevenness of the offerings makes for fine sport. When you think about it, art appreciation parallels all manner of games that people play—not least baseball, the individualistic American invention that has just lost its Homeric bard, Roger Angell, to unexpectedly devastating effect for some of us—with the pesky difference that art does so without a scoreboard and, eschewing inning breaks, never ends.

Several younger painters today play at hybridizing representation and abstraction. It's a mode of have-it-all eclecticism that is frequently redolent of the wishful artists' statements that art schools require their students to write—a godforsaken prose genre that is, at best, wholesomely cynical. (Graduates in literature aren't obliged to supplement their theses with paintings.) But here I am, wowed by "Pearl Lines," a large show at Greene Naftali of paintings and drawings by Walter Price, thirty-three years old, who deploys just such crossover stratagems with sterling discipline and untrammelled liberty. The forms of his eloquently colorful art, which mingles imagery of banal manufactured objects with evocations of fire and water, can seem at once to fly apart and somehow to precipitate ineffable harmonies. They qualify as decorative in the way that climbing a Himalayan peak might be deemed recreational.

Price was born in Macon, Georgia, and decided to become an artist while in the second grade. Straight out of high school, he served four years in the U.S. Navy, chiefly to take advantage of the subsequent G.I. Bill financing of his art studies at Middle Georgia College (now part of Middle Georgia State University) and the (recently defunct) Art Institute of Washington, in Arlington, Virginia. He's a Brooklynite today. These and other data points pepper an interview, in the *Financial Times*, that was conducted last year by the Nigerian American critic Enuma Okoro. A "dance with whiteness" is how Price describes his thinking behind work that he made during a residency in London. He regards himself as "political, but not overtly," aiming to "make people comfortable with being uncomfortable," both aesthetically and by way of any worldly association that occurs to them.

Price said that he shuns all social media: "Too much looking and not enough thinking." The abnegation pays off. Inexhaustibly surprising smears, blotches, fugitive lines, and incomplete patterns feel less applied than turned loose, to tell enigmatic stories of their own. The effect is redoubled in his exuberant, earthy drawings in which, often, faces and figures share spaces with visual equivalents of improvisatory jazz. I can think of no precedent for Price's style-defying style except in the spirit, though not the look, of certain decomposed compositions by Cy Twombly. There are occasional longueurs, as seen in dotted lines that seem overly calculated to knit a surface. But even these glitches evince Price's compulsion to risk all manner of painterly tropes. To think is to do, for him. Staggeringly prolific, he recalls Oscar Wilde's doctrine of mastering temptations by succumbing to them.

You must physically encounter Price's paintings to grasp their dynamics. Scale is germane: both internally, in the jostle of mismatched marks and textures, and externally, relating to the proportions of your body. This may be true in general of any effective painting, but it is essential in this case. It enables an exhilarating sense of participation, as if, by viewing a work stroke by stroke, you create it yourself. The artist has left you alone with it as he departs toward something not quite altogether but manifestly else, starting from scratch again and yet again. ♦

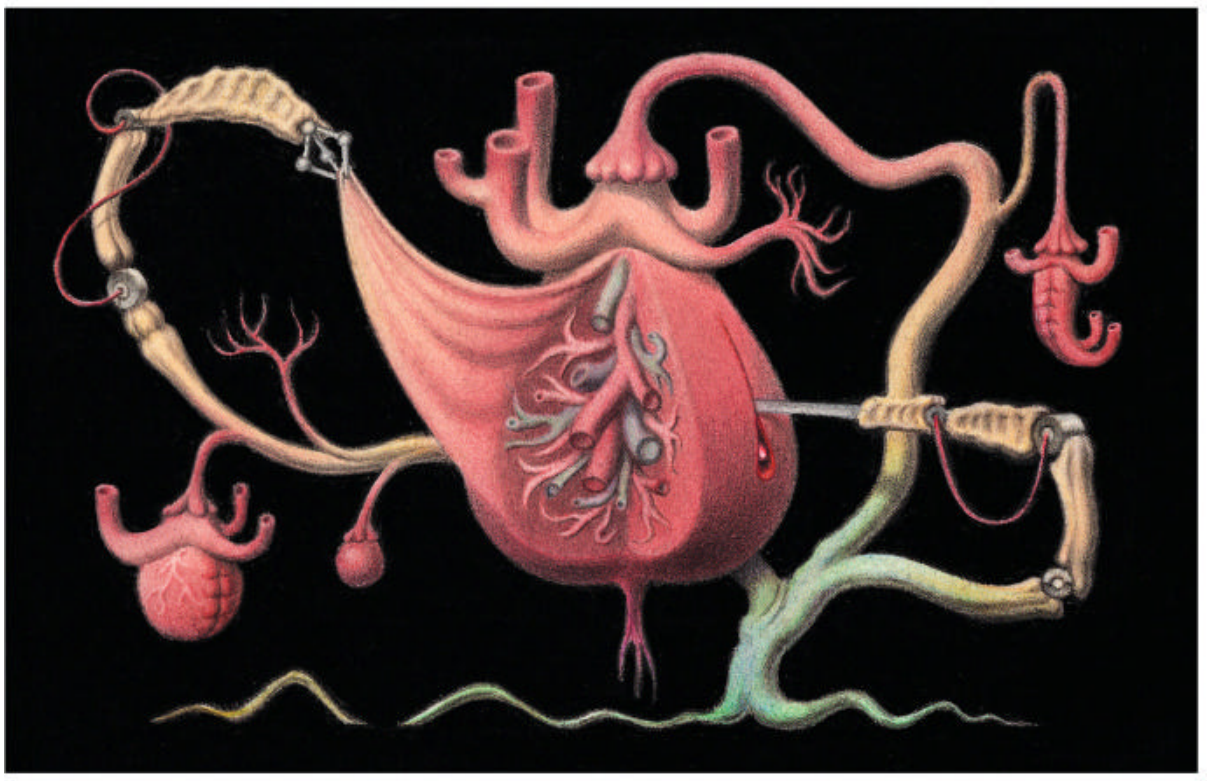
THE CURRENT CINEMA

# BODIES OF EVIDENCE

*"Crimes of the Future" and "Miracle."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

It was in 1970 that David Cronenberg gave us "Crimes of the Future." Lasting just over an hour, the film contained no conversation. Instead, we were treated to a voice-over from a reedy creep employed by, among other institutes, the House of Skin. "There must evolve a novel sexuality," he told us, "for a new species of man." We also heard a symphony of noises: clicks, beeps, and susurrations—a fitting soundtrack to Cronenberg's subject, which was, as ever, the variety of human disorders. The movie was funny, slightly camp, and, despite its limited special effects, gangrenously unpleasant.



*In David Cronenberg's sombre film, organ harvesting is performance art.*

Well, here we are again. The latest Cronenberg film is also called "Crimes of the Future." It is not a remake of its namesake, still less a sequel. Yet its worries remain the same. Cronenberg cannot stop wondering where on God's earth (though God, one suspects, has long since fled the scene) our homegrown maladies will take us next. The one big change is that, whereas the old future was set amid clean and hard-edged modern structures, the future that is now foreseen by Cronenberg unfolds in a world of abandonment and rot. Hulks of ships are beached like rusty whales. Streets are near-vacant under the shroud of night. Every encounter has the air of a furtive conspiracy, and the hero, Saul Tenser (Viggo Mortensen), is often clad in black robes, with his face half masked. He looks like a monk with a loaded conscience.

In fact, Saul is a performance artist, and what is performed upon him, for the delectation of a jaded audience, is surgery. He has a knack, if you can call it that, for cultivating fresh and unprecedented organs inside his body, which his professional partner, Caprice (Léa Seydoux), then plucks like rare blooms. (Traditional pain thresholds, we are given to understand, have all but vanished.) Once a trauma surgeon, Caprice now wields no scalpel; rather, with the aid of a remote control that resembles a squashy tortoise, she issues commands to robotic limbs, which make the required incisions. "Let us," she declares, "like professors of literature, search for the meaning that lies locked in the poem." If you say so, Doc. As befits the grand occasion, Saul is not laid on anything as drab as an operating table but housed within a darkly molded hull, which is armored less like a tank than like a cockroach. He seems as snug as a bug. *In* a bug. Gregor Samsa would shake him by the claw.

All of this creates an impressive spectacle. But how new is that impression? For many viewers, the organic-mechanical-diabolical is a well-worn trope; it's almost as if Cronenberg were pitching a contribution to the "Alien" franchise in the nineteen-eighties. Indeed, "Crimes of the Future" could be titled "Themes of the Past." Saul is seated and fed on a skeletal chair, with his back against its spine and a spoon raised to his mouth by bony arms: a clever image, but no smarter than the dish of gristle, in Cronenberg's "eXistenZ" (1999), from which somebody fashioned a dripping gun. And, when Caprice kneels to kiss a bleeding horizontal slit in Saul's torso—is this a blasphemous reference to the adoration of Christ's wounds?—we're only ninety degrees away from the vertical abdominal slit in Cronenberg's "Videodrome" (1983), into which a video cassette was thrust. If Cronenberg's sense of humor weren't quite so glum, he could end up directing a slitcom.

Sadly, the new film *is* glum, disheartenингly so, and its narrative pulse is weak. All but gone is the driving excitement of those tremendous works—"A History of Violence" (2005), "Eastern Promises" (2007), and "A Dangerous Method" (2011)—with which Cronenberg somehow slipped the clutches of science fiction without squandering its freakish intensity. In each case, his leading man was Mortensen, whose quick-witted stance, grave but never leaden, served to lift the spirits of the story. "Crimes of the Future," by contrast, straps him down. He keeps emitting little grunts and groans, as if struggling to be freed, and most of his fellow-actors, similarly, are forced toward the mannered and the arch. Listen to the broken stammerings of Don McKellar as an official at the National Organ Registry, or to the breathy gulps of Kristen Stewart as his assistant. Has the drug of pretending to be Princess Diana, in last year's "Spencer," worn off completely?

The plot has many tentacles. For reasons that I failed to grasp, Saul reports,



ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELE CASTELLANO

undercover, to a detective (Welket Bungué) from something called the New Vice Unit. We also get two software technicians (Nadia Litz and Tanaya Beatty) who suddenly take their clothes off and jump into one of the surgical pods as if enjoying an ocean dip. It's the sole instance of anyone in this movie having fun, and all the more to be commended. At the opposite extreme, we are invited to witness not only the death of a child but also, in lingering detail, his postmortem—a gruesome artistic decision that I, for one, will not attempt to defend. And yet, for anyone whose stomach is as strong as Saul's, it may be worth braving "Crimes of the Future" for the sake of a single conceit: a plan to reboot the human digestive system so that we will gradually become capable of eating plastic. We, the destroyers, will thus be rid of our own industrial waste. What an idea! Needless to say, nobody but David Cronenberg could have dreamed it up.

When you go to see "Miracle," at Film Forum, take a friend. Not because you'll need someone to hang on to during the passages of high tension (though you may) but because, once the movie is over, the two of you should head for the nearest bar, order shots, and ask each other, "What the hell was going *on* back there?" Even the final image of the film is a mystery.

The writer and director is Bogdan George Apetri, who is an assistant professor at Columbia, though "Miracle" is set wholly in his native Romania—a country about which the characters never cease to complain. The story is divided into two parts, and they lock together like hemispheres. The first is about a nun, or, to be exact, a novice nun. Her name is Cristina (Ioana Bugarin), and, given that her first act is to sneak out of the convent with a change of clothes and to be ferried by taxi to the nearby town, one fears that her novitiate has gone awry. Already, we are in the realm of lies and misconceptions; Cristina goes to the hospital, allegedly for pains in the head, though she quietly slips off to the obstetrics and gynecology department. She then catches another cab back to the convent, talking to the driver, who seems a pleasant fellow. He is not.

The second half of the film revolves around a cop, Marius (Emanuel Pârvu), whose job is to discover what has befallen Cristina. Because he is bearded and bespectacled, with a professorial mien, we assume that he will be scrupulous and fair. Wrong again. Marius plants evidence; he assails a suspect; and he reserves a particular contempt for the faithful. "What did you think this was, confession?" he says to a nun, having reduced her to tears. "To me, you spill your guts." He orders his sidekick to get out of a car and walk, in the middle of the countryside, merely for mentioning the Almighty. Why this secular zeal? Marius is chafing at the old superstitions, as he regards them, that are entrenching Romania in the past, but that's not all. Something else is biting at his soul.

Other than being pistol-whipped by Marius, nothing would make me disclose everything that happens in this film. Parts of it I still don't understand. The most revelatory of the twists (there are many) consists of a simple kiss, just after someone has leaned close to Marius and whispered words in his ear. We do not hear those words, any more than we hear what Bill Murray says to Scarlett Johansson at the end of "Lost in Translation" (2003), or what Edward G. Robinson, his profile in shadow, murmurs to Lauren Bacall in "Key Largo" (1948). For moviegoers, there is no more delicious—or more exasperating—enticement than the art of the withheld.

"Miracle" is busy on the eye. As in a documentary, we follow the characters around from one task, whether grim or menial, to the next. Stand back, however, and Apetri's careful patterning can be discerned. The movie begins with a weeping Cristina, mirrored in a basin of water; near the end, it is Marius who spies another reflection—one that appears to contravene reason—as he washes his face in a rippling river. The mood is at once down to earth, ragged with chats about music and cars, and heightened by hints of the otherworldly. Likewise, in the film's most remarkable scene, there is no mistaking the presence of evil at work, yet we observe it from a distance, anything but clearly, in a dark wood. Thunder mutters overhead, the wind picks up, and human cries are half lost in the rustle of leaves. The camera, as though unable to watch for long, turns its gaze to other sights and sounds: the bark of a dog, sheep's bells, and two men riding by, in all innocence, on horseback. We are not too far from "The Assassination of St. Peter Martyr," painted by Giovanni Bellini more than five hundred years ago; there, too, one can hardly see the crime for the trees. Murders, like wonders, will never cease. ♦

**NEWYORKER.COM**
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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VOLUME XCVIII, NO. 16, June 13, 2022. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four planned combined issues, as indicated on the issue's cover, and other combined or extra issues) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Lauren Kamen Macri, vice-president of sales; Rob Novick, vice-president of finance; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue; Anna Wintour, chief content officer; Jackie Marks, chief financial officer; Elizabeth Minshaw, chief of staff; Sanjay Bhakta, chief product and technology officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

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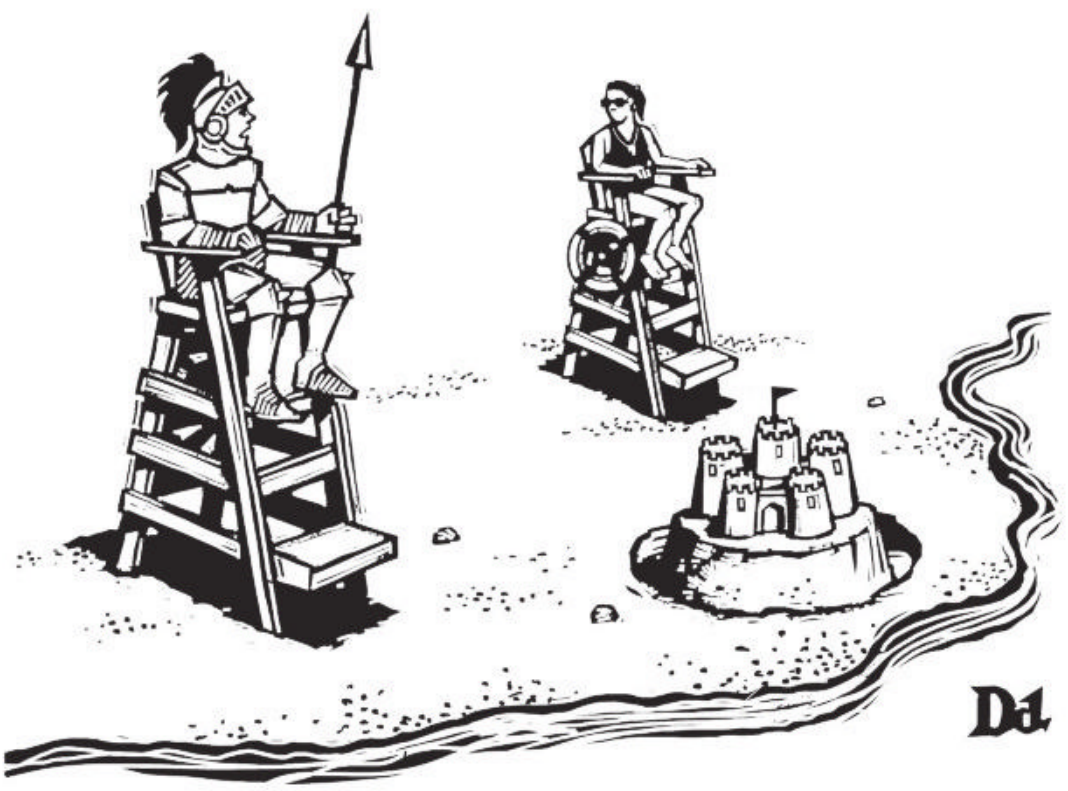
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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, June 12th. The finalists in the May 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 27th 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




*“You really want to add a kid to all this?”*
Hilton Hebb, Jacksonville, Fla.

*“I don't usually do this on a first date.”*
Lawrence Wood, Chicago, Ill.

*“See, I do things around the house.”*
Daniel Renton, Saint John, N.B.

### THE WINNING CAPTION

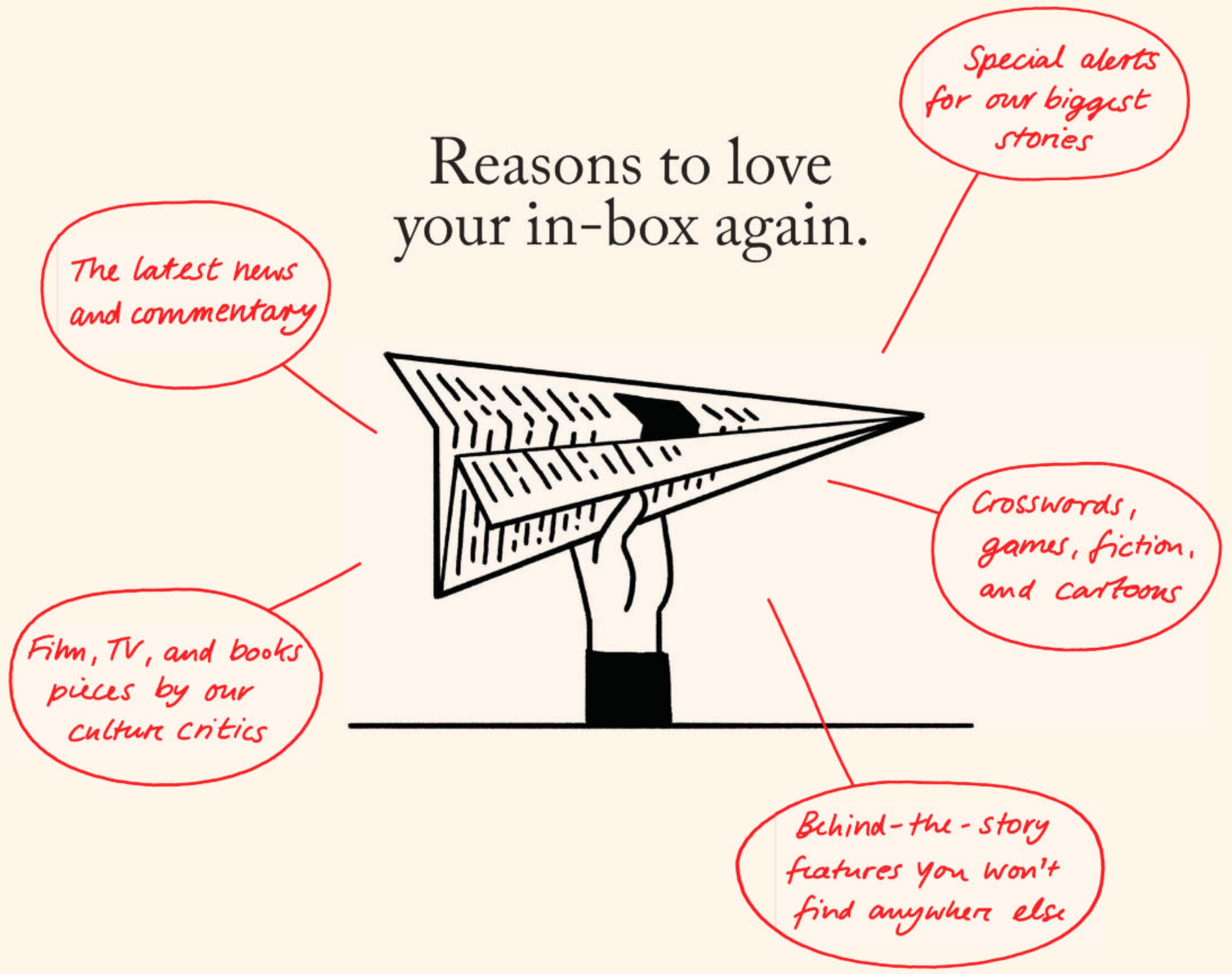


*“We usually don't deliver above Eighty-second Street.”*
Ryan Kendall, Novato, Calif.

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# The Daily

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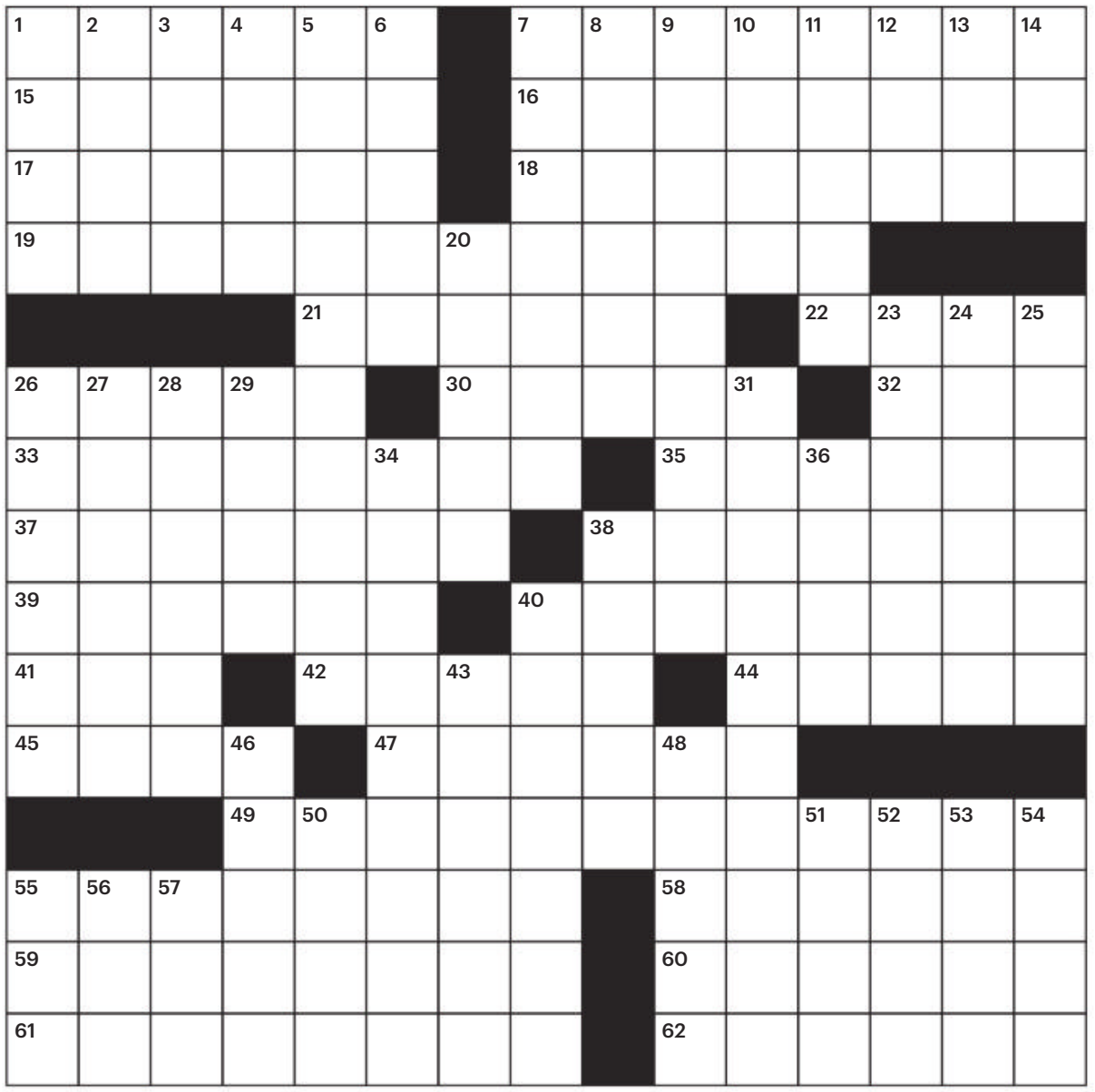
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PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

# THE CROSSWORD

*A challenging puzzle.*

BY ANNA SHECHTMAN



## ACROSS

1 Vichyssoise, e.g.
7 Sharp, as pain
15 Lindy West essay collection subtitled "Notes from a Loud Woman"
16 Response to bathroom humor, maybe
17 Perfectionist's bane
18 Summer birthstones
19 Type of reading program?
21 May of "Nichols and May"
22 Fios and Xfinity, for short
26 Bedazzle, say
30 Fix, as a soundtrack
32 A.O.C.'s Courage to Change, e.g.
33 Start of a diplomatic statement
35 Supplicate
37 Ones well past their prime
38 Container on an old steamship
39 Rhododendron relative
40 Odds that a randomly selected key on a grand piano is not a C
41 Console that débuted in 2006
42 Medium for a message
44 Zora Neale Hurston and Sheryl Underwood, sororally
45 Hawaii's state bird
47 O'Connor with a memorable 1992 "S.N.L." appearance
49 Writer who might provide grounding advice?
55 Dorothy Parker, e.g.
58 Director Denis
59 Non-French liqueur in a French Connection
60 Seasoning used to flavor limited-edition Goldfish crackers, in 2022
61 Less than great
62 What you will?

## DOWN

1 National Merit Scholarship screener, for short
2 "Alas!"
3 Colorful bowlful
4 "___ It Fun" (Grammy-winning Paramore hit)
5 Like rice vermicelli and glass noodles
6 ___ *de México* (Mexico City daily)
7 More schmaltzy
8 Last words?
9 See eye to eye about
10 ___-a-brac
11 ___ Tree (sacred fig under which Siddhartha Gautama is said to have gained enlightenment)
12 "Sands of ___ Jima"
13 Fiend
14 Geocacher's tool, for short
20 They may be worn with cholis
23 Cybersecurity brand with a "Search & Destroy" program
24 Miller who won a Tony for her performance in the 2013 revival of "Pippin"
25 Tearoom options
26 When Eos "touched the sky with roses," in the Odyssey
27 Humdinger
28 Come by
29 Like *e* but not *i*
31 Subjects of a 2004 lawsuit filed by Mattel
34 Thinker who wrote, "There is no art which one government sooner learns of another than that of draining money from the pockets of the people"
36 ___ *barbadensis* (dry-climate plant)
38 Whom a stan laurels?
40 Wee one
43 ___ please
46 Kuwaiti heads of state
48 Big name in bauxite mining
50 Android operating system between Nougat and Pie
51 Flits (about)
52 Wisecrack
53 Part of Q.E.D.
54 "Curious George" authors Margret and H. A.
55 Word in the names of two Central American capitals
56 "*Te* ___"
57 Bit of needlework?

*Solution to the previous puzzle:*

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

*Find more puzzles and this week's solution at* **newyorker.com/crossword**

Photograph / Jennifer Chase

# WOMEN WHO TRAVEL PODCAST



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