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# THE NEW YORKER

NOVEMBER 11, 2019

7 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

21 THE TALK OF THE TOWN

*Steve Coll on the impeachment inquiry's risks; harmony in Parliament; every likeness has its price; microchip-sniffing dogs; Isabelle Huppert's clues.*

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

*Adam Hochschild* 28 Obstruction of Injustice  
*A century ago, a battle to deport the nation's radicals.*

SHOUTS & MURMURS

*Sarah Lazarus* 35 The Environmental Impact of Breaking Up with Me

PERSONAL HISTORY

*Nick Paumgarten* 36 The Symptoms  
*Beer-league hockey and its multiple concussions.*

LETTER FROM THE AMAZON

*Jon Lee Anderson* 40 Blood Gold  
*The fight for the future of Brazil's rain forest.*

PROFILES

*John Lahr* 52 The Director's Cut  
*The magnificent obsessions of Todd Haynes.*

FICTION

*Joseph O'Neill* 62 "The Flier"

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

*Robert Gottlieb* 69 *Booth Tarkington's forgotten reputation.*

73 Briefly Noted

*Pankaj Mishra* 76 *The Economist as liberal lodestar.*

*Dan Chiasson* 82 *The poetry of Charles Wright.*

THE THEATRE

*Alexandra Schwartz* 84 *Richard Nelson's "The Michaels."*

ON TELEVISION

*Emily Nussbaum* 86 "Evil," "9-1-1."

THE CURRENT CINEMA

*Anthony Lane* 88 "Terminator: Dark Fate," "Marriage Story."

POEMS

*Rachel Eliza Griffiths* 46 "Comedy"

*Robin Coste Lewis* 66 "Aubade"

COVER

*Bruce McCall* "Down the Hatch"

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**DRAWINGS** Maddie Dai, Kendra Allenby, Liana Finck, Kaamran Hafeez and Al Batt, Roz Chast, Michael Maslin, Drew Panckeri, Amy Hwang, Edward Koren, George Booth, P. S. Mueller, Liza Donnelly, Corey Pandolph and Craig Baldo, Karen Sneider **SPOTS** Alexandra Zsigmond



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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Jon Lee Anderson** (“*Blood Gold*,” p. 40), a staff writer, began contributing to *The New Yorker* in 1998. He is the author of several books, including “*Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*.”

**Alexandra Schwartz** (*The Theatre*, p. 84), a theatre critic for the magazine, has been a staff writer since 2016.

**Adam Hochschild** (“*Obstruction of Injustice*,” p. 28) has written nine books, the most recent of which is “*Lessons from a Dark Time: And Other Essays*.”

**Nick Paumgarten** (“*The Symptoms*,” p. 36) began writing for the magazine in 2000.

**Robin Coste Lewis** (*Poem*, p. 66) is the poet laureate of Los Angeles. Her debut collection, “*Voyage of the Sable Venus*,” won the National Book Award for poetry in 2015.

**Paul Brownfield** (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 24), formerly the television critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn.

**Emily Nussbaum** (*On Television*, p. 86), the magazine's television critic, won a Pulitzer Prize in 2016. She is the author of “*I Like to Watch: Arguing My Way Through the TV Revolution*.”

**John Lahr** (“*The Director's Cut*,” p. 52) has written for *The New Yorker* since 1991. His book “*Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*” won the 2014 National Book Critics Circle Award for biography.

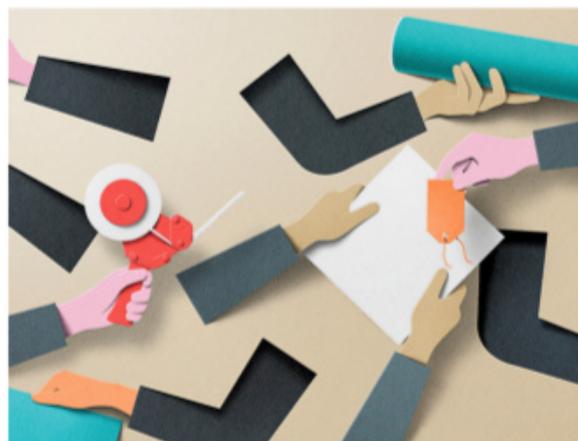
**Sarah Lazarus** (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 35) is a writer and a comedian based in Los Angeles.

**Joseph O'Neill** (*Fiction*, p. 62) is the author of, most recently, the story collection “*Good Trouble*.”

**Bruce McCall** (*Cover*), an artist and a satirical writer, has contributed covers and humor pieces to the magazine since 1980. This is his seventy-seventh cover.

**Rachel Eliza Griffiths** (*Poem*, p. 46) will publish a new poetry collection, “*Seeing the Body*,” in 2020.

## THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



**LETTER FROM SILICON VALLEY**  
“Our first stop was the robots.”  
Anna Wiener reports on her visit to an Amazon fulfillment center.



**PHOTO BOOTH**  
Shirley Baker's street scenes captured “the great madness and oddness of this life,” Lou Stoppard writes.

Download the *New Yorker Today* app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

# THE MAIL

## THE WRITE TOOL

John Seabrook, in his piece about predictive-text technology, wonders what the world would be like if artificial-intelligence programs learned to write as well as humans (“The Next Word,” October 14th). He suggests that people “would stop writing, or at least publishing, because all the readers would be captivated by the machines.” Roald Dahl’s 1953 story “The Great Automatic Grammatizator” imagines a remarkably similar world. The Grammatizator can reproduce the styles of all working authors, who have been paid to let the machine take over their careers, and to never again write anything of their own. The story’s narrator refuses to stop writing and go into creative silence. He ends the story with a plea: “Give us strength, Oh Lord, to let our children starve.”

*Ed Allen  
Vermillion, S.D.*

Seabrook reported that only one person passed his “Pinker Test,” which involved distinguishing the psycholinguist Steven Pinker’s words from those generated by the GPT-2 text-writing machine. For those readers still scratching their heads over where Pinker’s writing ends and the GPT-2’s begins, it may be useful to know that each of Pinker’s sentences, whether evaluated in isolation or in context, conveys a discernible piece of information, whereas the A.I.-generated sentences do not. For instance, the final sentence, written by the GPT-2, attempts to equate the words “separation” and “coherence,” even though these words are antonyms. I believe that this test exemplifies not how far A.I. technology has progressed but, rather, how poorly we humans parse what we read and hear.

*Eric Kinast  
Santa Ana, Calif.*

When Google’s Smart Compose feature suggested “proud” instead of “pleased” as Seabrook was writing his son an e-mail, he concluded that the technology was more thoughtful than he was. However, given that Smart Compose develops its

intuition from scanning the word order in the e-mails of millions of Gmail users, another way of describing this situation would be to say that the other parents e-mailing their children were more thoughtful than Seabrook was!

*Yael Swica  
New York City*

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Colton Wooten’s raw depictions of addiction, homelessness, and the shuffle between relapse and recovery allowed me to viscerally revisit my past as an addict (“The Florida Shuffle,” October 21st). I particularly related to the scene in which Wooten and his fellow-“shufflers” ruminate on the potential causes of their addictions. Although the correlation between addiction and one’s environment and genetics is indisputable, I find it admirable that Wooten considers the possibility that his circumstances are, in part, the result of his own choices. But, despite rightly damning those in power in the South Florida recovery scene, Wooten does not fully reckon with how addicts may enable the system that, in turn, enables both their relapses and their recoveries. If Wooten and his friends think that their own choices may have contributed to their addictions, it is also conceivable that those who spend years in “recovery” may be complicit in the insurance-fraud schemes common to the addiction-treatment industry.

Each of us has a different path to recovery from addiction, during which we must progress from shuffling to striding. Wooten has miraculously managed to find time for writing, research, and reflection. He may still be in Purgatory, but I believe that he has somehow shuffled his way out of Hell.

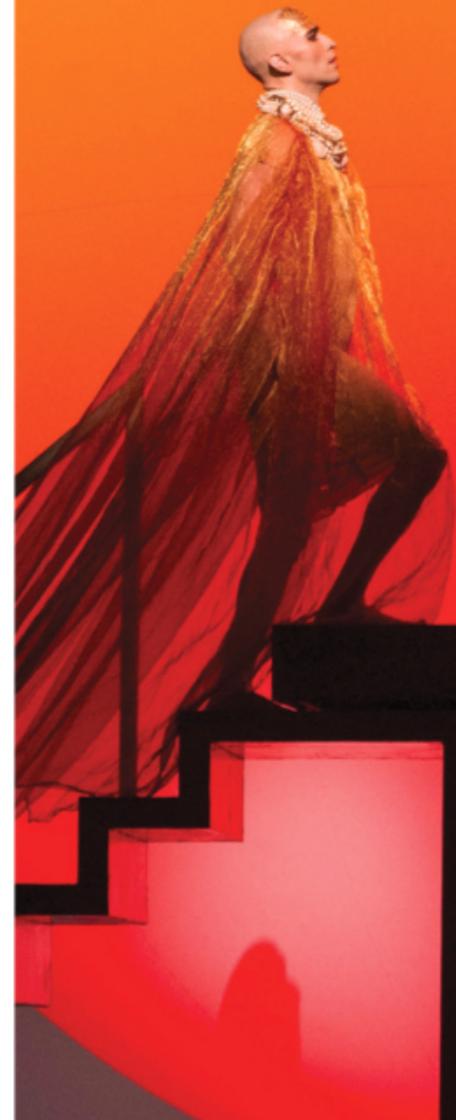
*Travis Huddleston  
Greensboro, N.C.*

•  
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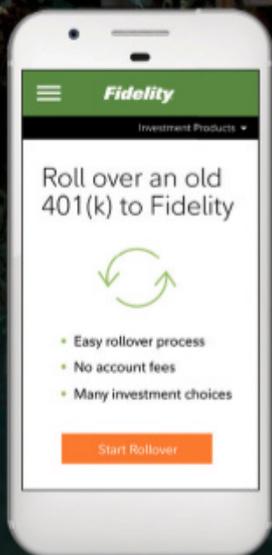
Philip Glass’s towering opera stars countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo as the revolutionary pharaoh who transformed ancient Egypt in Phelim McDermott’s spellbinding Met premiere production. Karen Kamensek conducts in her Met debut.

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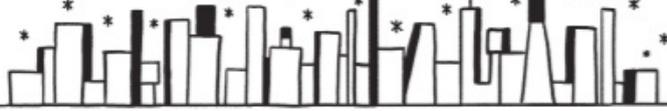
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WINTER PREVIEW



NOVEMBER 6 – 12, 2019

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The producer and rapper **Channel Tres's** home town may be Los Angeles, but the creative DNA of the Midwest—the soulful dance music of the Detroit icon Moodymann, in particular—forms the hypnotic backbone of his sound. Tres seemed to appear from nowhere in 2017, when his pulsing debut single, “Controller,” landed on the Internet; even then, the cool stylishness of his blend of hip-house and G-funk was undeniable. He will traverse his concise but enthralling catalogue in a pair of shows at Brooklyn Steel, Nov. 8-9.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KOVI KONOWIECKI

## WINTER PREVIEW

## Saharan Empires, Mexican Murals

This fall, Tribeca became Manhattan's latest art destination as multiple galleries decamped there from Chelsea. The essential nonprofit **Artists Space** returns to its roots—it was founded in the neighborhood, in 1972—inaugurating its new home on Cortlandt Alley with an adventurous show of works by Danica Barboza, Jason Hirata, Yuki Kimura, and Duane Linklater (opens Dec. 6).

Few painters have achieved the pop-culture stature of **Kehinde Wiley**, whose fans include President Barack Obama. The Brooklyn Museum pairs a 2005 canvas by Wiley with the neo-classical French picture it's based on,

Jacques-Louis David's "Napoleon Crossing the Alps," from 1801 (opens Jan. 24). Wiley's equestrian subject has a spiritual ancestor in a majestic ancient terra-cotta figure excavated in Niger, in 1985; it's a highlight of "**Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara**," in which the Met surveys fifteen centuries' worth of African treasures (opens Jan. 30).

The candy-colored canvases that spring from the wild mind of the Pop-surrealist **Peter Saul** have been taking aim at political targets since before the Nixon Administration; the New Museum surveys Saul's nearly

six-decade-long career in "Crime and Punishment" (opens Feb. 11).

A corrective to the deplorable attitude of the current Administration toward Mexico arrives at the Whitney: the blockbuster "**Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925-1945**," which considers the impact of "Los Tres Grandes"—the painters José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaró Siqueiros—and their peers on artists north of the border, from Jacob Lawrence to Jackson Pollock (opens Feb. 17).

**Dora Kallmus** is far less well known than the people she photographed—Josephine Baker, Colette, Pablo Picasso, and others she encountered in Vienna and Paris. After the Second World War, the subject of the Austrian photographer's work shifted dramatically; in 1956, at the age of seventy-five, she documented the slaughterhouses of Paris. "Madame d'Ora," at the Neue Galerie, includes selections from her oeuvre (opens Feb. 20).

OMA, the firm of Rem Koolhaas, is an acronym for Office of Metropolitan Architecture. In the Guggenheim's rotunda-filling show "**Countryside, the Future**," Koolhaas and his team turn their attention to rural concerns in a series of speculations on subjects ranging from A.I. and automation to migration and political radicalization (opens Feb. 20).

**Donald Judd** is considered a minimalist, but it wasn't a label he used. For the American artist, who died in 1994, his colorful, industrially produced "boxes," "stacks," and "progressions" opened a new space between painting and sculpture. MOMA mounts the first U.S. retrospective of his work in thirty years (opens March 1). Another master of the in-between, the German painter Gerhard Richter, has shifted between representation and abstraction throughout his brilliant career. More than a hundred of his pieces will fill two floors of the Met Breuer in "**Gerhard Richter: Painting After All**" (opens March 4).

—Andrea K. Scott



ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON LANDREIN

## ART

### Ernst Ludwig Kirchner Neue Galerie

The psychic torment of Kirchner's life aside, there's nothing not to love about this overview of the German Expressionist painter, whose uninhibited palette is played up here with the seductive use of flamingo-pink and Prussian-blue walls. Chronologically arranged, the exhibition presents Kirchner's early-twentieth-century work with Dresden's Die Brücke group (notable for its bold style of figurative abstraction); his depictions of Berlin's bustling street life; and his wartime works, in which the modernist agitation of his sensibility dovetailed with personal and geopolitical crises. Kirchner, who struggled with addiction and was discharged from military service during the First World War after a mental breakdown, shows himself, in "Self-Portrait as a Soldier," from 1915, uniformed, smoking in his studio, and holding up a gangrenous arm stump—a projection of his dread. Kirchner spent much of the remainder of his life in the Swiss Alps, producing wonderfully electric scenes of his environs. But his troubles were not over: following Hitler's designation of his work as "degenerate" and the Nazi annexation of Austria, in 1938, Kirchner, fearing Switzerland would be annexed next, committed suicide.—*Johanna Fateman (Through Jan. 13.)*

### "Pope.L: Choir"

#### Whitney Museum

Two years ago, this influential African-American artist boiled, bottled, and sold water that he collected from household taps in Flint, Michigan. (Sales of the limited edition benefited local charities.) Two months ago, in an unannounced, tenderly slapstick performance, Pope.L poured a seemingly endless bottle of the same water into the Hudson River as darkness fell. The incident—which you can watch in a two-minute video on the Whitney's Web site—was a prelude to this commandingly gnomonic show, in which a salvaged drinking fountain is suspended, upside down, from the ceiling of a dimly lit room. (It is, among many things, a clever retort to Marcel Duchamp's readymade urinal, whose title is "Fountain.") Water gushes from the metal behemoth into a battered thousand-gallon plastic tank below; once it fills, it drains through a jury-rigged network of pipes. The process repeats ad absurdum throughout the day, just as crises like Flint's perpetuate cycles of racial segregation. The phrase "NDVSBL WATER," set in black text on a black wall, mocks the fallacy of one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.—*Andrea K. Scott (Through Feb. 29.)*

### Ana Mendieta

#### Galerie Lelong

**CHELSEA** In 1961, when she was twelve years old, the Cuban-born Mendieta arrived in Dubuque, Iowa, as a refugee. The magnetic, numinous black-and-white photographs of the artist's "La Tierra Habla (The Earth Speaks)" document site-specific land works—petrogliphlike carvings that she made during a

visit to Cuba, in the early nineteen-eighties. Mendieta viewed the works as a communion with both the island's terrain and its indigenous Taíno culture. The forms she inscribed in limestone caves refer to ancient feminine and maternal deities, but they also recall the haunting imagery of her better-known "Siluetas," for which she traced her body's outline on the earth. An important figure in the feminist-art movement, the artist died in 1985, at the age of thirty-six, not long after making these mysterious and sombre works. With their almost abstract swaths of craggy texture, they hint at a new phase to come had her career not been cut tragically short.—*J.F. (Through Nov. 16.)*

### Howardena Pindell

#### Greenan

**CHELSEA** The festive look of these richly textured shaped canvases—blanketed with brightly colored impasto hatching or encrusted with confetti—belie the difficulties that this artist faced in producing them. Pindell's "Autobiography" series was made during a fifteen-year period following a car accident, in 1979, from which she suffered serious memory loss. Punctuating the surfaces of these handsome abstractions are seams—fissures, really—bridged by stitches resembling little teeth, and fragments of photographs and postcards. They lend the paint-toughened surfaces a pieced-together fragility and form their swirling and fanning interior structures. The found imagery, emerging from dense areas of acrylic color, includes disembodied hands, a frog, and a statue of Shiva. Neither random nor coherent, the fragments seem to represent the impressionistic puzzle pieces of partial recollection, which the compositions dynamically integrate into a meaningfully illogical whole.—*J.F. (Through Dec. 7.)*

### Bill Traylor

#### Zwirner

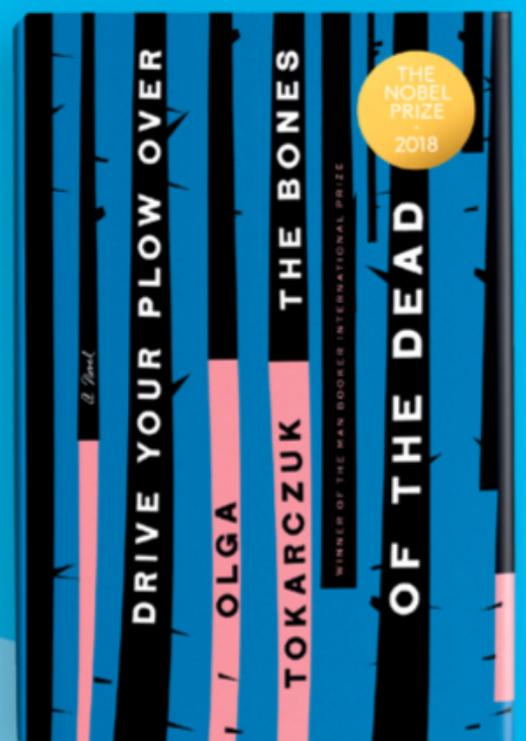
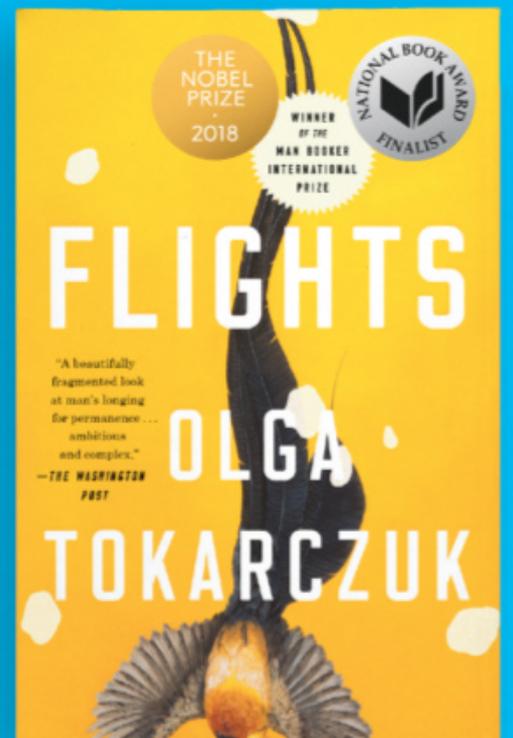
**UPTOWN** Traylor was about twelve years a slave, from his birth, in 1853 or so, until Union cavalry swept through the cotton plantation where he was enslaved, in 1865. Seventy-four years later, in 1939, homeless on the streets of Montgomery, Alabama, he became an extraordinary artist, making magnetically beautiful, dramatic, and utterly original drawings on found scraps of cardboard. He pencilled, and later began to paint, crisp silhouette figures of people and animals—feral-seeming dogs, ominous snakes, elegant birds, top-hatted men, fancily dressed women, ecstatic drinkers—either singly or in scenes of sometimes violent interaction. Traylor's style has about it both something very old, like prehistoric cave paintings, and something spanking new. Song-like rhythms and a feel for scale, in how the forms relate to the space that contains them, give majestic presence to even the smallest images. How should his art be categorized? What won't do are the romantic or patronizing epithets of "outsider" or "self-taught," which belong to a fading urge to police the frontiers of high culture. These terms are philosophically incoherent. All authentic artists buck prevailing norms and develop, on their own, what matters in their art.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Through Feb. 15.)*

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## WINTER PREVIEW

## Reenvisioned Classics, Gender Swaps

Ivo van Hove is an anomaly: an avant-garde European stage auteur who has become a name brand on Broadway. After his kinetic reinventions of “A View from the Bridge,” “The Crucible,” and “Network,” he returns to scramble up another American classic: **“West Side Story.”** Few musicals carry such familiarity and sentimental value—qualities that van Hove will inevitably strip away in search of something newer and stranger. The production, beginning previews on Dec. 10, at the Broadway Theatre, features choreography by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (supplanting the iconic work of Jerome Robbins) and thirty-two actors making their Broadway debuts.

The show joins a number of Broadway offerings in which the star is not an actor but a writer, a director, or a concept. **“Girl from the North Country,”** which uses the songs of Bob Dylan to tell the story of boarding-house denizens in Depression-era Minnesota, moves to the Belasco after a lauded run at the Public; previews start on Feb. 7, under

the direction of Conor McPherson, who also wrote the script. Marianne Elliott, who directed “Angels in America” last year, revives the 1970 Sondheim musical **“Company,”** but with gender-swapped characters: Katrina Lenk (“The Band’s Visit”) plays Bobbie—formerly Bobby—a thirty-five-year-old bachelorette (March 2, Jacobs). **“Six,”** a new musical by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, refracts the lives of Henry VIII’s doomed wives through the lens of twenty-first-century girl power (Feb. 13, Brooks Atkinson). Stefano Massini’s epic drama **“The Lehman Trilogy,”** adapted by Ben Power and directed by Sam Mendes, traces the Lehman brothers from their immigrant roots to the 2008 financial collapse (March 7, Nederlander).

That’s not to say that Broadway is forgoing big-name actors. Laurie Metcalf and Rupert Everett headline the latest Broadway revival of Edward Albee’s **“Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?,”** directed by Joe Mantello (March 3, Booth). There’s a dollop of star power Off Broadway, too: Rose Byrne and

Bobby Cannavale play a couple riven by infidelity and bloodlust in an adaptation of Euripides’ **“Medea,”** written and directed by Sam Stone (Jan. 12, BAM’s Harvey Theatre). The Ethiopian-Irish actress Ruth Negga makes her American stage debut in the title role of **“Hamlet,”** in a Gate Theatre Dublin production directed by Yaël Farber (Feb. 1, St. Ann’s Warehouse).

Duncan Sheik, the pop star turned prolific musical composer, lends his wry touch to **“Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice,”** a musical based on the 1969 Paul Mazursky film, about two married couples who dabble in free love; Scott Elliott directs for the New Group (Jan. 16, Pershing Square Signature Center). The English monologist Daniel Kitson weaves his latest existential yarn in **“Keep”** (Dec. 4, St. Ann’s Warehouse). Raja Feather Kelly directs **“We’re Gonna Die”** (Feb. 4, Second Stage), a rock show about mortality by Young Jean Lee (“Straight White Men”). And the British director Richard Jones returns to the Park Avenue Armory, where his eye-catching production of “The Hairy Ape” played in 2017, with Ödön von Horváth’s rarely seen 1937 play **“Judgment Day”** (Dec. 5).

—Michael Schulman

# A new MoMA is here

Installation view of *Energy*, on view at MoMA, October 21, 2019 – January 26, 2020. Shown: International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), Power symbol, 2002. Digital file. © 2019 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Noah Kalina



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## THE THEATRE

### American Utopia

Hudson

David Byrne stars in this gorgeously designed, deliciously fun, and intermittently politically intense revue of old and new songs, modelled on his recent world tour. Here, the singer and songwriter is backed by a rangy, versatile, exuberant band—made up, he notes pointedly, mostly of immigrants—and dances barefoot with an unmannered silliness that casts an ironic light back on his cooler, more insouciant days fronting Talking Heads. Behind them is a huge three-sided wall of metallic-looking beads—a seventies relic made futuristic. Most important, the songs sound great. Byrne and the band cover Janelle Monáe's protest song "Hell You Talmbout," which includes a recitation of the names of victims of police violence, with a fierce sincerity, and perform old favorites with a buoyancy sometimes reminiscent of New Orleans brass ensembles. When I went, two women stood up and shyly started to dance. By night's end, everybody had followed their lead.—*Vinson Cunningham (Through Feb. 16.)*

### for all the women who thought they were Mad

SoHo Rep

The space-time continuum is bent out of shape in Zawe Ashton's play: it's never quite clear where the action takes place, or when. The lead character, a career woman named Joy (Bisserat Tsegai), spends most of her time in a transparent box. The enclosure could signal an office, or a manifestation of Joy's mind; there are no obvious answers. Ashton (who is also an accomplished actress, currently starring in "Betrayal," on Broadway) prefers the poetic to the naturalistic as she explores Joy's increasing distress with a system—professional, medical—that is rigged against black women like her. Body horror mixes with magical realism when Joy's pregnancy progresses in the blink of an eye; the way that Ashton and the director, Whitney White, handle this section is the most gripping part of a show that too often relies on vague, frustratingly elliptical lyricism.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli (Through Nov. 24.)*

### for colored girls

Public

In this ecstatic new production of Ntozake Shange's 1976 choreopoem, "for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf," directed by Leah C. Gardiner, the characters are a swarm of unnamed women, identified only by the color each wears. Their talking and singing and dancing and rigorous listening make up the whole intensely varied texture of the show. It's a delicate work, a bittersweet cabaret held together only by the alchemical relationships among the actors onstage. Adrienne C. Moore, as Lady in Yellow, is as funny here as she was as Black Cindy on the TV show "Orange Is the New Black," but infinitely warmer, cannier, and more empathetic. At several points, Sasha Allen, as Lady in Blue, leads the ensemble in its sung numbers, seeming to pull the sad or lovely or touchingly naïve stories spoken by her castmates onto a higher and more terrifying plane.

When Okwui Okpokwasili, as Lady in Green, appeals to a former lover, "I want my stuff back," the mind somersaults at the thought of all that must have been taken.—*V.C. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/4/19.) (Through Dec. 8.)*

### Power Strip

Claire Tow

Sylvia Khoury's play about the refugee experience, set in a border-adjacent periphery of Greece, means well but only rarely hits its mark. The opening is bleak: Yasmin (Dina Shihabi) sleeps alone outdoors, on rocky terrain, and has to fight off Khaled (Darius Homayoun), a fellow-Syrian who's trying to steal her space heater. Their acquaintance turns intimate, and we learn how brutal life has been for Yasmin. That information is valuable and worth staging, as are the vagaries of life in refugee camps—desperate attempts at making money, scarce water, random violence. But "Power Strip," directed by Tyne Rafaeli for LCT3, rarely gets behind those facts to make its people real. One problem is that the acting isn't so hot: both leads struggle tonally through a text that means to plumb the humor in darkness but often ends up too silly by half. Our moments of pathos with Yasmin—a real hero, with a story to tell—are too thin, and too far between.—*V.C. (Through Nov. 17.)*

### Seared

Robert W. Wilson

MCC Theatre Space

In Theresa Rebeck's deliciously tense new comedy, an all too talented chef (Raúl Esparza) takes full credit for the excellence of his Park Slope bistro and deserves the blame for its imminent failure. He's an asshole—dictatorial, hotheaded, self-impressed, hypersensitive, faux philosophical, misanthropic, hypocritical, perfectionist, and craven—but he meets his match when his exasperated business partner (David Mason) brings in a breezy restaurant consultant (Krysta Rodriguez) with mysterious methods. Moritz von Stuelpnagel's direction is so precise, and the humor so rooted in character, that the cast—including W. Tré Davis, as a chronically underestimated waiter—can elicit big laughs from the smallest of gestures, especially in the nail-biting second act. Tim Mackabee's impeccably accurate, wonderfully overstuffed—and functional—kitchen set is a pleasure to examine all on its own.—*Rollo Romig (Through Dec. 15.)*

### The Sound Inside

Studio 54

Mary-Louise Parker's magnetism is hard to pin down, largely because it comes from somewhere antecedent to any line she delivers or gesture she executes. Hers is an art of thought, and it's edifying to watch her puzzle through an idea just before she parts her lips to convey it. "The Sound Inside," an interesting, uneven play by Adam Rapp, directed by David Cromer, is worth seeing for the chance it offers Parker to wrinkle her brow. She plays Bella, a wry writer and professor in the middle of a crisis. Meeting a new student, Christopher (Will Hochman), sends her ideas about writing and life into a messy spiral. The play is delivered partly in scenes, but mostly in monologues that sound more like prose than speech. As Bella, Parker reaches

for a phrase in that way of hers, then rushes to write it down. This interplay between showing and telling—display and description—often feels forced, but it points toward a promising formal breakthrough that Rapp doesn't quite reach here.—*V.C. (Through Jan. 12.)*

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## DANCE

### Paul Taylor

David H. Koch

During its Lincoln Center run, Paul Taylor American Modern Dance performs nineteen Taylor works, including one, "Post Meridian," that hasn't been seen in three decades. That dance is a collaboration by Taylor and the artist Alex Katz; four others—"Sunset," "Scudorama," "Private Domain," and "Diggity"—will be featured in a special program, on Nov. 11. Besides classics like "Black Tuesday," "Esplanade," and "Company B," the troupe also performs pieces by three outside choreographers, part of its strategy to expand its repertory beyond the dances of Taylor, who died last year. The three—Kyle Abraham, Pam Tanowitz, and Margie Gillis—represent a wide swath of the dance field: Abraham's style is urbane and internal, Tanowitz's is cerebral and postmodern, and Gillis's is fluid and steeped in emotion.—*Marina Harss (Nov. 5-9 and Nov. 11-12. Through Nov. 17.)*

### Maria Hassabi

1014

"Entre Deux Actes (Ménage à Quatre)" began, in 2009, with the artist Nairy Baghramian and the designer Janette Laverrière making an art installation out of an actress's dressing room that Laverrière had fashioned circa 1947. To this, Baghramian later added erotic Polaroids by Carlo Mollino. And now, for Performa 19, she brings in choreography by Maria Hassabi, whose work, closer to slow-moving sculpture than to conventional dance, is best appreciated in installation settings. The performance moves through two floors of a Fifth Avenue town house, finding drama and glamorous tension in the distance between dancers, arranged apart or body against body.—*Brian Seibert (Nov. 6-10.)*

### "Bacchae: Prelude to a Purge"

BAM Harvey Theatre

The audience may not learn much about Euripides' "The Bacchae" by watching Marlene Monteiro Freitas's evening of dance theatre, but that won't matter much once Freitas's surreal, grotesque onstage world is unfurled. Five trumpeters and eight dancers scream, sing, and don masks, eventually joining in a mad, mesmerizing rendition of Ravel's "Boléro." Half carnival, half decadent variety show, this seductive "Bacchae" embodies the Dionysian spirit that drives the play, dark side and all.—*M.H. (Nov. 7-9.)*

### Kia LaBeija

Performance Space New York

In 1922, the Bauhaus artist Oskar Schlemmer created "The Triadic Ballet": essentially an avant-garde fashion show, with performers posing and



## WINTER PREVIEW

## Irish Steps, Tap's Swing

As **"Riverdance"**'s twenty-fifth-anniversary tour approaches (March 10-15, at Radio City Music Hall), one of the mega-show's former stars offers a radically contrasting vision of Irish dance: **Colin Dunne**, who has spent the past twenty years deconstructing the form, brings a solo evening, "Concert," to the Baryshnikov Arts Center (Nov. 14-16). With the focus and the unpredictability of a veteran improviser, he dances his way through the music of the late Tommy Potts, a sagelike fiddler whose sole studio album, "The Liffey Banks," extended the idea of what traditional Irish music could be.

"Swing is from the inside," the legendary tap dancer Jimmy Slyde once said, referring to that special quality—a mixture of panache and freedom—that elevates a dancer beyond sheer technical brilliance. Slyde had oodles of it, as do the four dancers involved in the show **"And Still You Must Swing,"** at the Joyce (Dec. 3-8). The tap virtuoso **Dor-meshia**—considered by some to be the best tapper of her generation—has put together a stellar quartet of performers: herself, the tap dancers **Derick K. Grant** and **Jason Samuels Smith**, and the modern dancer and choreographer **Camille A. Brown**. Together and individually, they channel the rhythms and moods of the jazz trio with which they share the stage.

Russian music has been a major source of inspiration for the choreographer **Alexei Ratmansky**, but his newest creation, for **New York City Ballet's** winter season (Jan. 21-March 1, at the David H. Koch), is set to a cycle of pieces for piano and voice by the Austrian experimental composer Peter Ablinger. In "Voices and Piano"—from which Ratmansky will excerpt—the music mimics the rhythms and pitches of the spoken word. (The full cycle includes passages from such familiar voices as John Cage, Angela Davis, and Mother Teresa.) The choreography adds an additional layer to the exploration of language. Another new ballet for the company, by **Justin Peck**—who recently created the dances for Steven Spielberg's film remake of "West Side Story," to be released next year—is set to a score commissioned from Nico Muhly.

Last year, it was announced that the British modern-dance troupe **Richard Alston Dance Company** will shut its doors in 2020, after twenty-five years in operation; it's a loss to anyone who loves the craft of dance, and to those who admire Alston's lyrical voice and vivid response to music. The company will visit the area one last time, at Peak Performances (Feb. 20-23), in Montclair, New Jersey.

—Marina Harss



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promenading in bizarre, silhouette-altering costumes. For her first evening-length show, the vogue dancer and accomplished photographer Kia LaBeija finds inspiration in the final third of Schlemmer's work, the section known as the "black act." In LaBeija's piece "Untitled, the Black Act," presented as part of Performa 19, five dancers represent alternate versions of the choreographer in outfits by Kyle Luu.—*B.S. (Nov. 7-9.)*

### Big Dance Theater N.Y.U. Skirball

The choreographer and dancer Annie-B Parson may be finding new acclaim for answering the insanity of our age by getting musicians to perform Dada pantomime in David Byrne's "American Utopia" concert, now on Broadway, but absurdism has run through the work of her company, Big Dance Theater, for decades. The troupe returns in "The Road Awaits Us," which riffs on Ionesco's "The Bald Soprano" in a self-aware pageant about mortality, featuring a cast of dance elders that includes Bebe Miller, Meg Harper, and Keith Sabado. Parson's new "Ballet Dance" takes on ballet in general, and Balanchine's "Agon" in particular.—*B.S. (Nov. 8-9.)*

### Rashaad Newsome New York Live Arts

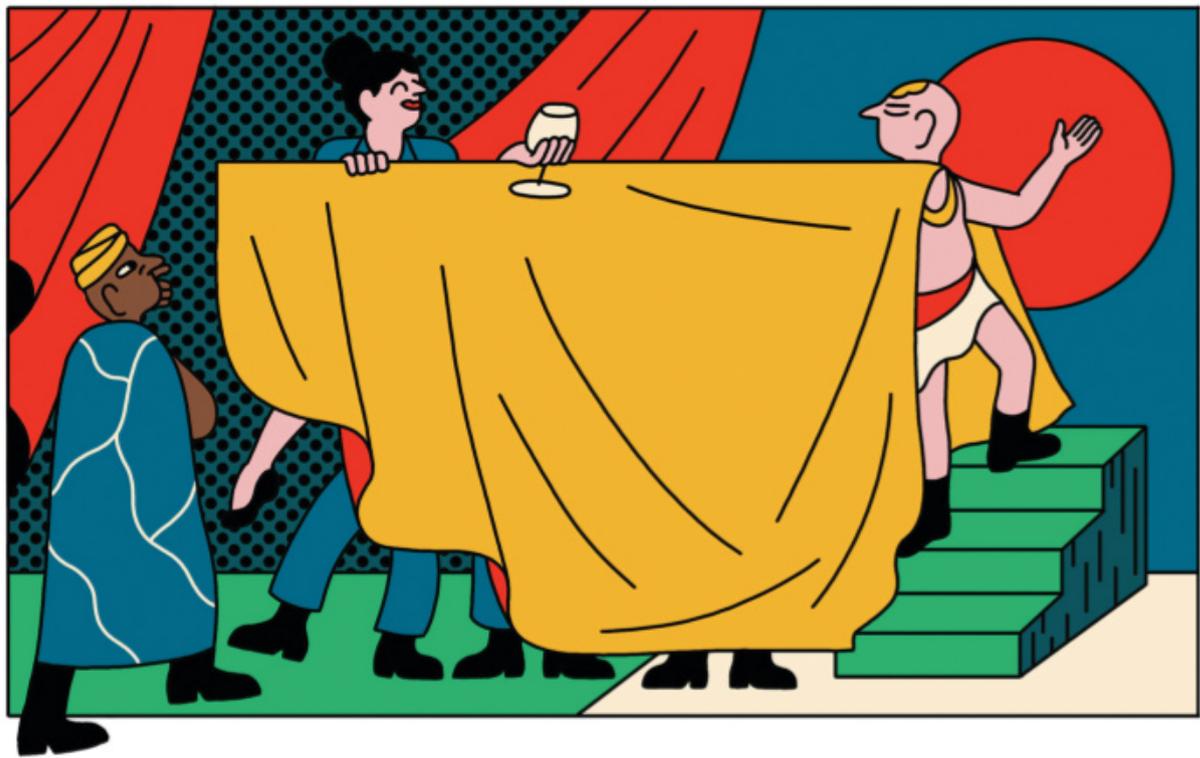
On one level, the concept for "Five" sounds fairly simple. The number refers to the components of vogue femme: hand gesture, catwalk, duckwalk, floor work, spin-and-dip. Performers mixing these elements are accompanied by a band, a gospel choir, an opera singer, and a ballroom-style m.c. Meanwhile, Newsome, using motion-capture and video-game technology, incorporates the dancing into digital drawings, and "Five" grows larger.—*B.S. (Nov. 8-9.)*

### Camille A. Brown Joyce Theatre

"Mr. TOL E. RAnCE," which premiered in 2013, is the first installment in a trilogy of dances in which Brown delves into ideas about race and identity. In the piece, Brown explores the stereotypes of black performance, from minstrelsy to depictions of blackness in the current culture. The dancers, accompanied by snippets of film, mimic and deconstruct the material, in a structure akin to a theme and variations. The sumptuous silent-movie-style score is played onstage by the pianist Scott Patterson.—*M.H. (Nov. 9-10.)*

### Jerron Herman & Molly Joyce Danspace Project

The dancer Jerron Herman, a strong and supple standout with Heidi Latsky Dance, is affected by cerebral palsy on his left side. The composer-performer Molly Joyce, injured in a car accident, has limited use of her left hand. These two artists treat disability as creative opportunity. In "Breaking and Entering," they explore their struggles and their transformations together—Joyce with ethereal vocals and an electric toy organ, Herman with his body in motion. Each performance is followed by a dance party.—*B.S. (Nov. 12-16.)*



### WINTER PREVIEW

## Female Composers, Intimate Recitals

It's hard to imagine anyone entering the holidays with quite as much to do as the American mezzo-soprano **Joyce DiDonato**, who is as dazzling as she is hardworking. As one of Carnegie Hall's four "Perspectives" artists for 2019-20, she sings Berlioz's dramatic "La Mort de Cléopâtre" with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Nov. 15), some sublime Mozart arias with the Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal (Nov. 22), and Schubert's "Winterreise," an intense narration across twenty-four songs, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin at the piano (Dec. 15). She also brings Handel's "**Agrippina**," an extravagant historical fiction of Nero's ascent to the throne, to the **Metropolitan Opera's** company premiere (Feb. 6-March 7).

The holidays are a time of splendor at the Met, with a new staging of Philip Glass's "**Akhmaten**," starring the counter-tenor Anthony Roth Costanzo (Nov. 8-Dec. 7), and a revival of Strauss's "**Der Rosenkavalier**," conducted by Simon Rattle in a rare appearance (Dec. 13-Jan. 4). In **On Site Opera's** production of Menotti's gentle "Amahl and the Night Visitors," the three wise men seek shelter at Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, where audience members are invited to donate nonperishable goods (Dec. 4-8). Menotti wrote the role of Amahl for the angelic tone of a boy soprano; such voices distinguish the **Saint Thomas**

**Choir's** performance of Britten's divine "Ceremony of Carols" at its namesake church (Dec. 19).

In the New Year, the **New York Philharmonic** marks the hundredth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, which extended voting rights to women, with commissions by nineteen female composers, starting with Joan La Barbara, Ellen Reid, and Paola Prestini (Feb. 5-22); **Juilliard's Focus Festival** (Jan. 24-31) programs works by women born in the wake of the law's passage. The city's new-music festivals also tell women's stories, with Ricky Ian Gordon's chamber opera "Ellen West" at the **Prototype Festival** (Jan. 9-19) and Lucy Dhegrae's musical investigation of trauma at National Sawdust's **FERUS Festival** (Jan. 10-15).

Carnegie Hall offers a bounty of world-class recitalists, including the pianists **Behzod Abduraimov** (Dec. 10) and **Yuja Wang** (Feb. 28), the bass-baritone **Bryn Terfel** (Feb. 9), and the violinist **Maxim Vengerov** (Feb. 11). Lincoln Center's "**American Songbook**" series provides cozier encounters with both classical and Broadway talent, including Stephanie Blythe as her drag-king persona, Blythely Oratonio (Jan. 30), and the 2019 Tony winners André De Shields (Jan. 29) and Ali Stroker (Feb. 28).

—*Oussama Zahra*

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### New York Philharmonic

David Geffen Hall

Anytime Esa-Pekka Salonen returns to the New York Philharmonic podium, it's a cause for celebration—all the more so when he conducts his own music. He leads the New York premiere of “Gemini,” which comprises two smaller pieces: the brooding “Pollux,” from 2018, and the bristling “Castor,” a new work formed from material that Salonen set aside during the creation of its companion. The concert opens with Hindemith's sassy “Ragtime (Well-Tempered)” and closes with his noble “Mathis der Maler” Symphony; music by Bach, as orchestrated by Schoenberg, completes this fascinating program.—*Steve Smith* (Nov. 6 and Nov. 12 at 7:30 and Nov. 8-9 at 8.)

### “Stabat Mater”

Alice Tully Hall

For all the prominence that the Scottish composer James MacMillan has earned with his orchestral and chamber music, his choral works still warrant wider circulation and broader recognition Stateside. This White Light Festival program presents the U.S. premieres of “Misere-re” (2009) and “Stabat Mater” (2015), two pieces that strike an exquisite balance between ambiguity and assurance. Both are performed by the Sixteen, a superb English choir that has long championed MacMillan; “Stabat Mater” also features the accomplished chamber orchestra Britten Sinfonia.—*S.S.* (Nov. 7 at 7:30.)

### Square Peg Round Hole

National Sawdust

Since its formation, in 2011, the percussion trio Square Peg Round Hole has pushed the boundaries of sound and texture in its performances and recordings, conjuring an effect that is cool, groovy, and current. At National Sawdust, the ensemble creates a soundscape that includes ambient, electronic, and post-rock elements, employing everything from vibraphones to glass bottles, metal pipes, and children's toys. Before the main event, the Puerto Rican composer and multi-instrumentalist Angélica Negrón presents a solo set, “Sembrar,” which she describes as “a collection of songs for plants, mechanical percussion, and voice.” Also playing: Negrón performs in “Isterica,” a multidisciplinary exploration of the historical and societal context around hysteria (Nov. 6 at 7:30).—*Hélène Werner* (Nov. 8 at 7.)

### Berg's “Lyric Suite”

Alice Tully Hall

Alban Berg's “Lyric Suite” was known as a piece for string quartet until 1977, when a musicologist discovered a copy of the score annotated by Berg himself. That find revealed the emotional provenance of the work—a narrative of the love affair between Berg and his mistress, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, encoded in highly complex musical form—and also included a phrase from a Baudelaire poem, “De profundis clamavi” (“From the depths I cried”), that intimates the heartbreaking trajectory of the work. Follow-

ing the discovery, the final movement of the suite has often been performed with a soprano. Here, the Schumann Quartet is joined by the American soprano Tony Arnold, one of the most acclaimed interpreters of contemporary vocal music.—*H.W.* (Nov. 8 at 7:30.)

### Strauss and Shostakovich

Carnegie Hall

The program for the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra's first evening at Carnegie Hall shows two very different sides of Richard Strauss. The interludes from “Intermezzo,” a domestic comedy in which the composer poked fun at his own marriage, burst with grand waltzes, silvery melodies, and musical wit; his “Four Last Songs,” sung here by the soprano Diana Damrau, is a captivating meditation on death that he wrote a year before he passed away. On the second evening, Weber's overture to “Euryanthe” and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, with the pianist Rudolf Buchbinder, provide a diverting introduction to Shostakovich's intense Symphony No. 10; Mariss Jansons conducts.—*Oussama Zahr* (Nov. 8-9 at 8.)

### “Akhnaten”

Metropolitan Opera House

The Met was no doubt hoping to repeat the success of Phelim McDermott's 2008 staging of Philip Glass's “Satyagraha” when it engaged the director for a new production of the composer's “Akhnaten,” which has already triumphed in runs at the Los Angeles Opera and the English National Opera. The works are the second and third entries in Glass's “Portrait Trilogy,” but they contain more thematic and narrative cogency than their famously abstruse predecessor, “Einstein on the Beach.” “Akhnaten” recounts the brief reign of its titular pharaoh, who attempted to institute monotheistic worship around the god of the sun, with radiant and numinous sonorities. Karen Kamensek conducts a cast led by Anthony Roth Costanzo and J'Nai Bridges.—*O.Z.* (Nov. 8 at 8 and Nov. 12 at 7:30.)

### William Basinski

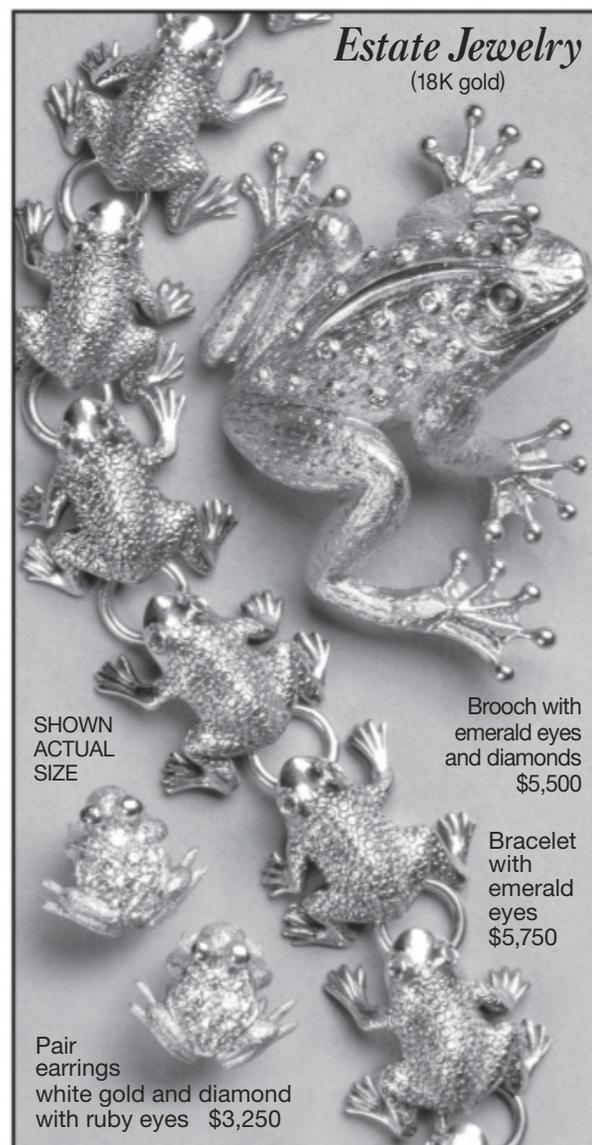
Issue Project Room

A composer of slow-drifting, ethereal ambient works, William Basinski taps into deep wells of emotion in his best-known creations, including “The Disintegration Loops” and “On Time Out of Time.” You might well hear portions from both of those pieces, and much more besides, during “Durational Performance for Suzanne.” This career-spanning eight-hour retrospective doubles as a threnody for Suzanne Fiol, the artist who founded Issue Project Room, in honor of the tenth anniversary of her untimely passing.—*S.S.* (Nov. 9 at 6.)

### “Music from Exile”

Baruch Performing Arts Center

In “Music from Exile,” the Daedalus Quartet offers a bracing selection of works by composers who lived in exile from their countries and their roots. Viktor Ullmann wrote his third string quartet while confined in Terezín, in 1943, about a year before he was murdered at Auschwitz. In the quartet's four connected and yet distinctly inflected sections, it's hard to



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## WINTER PREVIEW

## Seasonal Soundtracks, Star-Studded Arenas

The one-two punch of chillier temperatures and the impending holidays reinforces our natural inclination to partner up and wait out the weather in the arms of a loved one—or perhaps to bask (or wallow) in solitude. Whatever the case, a varied collection of singers offer a heart-tugging soundtrack to suit any mood. **“Soul in the City”** (Nov. 13, Chelsea Music Hall) showcases a roster of such young R. & B. rule-breakers as Sebastian Mikael and P.J. Throwback romantics can be ravished by the unparalleled vocal stylings of **Lalah Hathaway** (Nov. 15, Sony Hall), and millennial audiences will find a patron saint in the unfeigned lyricism of **Summer Walker** (Dec. 7-8, Terminal 5).

At Webster Hall, the silky singer **Snoh Aalegra** takes the stage with **Baby Rose**, whose emotive voice has drawn comparisons to that of Nina Simone (Nov. 24). Later, the rising stunner **Xavier Omär** and a few of his equally talented peers appear on the “Hot Javi” tour (Dec. 8). Just in time for Valentine’s Day, the wrenching singer **Michael Kiwanuka** (Feb. 8, Terminal 5) performs his folk-soul songs. For those who prefer to work out their emotions on the dance floor beneath skittish strobe lights set to epic bass drops, a few splashy E.D.M. headliners should provide opportunities for cathar-

sis. **Flosstradamus** shakes things up at Webster Hall (Jan. 3), and, across the bridge, at Avant Gardner, **Armin van Buuren** (Jan. 23-24) and **Deadmau5** (Feb. 6-9) do the same.

Local radio stations play up the seasonal cheer with an assemblage of genre-spanning big-ticket shows. The Barclays Center hosts 94.7’s **“Stars and Strings”** (Dec. 4)—featuring country musicians such as Sam Hunt and the viral star Blanco Brown—along with ALT 92.3’s **“Not So Silent Night”** (Dec. 5), whose lineup includes the folk rockers Mumford & Sons and the indie-rock darlings Vampire Weekend, and Hot 97’s **“Hot for the Holidays”** (Dec. 18), a largely R. & B. showcase with performances by Khalid, H.E.R., and Kiana Ledé. Z100’s annual star-studded **Jingle Ball** (Dec. 13) opts for Madison Square Garden, bringing such pop mainstays as Taylor Swift, 5SOS, and Lizzo.

**WinterJazzfest** (Jan. 9-18) offers a good reason to endure the brisk air, with venues stretching out across Brooklyn and Manhattan. This year’s programming shines a spotlight on the wide-ranging drummer and composer Mark Guiliana, the artist-in-residence, and honors the legendary hard-bop drummer Art Blakey and the jazz legacy of Detroit.

—Briana Younger

untangle the defiance from the despair, the optimism from the acquiescence. Gabriel Bolaños fled Nicaragua with his family, in the nineties; his string quartet, “Babel”—in which he works to expose the threads of commonality that bind us despite differences of time, place, and culture—receives its New York premiere. Mieczysław Weinberg’s massive and brooding piano quintet, written in Moscow, in 1944, after the composer escaped Nazi-occupied Poland, completes the program.—*H.W. (Nov. 12 at 7:30.)*

## Neil Rolnick

## Roulette

The composer Neil Rolnick has a knack for endowing his electronic and electroacoustic works with genuine humanity. That capacity reaches new levels of intimacy in two works he created in 2018, around the time of his wife’s death. “Journey’s End,” performed here by the versatile pianist Kathleen Supové, is meant to evoke the peace with which Wendy Rolnick came to accept her fate; “Messages,” for solo laptop with dancers, makes use of voice-mail messages recovered posthumously and the fiddle music discussed therein.—*S.S. (Nov. 12 at 8.)*

## NIGHT LIFE

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

## JPEGMAFIA

## Bowery Ballroom

The irreverent rapper and producer JPEGMAFIA gathers his disparate interests—anime, pop culture, antagonizing the morally and politically unsound—and renders them as captivating if dislocated songs. It’s easy to mistake the chaos for provocation for the sake of it, but Peggy, whose recent album “All My Heroes Are Cornballs” may be his most approachable, is a crafty lyricist who uses his music to both critique and exorcise the demons associated with being a veteran, an artist, and a black man in a world that remains unfriendly, in varying capacities, to all three. If righteous indignation had a sound, this would be it. (He also performs at Music Hall of Williamsburg, on Nov. 8.)—*Briana Younger (Nov. 6.)*

## “Still Point: Turning World”

## Roulette

The guitarist and composer Joel Harrison shifts so easily between genres—be they jazz, blues, rock, country, or international styles—that pinning him down is a sheer waste of energy. Here, in a typically sweeping project, he joins Indrajit Roy-Chowdhury on sitar and Swaminathan Selvaganesh on kanjira (plus other Western musicians, including the saxophonist Jon Irabagon) for a mashup of jazz and Indian classical music.—*Steve Futterman (Nov. 6.)*

## Tom Harrell

## Dizzy’s Club

Tom Harrell may not be the lickety-split trumpet phenom he was when he first hit New York,

back in the early seventies, but, at age seventy-three, he still knows the value of a buffed tone, a perfectly placed note, and a gracefully symmetrical musical line; he's long displayed the wisdom of a jazz master. His "Infinity" quintet cohorts include a younger wonder—the saxophonist Mark Turner—and the guitarist Charles Altura.—*S.F. (Nov. 7-10.)*

## Junglepussy

### Pioneer Works

The world within hip-hop that the vibrant rapper Junglepussy occupies is one filled with copious sex, self-love, and self-improvement; she can lecture on healthy eating just as readily as she can record an ode to oral sex—both receiving and giving, but only "if he start eatin' vegetables." It's a kind of duality that also functions as subversion, much the way her stage name can force listeners to confront their stereotypes head on. She performs within the immersive exhibition "You're at home," created by the multimedia artist Jacolby Satterwhite, a different kind of surrealist.—*B.Y. (Nov. 8.)*

## Lusine

### The Sultan Room

The Seattle-based composer and producer Jeff McIlwane, who works as Lusine, began releasing ambient and down-tempo music of pointillist detail in the mid-two-thousands. But on his third album, "The Waiting Room," from 2013, he began veering into techno-pop; he often cuts his collaborators' vocals into confetti and aligns them with gridlike beats that chirp and snap elusively. Lusine typically performs alone, but for this appearance he's accompanied by another Seattle musician, the drummer Trent Moorman.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Nov. 9.)*

## Devon Welsh

### Public Records

Devon Welsh is trim, bald, and frequently dressed like a stagehand; his skewed pop songs are even less garlanded. Formerly the front man of the Montreal duo Majical Cloudz and now a lone wolf tucked away in Wisconsin, the singer embodies a strange kind of minimalism that extends from his spare synthesizers to his disarmingly blunt lyrics. The night before Welsh's concert, Public Records showcases another sort of unvarnished sound with sets from the veteran guitar dynamos David Grubbs and Glenn Jones.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Nov. 9.)*

## HTRK

### Elsewhere

The Melbourne duo HTRK makes murmuring synth pop that's assiduously minimalist yet crawling with detail, rooted in the tiny, brittle constructions of the Welsh post-punks Young Marble Giants. Jonnine Standish's oft-blurry vocals play hide-and-seek—sometimes multitracked to dizzying effect, sometimes half audible behind a throbbing bass line. The producer Nigel Yang's arrangements tend to be built around effects as much as instrumentation; a stray looped rustle may take on the force of a melody line or transform into a rhythmic accent.—*M.M. (Nov. 10.)*

## Moon Duo

### Music Hall of Williamsburg

Ripley Johnson and Sanae Yamada, the married couple who perform as Moon Duo, devote themselves to psychedelia the way that the less constitutionally trippy might embrace culture or creed. The Portland, Oregon, duo's approach is ecumenical and thoroughly contemporary; the musicians cherry-pick influences from across genres, eras, and national borders. On Moon Duo's new album, "Stars Are the Light," they incorporate a pulse ripped from disco—once the perceived nemesis of the rock arcanist, now another chic old sound to distort at will.—*J.R. (Nov. 12.)*

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## MOVIES

### American Dharma

Errol Morris's documentary, built mainly around his interviews with the far-right strategist Steve Bannon, is clearly motivated by his hostility to Bannon's ideas and his dismay at their electoral triumphs. Drawing on Bannon's earlier career as a film producer and on his mythologizing of classic Hollywood depictions of (white) masculinity, Morris films Bannon in a Quonset hut and other settings borrowed from the 1949 war film "Twelve O'Clock High"—yet, in hoping to debunk Bannon's heroic vision of himself, Morris merely perpetuates it. He gives Bannon a wide platform on which to trip himself up in his own rhetorical tangle, but Bannon, a practiced performer, deftly and gleefully unspools his philosophical pronouncements, which Morris leaves largely unchallenged. When he does challenge Bannon's assertions, the movie's fussy editing delivers contrived drama rather than authentic conflict. In the absence of the journalistic agility to rebut Bannon's pompous and exclusionary generalities, Morris gives them a showcase.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

### Araya

This majestic documentary portrait, from 1959, of several families on Venezuela's vast and arid salt-marsh peninsula, is the only feature film by its director, Margot Benacerraf. Its arresting images of sea and sky evoke a vast historical arc; the individuals at its center—mainly laborers on their hard and monotonous rounds—emerge only gradually from the community at large. The Pereda family works mightily to build a pyramid of salt, only to break it down to sell in sacks. At a nearby beach, the Ortiz family, which survives by fishing, carefully calculates what they must consume and what they can afford to sell. Benacerraf's grand style captures the drama of subsistence in the face of nature; the overwhelming beauty of the wide-open spaces contrasts with the workers' burdened trudges through them. She offers a wealth of fascinating and moving details but little intimacy or analysis, avoiding with equal discretion both the subjects' inner lives and the wider political context. In Spanish.—*R.B. (Museum of the Moving Image, Nov. 10, and streaming.)*

### Burning Cane

The nineteen-year-old writer and director Phillip Youmans displays a preternatural ma-

turity in this intimately textured, far-reaching drama, set in rural Louisiana and centered on a middle-aged black woman named Helen (Karen Kaia Livers), who is weary in body and in soul. She lives alone in a house near cane fields, with an ailing dog as her sole companion. Her dissolute husband died of AIDS; her son, Daniel (Dominique McClellan), a heavy drinker who can't hold a job, physically abuses his wife, Sherry (Emyri Crutchfield), while nonetheless asserting his right to raise their young son, Jeremiah (Braelyn Kelly). Meanwhile, Helen's friend and pastor, the recently widowed Reverend Tillman (Wendell Pierce), is undergoing a spiritual trial that makes him judgmental and aggressive. Youmans, who does his own cinematography, depicts these harrowing emotional crises in dramatic fragments and shadow-drenched, often oblique images; they suggest his anguish at a legacy of male frustration, violence, rage, and self-destruction that leaves the region's women trapped in futile silence.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

### The Irishman

Martin Scorsese's new film, lasting three and a half hours, marks a return to his old battleground—to the glory days when wise guys walked the earth. The action spans decades, chopped up into flashbacks, and covers the adult life of Frank Sheeran (Robert De Niro), who sits in a nursing home and steers us through his past. We find him as a truck driver in Philadelphia, who falls in with one mobster, Russell Bufalino (Joe Pesci), and then another, Angelo Bruno (Harvey Keitel), before becoming a bodyguard to the labor leader Jimmy Hoffa (Al Pacino). The cast, which includes Ray Romano as a lawyer and Stephen Graham as a union boss known as Tony Pro, is almost absurdly strong, though Anna Paquin, as Frank's perspicacious daughter Peggy, is too often confined to the wings. As a rueful roll through time, the movie is grandly sustained; seldom has Scorsese's mastery felt more secure.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/4/19.) (In wide release.)*

### Tokyo Twilight

Yasujiro Ozu's direction brings emotional depth and philosophical heft to this turbulent and grim family melodrama, from 1957. A middle-aged businessman slowly awakens to the fact that his two grown daughters are unhappy in love. The elder, who agreed to an arranged marriage with a respected intellectual (despite loving someone else), finds her husband overbearing and egocentric; the younger is involved with a dissolute student who neglects his studies for gambling. But as family secrets emerge—the father's long-concealed romantic humiliations, as well as wartime disruptions and degradations—it becomes clear that secrets themselves are the problem. Ozu reveals the emotional corrosion caused by maintaining a brave front in the face of problems and by shielding children from darker issues—even those regarding their own past. By the movie's end, all Japanese society seems rotted out by the lies that pass for civility and propriety. An ostensibly happy ending offers little but resignation. In Japanese.—*R.B. (Film Forum, Nov. 8-14, and streaming.)*

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## WINTER PREVIEW

## Lonely Battles, Fervent Ideals

This season of Oscar hopefuls offers a batch of stories spotlighting misunderstood heroes and antiheroes, including **“Uncut Gems”** (Dec. 13), starring Adam Sandler, in a frenzied dramatic role, as a jewelry dealer in New York’s diamond district whose effort to sell smuggled goods is both sparked and complicated by his heavy sports-gambling debts. His desperate quest to raise funds involves his wife (Idina Menzel), his girlfriend (Julia Fox), a ruthless mobster (Eric Bogosian), and the pro basketball player

Kevin Garnett (playing himself); the script, co-written by Ronald Bronstein and the film’s directors, the brothers Josh and Benny Safdie, daringly intertwines the drama with real-life sporting events. In Marielle Heller’s drama **“A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood”** (Nov. 22), Tom Hanks plays the children’s-television luminary Fred Rogers, who is being profiled by a skeptical journalist (Matthew Rhys); the story is based on the journalist Tom Junod’s acquaintance with Rogers. Kristen Stewart plays the

title role in **“Seberg”** (Dec. 13), a drama, directed by Benedict Andrews, about the persecution of Jean Seberg—the American actress who became a French New Wave icon—by the F.B.I., in the late nineteen-sixties, as a result of her political activism. Clint Eastwood directed **“Richard Jewell”** (Dec. 13), based on the true story of a security guard at the 1996 Summer Olympics, in Atlanta, who was falsely accused of involvement in a terrorist bombing that he in fact tried to prevent. Paul Walter Hauser plays Jewell; Kathy Bates co-stars as Jewell’s mother, and Sam Rockwell plays his attorney.

A series of ambitious remakes begins with **“Charlie’s Angels”** (Nov. 15), written and directed by Elizabeth Banks, in which the three secret agents (Kristen Stewart, Naomi Scott, and Ella Balinska) are joined by three detectives named Bosley (Banks, Djimon Hounsou, and Patrick Stewart). Sophia Takal directed and co-wrote, with April Wolfe, a new version of the 1974 horror film **“Black Christmas”** (Dec. 13), starring Imogen Poots, Lily Donoghue, and Aleyse Shannon, about a group of female college students who are being menaced by a stalker and, having no confidence in the authorities, fight back. Greta Gerwig wrote and directed a new, nonlinear adaptation of **“Little Women”** (Dec. 25), starring Saoirse Ronan, Florence Pugh, Meryl Streep, Emma Watson, Laura Dern, and Timothée Chalamet.

Tales of political resistance are at the fore this season, including Terrence Malick’s historical drama **“A Hidden Life”** (Dec. 13), based on the true story of Franz Jägerstätter (played by August Diehl), an Austrian man who refused to serve in the German Army during the Second World War. **“Clemency”** (Dec. 27), directed by Chinonye Chukwu, stars Alfre Woodard as a prison warden who comes to question the practice of capital punishment. In **“Just Mercy”** (Dec. 25), Michael B. Jordan plays Bryan Stevenson, a defense attorney who takes the case of a death-row inmate (Jamie Foxx) who has been wrongly convicted of murder. Destin Daniel Cretton directed and co-wrote the script with Andrew Lanham, based on a memoir by Stevenson.

—Richard Brody



## TABLES FOR TWO

**Pilar Cuban Bakery**  
397 Greene Ave., Brooklyn

**Win Son Bakery**  
164 Graham Ave., Brooklyn

On a recent morning in Bed-Stuy, a young boy pressed his face against the glass case at Pilar Cuban Bakery and began to moan. “Mom, Mom, Mooooom. I want this!” he declared plaintively, pointing to an enticingly glossy Key-lime pie, sliced into neat wedges. “And what about this?” he exclaimed, moving on to the coconut-chocolate bars.

As for me, I was eyeing the fat squares of drippy yellow tres-leches cake in plastic clamshells, each wearing a heavy crown of pink whipped-cream rosettes and jewelled with berries; the puff-pastry *pastelitos*, encasing guava paste, cream cheese, or beef picadillo; and the miniature tin cups of rice pudding, topped with cubed pineapple and a healthy sprinkle of cinnamon.

There is hardly a happier place than a bakery, and, if this city could do with more of them, 2019 has been an auspicious year, thanks to both Pilar and Win Son Bakery, in East Williamsburg. Each is an offshoot of a restaurant, and each brings to Brooklyn relatively hard-

to-find delicacies from an island nation.

Chief among these delicacies is Cuban lard bread, which is what inspired the opening of Pilar Cuban Bakery: Ricardo Barreras, the owner of Pilar Cuban Eatery, next door, decided to start baking it himself, using dough, shipped frozen, from a trusted supplier in Florida. When he realized that his kitchen wasn’t big enough for the operation, he figured he might as well open a second place.

More than the eatery, the bakery evokes Barreras’s native Miami, with its mint-green façade and retro neon signage. You can order inside, where the walls are pastel pink and there are a few round wooden tables, or from a window that opens charmingly onto the sidewalk.

The lard bread is used for a decent Cubano and for a sandwich called the Porkinator, which features five forms of pork and is as silly as it sounds. You’re better off with a much simpler tostada, for which a quarter loaf gets sliced lengthwise, brushed generously with butter, and crisped on a big press. A smear of mashed avocado or *bocadito*, a pimiento-ham spread, is optional.

A tostada and a café con leche is a breakfast duo as iconic as a cappuccino and a croissant—or, if you prefer, a fried cruller dipped in frothy, freshly made soy milk. You can get that quintessential Taiwanese combo at Win Son Bakery, born of the Taiwanese-American restaurant Win Son, across the street. You can also get a mean *fan tuan*, a traditional breakfast treat that consists of sticky rice rolled around a fragment of cruller, a bit of

hard-fried egg, and a tangle of pork floss.

A coffee drink called the *xiao huai huai*—a shot of espresso poured over velvety five-spice crème anglaise and showered with powdered ginger—is decidedly nontraditional, but I’d like to nominate it for entry into the canon. The same goes for the scallion-pancake breakfast sandwiches and the savory-sweet pastries, including a millet mochi doughnut that’s bewitchingly elastic in texture and subtly nutty in flavor.

In the evening, Win Son Bakery moonlights as a restaurant, with counter service and cocktails. Instead of cookies and cakes, its white cardboard boxes get filled with excellent fried chicken and five-spice fries, both of which should be dipped in “ginger deluxe,” a spectacular Thousand Island-esque mixture of ketchup, mayo, and mustard punched up with ginger, garlic, and fermented tofu. I could take or leave most of the rest of the dinner menu: a short list of overwrought salads and sandwiches, including a dry-aged burger, on milk buns. But a dish called *ya fan*—featuring a glistening confited duck leg, slow-cooked in soy, red-rice wine, and rock sugar; a salty, jammy soy egg; fresh basil; and half-moons of daikon pickles, all atop fluffy white rice—sets a new standard for fast casual. And where else will you find barley soft serve in a white-chocolate magic shell? It’s served in a waffle cone, baked, of course, on the premises. (*Pilar Cuban Bakery, baked goods \$1.50–\$6. Win Son Bakery, baked goods \$3–\$4.*)

—Hannah Goldfield



Author photograph: © Sigrid Estrada

FROM #1 *NEW YORK TIMES*  
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**LEE**

JACK REACHER

NOVEL

**CHILD**

**BLUE MOON**

“JACK REACHER IS TODAY’S  
JAMES BOND, A THRILLER  
HERO WE CAN’T GET ENOUGH OF.”

—KEN FOLLETT

**ONCE IN A BLUE MOON THINGS TURN OUT RIGHT . . .  
ESPECIALLY WHEN REACHER’S ON YOUR SIDE.**



## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT JUST THE FACTS

Democrats in the House of Representatives voted last week in near-unanimity to adopt rules for public impeachment hearings; by doing so, they effectively bound their party to argue during the 2020 campaign that Donald Trump is unfit for the Presidency. There are any number of bases for such an argument, but the House's fast-track hearings will focus on the evidence about Trump's abuse of his power this year with regard to Ukraine. The case has been marked so far by a certain Scorsese-scripted clarity, catalyzed by the published record of a July 25th telephone conversation between the President and his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, during which Trump infamously asked for "a favor," by which he meant investigations of supposed ties between Democrats and Ukraine during the 2016 campaign, and of Joe Biden and his son, Hunter, who held a paid board seat at Burisma, a Ukrainian gas company.

The upcoming hearings will explore more deeply Trump's conduct before and after that call. Critical questions include: How did the nearly yearlong scheme to go after the Bidens, carried out by Rudolph Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer, distort and undermine U.S. policy toward Ukraine, an ally mired in a simmering armed conflict with Russia? And how rough were Trump's tactics—that is, how explicitly did he make U.S. support for Ukraine conditional upon Zelensky's willingness to aid his reelection?

For weeks, the Democrats' lead investigator, Representative Adam Schiff, of California, has been hearing testimony from diplomats and National Security Council aides in closed sessions. Its import has not always been easy to discern. The White House has thrown up as many obstacles to the investigation as its lawyers can conceive, and some current and former Administration officials summoned to testify have declined to do so. Yet a remarkable number of career public servants and political appointees in possession of detailed knowledge have defied Trump and come forward; the *Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other news outlets have published some of their written statements and reported on their answers under questioning. From this information we have a preview of what the public hearings are likely to reveal.



The available testimony makes clear that diplomats and N.S.C. officials working on Ukraine have been seething over how Trump and Giuliani jeopardized long-standing U.S. policy. As Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, an N.S.C. aide, put it in a statement submitted to Schiff's committee last week, "A strong and independent Ukraine is critical to U.S. national security interests." (Vindman received a Purple Heart for wounds he sustained while serving in Iraq; after parts of his testimony became public, the President denounced him on Twitter, and some of Trump's allies on Fox News questioned the colonel's patriotism.) Vindman and others who have testified describe themselves as fervent believers in the U.S. strategy in Ukraine, which predates Trump and enjoys bipartisan support; the policy seeks to bolster Ukraine's economy and its military, on the ground that doing so is vital to Europe's integrity and the containment of Russia. That so lofty a goal might be debased by Giuliani's machinations to influence U.S. elections disgusted some of these officials. One of them, reportedly, was the hard-line former national-security adviser John Bolton, who, according to a statement from William Taylor, currently the top U.S. diplomat in Ukraine, referred to the tactic as a "drug deal." Bolton has now been asked to testify.

The testimony to date has also clarified how Trump and his aides manipulated support for Ukraine. The Administration sent Taylor to Kiev with a letter that Trump signed on May 29th, which promised Zelensky a meeting in

the Oval Office, as a show of political support. Then the Administration withheld that offer in the apparent hope that Zelensky would open the desired investigations. When that didn't work, Trump proposed his "favor" in the July phone call. Zelensky still hesitated; over the next month, Trump tied his demands to the release of nearly four hundred million dollars in military assistance that is essential to Ukraine's defense against Russia. (It had previously been known that, in mid-July, the President ordered Mick Mulvaney, his acting chief of staff, to hold back this aid, which Congress had already approved.) On September 1st, according to Taylor, Tim Morrison, an N.S.C. aide, told him it appeared that the aid "would not come until President Zelensky committed to pursue the Burisma investigation."

According to Taylor's account of another conversation with Morrison, on September 7th, Trump told Gordon Sondland, his Ambassador to the Euro-

pean Union, that, while he was not asking for a "quid pro quo," he nonetheless wanted Zelensky to "go to a microphone and say he is opening investigations of Biden and 2016." (Last week, testifying in a closed session, Morrison confirmed the gist of these discussions, the *Times* reported.) The next day, Taylor wrote, Sondland explained Trump's thinking: "When a businessman is about to sign a check to someone who owes him something . . . the businessman asks that person to pay up before signing the check." Taylor replied that this "made no sense," since "the Ukrainians did not 'owe' President Trump anything." He added that holding up security assistance for domestic political gain was "crazy." (Without explanation, the Administration released the aid on September 11th.)

In view of all this, Trump's recent enthusiastic reliance on his base-rousing mantra "No quid pro quo!" is puzzling. The phrase's simple meaning is "a favor for a favor"; it's already clear that he

sought such a trade, an egregious abuse of power. Trump seems to believe that if he shouts denials often enough and loudly enough the public will believe them. That the Trump machine's torrents of populist propaganda may do more to persuade voters than any sober presentation of damning facts poses perhaps the greatest risk to Democrats as they take their impeachment investigation to the public.

The Ukraine story describes abuses of Presidential power that touch on a pillar of U.S. foreign policy in Europe. It is understandable that Democrats in the House believe they must follow the Constitution and consider an impeachment. It is also a political gamble. Trump is the opposite of a Teflon President; everything sticks to him, and yet he blusters on, unburdened by shame. For the Democratic Party, the road to Election Day, a year from now, still looks long and treacherous.

—Steve Coll

## LONDON POSTCARD HARMONIZING



On the evening before the stymied British Parliament decided that the best course of action it could possibly take was to dissolve itself, Dame Caroline Spelman, a Conservative M.P. who has represented the Midlands constituency of Meriden for twenty-two years, cast her vote on the Prime Minister's call for an early election, then descended to the Chapel of St. Mary Undercroft, for a restorative hour and a half of singing. Spelman is an alto in the Parliament Choir, a cross-party choral society that rehearses every Monday night in the ornate, gilded chapel in the bowels of Westminster. "It's very wearing, living on tenterhooks like this, because that's my job we're talking about, that might or might not exist tomorrow," Spelman said. "So, obviously, coming to the choir is a source of sanity and serenity."

The Parliament Choir is open to anyone who works in Parliament; its

members have included ministers, but also policemen, cleaning staff, and even one holder of the office of Black Rod—the figure who, for ceremonial reasons, has the door of the Commons slammed in his or her face at the State Opening of Parliament. Singers are drawn from both Houses: its current ranks include Lord Aberdare, a cross-bench hereditary peer; David Lidington, a Conservative M.P. who was Theresa May's de-facto deputy; David Lammy, a pro-Remain Labour M.P.; and Sir Bernard Jenkin, a Conservative M.P. who is among the hard-line Brexiteers. Jenkin is fond of saying that in the choir there are only four parties: sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses. Given a political climate in which Parliament is, apparently, divided between sopranos and basses who persist in singing loudly in different keys, the choir offers a rare opportunity for harmony.

"In an enterprise where we are designed to work against each other, in tribes, this is a way of us trying to see through and make an understanding for ourselves about how we relate to each other," Lord German, the treasurer of the Liberal Democrats, who sings bass, explained before rehearsal. Neither the current Prime Minister nor

the Leader of the Opposition is, or has ever been, a member of the choir, though German testified that Boris Johnson is capable of holding a tune, having been seated near him at a memorial service for Jo Cox, the Labour M.P. who was murdered by a pro-Brexit assailant during the 2016 referendum campaign. "What I would call campfire singing," German said.

The choir was founded almost twenty years ago by Simon Over, its conductor. (He is also the music director of Southbank Sinfonia.) "I was working at Westminster Abbey, and I had a little choral society in which some members of both Houses sang," Over explained. Members kept having to miss rehearsal because of pesky voting obligations, so Over started a new choir in the Palace of Westminster, where members can easily slip upstairs when the division bell is sounded. There's no cell service in the chapel, which was built in the thirteenth century and lavishly refurbished in the nineteenth, so singers have to wait until rehearsal is over to find out whether a motion has been passed. Occasionally, Parliamentary business does get in the way of the choir's commitments: in 2017, after Theresa May



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called a snap election, a concert had to be cancelled, because the choir was necessarily dissolved along with Parliament. (Its administrative status within Parliament was recently changed to prevent that from happening again, an example of the kind of foresight that eluded the architects of the referendum.) “People say to me, ‘Do the politicians take instruction?’ And they absolutely do,” Over said. “I think they rather relish it, because they are constantly having to think on their feet. The great thing about belonging to a choir is simply that they have to do as they’re asked.”

In mid-November, about a month before Election Day, the Parliament Choir will be performing Edward Elgar’s “The Dream of Gerontius,” at Westminster Cathedral. The work is a setting of a poem by John Henry Newman, the Victorian divine recently canonized by Pope Francis, and portrays a faithful soul’s entry into Purgatory before ascending to Heaven. A few days before Parliament opted to break the Brexit stalemate, Jacob Rees-Mogg, the theatrically anachronistic Leader of the House, suggested that Brexit itself was “suffering the pains of those in Purgatory.” The theme of the work is remarkably apt, Over agreed. “There’s an absolutely marvellous moment, when

the soul sees God and there is a cataclysmic chord, after which the soul screams, ‘Take me away,’” Over said. “Effectively, what he is saying is ‘Get me through what I need to get through, and I will get to where I need to be.’ And I think there really is a sense of: We’ve got to get through it, and we’ve got to get to somewhere where things will be better.”

—Rebecca Mead

## COLLECTIBLES DEPT. PERSONAL APPEARANCES



New York Comic Con can be grueling. The other day, one of its participants, Laraine Newman, took a break to fortify herself at the restaurant in her hotel, near the Javits Center. “I know I’m going to Hell, but can I get the duck-liver toast?” she asked a waiter. An original “Saturday Night Live” cast member, Newman is now a voice actor and has a role in the animated series “Summer Camp Island.” She was waiting for one of her Comic Con comrades, Paul Reubens. In the seventies, both were in the Ground-

lings improv workshop, in L.A., where Reubens created his character Pee-wee Herman. Newman was wrapped in a soft sweater and fighting a cold, her bangs hugging her forehead. “Paul needs to decompress,” she reported, looking up from a text.

Reubens, dressed in a newsboy cap, a black T-shirt, and a denim jacket, showed up a few minutes later. At Comic Con, a four-day convocation of cosplayers set against the fight for global hegemony between Marvel and DC Comics, Newman and Reubens were part of the personal-appearance cavalcade. “If they want an autograph, photo, and a selfie, it’s, like, sixty bucks,” Newman said.

“I’ve been doing a whole bunch of these over the last year or two,” Reubens said. “I’m old hat now.” (His autograph or a selfie cost eighty dollars; a glossy cost a hundred.)

“Paul’s in the rarefied world of carpeting,” Newman said, referring to Exhibit Hall 1E, where the lines for Paul Rudd (“Ant-Man,” \$200, autograph; \$225, photo op), Tom Hiddleston (“The Avengers,” \$250, autograph or photo op), and Billy Dee Williams (“Star Wars,” \$100, autograph; \$110, photo op) were organized into zones, in the manner of airline boarding gates.

“I’m next to the voice of the Little Mermaid,” Reubens said. He admitted to feeling line envy. “It’s not like she’s in a tank and she’s the Little Mermaid,” he said. “I would get *that*.”

Newman and Reubens first met in 1972, as theatre students at the California Institute of the Arts, in Santa Clarita. Newman dropped out after a few months to join her sister in a workshop that was forming around Gary Austin, of the San Francisco improv group the Committee. That workshop became the Groundlings, where, a few years later, Newman developed a character who spoke with an airy, vacuous drawl—a proto-Valley Girl. The character led to her being cast in a Lily Tomlin TV special, and then on “S.N.L.”

In 1980, as the Not Ready for Prime Time Players were dissolving, Newman moved back to L.A. and bought a 1929 house in Westwood, where she’d lived as a child. (Her father manufactured quilting fabric, and her mother designed



*“Well, if it’s any consolation, your social media makes it look like you’re absolutely thriving.”*

kitchens. “She was the first person to do the bleached-pine look,” Newman said.) After “S.N.L.,” she went to rehab, and, in the nineties, owing to “a phobia about the camera,” she moved into voice work.

Reubens started at the Groundlings in 1976, after Newman had left for New York. “The Groundlings added character work to improv,” he said.

“Character-driven improv is a whole different thing,” Newman agreed.

“When Laraine would drop in, we would all be, like, ‘Oh, my God, Laraine’s here!’” Reubens said. The workshop had migrated from its original home, in a dicey part of Hollywood, to a permanent space in a sketchy part of Hollywood. Newman’s parents donated sixteen thousand dollars toward renovations. “They didn’t have a permit to open the theatre, so it was just a company,” Reubens said. “I was there for three years when we never had an audience, ever. It was a pure workshop.”

Newman brought up an old Reubens character, Jay Longtoe, a politically incorrect Native American lounge singer, who, with sequined loincloth and feathered headdress, would not cut it today. Reubens crooned a few bars of one of Longtoe’s numbers, “Soon It’s Gonna Rain,” from “The Fantasticks.” He and Newman cracked up.

“It was all so *wrong*,” Reubens said. “And I grew up in the South. I was really, really attuned to racism. But Native American stuff went right over my head.”

Reubens said, “I don’t know what the Groundlings does anymore.” The workshop, now a school that trains eight thousand students a year, is viewed by some as a cog in the comedy-industrial complex. “I just got an e-mail about the forty-fifth anniversary.”

“I’m doing a couple of panels,” Newman said.

“N.A.—not available,” Reubens said. “When they wait till, like, three weeks before the show, I’m not available.”

The friends said good night. Reubens had a pile of cards to sign for fans of the “Star Wars” character he voices at Disneyland and Disney World. “I’m the robot-droid d.j. in Star Wars Land’s bar,” he said. “I’m signing cards that somebody’s doing something with.”

—Paul Brownfield

## MAN’S BEST FRIEND SNIFF PATROL



Dogs don’t brag, and you rarely see them pontificating on news shows, so it’s up to humans to act as their publicists. Last month, a Belgian Malinois named Conan chased Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi down a tunnel in Syria, before the terrorist leader blew himself up. Back on the domestic front, a yellow Labrador retriever who goes by Hannah is one of fourteen dogs who have been trained by Connecticut police to sniff out child pornography. One day recently, Hannah and her handler, John Hyla, of the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office, in New York, were in an abandoned office building in the town of Southeast, looking for flash drives, cell phones, hard drives, and micro S.D. cards that had been hidden in cabinets, vents, and, in one instance, a secret compartment inside a water bottle stashed behind a fire extinguisher.

“Seek, seek, seek,” Hyla told Hannah, drawing each word out into two syllables. He is thirty-five and has close-cropped dark hair and a kind, serious face. He studied information systems at Pace University and has been a policeman since 2007. Hannah and her fellow canine snoops went through a ten-week training course to learn to identify a compound called triphenylphosphine oxide. This chemical envelops the memory chips in all electronic-storage devices, reducing the risk of overheating. Although dogs trained in electronic-storage detection (E.S.D.) can, theoretically, work on any kind of cybercrime, they are almost always used to track down sex offenders. “Hannah is able to find G.P.S. trackers on cars and Bitcoin wallets,” Hyla said. “But most of my cases are child porn.”

It was mealtime for Hannah. “She’s learned that food is available to her only if she works, so once or twice a day I hide some devices, and each time she finds one I reward her with a handful of kibble,” he said. (Dogs schooled by the Connecticut police are typically Labradors, mainly because of their big

appetites.) Hannah, svelte and businesslike, hovered her nose over the industrial carpet. “Dogs can smell all the components of something,” Hyla said. “The way they explained it during training”—he and other handlers attended the latter five weeks of the program—“is that, if there’s a McDonald’s cheeseburger on a plate, you and I would just smell a cheeseburger. A dog smells the bun, the burger, the cheese, the sesame seeds, the lettuce. The smell of a memory device is equivalent to the smell of the lettuce—the faintest of all the scents.” Hannah stopped in front of an oven and nudged its bottom door. “Show me,” Hyla said, opening it. Hannah pointed with her snout to an old Nokia phone inside. She looked up expect-



Hannah

tantly at Hyla, who obliged her by offering a dainty portion of Royal Kanin dog food from a pouch on his belt. “Good girl, Hannah, grease and all,” he said, referring to a smudge of oven grime on her head.

Before being recruited by the Connecticut State Police K9 Unit, Hannah was a dropout from the Guiding Eyes for the Blind school. “I don’t know the exact reason she didn’t complete training,” Hyla said. “I’ve heard—and I don’t know if it was accurate—that she couldn’t keep a straight line, so she was basically afraid to push the blind person back to keep on course.” (According to the Guiding Eyes Web site, each dog “chooses its own career.”) Hyla looked down at Hannah. “Ready to work?” he asked, leading her into a large

room of cubicles. Without much ado, the dog found a RAM card on the floor, concealed by a nameplate that had fallen off a door.

Since Hannah's graduation, in March, she has accompanied Hyla on more than a dozen missions. (The sheriff felt that it would be too risky to allow a journalist to go out in the field—even a journalist who laughs at danger.) On an early case—a routine search of the home of a man on probation for a sex crime—she turned up a digital camera and a Game Boy inside a knapsack. Does Hannah feel proud when she locates an item? “I don't know,” Hyla said. “I never asked her.”

When Hannah is not working, she lives with Hyla, his wife, their three kids, and their other dog, Chestnut, a pug-gle. A while ago, the family misplaced an iPad. So far, Hannah has not been able to find it.

—Patricia Marx

## THE PICTURES THE SHRUG



Isabelle Huppert, the French movie star, marched across the little bridge from Madison Avenue into the Met Breuer, opened and shut her handbag for a security guard, and disappeared into a stairwell. The filmmaker Ira Sachs tried to keep up. “The stairwells here are famous,” he called out. Up a few flights, Huppert frowned at a taped-off door. “This floor is closed,” she said, then continued upward.

They emerged into an uncrowded gallery, containing a retrospective of the Latvian-American artist Vija Celmins, known for her photo-realistic renderings of spider webs, star fields, and desert floors. Sachs had wanted to show them to Huppert, he said, because “I felt that there was a relationship to the infinite.” The theme put him in mind of his new film, “Frankie,” set amid the bluffs and forests of Sintra, Portugal. Huppert plays the title character, a French movie star who reacts to a life-threatening diagnosis with what might be called the Huppert Shrug.

(Recall the opening scenes of “Elle,” in which her character is violently raped by an intruder, then brushes herself off and goes about her day.)

Huppert, who wore a gray tartan trenchcoat and nude lipstick, read the wall text. “Oh, Death Valley,” she said, picking out a familiar phrase. “I did a movie in the Death Valley. It's called ‘Valley of Love,’ by a French director named Guillaume Nicloux. We shot four years ago, with Gérard Depardieu and myself. It's a beautiful film. Nothing to do with Ira's, but it also deals with death.” She approached a graphite drawing of rippling waves: “Untitled (Ocean),” from 1977. Sachs remarked, “Vija paints so you have a sense that there's a world outside the frame, which is always my intention when shooting a film.”

Huppert nodded, and they moved on to a painting of a porcelain surface. “Is that a relief?” she said. “How do you say relief? It means you think it's not flat. You think there is another dimension.”

“Well, we use the French word ‘trompe-l'oeil,’” Sachs offered, as Huppert checked Google Translate on her phone. “Voilà!” she said: the English word was also “relief.” “You feel that the ink is thicker here.” She pointed back toward the painted porcelain.

“Do you feel that acting is an illusion?” Sachs asked.

“Not really, no,” she said. “It's hard, for me, to connect acting to painting or images. Only rhythm and music.” In 2005, she collaborated with the artist



Isabelle Huppert

Roni Horn on a series of a hundred photographs. “She wanted to have very different expressions on my face,” Huppert recalled. “I had no makeup, nothing. And she wrote the names of several of my films, put them in a hat, and each morning I would take a little paper and choose a film, and she would ask me to remember the main feeling which irrigated my performance in the film.” She tensed her lips. “For the first five minutes I thought, What is she talking about? But it made perfect sense.”

“I want to play that game!” Sachs said, then called out names of Huppert's films: “‘Loulou!’ ‘La Cérémonie!’ ‘Heaven's Gate!’”

Huppert smiled at the mention of “La Cérémonie,” in which she plays a blasé murderess. “That is certainly different from ‘Frankie,’” she allowed. “If you ask an actress to play an actress, it creates a feeling of reality, of course—much more than if I was playing a nurse or a butcher.”

“She's not as famous as you are,” Sachs said, of his protagonist. “Frankie's doing much more television than Isabelle.”

“But she has a beautiful bracelet,” Huppert countered. “She has some kind of exterior sign of being wealthy and successful. So with those little *indices*—how do you say *indices*?” She returned to Google Translate. Voilà: “A clue.”

“That's a lot of what filmmaking is,” Sachs said. “How many clues do you need to give to get the audience to know the characters intimately?”

A couple approached Huppert, star-struck. The man mentioned a friend who, in 2003, had a chance to buy one of Celmins's works for fifteen hundred dollars, but couldn't afford it. His companion said, “The same thing happened to me, with a James Castle.”

“Eggleston, for me,” Sachs chimed in. “Everybody's got their one.”

Huppert gave the Shrug. She's not a collector, she said. “I have this little painting of a tree, which I bought on a big boulevard in Moscow. It isn't worth anything, but I just love it. I have my own barometer of what's worth and what's not worth.” She circled back to where she had started and snapped a photo of “Untitled (Ocean).” She did not explain why. But it was, perhaps, a clue.

—Michael Schulman



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## OBSTRUCTION OF INJUSTICE

*When mass deportations were planned a century ago, one man got in the way.*

BY ADAM HOCHSCHILD



On a winter night a hundred years ago, Ellis Island, the twenty-seven-acre patch of land in New York Harbor that had been the gateway to America for millions of hopeful immigrants, was playing the opposite role. It had been turned into a prison for several hundred men, and a few women, most of whom had arrived in handcuffs and shackles. They were about to be shipped across the Atlantic, in the country's first mass deportation of political dissidents in the twentieth century.

Before dawn on December 21, 1919, the prisoners were roused from their bunks to be packed onto a barge and

transported to a waiting vessel, the *Buford*, which was berthed in Brooklyn. The *Buford* was an elderly, decrepit troopship, known by sailors as a heavy "roller" in rough seas. One of the two hundred and forty-nine people who were deported that day, Ivan Novikov, described the scene in the island prison: "It was noisy and the room was full of smoke. Everybody knew already that we are going to be sent out. . . . Many with tears in their eyes were writing telegrams and letters." Many "were in the literal sense of the word without clothes or shoes," he went on. "There was no laughter." Then, as now, deportations severed families: "One left a

mother, the other a wife and son, one a sweetheart."

At 4 A.M., with the temperature in the twenties, shouting guards ordered the captives outside, where a gangplank led to the barge and an attached tugboat. "Deep snow lay on the ground; the air was cut by a biting wind," wrote that day's most famous victim of what she called "deportation mania," the Russian-born anarchist and feminist firebrand Emma Goldman. "A row of armed civilians and soldiers stood along the road. . . . One by one the deportees marched, flanked on each side by the uniformed men, curses and threats accompanying the thud of their feet on the frozen ground."

The mass expulsion was so important to the U.S. government that, despite the hour, a delegation from Washington joined the deportees on the trip across the harbor to the *Buford*. The group included several members of Congress, most notably Representative Albert Johnson, of Washington State, who was the chair of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization as well as an outspoken anti-Semite, a Ku Klux Klan favorite, and an ardent opponent of immigration. Shepherding the party was a dark-haired, twenty-four-year-old Justice Department official who was quietly respectful toward the dignitaries he was with but who would, before long, wield far more power than any of them: J. Edgar Hoover.

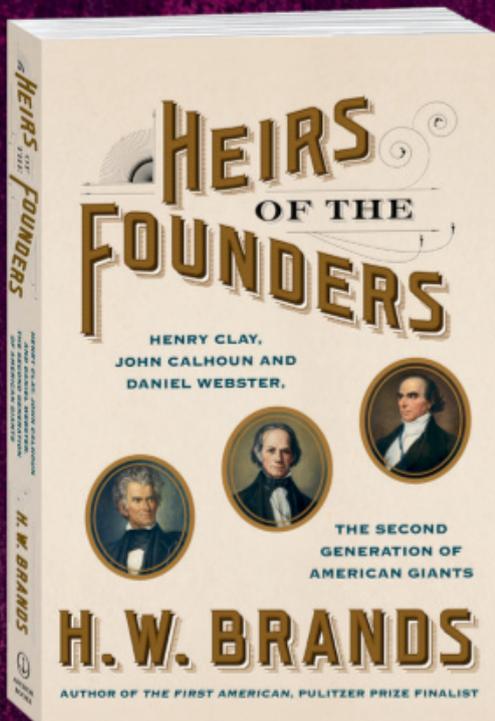
Hoover had met Goldman some weeks earlier, in the courtroom where he made the case for her deportation. Now one of the great American radicals of her day and the man who would become the country's premier hunter of such dissidents encountered each other one last time, in the galley of the tugboat. She was fifty, more than twice his age, but they were of similar stature, and would have stood nearly eye to eye, with Goldman looking at Hoover through her pince-nez. One admirer described her as having "a stocky figure like a peasant woman, a face of fierce strength like a female pugilist." Hoover had won this particular match, but, according to a congressman who witnessed the exchange, she got in one last jab.

"Haven't I given you a square deal, Miss Goldman?" Hoover asked, as

*The Palmer Raids sought not just to round up "subversives" but to expel them.*

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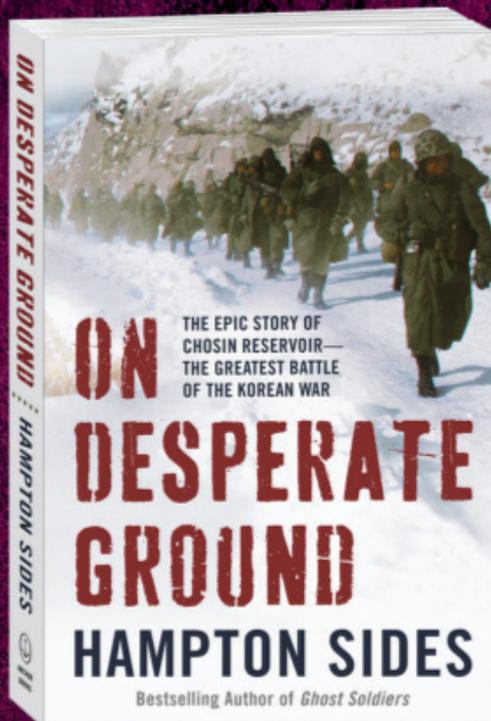
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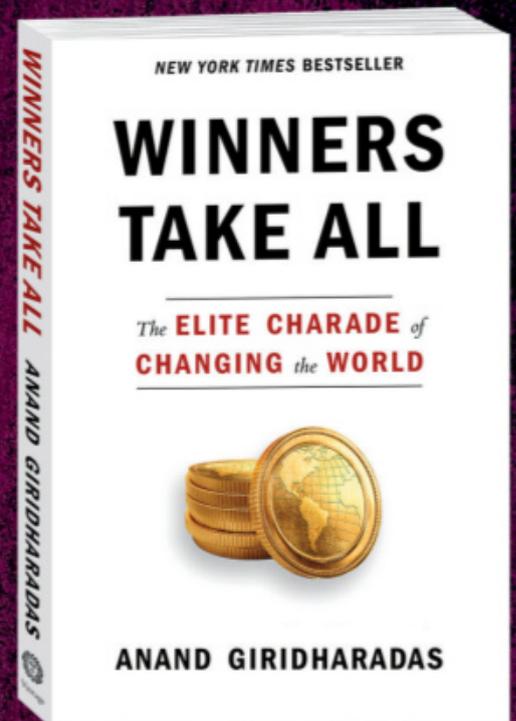
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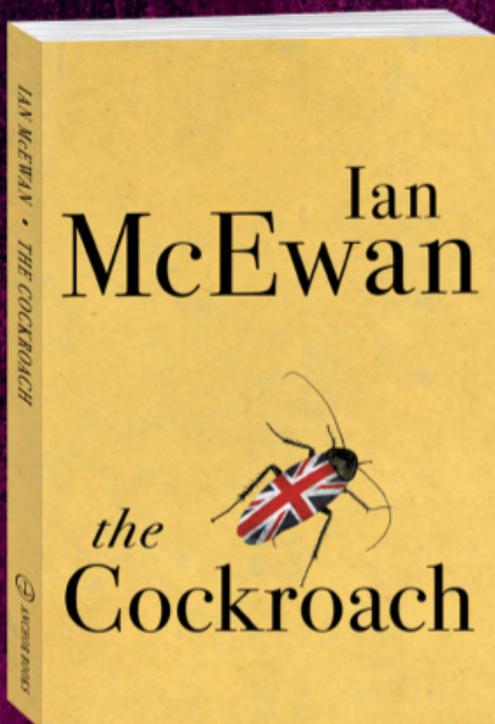


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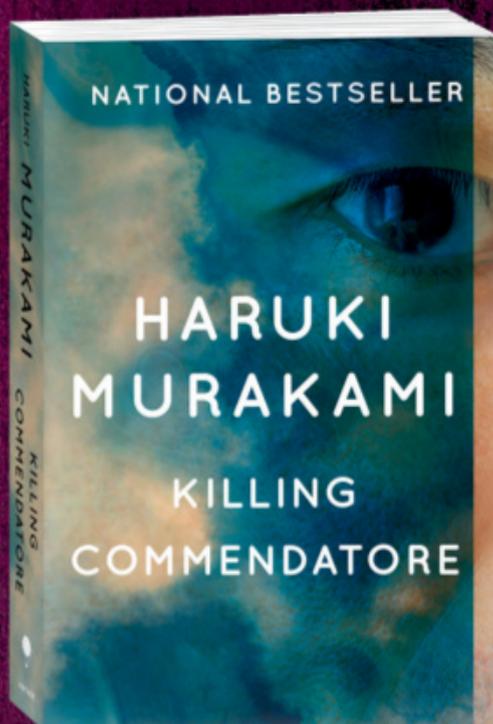
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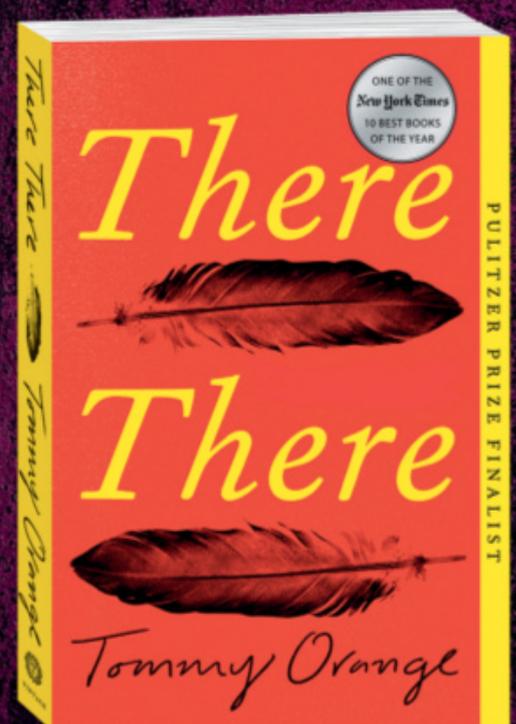


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they steamed toward Brooklyn in the darkness.

“Oh, I suppose you’ve given me as square a deal as you could,” she replied, two hours away from being ejected from the country where she had lived for thirty-four years and found the voice that had won her admirers around the world. “We shouldn’t expect from any person something beyond his capacity.”

That morning’s mass deportation had been preceded by a crescendo of anti-immigrant rhetoric that will sound distinctly familiar today. “The surest way to preserve the public against those disciples of destruction,” Thomas Edward Campbell, the governor of Arizona, told a conference of newspaper editors on February 22, 1919, “is to send them back forthwith to lands from which they came.” And if native-born Americans were acting un-American, why not deport them, too? Senator Kenneth McKellar, of Tennessee, suggested that they “be deported permanently to the Island of Guam.”

And why not go one step further and strip objectionable people of U.S. citizenship, to make them more deportable? In 1919, alarmed by the growing presence of “peoples of Asiatic races,” the Anti-Alien League called for a constitutional amendment “to restrict citizenship by birth within the United States to the children of parents who are of a race which is eligible for citizenship”—i.e., whites. Senator Wesley Jones, of Washington State, promised to introduce such a measure—a proposal not unlike today’s calls to end birthright citizenship. That May, a cheering convention of the American Legion demanded the deportation not only of immigrants who evaded military service during the First World War but of *any* men who evaded service.

What made high-ranking government officials so passionate about deportations that they would get up in the middle of the night to ride through freezing wind across New York Harbor? One factor was the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in Novem-

ber, 1917, which political and corporate leaders feared might incite militant labor unionists in the U.S., who had already shaken the country with a stormy, decade-long wave of strikes. Lenin had written a “Letter to American Workingmen” declaring “the inevitability of the international revolution.” Postwar economic turmoil promised to make the country more vulnerable than ever to radical doctrines.

For these officials, the most worrisome left-wing group was the Industrial Workers of the World, known as the Wobblies. The I.W.W. had more flash than breadth—the number of members probably never exceeded a hundred thousand—but the Wobblies caught the public imagination with their colorful posters, stirring songs, and flair for drama.

The Justice Department began a nationwide crackdown in September, 1917, raiding all four dozen I.W.W. offices and the homes of many activists. In sealed boxcars, Wobblies from around the country were brought to Chicago’s Cook County Jail. When they received news of the Bolshevik takeover in St. Petersburg, they celebrated by singing and banging tin cups on their cell bars. A hundred and one leading Wobblies were charged with violating a long list of federal laws as part of a mass trial—still the largest in American history—that ran through the spring and summer of 1918. The jury took a mere fifty-five minutes to render its verdict, finding all the defendants guilty on all counts. They were sentenced to an average of eight years in prison. Tons of I.W.W. records, which the Justice Department had seized in the raids, were later burned.

Fear of bolshevism blended with a long-standing hostility toward certain classes of immigrants. By 1890, those coming ashore at Ellis Island were no longer from places like Britain and Germany; the great bulk were now from Italy, Eastern Europe, or the Russian Empire, and they were Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Jewish. There were a lot of them, too: by 1900, the majority of men in Manhattan over

the age of twenty-one were foreign-born.

Many Americans shared the resentment voiced in a book published in 1902: “Throughout the [nineteenth] century men of the sturdy stocks of the north of Europe had made up the main strain of foreign blood which was every year added to the vital working force of the country . . . but now there came multitudes of men of the lowest class from the south of Italy and men of the meaner sort out of Hungary and Poland, men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence; and they came in numbers which increased from year to year, as if the countries of the south of Europe were disburdening themselves of the more sordid and hapless elements of their population.” The writer of these words was a young Princeton professor, who, a decade later, would become the President of the United States: Woodrow Wilson.

His feelings were echoed widely among the American establishment. The Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge was a prominent political enemy of the President’s, but he completely shared Wilson’s attitude on this score. In a speech to the Senate about the need to restrict “undesirable immigrants” who came from the “races” he found “most alien,” he invoked Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s poem “Unguarded Gates,” which compared such people to the “thronging Goth and Vandal [who] trampled Rome.” For Lodge and others anxious to restrict immigration, Eastern European Jews were definitely among the undesirables. The historian Henry Adams, a friend of Lodge’s, declared that “the Jew makes me creep” and wrote of a “furtive Yacob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish.” The novelist Henry James was disgusted by the people he saw “swarming” on New York’s heavily Jewish Lower East Side, who reminded him of “small, strange animals . . . snakes or worms.”

These immigrant swarms, politicians claimed, were not just unseemly; with their affinity for radical movements, they were a threat to national security. Many leftists, like Goldman, were Jewish, and the most violent anarchists were largely Italian-American. In June, 1919, one of them managed to blow



himself up as he was planting a bomb at the Washington, D.C., home of Wilson's Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, and among the items he left at the scene was an Italian-English dictionary. The Socialist Party had a high proportion of foreign-born members, and the pro-Socialist press included newspapers like New York's *Robotnik Polski* and Chicago's *Parola Proletaria*.

The tenor of the deportation frenzy was heightened by the upcoming 1920 Presidential election. Several of those hoping to succeed Wilson saw great potential in promising to deport troublemakers. A leading Republican contender was Major General Leonard Wood, a dashing hero of the Indian Wars and a former Rough Rider, who captured headlines in 1919 for leading military forces against strikes and race riots in the Midwest, and who at one point put Gary, Indiana, under martial law. "Deport these so-called Americans who preach treason," he told an audience in Kansas City.

Another Republican candidate, the president of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler, said in a speech, "Today, we hear the hiss of a snake in the grass, and the hiss is directed at the things Americans hold most dear." He called for deporting "Reds" to the Philippines. The Republican senator Miles Poindexter, of Washington State, also eyeing the Presidential nomination, called on the government "to deport every alien Bolshevik and to punish rather than protect those who practice their savage creed in this country." Poindexter suggested that Attorney General Palmer was pursuing the deportation of these savages with insufficient vigor: "The government had positively refused in many cases to allow them to go."

But Palmer, a Democrat, had his own hopes for the Presidency. An imposing-looking man with a shock of gray hair who wore three-piece suits crossed by a watch chain, he was not about to let anyone outflank him in enthusiasm for deportations. And, unlike the out-of-power Republicans, he had the authority to back up his words. Raised as a Quaker, Palmer had declined the position of Secretary of War, when Wilson had offered it, in 1913, but, when he accepted an appointment

as Attorney General, in 1919, his faith did not prevent him from waging a kind of domestic war the likes of which the United States has seldom seen.

The bombing of Palmer's house, which was clearly intended to kill him, his wife, and their ten-year-old daughter, understandably left him terrified. Eight other bombs went off the same night, mostly at the homes of prominent politicians or judges. Some five weeks earlier, a mail bomb had exploded in the home of a former U.S. senator from Georgia, blowing off the hands of his maid, and thirty-five additional mail bombs addressed to Cabinet members, judges, and business moguls were intercepted before they could go off.

Immediately after the spate of bombings, Palmer founded the Radical Division of the Justice Department to track subversive activities of all kinds, and he put J. Edgar Hoover in charge. This post, as Kenneth D. Ackerman shows in his biography "Young J. Edgar," was a key step on this precocious man's path

to power. Hoover, during an earlier job at the Library of Congress, had come to love the great information-management technology of the day: file cards. Within two and a half years in his new job, he would amass a database of four hundred and fifty thousand cards on people and organizations, carefully linking them to documents in the Radical Division's files.

To those in power, signs of a simmering revolution were everywhere. Two rival Communist parties each promised to reproduce on American soil the Bolshevik takeover. In 1919, amid the largest strike wave in U.S. history, one in five workers walked off the job—everyone from telephone operators to stage actors. An unprecedented general strike briefly brought Seattle to a halt. In September of that year, most Boston police officers went on strike. If even those sworn to defend law and order were in rebellion, what could come next? Senator Henry Myers, of Montana, warned that if America did not hold firm it would "see a Soviet

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Lorenz Helmschmid, Field Armor of Maximilian I (detail), 1480. Sallet: Private Collection, New York; all other armor elements: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Imperial Armoury.



*“Remember, fall is just one of many reasons you shouldn’t leave your mother to go live in California.”*

government set up within two years.”

At the same time, agents provocateurs played a significant role in the turbulence. Many came from the ranks of private detectives; the three biggest such firms had a hundred and thirty-five thousand employees. In July, 1919, the U.S. attorney in Philadelphia wrote to Palmer to tell him that many of the most extreme agitators were undercover operatives “actively stirring up trouble” because “they know on which side their bread is buttered.” Justice Department officials in Los Angeles concluded that private detectives, in order to create more business, had planted bombs in nearby oil fields. But none of this deterred Palmer, who was now on an anti-dissident crusade, with mass deportations as his main goal. Ninety per cent of Communist and anarchist agitation, he maintained, “is traceable to aliens.”

Millions of immigrants, even if they had arrived decades earlier, had never bothered to become American citizens. The bureaucracy of doing so could seem intimidating, especially for those who didn’t speak English well, and naturalization hadn’t seemed important at a time when the country pro-

fessed to welcome newcomers. Now, however, lacking citizenship became an enormous liability. Emma Goldman, a prime target, was under close surveillance—her mail was opened, her phone calls were tapped, and her secretary, unbeknownst to her, was a government informer. Goldman believed that she had become a citizen thirty-two years earlier, by marrying a naturalized immigrant, Jacob Kershner. But Hoover contended that the rabbi who performed the ceremony was not properly ordained; moreover, two decades after their divorce, Kershner’s citizenship had been revoked, because he had falsified something on his original application. It was deemed that Goldman had thus lost her status as a U.S. citizen as well, and could be duly shipped off on the Buford.

The crackdown at the time of Goldman’s deportation came to be known as the Palmer Raids, although they were planned and closely supervised by the much younger Hoover. The first big raid rounded up members of the Union of Russian Workers, an avowedly anarchist organization that also offered classes and social activities. Offices of the union in more than a dozen cities were raided during the night of No-

vember 7, 1919—pointedly, the second anniversary of the Bolshevik coup—and 1,182 people were arrested and interrogated. A far larger number were roughed up, briefly detained, and then let go. Hoover’s agents were helped by local police. A raid of offices near New York’s Union Square, where members of the anarchist group had been attending night-school classes in mathematics and auto repair, left the building looking “as if a bomb had exploded in each room,” the *New York World* reported. “Desks were broken open, doors smashed, furniture overturned and broken, books and literature scattered, the glass doors of a cabinet broken, typewriters had apparently been thrown on the floor and stamped on,” and there were “bloodstains over floor, papers, literature &c.” The *Times*, although it backed the arrests, acknowledged that “a number of those in the building were badly beaten by the police during the raid, their heads wrapped in bandages.” The raids, which were recorded by newsreel-makers for greater impact, produced the outcome that Hoover and Palmer wanted: foreign-born radicals began filling immigration prisons like the one on Ellis Island. President Wilson, incapacitated by a stroke at the time, never publicly addressed the raids, but just before falling ill he had spoken of the “disciples of Lenin in our own midst,” from whom “poison has got in the veins of this free people.”

The Palmer Raids reached their climax on January 2, 1920, with night sweeps in more than thirty cities and towns. Their professed targets were the two Communist parties, whose combined membership was no more than forty thousand but was ninety per cent immigrant. Many of those arrested had only a tangential connection, if any, to the Communists, including, in Nashua, New Hampshire, a hundred and forty-one Socialists. In nearby Manchester, it was everyone dancing at the Tolstoi Club; in Chicago, all the patrons at the Tolstoy Vegetarian Restaurant; in Lynn, Massachusetts, thirty-nine bakers, a third of them American citizens, in the middle of a meeting to discuss forming a coöperative; in New Jersey, a group of Polish-Americans soliciting money

for a funeral; in Philadelphia, the members of the Lithuanian Socialist Chorus, mid-rehearsal. There are no complete records of how many people were seized, but a careful study by the Danish scholar Regin Schmidt estimates the total arrested in the Palmer Raids at ten thousand.

More than five hundred of those arrested were jammed into quarters at Ellis Island, which ran out of cots and bedding. Several inmates died of pneumonia. In Detroit, some eight hundred men and women were held for up to six days in a narrow, windowless corridor of a federal building, with a bare stone floor to sleep on and one toilet and one drinking fountain. They were without food for twenty hours, and then could eat only what their families and friends brought them. In Boston, a hundred and forty prisoners in chains and leg irons were marched through the city's streets, then locked up in an unheated prison on an island in the harbor. One despairing prisoner committed suicide by jumping from a window.

A. Mitchell Palmer, with one eye on justifying these mass arrests and the other on his Presidential campaign, issued a series of press releases. One was headed "WARNS NATION OF RED PERIL—U.S. Department of Justice Urges Americans to Guard Against Bolshevism Menace." The department's press office distributed photographs of prisoners, taken after they had been jailed for days without the chance to shave or wash, captioned "Men Like These Would Rule You." And Palmer published a magazine article warning that Communism "was eating its way into the homes of the American workman, its sharp tongues of revolutionary heat were licking the altars of the churches, leaping into the belfry of the school bell, crawling into the sacred corners of American homes, seeking to replace marriage vows with libertine laws." (In fact, a survey by a church organization found that a large majority of the arrested men—eighty per cent of whom had lived in the United States for at least six years—were married.)

The arrests continued, and Palmer promised that deportations by the thousands would follow. New Yorkers would soon find, he told an audience in the city, a "second, third, and fourth" ship

like the Buford, "sailing down their beautiful harbor in the near future." Hoover personally led a raid in New Jersey in February, 1920, and Palmer began predicting that a nationwide Communist uprising would erupt on May Day of that year.

Palmer and Hoover had assumed that they could deport most of those seized in the raids. A high proportion were non-citizens, and a law passed in 1918, during the martial fervor of the First World War and the anti-Bolshevik hysteria, said that any alien who advocated anarchism or violent revolution, or who belonged to an organization that did so, could be expelled. There was, however, one considerable roadblock: although it was Palmer's Justice Department that had the power to arrest people, deportations were under the authority of the Immigration Bureau, which was part of the Labor Department.

Then something happened that neither Hoover nor Palmer anticipated. Two and a half months after the Buford had sailed, and just as the two men were hoping to deport many more shiploads of newly arrested "undesirables," the Secretary of Labor went on leave, to tend to an illness in the family; his replacement resigned; and a seventy-year-old man named Louis F. Post became the acting Secretary of Labor.

Post was no typical bureaucrat. His wire-rimmed glasses, Vandyke beard, and thick head of dark hair combined to give him a striking resem-



blance to the man then commanding Soviet Russia's Red Army, Leon Trotsky. As far as Palmer and Hoover were concerned, he was just as dangerous.

He was born on a New Jersey farm in 1849 and, though too young to serve in the Civil War, was imbued with abolitionist zeal. As a boy, he talked to the free black handyman who worked

for his grandfather and noticed that the man had to eat at a separate table. As a young man, Post spent two years working in the South during Reconstruction and saw how white Southerners foiled all possibility of advancement for the former slaves who hoped for equal rights at last. He served as a court reporter in a series of South Carolina trials in which Ku Klux Klansmen were convicted of murder—only to see President Ulysses S. Grant pardon most of the Klansmen several months later. He returned North, where he became a prosecutor and then a private attorney in New York City. The work left him uninspired, but he acquired a keen sense of the law that he was able to put to extraordinary use decades later.

Journalism, first on the side but eventually full time, became Post's calling. While running the opinion pages of a lively pro-labor daily, the *New York Truth*, he supported the campaign that established Labor Day. Along the way, he became a convert to Henry George's single-tax movement, which advocated a land tax meant to discourage speculators from getting rich by acquiring land and leaving it idle, impoverishing those who could have put it to good use. A friend of George's, Post in effect became the leader of the single-tax movement after George's death, in 1897, and toured North America lecturing on the subject. As the editorial writer for the *Cleveland Recorder*, Post crusaded against industrial monopolies and in favor of workers' rights. By the turn of the century, he and his wife had started a Chicago-based magazine, *The Public*, which denounced American colonization of the Philippines, the power of big business, and racial discrimination while supporting women's rights and unrestricted immigration. Post had been impressed by the promises of reform that helped Woodrow Wilson first get elected President, and, in 1913, when offered a position in the brand-new Department of Labor, he happily accepted.

Post knew, and had published, many of the leading reformers and radicals of the day. Indeed, Emma Goldman had been a dinner guest in his home, and he had managed, in 1917, to prevent her from being deported, although he was

powerless to do so two years later, when the laws had been tightened. Being in government did not tame him: as the Assistant Secretary of Labor, he had boldly written to President Wilson suggesting a blanket pardon for jailed draft resisters. As for anarchists, Post knew that some practiced violence, like the man who had bombed Palmer's home, but he argued that anarchist ranks also included "apostles of peace," like the followers of Tolstoy, who were "supremely harmless." It was "perverted," he wrote, to lump them all together as people to be deported.

Now, in charge of the Department of Labor, Post proved a shrewd investigator and decisive reformer. When he discovered that many of the raids had been made without warrants, or with warrants based on faulty information, he invalidated nearly three thousand of the arrests. He found that prisoners had been questioned without being informed that their answers could be used as evidence against them and without being given access to lawyers. In response, he ruled that any alien subjected to the deportation process was entitled to full constitutional safeguards. Post learned that many people taken in the raids hadn't known that one of the Communist parties listed them as members; these factions had seceded from the Socialist Party and were intent on claiming as large a membership as possible. He ordered the release of many of those still held in immigration prisons like the one on Ellis Island; he slashed the amount of bail for others. Palmer and Hoover were furious.

Public opinion, however, slowly turned in Post's favor. Quoting an unnamed commentator, Representative George Huddleston, of Alabama, said that some of the supposedly dangerous "Reds" targeted for expulsion probably didn't know the difference between bolshevism and rheumatism. A federal judge in Boston ordered a group of immigrants to be released from custody, declaring that "a mob is a mob, whether made up of government officials acting under instructions from the Department of Justice, or of criminals, loafers, and the vicious classes." Despite the estimated ten thousand arrests made amid the Palmer Raids

and the 6,396 deportation cases that Hoover's Radical Division prepared during this period, Palmer succeeded in deporting fewer than six hundred radical immigrants.

The Attorney General condemned Post's "habitually tender solicitude for social revolution and perverted sympathy for the criminal anarchists." Privately, Palmer suggested that Post was "a Bolshevik himself." Palmer and Hoover sought to discredit Post and get him impeached by Congress. A three-hundred-and-fifty-page file on Post attempted to tarnish him with evidence about everything from contacts with I.W.W. members to his advocacy of divorce reform. The House Rules Committee, supplied with this file, called Post in for ten hours of testimony. But he acquitted himself brilliantly, and the committee could find no grounds for impeachment.

Palmer's Justice Department continued to issue dire warnings, almost daily, of the nationwide Communist uprising predicted for May Day, 1920. As the date approached, New York City's police force was put on twenty-four-hour duty; Boston stationed trucks with machine guns at strategic locations. In Chicago, three hundred and sixty local radicals were arrested and put in preventive detention.

May Day came and went. Nothing happened. Yet the silence turned out to be an event in itself. It deflated the national hysteria about arresting and deporting "Reds," and helped kill Palmer's campaign for the Presidency. Nor did any of the three Republicans who had thundered about deportation become his party's choice. The eventual candidate and victor was Warren Harding, a Republican who declared that "too much has been said about bolshevism in America," and campaigned for a "return to normalcy." The Republican Party platform that year rebuked the "vigorous malpractice of the Departments of Justice and Labor."

Owing in part to Post's courage, normalcy did not include mass deportations on the scale that people like Hoover and Palmer had hoped for. But a larger battle was lost, since pressure for deportations has always been linked to another cause: keeping people out in the first place. In 1924, Congress

passed a law that, for the next four decades, slammed the door on all but a tiny trickle of immigrants. It barred Asians from entering the United States and assigned country-by-country quotas, set to reflect the American population as it had been in 1890—when the proportion of Eastern Europeans, Italians, and Jews was small. The law bore the name of its principal author, Representative Albert Johnson, one of the men who, along with Hoover, had seen off the *Buford* and its cargo of deportees from New York Harbor. It was the Johnson-Reed Act that, years later, would prevent untold numbers of people trying to flee the Holocaust from finding shelter in the United States.

Post did not live to see that shame; he died at the age of seventy-eight, in 1928. But he died proud. He had entered the Wilson Administration expecting to fight for workers' rights, but ended up fighting a very different battle. When faced with a challenge he had never anticipated, he rose to it magnificently, saving thousands of people from being expelled from the country. Moreover, his example emboldened others to speak out. It was only after Post had spent several months publicly stopping deportations that a group of a dozen distinguished attorneys, law professors, and law-school deans, including the future Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, issued a report denouncing the Justice Department's many violations of the Constitution in carrying out the Palmer Raids. The report was accompanied by sixty pages of material, from sworn statements of witnesses to photographs of bruised and beaten prisoners.

The report had a big impact on members of Congress and the press. Few were aware that two of the people who had helped prepare it were close allies of Post, and that Post almost certainly supplied much of the information in it. Post was both a man of high principle and a master of bureaucratic maneuvering—a rare combination. "He struggled without ceasing to preserve our liberties and to enlarge them," the Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis wrote after Post's death. "He resisted the clamor of stupid intolerance. He exposed its shameful, ruthless lawlessness." ♦



## THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF BREAKING UP WITH ME

BY SARAH LAZARUS

So you're thinking about breaking up with me. As unlikely as it may sound, you are not the first. Chances are you've got a lot on your mind right now, as you tackle such questions as: When should you do it? *Where* should you do it? Are you making a colossal mistake? Breaking up with me can be a confusing time in anyone's life, but in 2019 it's a more complicated moment than ever. Before smashing that Eject button, make sure you have examined the short- and long-term environmental effects of straight-up dumping my ass.

Every day we make dozens of decisions that we barely even register. Plastic bag or reusable tote? Straw or no straw? Grow old with me or turn your back on the best thing that ever happened to you, risking a lifetime of gnawing regret? These choices may seem small, but they have real consequences for the health of our planet.

When it comes to breaking up with me, the complex web of environmen-

tal factors to address can feel overwhelming. Fortunately, some factors are readily apparent, even to the breaking-up-with-me layperson. Let's start simple: consider the untold gallons of clean, potable water that would be wasted by my crying in the shower. Scientists don't have a precise estimate of how much water might be lost, but, taking into account my new shower-safe speakers and the combined length of Mitski's two most recent albums, the amount is sure to be catastrophic.

Make no mistake: running from my sweet embrace leaves a sooty set of carbon footprints. If historical data trends are any indication, your dumping me will trigger a swift chain of events that culminates in me at a bar, drunkenly disparaging you to my friends. At the end of the night, my level of inebriation and the late hour will force me to take a Lyft home instead of the subway. Those extra CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are a breakup by-product, as are

the single-use plastic bottles of Glacier Freeze-flavor Gatorade I'll inevitably buy the next morning.

Some effects are more insidious. Should you kick me to the curb, you must anticipate that I am going to sit on that curb eating ice cream. I will eat ice cream every day, sometimes at strange hours, because I have seen sad women do this in movies. This, of course, spells ecological disaster. Not only do dairy cows produce greenhouse gas, but industrial dairy farming can cause the destruction of prairies, forests, and other ecosystems. You might meet other interesting women in your life, but good luck replacing North America's wetlands!

You may find yourself doubting that this scale of devastation can be blamed on any one individual's decision to break up with me. This is natural, completely understandable, and wrong.

It's a statistical near-certainty that, if you break my heart, I will take a month off from work and embark on an "Eat Pray Love"-style journey around the world. We're talking a dizzying montage of airplanes, cabs, bottled water, economic support of environmentally irresponsible nations, and God knows what else. Again, this is a conclusion based on years of independent data collection and analysis. If it were up to me, I would hike the Pacific Crest Trail, like Cheryl Strayed in "Wild," but, as irrefutable evidence shows, I am weak, and scared of bugs.

I could go on, and I have, in the attached graphs and flowcharts. Breaking up with me is a very personal choice, and no one can make it for you. I only hope that you have gained a helpful new perspective, one broad enough to confront the fiery, drought-ravaged world that awaits you in your singlehood. There might be "other fish in the sea," but will there be actual fish in the literal sea? It doesn't look good. Alternatively, we could stay together and preserve this beautiful blue marble for our grandchildren. (I know we're not on the same page about having kids right now, but I think that if we keep discussing it we'll find a compromise!) The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and I eagerly await your decision. ♦

## THE SYMPTOMS

*My year of concussions.*

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN



The first concussion in the year of concussions was delivered by the right fist of a man whose name I either don't know or can't remember. You could say it was a mild concussion, and I always will, but many experts say that there's no such thing. You have a concussion or you don't. You can't be mildly pregnant. But a brain injury is not a baby. We know what a baby is.

I didn't lose consciousness, or even my footing. When it was over, I skated away, with a ludicrous grin but without every item of my equipment or all of my wits. I had a sudden headache and a sense already of an alteration in the fabric of the world beyond the confines of my skull.

Teammates leered at me. Aluminum rink light glinted off a thicket of surfaces: ice, plexiglass, helmets, sticks. The referee bent to report the infractions to the timekeeper, through a slot in the glass. In the penalty box, I fought the urge to lie down.

This was men's league—beer league. You play hockey, then you drink beer. Beer in the locker room, beer in the parking lot, beer at the bar. Specifically, this was Game One of the league final, best of three, early July, 2016, after a sixteen-game season and a couple of playoff rounds. We all cared more than we should have. We ranged in age from just-out-of-college to my-kid's-applying-to-college, with varying degrees of

organized-hockey experience. I was one of the oldest, and one of the least experienced—I'd quit in freshman year of high school—but I'd never stopped skating in pickup games. I'd been a beer leaguer for twenty-five years and could still contribute here and there, and even, with crafty editing, create a mind's-eye reel of my highlights to play as I drifted off to sleep.

Our team was called the Intangibles, for the sports cliché describing that unquantifiable quality of grit and attention to detail which valuable players, especially older ones, are often said to have, and which we reckoned was all we had left, amid a general decline in fitness and skill. On our jerseys, black, with a little orange and white, the word "Intangibles" ran diagonally from top left to bottom right. On the back: numbers, but no names. Most of us wore matching socks, black with orange trim. The rest of the gear—helmets, gloves, pants—was rag-tag. A motley militia, in the reeking regalia of past schools and teams. The games were at night, sometimes as late as midnight. We got a little nervous on game day. We perfected the timing of the nap and the meal. We stretched at home. We knew we were ridiculous, and made fun of ourselves constantly, but approached it all with enough sincerity to wring real gratification out of it. A good beer-league team consists of players who take it no more or less seriously than you do. Ours was a good team. Afterward, we could talk about a game for hours—about our own failings, in front of the others, and about the others' failings, behind their backs.

What led to the first concussion? I'd decided to repay an opponent who had, during a battle for a loose puck, shoved me into the boards head first. I'd been having neck issues, and this had made them instantly worse. Ours was a no-checking league, and yet we were allowed to play the body, as they say, and hostilities bubbled up from time to time. Now the game was basically over, and we were losing by several goals with a minute left. Fuck it. As the guy stole the puck from our captain and bore in uncontested on our goalie, I came off the bench on a line change (a player substitution, often mid-play) and skated toward him as hard as I could. I came at him from his blind side, and arrived just as he slowed up a touch to execute a feint on our goaltender. My check blew him off his skates.

*The light dimmed, the ringing kicked up, and the fog rolled in again.*

This was an uncool thing to do. Even in the pros, it would have been at least a charging penalty; in a middling no-hit beer league, it was beyond the pale. Also, the guy was much bigger, stronger, and younger than I was. He rose to his feet and rushed at me. I stood still, hands at my sides, in wonderment at the size of him, and at the purity of the grievance. I had an inkling that I deserved what was coming. His head was the size of a bucket. He shook his gloves off and quickly landed a series of right hooks before my teammates swarmed him, like rodeo clowns. The punches caught me behind the left ear, below the edge of my helmet. The thud was thicker than I'd expected. It felt as if my head had been slammed in a car door.

I had never punched, or been punched by, an adult before. The last time I'd used my fists was on my younger brother, during a tussle in our early teens; he retaliated by pelting me with a boom box. It got me in the mouth. I should have learned then: put up your dukes. The next morning, a dentist levered my teeth back into place with a tongue depressor and cemented them in line. I showed up for freshman year of high school with a mangled upper lip and a smile made of grout.

After the Game One punch-up, I sat out the rest of the series. I didn't feel right. We won without me. The rink manager handed the guys a yard-tall plastic trophy, which wound up on the bar of the tavern where we hung out after the games. I was a longtime fan of the Philadelphia Flyers, who in their heyday and my formative years were known as the Broad Street Bullies, for their use of physical intimidation as a tactic. So I allowed myself to believe, half seriously, that I'd contributed something. The boys encouraged me in this. I'd sacrificed my services, and my head, to change the complexion of the series. One intangible is knowing when to be a jackass.

**I** skate low, torso over toes, head turtled forward. It's not awful, but it's not ideal, either. I catch a lot of stray elbows. It's hard to count the times, after those late-night games, that I've felt dazed the next day. Headaches, stiff neck, trouble finding words. But then there were always other variables: beer, dehydration, a severe shortage of sleep. Stay out or go home, six pints or two, I always needed

four hours, from the time of the opening face-off, before I could fall asleep. Midnight games on Mondays left a mark.

After a day or two, the fog would lift. Nothing ever stuck, and so I decided that those passing head shots, the little dings, weren't anything at all. It seemed a small price to pay for the weekly company of the boys. There was the Brad, a master rigger of industrial cranes, whose gruff diatribes against bankers, bike lanes, hipsters, and "harelips" we surreptitiously recorded, for laughs. Pat (Patty) Patterson had grown up down the block from me; in the late seventies, our local street-hockey game had made the *Daily News*. We had a couple of smooth Minnesotans—Scoobs, a soulful bull of a kid who ran a charter school in Harlem, and Mahonze, our ringer from Duluth, lanky and shy. And some spicy Mainers, too: Brawny, who was always grumbling about the libs; Bix, who smelled like a dead animal; and Junta, whom I met playing roller hockey in Tompkins Square Park, in the mid-nineties, and who had a thing about the size of his own wrench, which, admittedly, was prodigious. New recruits were always amazed to learn that Phish had named its first album for him. He came up with a lot of the nicknames, some of which only he used. Our goalie, whom we called Z, had eight children and lived in a shoe. Or so it was said.

Hockey nicknames are determined by an esoteric set of principles, the most basic one being that you add a long "e" to a name that does not have one, and drop it if it does. Clarke was Clarkie, Gretzky was Gretz. The Intangibles called me Dickie, for Dickie Dunn, the beat writer in the movie "Slap Shot." For us, as for a generation of hockey players, "Slap Shot" was both a mirror and a prompt, in the way that "The Godfather" was for the Mob. There's a scene in a bar in which Dickie tells Reg Dunlop, the player-coach played by Paul Newman, "I tried to capture the spirit of the thing." We were all about the spirit of the thing. We took turns doing the post-game writeups: mock heroics, gong shows, choice chirps. Our team's captain, for a while, was a handyman for a bunch of wealthy tenants of Upper East Side town houses; reared in Detroit, he'd played college hockey at Liberty University, during a born-again-Christian phase, and then, as a pot-smoking apostate, had been

Woody Allen's superintendent. He made paintings and signed them "Evryman." We called him Reg. One year, after we won a league championship, I e-mailed my brother a team photo. The trophy, the flushed faces, the thinning hair. My brother singled out a Philly kid we called Murph—for Audie Murphy, because his surname contained the letters "a-u-d" (and no long "e")—or Jesus, because he performed miracles. "That guy looks like a tough dick," my brother wrote. I shared this e-mail with a few of my teammates. From then on, Reg implored us from the bench to play with an edge: "Tough dicks, boys. Tough dicks." Hockey, it needs to be said, brings out the dickishness in us all. It may even require it.

**I**n New York City, in the nineteen-seventies, when I was a kid, recreational ice hockey was a curiosity, an obscure pastime of hard-nosed Long Islanders, Massholes, preppies, and Hell's Kitchen roughnecks. There was a men's league at the old Sky Rink, on the sixteenth floor of an office building near the West Side rail yards; one misremembers it now, with its steamed-up windows and its hothouse violence, as a kind of puckhead's Plato's Retreat. There were rugged barns at Coney Island, Long Beach, and the World's Fair site in Queens. During the winter months, I skated in Central Park and the Bronx, getting just a handful of weekend games in the suburbs each season. In summer, I went to hockey camps for a couple of weeks, in New England and Nassau County. But mostly I played roller hockey—pre-Rollerblades, on the old quads. The city had a lot more open asphalt than open ice. We used garbage cans for goals, a roll of electrical tape for a puck, and wooden sticks with the blades worn down by the pavement to the width of paint stirrers. The pace was slow, and nobody wore shin pads or helmets. Still, the games got chippy. My sharpest memory is of a full baseball swing I took to the back of a knee from the stick of a neighborhood bully known as Fat Allie.

Thirty years later, I was out mucking it up on the ice two or three nights a week—at Chelsea Piers, mainly, but also in Long Island City, Flushing, and Central Park, in leagues and in regular pickup games. It was my outlet, my social life, my private map of New York. One team blended into the next: Flin Flon, Team X,

Red Army, Blind Justice, Lady Blue, Wheat Kings, Rink Rats, Polar Bears, Blackjacks, Hit Factory, Triple Canopy, LCHC (Lamb Chop Hockey Club), and THC, which, of course, stood for the Hockey Club.

Meanwhile, my sons got deep into organized travel hockey, the weekends a blur of games and practices. For a number of years, I helped out as a coach. To do so, I had to take a series of seminars and online modules, including a perennial refresher devoted to concussions, with strategies for getting children to provide an accurate accounting of their symptoms. But, when it came to self-diagnosis, those were superfluous.

I got the next concussion that fall, in a game in Central Park, at the outdoor rink where I'd learned to play, four decades earlier. This was a league for players older than forty. The team was called Tiger Williams, for a notorious goon. On a chilly night under the lights by the Harlem Meer, with friends on both teams, the mandate was to play it cool. Skating backward, defending, without much conviction, against an onrushing forward, I leaned to execute an over-fortyish poke check. The forward, maybe with too much conviction, cut hard and caught the side of my head with a shoulder. The contact helicoptered me into the air and then down to the ice. I stayed prone awhile, then made my way to the locker room, where I undressed and zombied my way home. Headache, vertigo, unrelenting fatigue: the symptoms reminded me of altitude sickness. I acclimated after a moment or two. I took six weeks off, and then resumed skating after Christmas.

The third concussion came months later, in another Intangibles game, the clock running out on a late-night mid-season loss. A freak accident, a collision with a teammate: we hadn't seen each other. I got the worst of it. The light dimmed, the ringing kicked up, and the fog rolled in again.

In the following weeks, my skull felt as though someone had draped a towel over it and was pulling down on all four corners, or maybe cinching tight a bank robber's stocking. I had trouble concentrating. If I tried to exercise, the headache came galloping in. I couldn't handle

crowds or concerts or the ordinary din of New York. The thought of playing hockey, the sight of men playing football on TV: it seemed as reasonable to stroll on foot across the New Jersey Turnpike. After an hour or two in front of a computer screen, a kind of dizzy fatigue washed over me. I began napping a couple of times a day. The Advil stopped working. My moods darkened. My work stalled.



At the urging of family and friends, I went to see a doctor, who said that the symptoms were consistent with post-concussion syndrome. Still, a diagnosis is an approximation. An M.R.I. showed nothing, except some other things, which had nothing

to do with concussions or my symptoms, and which I'd probably have preferred not to know about: *White matter intensity is generally preserved, however a solitary probable chronic lacunar infarction is present in the right caudate head, and trace probable microangiopathy is present in the parietal region on the left.* A neurologist told a friend, to whom I had sent the report, "He shouldn't freak out (too much)."

I was familiar with the murk of concussion science. Like anyone who follows sports, I'd been reading for years about professional athletes undone by head injuries, marooned in the dark, mulling suicide. One knew about C.T.E., the disease of progressive neurodegeneration, brought on by repeated blows to the head, that seemed disproportionately to afflict boxers and football and hockey players, such as the linebacker Junior Seau, who shot himself in the chest, at the age of forty-three, or Todd Ewen, the N.H.L. enforcer known as the Animal, who shot himself in the head, at forty-nine. One of my son's coaches, a retired N.H.L. player and a gentle giant who participated in more than a hundred fights as a pro, had several episodes a year of overpowering vertigo that lasted for days. Of course, I hadn't done any of this. I hadn't even played high-school hockey. I was just a mildly rambunctious boy on planet Earth: bicycle crashes, skiing accidents, pitiless shore breaks, a drunken tussle or two. But it was widely accepted that the damage accrues.

I bore witness as the kids opened their own accounts. In a peewee practice, one

of my sons collided with a teammate, and the other boy had to quit hockey and miss months of school. I attended a concussion-awareness fund-raiser at his parents' apartment, featuring a former professional football player and the former pro wrestler Chris Nowinski, who suffered sixteen concussions and now runs a research-and-advocacy group called the Concussion Legacy Foundation. This is an epidemic, they told us. There's so much we don't know. When in doubt, keep them out. The youth-hockey organization my sons played in adopted something called the King-Devick test. At the beginning of the season, we took the kids aside, one at a time, and had them perform cognitive exercises while an adult timed them with a stopwatch. Patterns of numbers on flip cards, read aloud, in sequence. This established a baseline. The idea was that, if a player was suspected of having a concussion, we'd administer the test on the bench and compare it with the previous result, and thereby have some basis for a decision about his continued participation in the game.

One day, during a game on Long Island, a boy on our squirt team (squirts are nine- and ten-year-olds) got clocked in front of our bench. The referee saw it but gave no indication that he considered it a penalty. Home cooking? The visitors always think so. Our player lay on the ice. From the stands, his father started shouting at the referee, who skated over and told him to knock it off. The father yelled, "That's my son!" Then he let loose with some obscenities. The referee ordered him to leave the rink. The father went quietly, which was a relief, because he had a black belt in judo. Another father went with him, to make sure.

On the bench, I took the boy aside to administer the King-Devick test. He had put up a conspicuously slow time on his baseline. He was immensely talented but easily distracted: sometimes, when a coach explained a drill to him, his vacant expression brought to mind the badger sidekick in the movie "Fantastic Mr. Fox"—eyes just spirals. Now the boy sat on the bench, facing away from the ice, and read out the number patterns. He got through them much faster than he had for his baseline. This scenario hadn't come up in the pre-season tutorials. We sent him back on the ice, which was almost certainly the wrong

thing to do. The game ended in a tie.

During a bantam game (bantams are thirteen and fourteen), at a rink on the top floor of a mall in West Nyack, one of our players got rifled into the boards. His head bounced off the plexiglass. He stayed down. The referees blew the play dead and stood nearby, dawdling like a pair of plainclothes detectives at a crime scene. The players retreated and took a knee. In street shoes, I made my way across the ice. This boy's father had played in the N.H.L. and was in the Hall of Fame. Hundreds of goals, thousands of penalty minutes, dozens of fights. A legend. But he wasn't there that day. His son was lying face down, as though on a massage table. I asked the boy how he was doing.

"I'm done," he said.

"Do you know where we are?"

"Some shitty mall."

Lucid. Droll. Good to go? We held him out, without subjecting him to the numbers.

Years before, I'd been in the stands at Madison Square Garden when his father, playing for the Rangers, collided with an opponent head on head, neither seeing the other. Paramedics spent more than five minutes trying to revive him, as the arena went quiet. "Is he dead, Daddy?" my older son, then six, asked.

"I don't know," I said. I could hardly speak, being somehow on the verge of tears. After a while, the crowd started chanting the man's nickname. That's what brought him back to consciousness, he later said. He was wheeled off on a stretcher. He missed fifteen games, then returned in time for the playoffs, and played for another two years. He stayed in the city and signed his son up for our program. He helped coach. You could see the opposing coaches and parents sneaking glances. On tournament trips, as kids raised hell in the corridors of the hotel, the hockey dads and moms gathered around him at the bar and pumped him for insights and anecdotes, a prince among the plebes. He liked to stay up late, too. An old habit, perhaps, from his playing days.

The symptoms lingered and mutated and became almost commonplace, and I began to contemplate retirement. That word, however facetiously it was deployed—because to consider the beer

leagues a career, even in jest, was grandiose—had a finality that got marbled up with whatever depression the concussions had brought on. I missed skating, making plays, throwing my body around. I missed the boys. I missed the post-game high, endorphins giving way to beer and refrigerator raids.

A few months after my third concussion, a teammate, Mango, got one, too. We had chemistry on the ice, and liked talking and thinking the game, on our way to and from the rink. We were nerds for puck support and a methodical approach in the offensive zone. He was attacked in a melee at the final buzzer. Such things were much rarer than I have made them out to be, but here it was, violence that was not cartoonish. This time, there were no rodeo clowns. Maybe the Intangibles had lost sight of the intangibles. A lot of guys had moved away or stopped showing up. Injuries, work, babies, the burbs. Colorado, Chicago, Minneapolis. Ribs, disks, ankles, brains. Jesus had a heart attack. Scoobs's house burned

down. The spirit of the thing: catch it if you can.

Mango's symptoms lasted for more than a year. Before long, he had to quit. So did Junta and Mahonze. The team disbanded. Now we were the invisibles, a chunk of our city life eliminated by blows to the head. My sticks stand blade down in a corner of the apartment; now and then, I catch a whiff of the old hockey-glove stink that still saturates the knob of cloth tape at the butt end of each one. I feel well enough to entertain the idea that there's got to be a game for me somewhere out there in the city, one peppy enough to make it worthwhile yet so moderate as to be safe. Will I never again collide with another human being? The thought is hard to bear. When I can't sleep, I have a habit of imagining myself, over and over, crossing the red line and, with a flick of the curved blade, flipping the puck high in the air, over the opposing defensemen and into the corner, but then, instead of chasing it, swerving toward the bench to get a line change. ♦

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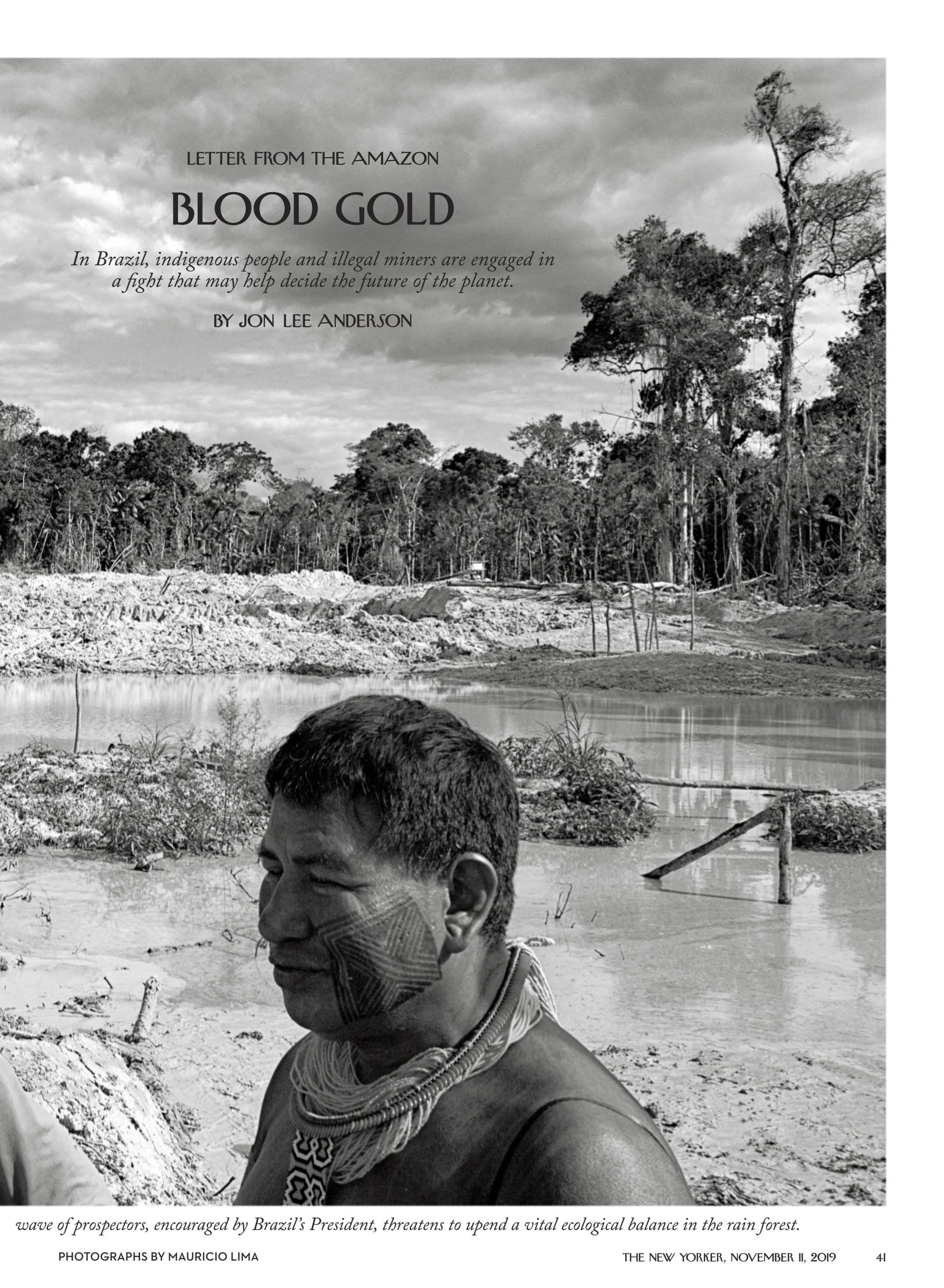
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*Belém, a member of the Kayapo people, confers with Chicão, a miner whom his tribe allows to work on indigenous land. A new*



LETTER FROM THE AMAZON

# BLOOD GOLD

*In Brazil, indigenous people and illegal miners are engaged in a fight that may help decide the future of the planet.*

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

*wave of prospectors, encouraged by Brazil's President, threatens to upend a vital ecological balance in the rain forest.*

One day in 2014, Belém, a member of Brazil's Kayapo tribe, went deep into the forest to hunt macaws and parrots. He was helping to prepare for a coming-of-age ceremony, in which young men are given adult names and have their lips pierced. By custom, initiates wear headdresses adorned with tail feathers. Belém, whose Kayapo name is Takaktyx, an honorific form of the word "strong," was a designated bird hunter.

Far from his home village of Turedjam, Belém ran across a group of white outsiders. They were *garimpeiros*, gold prospectors, who were working inside the Kayapo reserve—a twenty-six-million-acre Amazonian wilderness, demarcated for indigenous people. Gold mining is illegal there, but the prospectors were accompanied by a Kayapo man, so Belém assumed that some arrangement had been made. About nine thousand Kayapo lived in the forest, split into several groups; each had its own chief, and the chiefs tended to do as they pleased.

Ever since the Kayapo had come into regular contact with the outside world, in the nineteen-fifties, whites had been trying to extract resources from their forests, beginning with animal skins and expanding to mahogany and gold. In the eighties, some chiefs made easy profits by granting logging and mining rights to outsiders, but after a decade the mahogany was depleted and the price of gold had dropped. After environmental advocates in the Brazilian government brought a lawsuit against miners, the Kayapo closed the reserve to extraction. Since then, though, international gold prices have tripled, to fourteen hundred dollars an ounce, and an influx of new miners have come to try their luck.

The prospectors whom Belém met told him that they wanted to build a road linking Turedjam with their mine, about forty miles away through the forest. Belém understood why they wanted such a road. Turedjam was situated on the Rio Branco, which formed the northeastern boundary of the Kayapo reserve. The area was rich in gold—and Turedjam had a recently built bridge that could support heavy vehicles. The proposed road would also allow prospectors to sneak machinery through the reserve under tree cover, without being spotted

from the air by federal police, who periodically raided their operations.

Back in Turedjam, Belém told his chief, Mro'ò, about the proposal. A young chief, Mro'ò had founded Turedjam four years earlier, leading a group of Kayapo from his home village after a dispute with a senior chief, who wished to allow outsiders to mine and to log mahogany. Mro'ò had established Turedjam as a "sentinel village," keeping watch over the vulnerable edge of the reserve. He told Belém to let the prospectors know that he wasn't interested.

A year later, Mro'ò died, apparently from diabetes. His brother, a heavy drinker known as Juan Piranha, quickly made a deal with the prospectors, and before long their road was cut—a track through the forest wide enough for excavators capable of moving hundreds of tons of rock and earth a day. Then Mro'ò's successor began allowing prospectors to work the surrounding land in exchange for ten per cent of their findings. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miners poured in.

Wildcat mining is less pervasive than logging, but it can be more insidious. Loggers usually harvest valuable trees and leave the rest; miners cut everything. Mercury, used in the refining process, leaves rivers poisoned, and the pollution can spread hundreds of miles downstream. The allure of gold attracts fortune-seekers, who bring prostitution, alcohol, drugs, and violence. "Letting prospectors into the Kayapo reserve is like leaving your children in the protection of a drug gang," Barbara Zimmerman, a Canadian ecologist who has worked with the Kayapo for three decades, told me. In the past few years, according to environmentalists, several hundred thousand acres of the reserve have been destroyed or degraded by illegal mining and logging.

The destruction of Kayapo land is just part of what Zimmerman calls the "sacking" of the Amazon. In addition to the mining and logging, soy farmers and cattle ranchers have cleared huge tracts of forest, mostly by fire. Brazil's National Institute of Space Research, which tracks the damage, calculates that one-fifth of Brazil's Amazonian rain forest—the world's largest remaining "green lung," which absorbs billions of tons of carbon dioxide—has been de-

stroyed since the nineteen-seventies. Indigenous reserves serve as a bulwark against destruction, green islands amid industrial soy fields and clear-cut ranchlands. But the closer indigenous people live to whites the more vulnerable they are. In these places, all that stands in the way of the destruction of the Amazon is the ability of a few thousand indigenous leaders to resist the enticements of consumer culture. In Turedjam, that battle is being lost. "It's like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have been let loose," Zimmerman said.

There are eighty-two Kayapo settlements, scattered across the green expanse of the reserve. In riverside communities, small boats are the primary means of transportation; prospectors haul away ore on barges, or in trucks where there are roads. In the forest, indigenous people traditionally walked from village to village, on journeys that could take days. During the past few decades, airstrips have been hacked out, so that bush planes can ferry people and goods.

In the course of a two-week visit, I took several flights over the forest. On one, as the plane cleared the treetops, I saw smoke rising in a huge, menacing column, like a cloud of volcanic ash. For hours, the fire burned, unattended, and a dense blanket of smoke settled on the horizon. Fires like this one are an increasingly regular feature of life in the Amazon, where settlers regard them as an essential part of progress.

Thomas Lovejoy, an American biologist who for decades has been a preëminent authority on the Amazon, told me that the burning of forests, along with climate change, was disrupting the Amazon's ability to produce rain for itself. "We're now seeing historic droughts every four or five years," he said. "The problem with droughts is that they dry up rivers and cause more fires, leading to more deforestation." The Amazon, he noted, produces twenty per cent of the world's rainwater. If the system is pushed too far out of balance, the forest will cease to be able to regenerate itself and turn into a savanna; a carbon sink nearly the size of the continental United States will become a carbon producer. "We're really close to the tipping point right now," Lovejoy said.

The conquest of the forest began in

earnest in the seventies, after Brazil's government, which was then a military dictatorship, carved a highway into the Amazon and encouraged people to move in. Since then, millions of settlers have founded towns and cities, built roads, dammed rivers, and burned forests, ultimately clearing an area larger than France.

Much of their land sits uneasily alongside indigenous reserves, which constitute about thirteen per cent of the national territory—more than four hundred thousand square miles, in which approximately nine hundred thousand people live. (They are what remain of an estimated eleven million indigenous people who lived there when the Portuguese arrived, in 1500.) For decades, FUNAI, the country's indigenous-affairs agency, has delineated reserves and helped guard them from developers. But Brazil's leaders have been lax about enforcing the strictures, and in the Amazon conservationists and indigenous-rights activists have struggled to contain a scramble for land and fortune. While the leftist President Inácio Lula da Silva was in office, from 2003 to 2010, deforestation decreased for a time. But since last January, when Jair Bolsonaro became President, the destruction has become a kind of perverse political goal.

Bolsonaro, a former Army captain whose followers call him the Legend, is an unabashed racist, homophobe, and misogynist. A climate-change denier, he came to power with a vehemently anti-environmentalist message, supported by a powerful lobby known as “the three B's”: Bibles, bullets, and beef, meaning evangelicals, gun advocates, and the agribusiness industry. Bolsonaro has complained for years that indigenous protections are a senseless brake on development. “The Indians do not speak our language, they do not have money, they do not have culture,” he once said. “How did they manage to get thirteen per cent of the national territory?” Before he was elected, he described the Amazon as “the richest area in the world” and vowed, “I'm not getting into this nonsense of defending land for Indians.”

During his first days in office, Bolsonaro, emulating Donald Trump, signed a flurry of executive orders dismantling environmental safeguards and protections for minorities. He reduced FUNAI

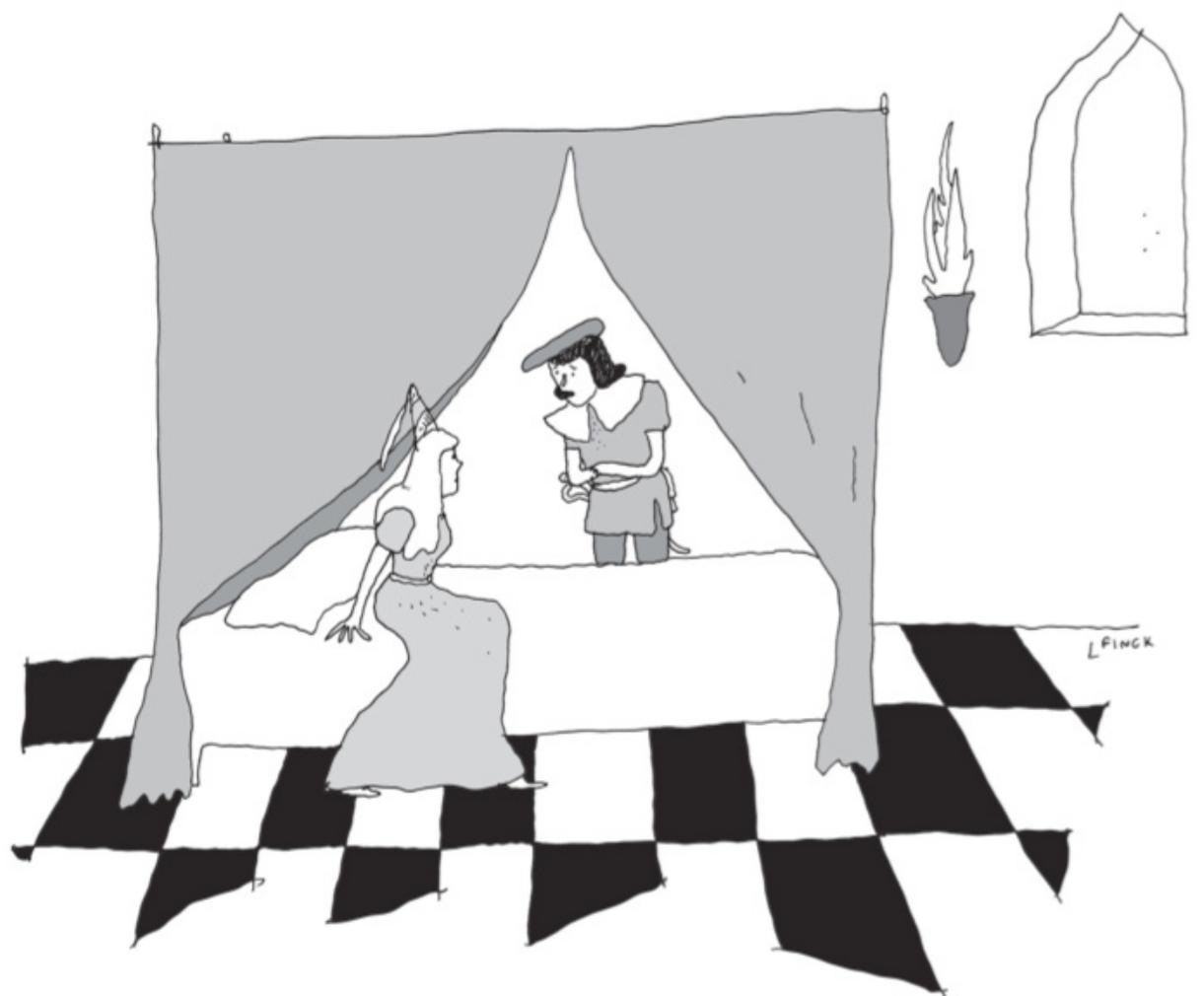
to a subsection of a new family-and-human-rights ministry, led by an ultra-conservative evangelical pastor, and stripped its ability to create reserves. (The Supreme Court recently overturned these measures, but FUNAI remains politically disenfranchised.) Bolsonaro also slashed the budget of the primary environmental agency, IBAMA, by a third.

Since last year, the rate of deforestation in Brazil has increased nearly forty per cent, with thousands of fires—many of them intentionally set—scorching forests across the Amazon. In August, as the skies over São Paulo blackened from the smoke of fires burning more than a thousand miles away, concern grew around the world. With the G-7 summit approaching, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, called for international leaders to hold an emergency discussion, and tweeted, “Our house is burning. Literally.” Bolsonaro indignantly accused Macron of a “colonialist mentality unacceptable in the 21st century.”

After Germany and Norway announced plans to revoke funding for conservation projects in Brazil, Bolsonaro ordered his military to combat the fires, and declared his “love” for the Amazon. But when G-7 members pledged twenty million dollars to help fight the

fires, Bolsonaro refused, then said he would accept the money only if Macron apologized. In the argument over the fires, he mocked Macron's wife on Facebook and declared that he would boycott Bic pens, because they were made by a French company. His tourism ambassador, a former mixed-martial-arts fighter named Renzo Gracie, told Macron, “The only fire going on is the fire inside Brazilian hearts and our president's heart, you clown. Come over here you'll be caught by the neck, that chicken neck. You don't fool me.”

In recent months, Bolsonaro has given speeches encouraging the development of the Amazon. Addressing a group of miners in October, he noted, “Interest in the Amazon isn't about the Indians or the fucking trees—it's about mining.” For Bolsonaro, gold prospectors serve as a symbol of the country's pioneer spirit—much as West Virginia coal miners do for Trump. In the eighties, Bolsonaro's father, an itinerant dentist, went to work among the tens of thousands of prospectors at the Serra Pelada gold mine, a brutal place that Bolsonaro speaks of nostalgically. Whenever he has a chance, he maintains, he parks his car at a riverbank to take out a pan and try his luck. Miners and loggers understand that they have a friend in office. Last year, Brazil's



*“You're not the sleeping beauty I fell in love with.”*

military abandoned two river outposts guarding the country's Yanomami reserve, which had been established to keep out prospectors. Since then, at least twenty thousand miners have made their way into the reserve. In July, prospectors in another reserve killed an indigenous man in his own village; Bolsonaro's environment minister, contesting the reports, suggested that the victim had got drunk and drowned.

In Brazil, illegal mining is estimated to bring in more than a billion dollars a year—for Bolsonaro, an apparently unconscionable amount of money to give up. In August, he announced that he was working on a bill that would legalize mining on indigenous lands. "We can't keep living like poor people on earth that is so rich," he said. "We want to include the Indians in our society, and a large part of them want it that way, too."

Turedjam is a tiny, sleepy place, with two dozen communal homes set around a dusty clearing in the forest. Except for a few signs of relative prosperity—tin roofs, homes made of wood planks rather than of palm thatch, the occasional Chinese motorbike—there is little to suggest that it plays a central role in Brazil's gold boom.

Children kick balls around, and a few scrawny dogs loll in the shade. Behind the houses, there are hammocks and wooden benches where women sit together, stoking cook fires and making intricate beaded armbands and necklaces. They wear short, sleeveless dresses cut from vividly patterned fabric. When I visited recently, one woman's was decorated with cartoon squirrels, owls, and lions; another's had a Christmas motif, with snowflakes and stockings stuffed with gifts. Most women adorn their limbs with black paint, like leopard spots, and their cheeks with geometric designs; their scalps are shorn in a distinctive V. The men traditionally wear their hair shoulder-length and their bodies intricately painted.

I had arrived in Turedjam with Felipe Milanez, a humanities professor at the Federal University of Bahia, who has spent years visiting Amazonian communities and advocating for indigenous rights. Mro'ô's widow embraced him with the traditional Kayapo greeting of

tears, in which they produced a high-pitched keening to mourn dead friends and relatives. I was new to the area, so the community's elders—including Belém, the bird hunter, who was also the village schoolteacher—welcomed me with a handshake.

In the eighties, the Kayapo were known as committed activists, traveling to Europe and the United States to raise awareness about the destruction of the Amazon; the chief Raoni Metuktire appeared onstage with Sting, a distinctive three-inch plate in his lip. But the leaders of Turedjam took pains to talk to me about anything but mining. When I asked Belém about its effects, he demurred. He had spent five years commuting to school in the capital of Pará—a city called Belém, which also supplied his nickname. Because he had come and gone so often, he said, he hadn't noticed much mining, so he couldn't really say what effect it might have had. When I asked if life in Turedjam had been better before the miners came, he hesitated. There was less disease then, he acknowledged. Now there was leishmaniasis (akin to leprosy) and also malaria, and there were "too many *kuben*"—white people. He paused, and offered, "But we have free electricity now, which is good."

The opening of the reserve was the subject of a long fight in Belém's family. Born in 1973, he was a nephew of Tutu Pombo, a wily, flamboyant chief who had grown rich in the eighties as he negotiated with whites to extract mahogany and gold from the jungle. Glenn Shepard, an American ethnobotanist and anthropologist who has known the Kayapo for decades, told me that Tutu Pombo devised a template for dealing with the *kuben*: demand a cut of the take and make sure that they don't cheat. "His genius was in recognizing that this was an unavoidable reality and deciding to get organized for it," he said. At the peak of Tutu Pombo's wealth, Kayapo people told me, he had five hundred head of cattle, an airplane, and houses in Tucumá and Belém; he also had numerous wives, including several white women. His deals with outsiders helped to open a rift among the Kayapo. In the eastern part of the reserve, where Tutu Pombo lived, many people embraced mining and logging; in the west, many

resisted, and conservation N.G.O.s came in to support them. In his own community, Tutu Pombo eased dissent by spreading money around.

Belém's father died while he was a boy, and Tutu Pombo financed his schooling in the city. But, eventually, the chief asked him to return and work as a bag-checker in a gold mine. "It was my job to make sure the prospectors weren't bringing in guns or drugs, or stealing gold on their way out," Belém explained. "I also made sure they paid their percentage." He didn't like the job, so Tutu Pombo installed him as a supervisor at a logging camp; he also arranged for him to marry one of his nieces. Belém stayed in the job until Tutu Pombo died from illness, in 1992.

After the chief's death, the Kayapo fell into conflict about how much extraction to permit. In 2007, one of Tutu Pombo's heirs pressed to allow more. Mro'ô argued with him, and eventually stabbed him in a knife fight. As Mro'ô prepared to leave and found a new village, Belém was conflicted—he was related to both men—but he decided to go.

Mro'ô established Turedjam at the edge of the reserve, across the border from a mining town called Ourilândia, in the hope of bringing some of its benefits to his people. An intelligent, charismatic man, Mro'ô persuaded local whites to supply his village with electricity, and to pay for the bridge across the river. Before long, Turedjam also had a health clinic and a primary school. But Mro'ô was adamant about preserving the traditional Kayapo way of life, and tried to keep out loggers and prospectors. "After he died," Belém said quietly, "everything changed."

Belém seemed embarrassed by what had happened in Turedjam since then, but he didn't say so; the Kayapo consider it inappropriate to criticize elders, and his elders had decided to allow mining. When I asked to see one of the mines, he offered instead to show me the community farm. We drove to a spot on the prospectors' road, and he led me into the forest where a tangled patch of yucca and bananas grew. He said vaguely that the Kayapo hoped to expand their agricultural activities, but would need help from N.G.O.s. Somewhere nearby, an excavator churned past, its engines the



*Since gold money came to Turedjam, old customs have coexisted uneasily with a consumer ethos.*

loudest noise in the forest, but he pretended it wasn't there.

At the riverside, the effects of mining became impossible to ignore. The water of the Rio Branco, the river that runs past the community, was a nauseous pale yellow. In most Amazonian villages, people go to the river every day, to bathe or wash clothes or escape the heat of the late afternoon. Here there was no one. Across the river, on the *kuben*-owned ranches, the land was rumpled and gouged, with dirt piled up next to wide craters filled with standing water, the same livid color as the Rio Branco. On the way back from the farm, I asked Belém about the river. "It changed color when the mining started," he said neutrally. "Now nobody goes to wash in the river. People get skin rashes if they do."

On my third visit to Turedjam, Kupato, the village chief, agreed to show me one of the illegal prospecting operations on the reserve. When I arrived at his home, he and Belém were getting painted by their wives in preparation for the outing, their torsos and

faces daubed in vivid swatches of yellow and red. Kupato carried a carved hardwood staff, a chiefly version of the traditional Kayapo war club.

Before the trip, Belém explained that he and Kupato wished to pay their respects at the tomb of Mro'ò. We walked along the Rio Branco, into a clearing where a half-dozen earthen mounds rose from the forest floor, piled with former belongings—sun-bleached mattresses, household appliances, pots and pans, flip-flops. Kupato and Belém stood looking at Mro'ò's tomb, at the center of the site. Kupato whispered a few inaudible words, and the men began to cry. After ten minutes, we walked silently back to the village, climbed into my pickup truck, and drove into the jungle.

Kupato sat in the front seat next to the driver, using peremptory hand signals to direct the way. (The Kayapo all share a language, with regional differences on the scale of Brooklyn and New Jersey, but few speak Portuguese.) Not far past the community farm, Kupato motioned for us to stop. He led the way down a path to a makeshift thatched hut, where a grizzled middle-aged man

clambered out of a hammock and hailed us uncertainly. As Belém introduced us, he relaxed a bit and said that his name was Chicão. He walked us over to his site, a couple of hundred feet away.

Chicão's operation was small, just him and a three-man crew, but in half a year it had torn a chunk out of the forest the size of five football fields: a miasma of muddy pathways, water-filled craters, and fallen trees. In the nearest crater, the crewmen were running a pump off a small generator, washing mud toward a sluice with a hose. The generator shook and roared, drowning out the macaws that flew overhead.

Belém stared down at the hosemen, his expression unreadable. In the pit, the prospectors cut the generator in order to take a water break: the heat was ferocious, and they were parched. One of them, a thin man with curly hair, introduced himself as Jorge Silva. He told me that he had studied physics, but had never been able to find paying work in his field, and so, in addition to prospecting, he had worked as a gym teacher and as an electrician. Looking me in the eyes, he said, "All of us here realize we're

fucking the environment. It's not like we want to—it's that we haven't found any alternative means to survive."

Chicão seemed hesitant to discuss his mine's yield in front of the Kayapo, but he eventually said that he found three or four grams a day. It wasn't a lot, but Chicão thought that he would carry on for the time being. He was married, and his wife visited him from their home town, eight hours away by bus. His only real preoccupation, he said, was his leg. He peeled back a bandage on his shin, revealing a line of deep, festering lesions. He thought it was leishmaniasis, but a doctor had said it wasn't, so he wasn't sure what it was. He was taking medicine for it. He shrugged.

As we drove back to Turedjam, Belém said that Chicão seemed to be a poor man, trying to make his way. He spoke as if the mine were a kind of charitable endeavor, helping the unfortunate. A few days later, on a bush-plane flight, I spotted Chicão's mine from above: a tiny, raw rectangle in the forest, like a gum wrapper dropped onto Wrigley Field. Beyond it, a denuded area, hundreds of times larger, came into view. Scores of illegal mines had carved out a vast expanse where there was no green—only mud, dirt roads, excavators, mining camps, and a couple of airstrips, from which, presumably, bigger operators were able to fly out their gold without encountering resistance. Much of the Rio Branco on either side of Turedjam no longer resembled a river; mining had turned it into a spreading mass of craters, filled with toxic lime-white water.

The forest ends at Turedjam. On the far side of the bridge spanning the Rio Branco, a dirt road leads through treeless, rolling hills to the town of Ourilândia, a half-hour journey by motorbike or pickup truck. Ourilândia, or Land of Gold, is the frontier of development in this part of the world.

Three decades ago, the area where the town stands was untouched forest. "Ourilândia started as an airstrip in the jungle," Zimmerman, the ecologist, said. "Then the settlers came, and it's exactly like what happened in the United States in the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties—the land gets cleared and the Indians get pushed back. The reason

## COMEDY

I am here before the nurse brings my mother breakfast.  
I study her body. Try to remember if I ever caught my mother in the dream I had the night before where the hem of her gown flew through a silver tunnel without end. Her skin went right through my hands whenever I was close enough to save her. She slipped through her name, her name I could not stop calling until I sat up alone in my crib. Embarrassed, she tells me she remembers how she phoned me last night to let me know she was in the morgue. She laughs as the nurse, whose feet squeak in Minnie Mouse Crocs, arrives with tea. We watch the nurse with eyes that will never remember her face. Thank her for the toast that is thicker than my mother's hand.  
*That morphine is some powerful shit*, my mother says.  
I agree with her as though she has merely mentioned it is cold outside though I have rarely had morphine & have never made courtesy calls from a morgue. *It was late & I didn't know where I was*, she says. *Because that wasn't death, which means I couldn't have called you from that place.*  
This is my new mother, who has finally admitted fear into the raw ward of her heart. This is my mother who flew away from my grasp in the tunnel without end. The woman who could not wait for me to grab the white edge of where she was going. *I was afraid*, she says. Looking over the rim of her plastic cup, she shakes the world. Chipped ice between us. *Yeah don't go & write about me like that*, she says. *I already know you.*

—Rachel Eliza Griffiths

the Kayapo got as much land demarcated as they did for their reserves is that they were tough guys, warriors, and people were afraid of them. The first thing the Kayapo traded was jaguar skins—pilots flew in to get skins for the fashion industry. And it progressed from there to logging and gold." As Ourilândia grew, it had an inevitable effect on the indigenous people nearby. "When the Kayapo have such close contact with the outside, the elders come under pressure from the youth, who see things they want in the towns," Zimmerman said. "They come back with visions of sugarpilums in their heads."

Ourilândia has a few modest residential neighborhoods; the rest feels like a latter-day Silver City, with Hilux pickups instead of stagecoaches. A bronze sculpture of a prospector stands on one of the main avenues, and dozens of shops sell mining gear: water pumps, generators, bulldozers, hammocks, rubber boots. At Casa do Garimpeiro, two young

women buy gold dust from prospectors and sell them gold jewelry, to give to their wives and girlfriends; outside is a giant glass-topped table, fashioned out of the gold-painted metal treads of an excavator. There are "kilo" restaurants, where patrons pay according to the weight of their food; there is also a series of gimcrack Pentecostal churches, a red-light district, and a few seedy hotels. At the entrance to the place where I stayed, plastic sculptures of leaping black panthers stood guard. Parked alongside was a truck that the proprietor employed in his side business, a septic-tank-cleaning operation. Its container was emblazoned with the slogan "Expresso da Merda"—"The Shit Express."

In an office on a street lined with brothels, Wesson Cleber Guimaraes, a spare-looking lawyer, acknowledged that illegal gold was the lifeblood of the local economy. He estimated that some fifteen million dollars' worth a month was being extracted from the pits nearby.

He described Ourilândia as a lawless place. Pointing to a construction-supply business across the street, he told me that its owner, who was now in jail, had been found to own forty-seven airplanes. The man had apparently been operating his business as a front for the cocaine mafias that increasingly invest their money in the mines and also use the miners' clandestine airstrips to ship drugs. "Money laundering is a big business here," Cleber said mildly. When I expressed amazement that an operation as big as his neighbor's could have gone undetected, Cleber laughed: "Here, it's the law of silence."

Cleber had been in Ourilândia since 2004, offering legal services to the "entrepreneurs" in town, but he wanted me to know that he had a social conscience. His current mission was to help the Kayapo overcome their status as third-class citizens. He was part of a group that had drafted a proposal to legalize gold mining and logging on the reserve. It was time, he said, for the Indians to exploit their lands to their full potential, and to benefit from them. When I said that his views seemed to echo Bolsonaro's, Cleber beamed. "Exactly," he said.

Cleber showed me a draft charter for the recently created Kayapo Coöperative, described as an "indigenous coöperative for the extraction, production, and commercialization of the Kayapo agro-industrial, forest, and mineral resources." He was not himself Kayapo, of course, but he and his associates claimed to have secured the support of Kayapo elders from various communities. He showed me a page filled with signatures.

Taking out a calculator, Cleber explained that the untapped resources in the Kayapo reserve represented an "incalculable" fortune. "There are twenty-five cubic metres of harvestable wood per hectare," he said, punching buttons. "That makes twenty-five million cubic feet of wood, which in turn is worth about twenty-five billion reals"—roughly six billion dollars. This was a conservative estimate, he said; the actual value could be three times that. "There are about nine thousand Kayapo living in that whole area, which means that, if the wealth they extracted were distributed evenly among them, each of them would be very rich. But today they are living in misery, people in a zoo where

you go and take pictures of them." The coöperative would change all that, Cleber said with a smile: "The Kayapo could be billionaires."

The main local promoter of the Kayapo Coöperative—João Guerra, a friend of Cleber's—had an office down the street, across from a Pentecostal church. A potbellied man in his late fifties, he was the president of the local Association of Prospectors, an advocacy group for gold miners. When I pointed out that his association represented an illicit enterprise, he laughed good-naturedly; there was, he pointed out, one legal gold mine in the region, just across the river from Kayapo land.

The next day, we set off to see it, speeding in four-wheel-drive vehicles on the dirt road that also led to Turedjam. Near the bridge over the Rio Branco, we turned down a private road and into the mine. There were sheds for workers to wash and to change their clothes, a canteen, and, beyond, a landscape dominated by huge piles of dirt and deep craters. The mine had two yellow excavators, which allowed workers to strip the land far faster than Chicão's crew could. The machines were in constant motion, working a pit about twenty feet deep. A forlorn patch of forest stood intact just beyond the pit's edge. A few hundred feet away was the Kayapo reserve, its jungle hills rising from the river.

Guerra waved toward the jungle. "From there to Mato Grosso"—the neighboring state—"it's about five hundred kilometres, and it's all *indio*." At three points of the compass from where we stood, he complained, indigenous people controlled the land. "It's just not viable," he said.

He explained that when the boundaries of the indigenous territories were set, beginning in the nineties, some white settlers had been dispossessed. "That's where the problems start," he said. "They should reduce the size of the reserves, especially in those places where whites are now living. That would pacify a lot of people." Pointing to the Kayapo reserve, he added, "As for that, it's theirs. But they should have economic activity going on: mining,

logging, Brazil-nut collecting, and cattle ranching. If all that were allowed on their land, in addition to the re-demarcation of Indian reserves, it would reduce the conflicts by eighty per cent."

Down in the belly of the crater, men held the ends of giant black hoses between their legs and moved the nozzles back and forth, directing torrents of water into loose mounds of scree. Downstream, by the mouth of a larger hose, another man stood in the water, separating rocks from the flow of sediment. The flow was sucked uphill and burst onto a sluice tray, lined with a layer of felt that trapped the gold. Inside a shed, several employees got into waist-deep water in a concrete pool and sifted the final sediments. Using handheld pans, they washed the sediment with silvery streaks of mercury, until they came up with a pinkish blob of unrefined gold. It went into a vial in the owner's hands. The day's yield was about a hundred and forty grams, worth some sixty-five hundred dollars.

For buyers abroad, it is difficult to distinguish between legal and illegal gold. Ore from small mines travels through a complex network of intermediaries before arriving at a processing facility, where it's melted together with ore from other sources, in a procedure sometimes called "gold laundering." Much of the resulting alloy is shipped abroad; last year, Brazil exported ninety-five tons of it, mostly to the U.S., the U.K., and especially Switzerland, which refines seventy per cent of the world's gold.

The trade in gold provides an index of global sentiment. In times of political anxiety and market volatility, investors stockpile gold bars. Authoritarian governments see deep reserves as a sign of strength; last year, demand from central banks was the highest in decades,

with large purchases from Russia, Turkey, Hungary, and Poland. A third of the gold produced is sold as jewelry in China and India, where booming middle classes support demand for wedding bands, ornate bridal necklaces, and New Year's charms. Tech companies are thought to consume three hundred and thirty-five tons of gold a year. (Pure gold,



a corrosion-proof conductor, is used in every smartphone.) The larger companies profess ethical buying practices, but the Brazilian government's unwillingness to regulate the supply chain insures that "dirty gold" finds its way into the market, much as blood diamonds do. According to a 2016 report by the human-rights group Verité, ninety per cent of the Fortune 500 companies that are required to file disclosures had bought gold from refineries linked to illegal mines. Last August, Brazil's Federal Public Ministry called the current conditions "a breeding ground for fraud."

For local workers, these kinds of concerns seem remote, even ridiculous. In the mine's canteen, I met João Vieira da Silva, a thin man of sixty-two who was the oldest worker on the site. He had grown up in Piauí—Brazil's poorest state, in the drought-stricken northeast—and when he was ten his father had abandoned the family. Silva left soon afterward, hoping, he said, to "escape the poverty." He had landed at a metallurgy plant in São Paulo but found the work tiring, so he had gone to seek his fortune in the Amazon. There, he had worked in *desmatamento*—burning the jungle to create pastures for cattle. In 1983, he followed talk of a gold rush to a place called Castelo dos Sonhos, or Castle of Dreams. In the years since, he had worked when he could as a prospector, or else on cattle ranches, on the crews that drove fenceposts.

Every two weeks, he took a few days off in the nearby town of Tucumã, where he had a small house. A widower with no children, Silva spent his free time in complete idleness, eating his meals in a local restaurant. He didn't own a car or a motorbike, so he got around on his own "hooves," he said, but sometimes people gave him rides. He didn't know how to read, so whenever an official signature was necessary he made a thumbprint.

At the mine, he worked as a *despedrador*—the last man in the pit, who removes rocks from the water before it is sucked into the sluice. His hands were deeply calloused and rough, like a barefoot runner's feet. "I could drive an excavator, and I wouldn't have hands like these," he said, without regret. He

smiled, and added, "Prospecting is my favorite kind of work. It's better than clearing forests and driving posts. I grew tired of that."

On the way back to Ourilândia, João Guerra talked about the allure of the gold-mining life. He had come to the region, with his two brothers, during the boom of the eighties. Smiling nostalgically, he said that they had been successful enough to buy themselves ranches. A few years ago, when Ourilândia's gold rush began, he had returned to the business. He laughed ruefully, and said, "It's easier for a man to become a prospector than for a prospector to become a man." He meant that once gold fever gets into your blood it doesn't easily leave.



A survey published last December by the regional environmental group R.A.I.S.G. identified some twenty-three hundred illegal mining sites in the Amazon, spread across six countries. "The craving for valuable minerals resembles an epidemic," the report said, adding that the proliferation of mining "is not comparable to any other period of its history." Guerra figured that there were more than two hundred thousand prospectors working illegally in Pará, but he suggested that the real problem was government intervention. Although conservation laws are spotily enforced, the federal police had at times worked with N.G.O.s to mount aggressive raids. "We don't repair the areas where we mine, because we are always ready to run from the police operations," Guerra said. If prospectors could work legally, he argued, they could institute safeguards in their use of mercury, and could also bulldoze their tailings and plant tree seedlings.

In 2013, a wave of new miners arrived with heavy excavators, radically accelerating the damage to the forest. Locals surmised that drug gangs were involved in the trade; no one else could afford such expensive equipment. The Kayapo asked IBAMA, the environmental agency, for help. The agency coordinated a series of assaults with the federal police, in which helicopters firebombed dozens of machines and a

handful of trucks. "It was pretty good," an N.G.O. official who has worked extensively in the reserve told me. "But it's not enough—it's a bit like chemotherapy with aggressive cancer."

Guerra complained that, in the past two years, as many as forty-five excavators had been destroyed. The machines cost more than a hundred thousand dollars apiece, and losing one could put a small operator out of business. Guerra himself had lost an excavator on the reserve, he confessed; he was fighting the fine, the equivalent of about six thousand dollars.

The campaign of raids had cooled the mining activity in the region. But since Bolsonaro took office the raids have stopped. "The government is not only not working with us—it's actively against us," the official said. The agencies that look after the environment and indigenous concerns are practically defunct—and, the official said, the Bolsonaro administration is trying to block funding for conservation N.G.O.s.

This summer, when fires in the Amazon attracted scrutiny, Bolsonaro claimed that N.G.O.s had set them in order to discredit his administration. On Brazil's far right, it is an article of faith that N.G.O.s are conspiring with outside powers to seize control of the Amazon. In São Paulo, a Bolsonaro adviser named Dom Bertrand de Orléans e Bragança told me that environmentalists were akin to a Communist insurgency, saying, "Greens are the new Reds." (A descendant of Brazil's last emperor, he is scheduled to join Steve Bannon this month at a legislative hearing on the environment.) This kind of talk exacerbates a tradition of hostility toward anyone who resists mineral extraction. N.G.O. workers in the region raise the example of Zé Cláudio, an environmentalist in Pará, who was murdered, along with his wife, in 2011. Several of them explained that they often received threats, and had begun to restrict their movements in the countryside. The official told me, "The Kayapo provide a good example of how conservation is an actual war."

Just outside the Kayapo reserve is a bar built in a roadside shack, with a jukebox and a couple of cloth-sided rooms, where prostitutes entertain prospectors who work in the reserve. At the

entrance to Turedjam, another shack serves as a bodega and a rest house; the clients I saw there were invariably non-Kayapo, hanging out, avoiding eye contact. My hosts passed by without acknowledging the place at all.

I asked Belém whether the Kayapo were concerned about having so many strangers in their midst. How did they know who was trustworthy? Belém spoke cautiously, but he acknowledged that security and trust were issues. The Kayapo had appointed men to guarantee that the prospectors paid a fair commission, but there were suspicions that some might be cheating their own communities. He mentioned a recent rumor that a prospector had found a giant gold nugget, weighing forty-six pounds, and hadn't paid a commission. "We were told it was a myth," Belém said. "Later, we found out it was true." The prospectors were sometimes violent, Belém added. The Kayapo women didn't go alone into the forest to harvest food, and the men took care to bring a partner when venturing outside Turedjam.

The violence of the gold economy unsettled the Kayapo, but Ourilândia's white community regarded it as normal. Everyone I spoke to accepted that the Brazilian state was weak, and that vigilantism was necessary. "Criminals who pop up around here tend to end up dead," Cleber, the lawyer, told me with a smile. At the mine I visited with João Guerra, an employee named Patricia Soffa mentioned in the canteen that the local police had killed three *criminosos* the day before. The official version was that the police had been tipped off about the location of their hideout and gone to arrest them. When they arrived, the criminals had begun shooting, so the police had fired back, killing them all. It sounded a little pat, I remarked, and asked, "So, they applied *la ley de fuga*?" The "law of escape" is a euphemism that Latin-American police use for the summary execution of suspects. Soffa and the prospectors burst into approving laughter.

Soffa told me that a local criminal had recently filmed himself murdering a man and then shared the video on social media. She handed me her phone and played me the clip. It showed a man falling to the ground, twitching,

and then the face of a teen-age boy, who smiles and says, in Portuguese, "I just killed that motherfucker." Soffa said triumphantly, "The police caught and killed that boy the next day, along with his friends. He was stupid. Now he's dead."

At a restaurant one evening, a man and a young girl in pigtails walked over to my table. The man, a comfortable-looking Brazilian in his late thirties, politely introduced himself and said that his daughter was learning English. Would I mind exchanging a few words with her? I agreed, and in several minutes of earnest conversation I learned that the father was an engineer for the Vale mining consortium, and that the family had visited the United States seven times, to go to Disney World. "She loves Disney," he said, looking at his daughter indulgently.

A half hour later, the girl returned to my table with her mother. The mother explained that they had come to Ourilândia because of her husband's work, and they loved it. "It's like the Brazil of the eighties," she gushed. "We can sleep with the doors and windows open. The kids can play in the streets, and you don't have to worry about them. You can't live like this in São Paulo anymore." I asked her why Ourilândia was so safe. She replied, "If anyone does something criminal around here,

we just kill them." She made a shooting gesture with her hands. Her daughter giggled.

Iolanda, a nurse at the clinic in Turedjam, had worked among the Kayapo for years, moving from settlement to settlement. During our conversations, she spoke of Kendjam, an isolated village at the heart of the reserve that had prohibited prospecting and logging. She described it as a kind of utopia. I should go, she said, if I wanted to see a place that hadn't been ruined by gold fever.

Flying there, I passed over an almost completely uninterrupted landscape of wild forest. At one point, I spotted a diamond-shaped clearing—all that remained of a cattle ranch that Tutu Pombo had carved out of the jungle and then abandoned. A quarter century later, the trees had not grown back.

Kendjam sat alongside a glass-clear river, the Irirí, with a dozen traditional houses next to a grass airstrip and a red rock formation jutting several hundred feet above the treetops. At a small building that served as a health clinic and a radio-communications post, I was greeted by Pukatire, the chief of Kendjam, a tall, slender man with long gray hair and a wry sense of humor.

Pukatire was unsure precisely when he was born, but he thought he was "around seventy-two." He had grown up



*"I used two spaces after every period."*



*Kendjam, an isolated village at the heart of the twenty-six-million-acre Kayapo reserve, prohibits prospecting and logging.*

*bravo*, he said—the Portuguese word for wild. When he was about ten years old, the Kayapo were contacted by white outsiders. Pukatire recalled that sickness had spread, and many of the Kayapo had died. Missionaries came next, providing medical care and establishing a mission school, where Pukatire had learned Portuguese and a little English. (As he translated the Kayapo word for *bravo*, he revived an English phrase. “No-good boys,” he said, and laughed.) He had fond memories of the missionaries but had learned to fear and distrust most other whites. In one of his early memories, he was in the woods with his uncle and his cousin when rubber tappers sneaked up and fatally shot his uncle. His cousin had killed two of the white men with his bow and arrow.

Pukatire was worried about Bolsonaro’s call to open reserves to development. “If prospectors come here to explore for gold, we’re going to lose,” he said. “The whites are the only ones who win at that.” Pukatire grumbled about young Kayapo taking up white life styles. “That path is a troubled one,” he said. “If the Indian leaves his community and does white things, like cutting his hair,

drinking alcohol, mixing his blood with that of the whites, and losing his traditions, he loses everything.” He visited other Kayapo settlements to warn about these risks, but fewer people listened these days; more than a third of the villages in the eastern part of the reserve have succumbed to gold mining.

Every afternoon, the children of Kendjam gathered in the water of the Irirí, laughing and splashing. During my visit, I joined a young man named Ikatipe, his wife, and their two teen-age daughters on an excursion upriver, in a skiff with an outboard motor attached. The river was an iridescent blue, and the forest was intact all around. On sandbanks, we saw the tracks of tapirs and large turtles. Parrots and parakeets and macaws flew overhead. After a couple of hours, we pulled up to a rocky shore, and Ikatipe’s family went off into the forest carrying baskets with straps, like backpacks. They returned laden with hard-shelled fruits from cumaru trees, which the local Kayapo sell, along with Brazil nuts, through a coöperative set up with help from an N.G.O. (A British company, Lush, makes soap from the seeds of their cumaru.)

That afternoon, while his wife pounded fruits to extract the seeds, Pukatire sat in a hammock, carving a war club. Years before, he recalled, he had visited a series of European capitals to speak about the plight of the Amazon. He would like to return, but he couldn’t leave Brazil, because authorities said that there was an outstanding warrant for his arrest, for the murder of a *kuben*. He threw up his hands with a mystified expression. He had never killed a white man, he said. He had killed an Indian, but long ago. It had occurred after the Kayapo moved into the territory of the Panará indigenous group, and the Panará began raiding their farm plots and stealing their bananas. A series of skirmishes killed several Panará and many Kayapo, including Pukatire’s mother. On a revenge mission, Pukatire killed a Panará man. His party also kidnapped four children, one of whom he had raised as his daughter. “She is grown up today, a Kayapo,” he said.

A beat-up shotgun hung from a pole in Pukatire’s hut, and a bow was stashed in the rafters, along with a variety of arrows. He explained that arrows made

from a stingray's barb were best for killing jaguars, tapirs, and people, while smaller ones of palm wood were ideal for fish, birds, and monkeys. Pukatire had spent many years passing on his knowledge to Kayapo youngsters up and down the river. But when I asked if they were still seeking him out he shook his head. Staring into his cupped hands, he said, mockingly, "Only cell phones."

Glenn Shepard, the ethnobotanist, believes that the Kayapo in Turedjam are losing their traditional way of life, their security and autonomy. "The door they opened a crack has now opened wide, creating a situation they can't control," he said. "They can see what it's doing—the forest it's destroyed, the people it has killed. But it gives them access to money—and greater clout, or so they believe, especially with other Indian communities."

Shepard mentioned the Xikrin, a group, related to the Kayapo, whose reserve is rich in nickel. In the eighties, Vale began mining there, paying millions of dollars in compensation. The Xikrin quickly became the wealthiest Indians in the Pará state. "Before long, the Xikrin were throwing big parties, and inviting the Kayapo to attend as guests," Shepard said. "They even chartered bush planes to fly in crates of soda pop." Such displays of wealth, he explained, inspired a local ethos of competitive consumption.

No less than the residents of Rio, or of Park Slope, the indigenous people of the Amazon were satisfying their immediate needs at the expense of nature. "The Kayapo don't really know what 'development' is, but they do have a desire for cash, for things like boats, guns, and cell phones," Zimmerman said. "Any Kayapo will tell you, 'We really want to protect our land, we don't want the miners and loggers to come in—but we need cash.'" Zimmerman collaborates with several Brazilian N.G.O.s to devise sustainable-development plans for the Kayapo—mostly harvesting nuts but also running a fishing camp for ecotourists. A majority of the communities they work with, representing perhaps half the Kayapo, are becoming self-sustaining. But Adriano Jerolimski, the head of the N.G.O. Floresta Protegida, told me, "It takes a while to build a sus-

tainable economy from Brazil nuts and cumaru—and it's hard to compete with the money that comes from gold."

In ways, the Kayapo of Turedjam were stranded between the *kuben* world and their own traditions. The first visible change, after the mining started, was the tin-roofed houses; in Mro'ô's time, the village had decided to replace the traditional palm-thatch huts, which rats had invaded because there was less surrounding forest. Their houses still have dirt floors and no partitions inside; the Kayapo sleep in hammocks strung around an open space. But electricity from the Ourilândia grid has allowed them to install televisions, on which they watch variety shows and soccer matches. There is also a small Pentecostal church—an increasing number of Kayapo have converted—and the clinic.

At the edge of Turedjam was a kind of toll booth, where a rope barrier had been strung across the road, so that a Kayapo family could extract a fee from prospectors passing through. During my last visit, the site was abandoned, and the village nearly empty. I learned that a large group of Kayapo had gone to a party on the Xikrin reserve, while another had gone to attend an evangelical jamboree. At the clinic, I spoke with Iolanda, the nurse, who came in from the city three weeks a month. She said that she spoke with the Kayapo women about sex, drugs, and other health issues, and tried to inculcate basic hygiene, such as washing hands and putting garbage in closed containers. The incidence of disease was typical of areas where forest was cleared, she suggested: a little malaria and a little TB. What was worse was the cultural transformation. The Turedjam Kayapo had lost interest in their traditional diet and begun to eat more processed food, and some were suffering from digestive problems. "They have left their culture aside," she said. Some of the men also drank, she said, and the community showed "signs of exaggerated consumption, in everything from electronics to clothes and food. They are becoming dependent on the consumer life style of the white world."

In Turedjam one morning, Belém told me about the village school, established six years earlier. Four days a week, he taught Portuguese, math, geography, and history; one day was devoted to the Kayapo language. He was aided by four

non-indigenous teachers, provided by the government, and by several local monitors and translators. The younger children seemed to be thriving, but the school stopped at the sixth grade, so promising students went on to study in Ourilândia. They didn't do very well there, he said, because they didn't have the benefit of the monitors and the translators who had helped them in primary school. But that wasn't the biggest problem. Last year, one of the Kayapo boys had bought a motorbike in Ourilândia. When he was unable to keep up the payments, the former owner had hired a hit man to pursue him. The killer had brazenly come to Turedjam and stabbed the boy to death. The other students' parents, terrified, withdrew their children from the school.

For the local Kayapo, the killing was a harsh reminder of the difficulty of accommodating themselves to the outside world. Belém told me that the Kayapo felt discriminated against whenever they went into town. When they visited doctors, he said, "if we go to them wearing our traditional clothes, they won't see us." Pointing to the piercings in his ears and lower lip, he said, "These piercings are our tradition and should be respected." To fit in, he and other Kayapo men had donned *kuben* clothing, but that didn't work, either, he said. "There are those who say the Indians aren't Indians anymore, because we wear shirts or speak Portuguese, but that's not true. We have to learn Portuguese to defend ourselves. I learned how to speak Portuguese and drive a motorbike, and I live in a wooden house. But my culture is here"—he patted his torso. "I am an Indian. Even though I live in a wooden house, I can't be a white person. Look at my hair—it's not curly. And my body is painted!" Belém had spoken in a torrent, and with visible feeling. He paused for breath and went on. "Some white people come to teach us things, and then other white people come and say, 'You're not Indians anymore,' but that's not true. Even Indians who live in the city for years are Indians when they come back. You cannot turn white."

Belém looked around the village and said in a quiet voice, "This used to be a great place to live. Now it's so-so. If we can get the miners out, it will be good again." ♦

# THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

*How Todd Haynes rewrites the Hollywood playbook.*

BY JOHN LAHR

At 7:30 A.M. on a frosty March Saturday in downtown Cincinnati, the director Todd Haynes was on the sixteenth floor of the corporate law firm Taft Stettinius & Hollister, and he was already, as he puts it, “in the weeds, dealing with every little piece in every shot in every scene.” The firm’s lawyers and secretaries had been banished for the weekend, and the maze of cubicles and passageways was cluttered with cameras, cables, extras, and a drowsy crew. Haynes, a trim, boyish fifty-eight, with dishevelled brindle hair, was standing at the epicenter of his newest drama: a small corner office, whose west-facing windows looked out on skyscrapers and a sliver of the Ohio River.

It was from here, in 1999, that Robert Bilott, a partner in the firm and a specialist in helping corporations negotiate environmental regulations, switched sides and sued DuPont, a chemical leviathan, whose plant in Parkersburg, West Virginia, was thirty-five times larger than the Pentagon. In what became a class-action suit on behalf of seventy thousand residents of West Virginia and Ohio, Bilott pursued the company for having knowingly dumped in those states more than seven thousand tons of perfluorooctanoic acid, or PFOA, a toxic, nonbiodegradable chemical used in making Teflon—thereby poisoning hundreds of acres of land, deforming and killing hundreds of animals, contaminating the water supply, and doing long-term, irreversible damage to the health of the community. Bilott’s fight pitted him not just against DuPont but against his own firm; he was the legal insider turned outsider, a poacher turned gamekeeper. A herculean, eighteen-year legal struggle followed. In 2017, Bilott won a six-hundred-and-seventy-million-dollar settlement for thirty-five hundred of the people who had filed claims relating to illnesses linked to the

PFOA in their drinking water. (Additional personal-injury claims against the company are still in progress.) For Haynes’s eighth feature film, “Dark Waters,” Bilott’s battle had been broken down into a two-hundred-and-forty-six-scene jigsaw puzzle that the director was now painstakingly piecing together.

Haynes, in T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, sat down on the office sofa to discuss the morning’s scene with his stars: the towering Tim Robbins, who plays Bilott’s boss, Tom Terp, the head of the firm’s environmental group, and the shortish, stocky Mark Ruffalo, as Bilott, the saga’s unlikely hero. Ruffalo was not only the film’s marquee attraction; he was its lead producer, and he had initially sought out Haynes to direct and deepen the screenplay, by Mario Correa and Matthew Michael Carnahan, which was inspired by Nathaniel Rich’s 2016 exposé on the subject in the *New York Times Magazine*, and which Ruffalo felt had been written too strictly as a procedural thriller. “You’re trying to find the balance between character and story,” Ruffalo told me. “If you go heavy on the plot, you lose character.” He added, “I love the inner space of Todd’s work with actors and characters. I always feel he’s interested equally, if not more, in what’s happening below the lines.” Haynes, who is a gifted screenwriter—he was nominated for an Academy Award for the screenplay for his movie “Far from Heaven” (2002)—made sure that Bilott’s wife and his family relationships were given a real presence in the shooting script.

As a student at Brown University, in the mid-eighties, Haynes studied painting and semiotics in a program that, he said, “kind of combined Freud, Marx, and feminism.” He emerged, as he wrote in the introduction to an edition of three of his screenplays, with “a strong interest in popular form, combined with a

strong desire to invert it.” In earlier films, he played on the bio-pic (“Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story,” 1988), the horror movie and the tabloid documentary (“Poison,” 1991), the “disease of the week” film (“Safe,” 1995), the melodrama (“Far from Heaven” and “Carol,” 2015), and even the silent film (“Wonderstruck,” 2017). “Dark Waters” subverts by taking the legal thriller—a form that traditionally concludes with the triumph of good over evil—into areas of psychological complexity and ambiguity. All investigative stories, he told me, when we met in Los Angeles in June, have the burden of revealing a truth. “What I love so much about the genre,” he explained, “is the *cost* of revealing the truth. The drama of that, and what it does to people. That is the part that kills you.”

On the set, the camera perched on the threshold of Bilott’s office, and a scrum of technicians outside formed a second barricade, so I watched the filming from a conference room, where a large monitor had been installed for the production staff. “I have no actual time beyond the shoot itself—every day is a mortal trial,” Haynes had warned me before I flew in to watch him work, but I had no idea then just how fiercely he inhabited his imagined worlds. “He’s got himself in a bubble,” one of the film’s producers, Christine Vachon, said of the laser-like focus that he exhibited on the monitor. A co-founder, in 1995, of Killer Films, Vachon is the doyenne of independent producers; she and Haynes met at Brown, where she, too, studied semiotics, and she has produced all his feature films. She sat across from me, working the phone, in her customary getup—black T-shirt, pants, hoodie, and combat boots (which gained some notoriety when she wore them on the red carpet at Cannes for the premiere of “Carol”). “He’s always very passionate,”

*Haynes, at the Metrograph, New York. His films ask us to contend with ambiguity, which is part of their sly subversiveness.*



she added. “He’s not good at juggling a lot of balls in the air.”

I was thinking of myself, sadly, as one of those balls when Haynes’s director’s assistant, Lucas Omar, suddenly materialized with a large black leather portfolio. “Todd wanted you to see the Image Book,” he said, and disappeared. The incident was proof of Haynes’s attention to detail; even in the early-morning hubbub, he’d kept my presence on the set in mind. Haynes is renowned in the business for his preparation: rigorous shot lists, hundred-page editing notes, and his Image Books, which remain close at hand throughout his shoots. These books are key, Haynes has said, to his “psychic process.” Before beginning each film, he distributes a magazine-size version to the head of each department, to insure that all his collaborators have a sense of the film’s emotional terrain.

The “Dark Waters” Image Book consisted of forty-six laminated pages that followed the linear and thematic trajectory of Bilott’s crusade, a sort of map of Haynes’s ideas for the movie’s visual language. The images, many of which were shot with foreboding lighting or from unsettling angles, included derelict West Virginia landscapes, DuPont billboards, and screen grabs from other movies (“Silkwood,” “The Insider,” “The Parallax View,” “Invasion of the Body Snatchers,” and “All the President’s Men”—a primer for the postures of fear and frustration in Bilott’s battle against corporate corruption). Into this visual stew, Haynes had mixed photographs of Bilott as a boy, and of his family (his grandmother lived in West Virginia, not far from DuPont’s most toxic dumping site); a wall of boxes holding the hundreds of thousands of pages of relevant correspondence and documentation that Bilott had extracted from DuPont; the worn faces of West Virginia farmers; the severed head of a wild-eyed contaminated cow; polluted streams. The album also included a list of the painters and photographers Haynes had chosen to inform the film’s palette and perspective, among them Gerhard Richter, Gordon Parks, Andreas Gursky, William Eggleston, Stephen Shore, and Joel Meyerowitz. Haynes’s vi-

sual challenge in “Dark Waters” was to elevate the legal offices, storage rooms, and middle-class homes where most of the drama of the movie takes place to an expressive backdrop for Bilott’s internal struggle, which, he said, was infused “with anxiety, dread, futility, and despair.”

Around noon, while Robbins and Ruffalo were horsing around between takes—Robbins: “You were horrible.”



Ruffalo: “Wait till I’m off camera. I’m gonna be horrible to you”—a slight middle-aged man, in a plaid shirt and jeans, slipped into the conference room and took a seat against the back wall. It was Rob Bilott. I introduced myself. Ruffalo, in his round-shouldered, restrained performance, seemed to have uncannily captured Bilott’s

trout-lipped solitude, a standoffishness that made him seem permanently braced. The one physical quality that no actor could capture was his sunken, forlorn eyes. Bilott said that he was nervous about the next scene on the schedule. I asked why. “Neurological issues,” he said.

In the scene in question, which takes place thirteen years into Bilott’s legal battle, Bilott’s boss tells him that he has to wrap up the suit and take a pay cut. “Tom, that’s my fourth. I’m down a third now,” Bilott replies quietly. Terp says, “You don’t have any clients. No one will take your calls. What am I supposed to do here? Now, I’m on your side, but, Rob . . .” At this point in the script, Bilott starts to stand up, his legs give out, he grabs at the desk and collapses. Haynes went to work on the choreography of the fall.

During the next four hours, with the three-page scene in hand, Haynes kept popping out from where he was crouching behind the door, to explain the motivation of the moment. “You think he’s going to get up,” he said to Robbins at one point, then, turning to Ruffalo, “You’re fighting waves of nausea.” They explored the scene’s dynamics, then, satisfied, moved on to the next beat. Systematically, Haynes ramped up Bilott’s tension: his blinking eyes, his twitching hands, his juddering feet, his fumbling for the chair, and his flailing spasms on the floor. By the fifth take, Ruffalo’s portrayal of Bilott’s psychological struggle to contain his collapse

had become as sensational as the physical one. Afterward, in the conference room, I turned to the real Bilott, who had been joined by his wife, Sarah (played by Anne Hathaway in the film), to ask what he thought of it. “Hard for me. Disturbing,” he said, adding, “I’m not being very articulate.” He scratched his forehead, searching for more words. “Never realized I didn’t smile,” he said.

The caravan of lights and cameras moved down the partitioned corridors to the next location. The dark passageways, the contrasting bright sources of light, and the outside vistas with no direct horizon all served Haynes’s effort to create a landscape of obfuscation and menace. “Barrier upon barrier upon barrier. It’s so smart,” Ruffalo said later of what he calls Haynes’s “geometrics,” as he waited to be filmed from another disconcerting angle, below a stairwell. “He’s laid the music down, and I’m the piano player. I can move within the structure. It’s a complex game. He’s challenging you, and he won’t walk away until it’s impeccable.”

The first of three children, Haynes was born in 1961 to Allen and Sherry Haynes, who had married at nineteen. Haynes grew up amid the suburban buoyancy and abundance of Encino, California, just a few miles from Hollywood, during one of the industry’s most vital periods. At three, ravished by the movie “Mary Poppins,” he fell into what he called “a total imaginative rapture”: he didn’t just want to rewatch the movie; he wanted to enter the story through “a fanatical, creative, obsessional response where I had to replicate the experience,” he said. He drew hundreds of pictures of Poppins, performed the “Poppins” songs, even persuaded his mother to dress up as Poppins. (“You gotta put the flower hat on, Mom.”) “I had to satisfy the hysteria I felt for this experience creatively,” he said. In “Dottie Gets Spanked” (1993), Haynes’s remarkable thirty-minute map of his boyhood inner world, he depicted his spellbound self, sitting cross-legged in a bathrobe in front of the TV with a pad and colored pencils in hand. In the background, his parents contend sotto voce with his fixation. “I could feel my parents behind me, worrying about what this might mean, or worrying whether they should be worried, and I always felt defiant of their concerns,” he said.

Haynes was a kind of prodigy, who was lucky enough to have been born into a cultured and progressive extended family, presided over by his liberal-thinking maternal grandfather, Arnold Semler, “the Almighty Bompi,” as Haynes called him, and his charismatic, artistic wife, Blessing, with whom Haynes sometimes painted. Sherry, whose own ambitions were deferred until her later years, when she studied theatre with prominent teachers, including Salome Jens at the Stella Adler Studio, encouraged all her son’s art-making. Within the family, Haynes’s constant engagement with creativity turned him into a “child of God,” according to his father. (In “Dottie Gets Spanked,” the boy is depicted as a little king, complete with paper crown, ruling over his imaginative domain with his superpowers.) “We’d come home from a movie and my wife and I’d be fixing dinner, and he’d be sitting at the piano and playing one finger, one finger, one finger,” Allen told me. “Forty-five minutes later, we’d come in and he’d be playing the whole melody from the movie. Now, where that came from I don’t know. I mean, he was a little scary to me. I was awed by the multitalents that were part of his everyday being.”

When Haynes was seven, his grandfather, who had been the head of set construction at Warner Bros.—until the late forties, when the HUAC investigations and the blacklisting of his friends made the position untenable—arranged for him to meet his TV idol, Lucille Ball, and watch her rehearse. (That event became the erotically charged inciting incident of “Dottie Gets Spanked,” in which the boy sees the aloof, non-sense Ball preparing offscreen for a scene in which her ditzy, caterwauling alter ego is spanked by her husband.) In addition to taking Haynes to concerts, plays, and museums, his grandparents took him, at age nine, to New York and to Washington, D.C., and, at fourteen, to Asia. Their support extended into adulthood. Bompi invested more than a hundred thousand dollars in “Poison,” Haynes’s first feature.

In 1968, the seven-year-old Haynes appeared on “The Art Linkletter Show.” In response to the inevitable question “What do you want to be when you grow up?,” he replied, “An actor and an artist.” The same year, his parents took him to

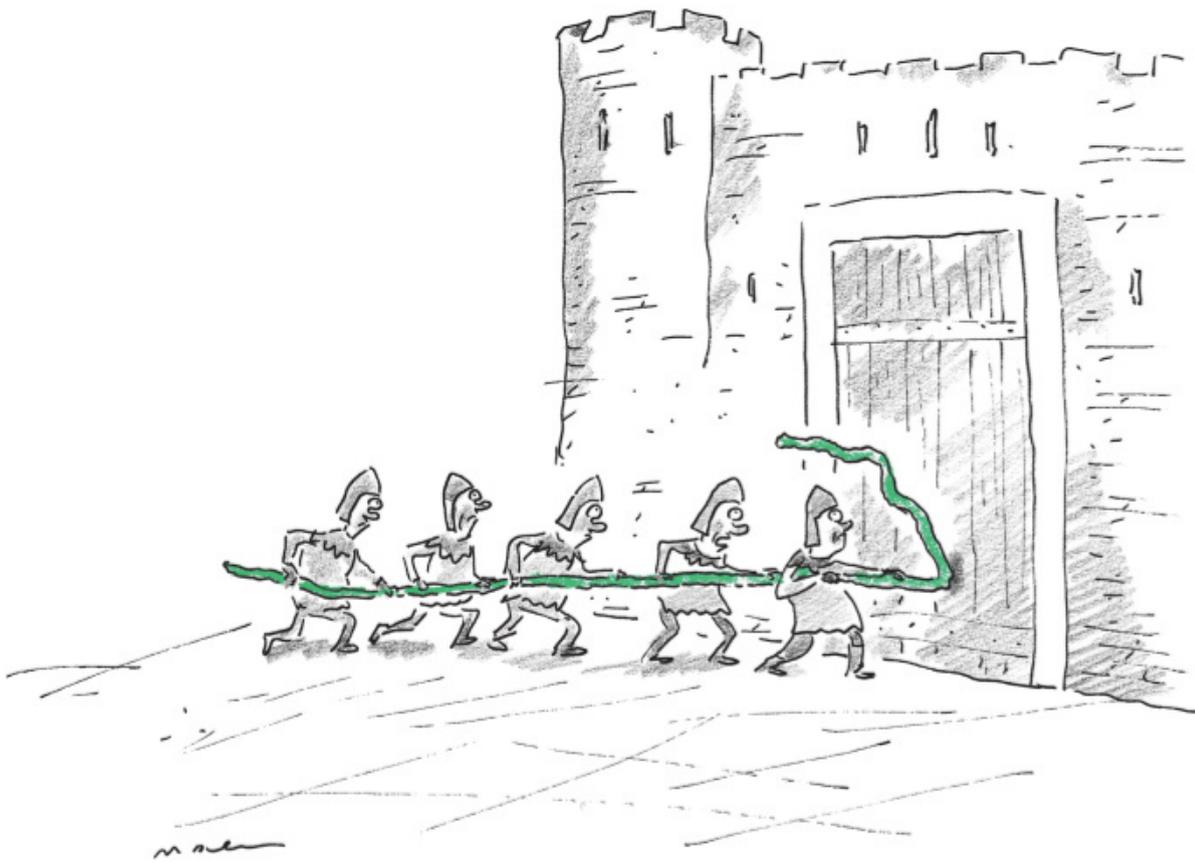
see Franco Zeffirelli’s film adaptation of “Romeo and Juliet.” It was a seismic experience that “absolutely changed my life,” Haynes said. At nine, he made his first movie: a fifteen-minute Super-8 version of “Romeo and Juliet” in which he played almost all the parts. “I made the tunics out of towels, tied a rope around the middle, got tights,” Haynes said. “My dad would run the camera, and hold the sword offscreen when I was playing Mercutio. And then we’d do the other side and I’d dress in Tybalt’s outfit.” Haynes drew the backdrop for the Capulet ball with crayons on a big piece of butcher paper. The Nurse was played by his six-year-old sister, Wendy, who also performed in the after-dinner plays that Haynes regularly conceived and staged. When Wendy was very young, he would drape a blanket over her bedroom table and light the space with a reading lamp, creating a mini-amphitheatre in which he acted out melodramatic tales with her toy horses. “She was my audience,” he said. “I remember just loving to make her cry.” Wendy Haynes, now a therapist as well as the lead singer of the glam-rock band Sophe Lux & the Mystic, was charmed by her brother’s mind. “Who was this creature?” she said. “What’s going

on in there? It wasn’t stopping. It was a train. It left the station when he was born. It’s a beautiful thing to see someone who knows his destiny.”

For a decade, Haynes attended weekend classes at Virginia Rothman’s Art School, in Studio City, and he used his art to make contact with the show-biz icons he adored. When he drew a picture of Diana Ross with six arms, according to his father, he managed to deliver it to her backstage at the Universal Amphitheatre. When he was in high school, his mother drove him to Joni Mitchell’s home in Bel Air so that he could give her his illustrations of some of her lyrics. “I knocked on the door, and a sort of Joni clone came to the door, in a bikini with long blond hair,” Haynes told me. “And she said, ‘Oh, that’s so sweet. Thank you. I’ll give them to her.’” The actress Elizabeth McGovern, who was Haynes’s best friend at the progressive Oakwood School, in North Hollywood, remembered him being indignant that Mitchell never responded. She added, “He had that sense of himself—to think that it was rude of her. He was just a high-school kid.”

“Eyes should be seen not hid” are the first words spoken in “Dottie Gets





*"Tell me our battering ram isn't a pipe cleaner."*

Spanked," and the phrase seems to hold a clue to Haynes's obsessive art-making. "I know that I enjoyed being seen—performing and putting on shows for the family, impressing people with my drawings and paintings," he said. "But there may have been something beyond that, where what I was really interested in was replaying my own pleasure in seeing: returning to that moment of seeing 'Mary Poppins' on film, seeing 'Romeo and Juliet.' The rapture was in the process of re-creating it, over and over." Other films, including "The Miracle Worker," "Anne of the Thousand Days," and, especially, "The Graduate," fed his excitement at how a lens could tell a story. "I remember feeling stimulated through my entire body. I would walk around looking at the world literally through frames," he said.

From the outset, Haynes was a sort of escape artist, compulsively immersing himself in art. But to escape *to* is also to escape *from*. Haynes was, in part, fleeing his parents' "absolutely terrifying" arguments, which left him in "a constant anxiety that the family unit was imperilled." One brouhaha spilled into Haynes's bedroom while he was asleep. "She was pulling her ring off, and she threw it into the yard from my upstairs window," he said. "I remember

them looking through the ivy the next day on hands and knees. Never found it." Sherry, whose public manner was genteel, "knew how to get what she wanted," Haynes said. Allen could be moody and had a temper. Haynes's relationship with his father as a child, he said, was sometimes "distant and competitive," but these days he refers to him as a "mensch." The transformative event was a nearly fatal aortic rupture that Allen suffered when he was in his forties and Haynes was in his twenties. For a month, Haynes and his brother, Sean, slept on the floor of their father's hospital room. "He wanted me there more than anybody. More than my mom—he wanted me there," Haynes said.

Haynes's immersion in art was also the result of a kind of apprehension of his own otherness, an undertow of estrangement that he felt long before he understood it. Sherry was a perfectionist, both in her personal style—"She always had perfect hair, perfect nails, perfect, perfect, perfect," McGovern recalled—and in the clean lines, white walls, and spotless, plastic-covered furniture of her home. "My mother would literally pour Clorox bleach on the kitchen tiles each night," Haynes said. He, on the other hand, "desired contamination. I wanted it." As a boy, he was

constantly drawing women: "I loved doing the lips and the eyelashes or the cleavage." When he badgered his father to buy him a new sketch pad, his father said, "I'll buy you a drawing pad if you draw men." "It was the most remarkable thing, because it was so clear and precise," Haynes said of his father's request. On another occasion, while playing Cinderella's Fairy Godmother in one of his after-dinner performances, Haynes made a limp-wristed gesture that earned him an immediate, unexpected rebuke. "They were, like, 'Don't do that!' I was, like, 'I'm playing the Fairy Godmother, you guys.' I was angry. I wasn't ashamed. It stirred up a kind of revolt in me," he said.

At Oakwood, which placed a strong emphasis on the arts, Haynes was a class star, and he and McGovern were inseparable. "He was my first experience of loving," she said. When they weren't staging their own performance pieces, they were acting in school productions. After school, at Haynes's house, they played theatre games, improvised sketches, rehearsed scenes from plays. "He was a work machine," McGovern said. "You'd never see Todd just hanging out. If he was sitting down, he was drawing or writing. Seven days a week. Every waking hour he was making something." In one of many poems he wrote for McGovern, he envisioned a joint future:

... I will be the  
Famous film director and you will be  
The actress. I will write scripts for you.  
Ingmar and Liv, she smiled. Someday,  
I said

McGovern often slept over in Haynes's room, but they were never together "in any remotely physical way," she said. "He had a fairly clear idea that he was attracted to boys, although not exclusively." Haynes's parents maintained "a fantasy for happy heterosexual closure" with McGovern, he said. He didn't come out to them until he was in college and in his first relationship with a man. "My dad assured me that it was all right with him," Haynes said. But his mother found the news hard to accept. "She freaked out," Wendy said. "She had a meltdown. She was concerned about what the world would think. She was concerned about him being hurt in the world. It shattered her dream." Later, however, according to Haynes, "she would

say that my being gay made her grow as a person and rethink the world.”

At Oakwood, Haynes’s intellectual “exceptionalism,” as he called it, was matched by his exceptional appearance—he kept his hair in a long blond mane. “He did look like a girl. Everybody thought he was a girl,” McGovern recalled. “It never bothered him.” Haynes’s androgynous look was the outward sign of his increasing ambivalence toward middle-class convention. “I always felt identification with the outcast, fragile, vulnerable people in the classroom,” he said. “I had an empathy for kids who had a harder time fitting in.” In a high-school-era letter to McGovern, Haynes spelled out his own sense of separation:

Sometimes my life is so desperately alone and full of sorrow. It sounds self-centered to say, so pretentious, but I feel so truly different from anyone I’ve met. Sometimes I can barely imagine seeing things the way people do. I do not feel better or worse than them, but apart.

In ninth and tenth grades, he made a twenty-two-minute film, titled “Suicide,” which depicted a similarly troubled outsider, Lenny, who is terrified of making the transition from junior high to high school. He is “enraged at the world for making him feel so afraid and subjugated and minimized, and uses his body to exorcise his rage,” Haynes said. The film grew out of a humanities assignment to write a hero myth. Haynes wrote the competing voices in Lenny’s head with different-colored pens. Lenny’s first words, written in red, were “I carefully and intricately began cutting myself into several pieces”—a prescient line for the incipient filmmaker. “The teachers were quite impressed with the method, the style, and the sort of Modernist construction” of the written piece, Haynes said, and he and a few friends decided to turn it into a Super-8 movie. The film crosscut scenes of Lenny stabbing himself with scissors in an all-white bathroom with scenes of schoolyard humiliation and maternal consolation. Lenny’s last voiced-over words are “Really hard to live.” Although Haynes maintains that “Suicide” wasn’t his story, some of its motifs have endured in his work: the montage structure and the idea of a derangement of identity as a form of liberation.

The movie looked good but didn’t sound good. Through connections to a

Hollywood producer, Haynes and his cohorts were able to get the sound remixed on a soundstage at the Samuel Goldwyn Studio. “We were the session booked after ‘The Last Waltz,’” Haynes said. “We brought our little Super-8 projector and synched up to a mixing board, with all our tracks of 35-mm. sound, the music, the effects, the dialogue. We did it in a real way. It was crazy.” When the movie was done, they staged an ersatz Hollywood premiere at a theatre in Westwood, with a limo hired by one boy’s parents. The experience, however, gave Haynes second thoughts about the template of studio filmmaking. “I kind of turned against that in my head,” he told me. “I said, ‘I don’t want to replicate that system. I want to make experimental films, and I want to do them alone.’”

When Haynes was in eleventh grade, his film teacher, Chris Adam, told him “that films shouldn’t be judged on how they conveyed reality, that films were not about reality,” Haynes said. Cinema was a trick, almost like Renaissance perspective: a two-dimensional event that represented three-dimensionality; it created the sense of direct, unmediated life, whereas, in fact, everything in it was mediated. The notion, Haynes said, was “a revelation to me.” He began to interrogate our “endless presumptions about realness and authenticity. It started to make me think about stylistic and formal changes and deviations.”

Haynes’s graduation project at Brown, in 1985, was “Assassins: A Film Concerning Rimbaud”—a forty-three-minute rambunctious mashup of artifice and anachronism, in which glimpses of the libertine lives of Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine are crosscut with scenes of the film’s construction, all set to the sounds of Iggy Pop and Throbbing Gristle. In voice-over at the end, Haynes reads the last line of Rimbaud’s “Morning of Drunkenness,” a salvo directed at bourgeois stability: “Now is the time for assassins.” The words are a kind of aesthetic battle cry against cinematic convention. “I was never going to crawl into the Hollywood world of feature filmmaking,” Haynes said.

The world of experimental filmmaking, however, was changing. In the wake of such groundbreaking works as Sally

Potter’s “Thriller” (1979) and David Lynch’s “Blue Velvet” (1986), narrative began to leach into experimental films, and experimental technique was leaching into narrative films. Haynes’s first major offering, which he produced in 1987, while he was in the M.F.A. program at Bard College, was the forty-three-minute “Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story” (co-written and co-produced with Cynthia Schneider, another friend from Brown). The film set out to tell a straightforward story of the singer’s life, tracing Carpenter’s trajectory from her early success to her slow death, of anorexia, at thirty-two—but dramatized it all with modified Barbie dolls. As Haynes wrote in the introduction to his screenplays, the question he was trying to answer through this radically artificial conceit was: What would happen “if the narrative gears subsumed by our identification were quietly revealed”? Would viewers’ “desire to identify even succumb to an ensemble of plastic”? Haynes made meticulous sets and props for his Lilliputian world, and structured his story using documentary tropes—talking heads, newsreel footage, performance clips, laxative ads. Of the first screening, Vachon wrote, “When it began, there were gasps and laughter from the audience, because it was so funny and perfect to have Karen Carpenter played by a Barbie doll. But at the end, when the doll turned around and half her face was gone, carved away by weight loss, it wasn’t so funny anymore, and some people burst into tears.”

“Superstar” was a success at the 1988 Toronto International Film Festival, and played at a few venues in New York, getting unexpectedly good notices in the *Village Voice* and *Artforum*. Another unexpected indicator of its impact was a cease-and-desist order served by Karen Carpenter’s brother and musical partner, Richard Carpenter, the estate of Karen Carpenter, and A&M Records. Haynes had failed to acquire the rights to the Carpenters’ songs. “My orientation was that of guerrilla filmmaking, where music rights were historically ignored, never assuming a film would have a commercial life of any sort,” he said. At first, he tried to deflect the demands, but the lawyers prevailed. In 1990, “Superstar” was ordered withdrawn from exhibition and all copies destroyed. Nonetheless,

bootleg copies still circulate; and in 2003 the film made it onto *Entertainment Weekly's* list of the Top 50 Cult Movies.

In 1988, Haynes, Vachon, and another college friend, Barry Ellsworth (who had collaborated on "Superstar"), set up their own company, Apparatus Productions, in New York. The goal, according to Vachon, was "to change people's perception that 'experimental' was synonymous with 'excruciating.'" In the late eighties and early nineties, the AIDS epidemic in New York was nearing its peak. "Our lives were so defined by that kind of death and fear," Vachon recalled. "It felt like we were constantly going to memorial services." Haynes became a founding member of Gran Fury, a group of artists who devised visual campaigns for ACT UP, and he was acutely aware, he said, "of how gay people with H.I.V. were being depicted by the media." He started to examine the cinematic tropes of other forms of "deviant" behavior—the outcast, the castigated, the criminal. He was trying to locate "the ways that our culture orients the insider and the outsider through our storytelling," he told me, adding, "These are not benign practices."

The result of this inquiry was "Poison," which Haynes co-edited with his

then lover Jim Lyons, who also acted in the film and later edited and co-wrote the story for Haynes's "Velvet Goldmine" (1998). A daring, irreverent triptych, "Poison" is organized into discrete segments—"Hero," "Horror," "Homo"—in each of which society rejects the main character and destroys his sense of belonging. "Hero," which is shot in faux-documentary style, tells the story of a troubled seven-year-old, who killed his father for abusing his mother, and then apparently flew out an open window. His escape plays as an ironic daydream of romantic transcendence, elevating him from the stigmatized to the sanctified. In "Horror," filmed in black-and-white, a scientist invents a sex-drive potion. When he drinks it himself, he becomes an incarnation of contagion, his skin mottled with oozing pustules, a walking embodiment of alienation who disgusts himself and others. Rejected, spat on, enraged, and enraging, he is hunted and finally cornered in his apartment, where he jumps to his death from a fire escape in front of a gawping crowd. "Homo," which is shot in color, reverses the angle on otherness. Drawing on Jean Genet's work, it depicts a lyrical, elliptical gay prison romance in

which transgression is embraced as a weapon against cultural convention, "the ink that gives the white page a meaning," as Genet wrote.

At the 1991 Sundance Film Festival, "Poison" beat out movies by Stephen Frears and Richard Linklater to win the Grand Jury Prize. "He has restored my faith in youth," John Waters said of Haynes, who at thirty became the poster boy for the budding queer-cinema movement. Haynes said, "The thing I dug about New Queer Cinema was being associated with films that were challenging narrative form and style as much as content. It wasn't enough to replace the boy-meets-girl-loses-girl-then-gets-girl with a boy-meets-boy version. The target was the affirmative form itself, which rewards an audience's expectations by telling us things work out in the end." He went on, "Queerness was, by definition, a critique of mainstream culture. It wasn't just a plea for a place at the table. It called into question the table itself."

Inevitably, a graphic rape depicted in the "Homo" chapter of "Poison," and a "gobbing scene"—a ritual humiliation in which prisoners spit into another inmate's open mouth—got the movie into political hot water. The Reverend Donald Wildmon, of the fundamentalist Christian group the American Family Association, brought it to the attention of some members of Congress, who then protested the twenty-five-thousand-dollar N.E.A. grant that had made it possible for Haynes to finish the film. Haynes found himself drawn into an ongoing congressional debate about government funding of the arts. He appeared on "Larry King Live" and other talk shows to defend himself and artists in general against the right-wing outcry over taxpayers' money being used to fund art that offended public sensibilities. A special screening of "Poison" was held in D.C. for senators and their spouses. An editorial in the *Washington Times* afterward declared Haynes "the Fellini of fellatio." "A proud moment!" Haynes said.

Despite his new acclaim and the fact that "Poison" turned a profit, it took Haynes four years to raise the million dollars he needed to make his next feature, "Safe." A restrained, masterly tale about a rich San Fernando Valley house-



*"I got this one in middle school."*

wife, the well-named Carol White (played by Julianne Moore), who finds herself allergic to her environment, “Safe” was Haynes’s attempt to take on the discourse of recovery. As a heroine, Carol is sensationally uncharismatic: thin-voiced, remote, desireless, a stranger to herself. Her identity is defined by the bourgeois perfection of her material world. Unlike traditional “disease movies,” which, under the guise of teaching about illness, as Haynes put it, “are really the story of people’s personal victories over the odds,” “Safe” provides no clear explanation for Carol’s malaise. Is it chemical? Biological? Psychosomatic? “I was coy, I was tricky,” Haynes said. “I wanted to touch that little bit in everyone where you just aren’t convinced that who you think you are is really who you are—that moment when you feel like a forgery.” “Safe” also refuses the moral certainty and the redemptive narrative resolution of the genre, which, according to Haynes, would have been “contingent on the central character coming to accept her illness, ‘finding herself.’” “There’s no achieving perfect health,” Haynes said. “There’s no resolving the conflict of desire and oppression. There’s no resolving the individual and the civilization.”

“One of the things that’s interesting to me about Todd is that he’s always examining our position within certain social structures,” Julianne Moore told me. “Is identity purely your own? Or is it something that you’ve assumed?” Carol ends up at a ramshackle New Mexican community of fellow-sufferers, who purvey the mantra of self-love. (The film does not explicitly address AIDS, but does wink at the New Age recovery language adopted in such books as Louise L. Hay’s 1988 “The AIDS Book: Creating a Positive Approach,” whose argument Haynes summarizes as “If you loved yourself more, you wouldn’t have gotten sick.”) At her birthday celebration, Carol, surprised by a cake, is asked to make a speech. In Haynes’s script, she is not only lost for words; she is entirely lost. Her sentences are a scaffolding that holds up a nonentity:

I don’t know what I’m saying, just . . . it’s true how much I . . . (she stumbles, her eyes filling unexpectedly) hated myself before I—came here, so I’m . . . trying to be more—aware . . . seeing myself more as I hopefully am. . . . More positive, like seeing the pluses—like I think it

slowly opens people’s minds, it’s like educating and AIDS and other types of disease—and this *is a disease*. . . . ‘Cause it’s out there. It’s just making people aware of it and even our own selves. I mean we have to be aware of it . . . reading labels . . . going into buildings. . . . (Carol stops, suddenly forgetting what she was saying.)

At the finale, Carol, cut off from all connection to the outside world, sits inhaling oxygen in her white, ceramic-tiled “safe room.” It’s a moment of almost lunar loneliness. She walks over to a mirror and stares into it. “I love you, I really love you,” she whispers. Then, a little louder, “I love you.” She waits in front of the mirror for something to happen, as if her words will somehow inflate her into being. “Nothing happens” is the last line of the script, before the film cuts to black. In that devastating moment, “Safe,” which won the *Village Voice*’s 1999 poll for the Best Film of the Decade, becomes a coruscating metaphor for the negative.

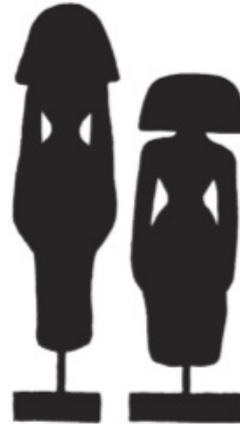
In “Safe,” the chaos is internal; in Haynes’s subsequent works, including “Far from Heaven,” “Mildred Pierce” (a 2011 HBO miniseries adaptation of James M. Cain’s novel), and “Carol,” the battle between social norms and repressed desires is filtered through the external tumult of the melodrama, a much criticized form that he has enthusiastically adapted to his own expressive needs. “We don’t live in Westerns, noirs, murder mysteries, and shit,” he said. “We live in families and we have relationships that come and go; we suffer under social constraints and have to make tough choices. And that’s really what all these stories are about.”

In “Far from Heaven,” Haynes put a semiotic shellac on his homage to Douglas Sirk’s rococo fifties domestic weepies, which featured lush, saturated color, claustrophobic décors, and attractive stars in gorgeous clothes speaking in vapid full sentences, who nonetheless played ordinary people struggling to be happy and stand up to society. “From the outset, I think it was about embracing this beautiful, almost naïve language of words, gestures, movements, and interactions that were totally prescribed and extremely limited—not condescending to it, but

allowing its simplicity to touch other feelings that you can’t be over-explicating,” Haynes told the *Village Voice*. In his meta-melodrama, the beautiful Cathy Whitaker (Julianne Moore, playing the flip side of Carol White) is living the Populuxe dream in Hartford, Connecticut. But her paradise is soon lost to the conflicting desires of those who inhabit it. Her husband, struggling in vain with his homosexuality, divorces her, and she falls for her African-American gardener only to see him forced out of town by bigotry.

“To me, the most amazing melodramas are the ones where, when a person makes a tiny step toward fulfilling a desire that their social role is built to discourage, they end up hurting everybody else. It’s like a chess game of pain, a ricochet effect where everybody gets hurt but there’s nobody to blame,” Haynes said. The pragmatic restaurateur Mildred Pierce (Kate Winslet, who earned an Emmy for her performance in the miniseries), for instance, wins wealth and social standing in the midst of the Great Depression by turning her domestic skills into a business, but it costs her her relationship with her daughter. Likewise, in “Carol,” an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith’s 1952 novel “The Price of Salt,” the suave Carol (Cate Blanchett), who is going through a difficult divorce, and the jejune Therese (Rooney Mara) act out a kind of Kabuki of normality, while the signs and signals of their attraction are being sent, received, and returned. In the aftermath of their connection, Therese loses her fiancé and Carol loses custody of her daughter.

Haynes calls his melodramas “assaults” in which “identity as a natural and stable property is the target.” By contrast, his music films celebrate the protean self. Haynes’s goal in the glam-rock fantasia “Velvet Goldmine” (1998) was to construct a “parallel universe in which the self-created fictions and high camp of glam rock become the raw material of a ‘Citizen Kane’ structure, in which no depiction of the ‘famous subject’ is unchallenged.” His Cubist interrogation of Bob Dylan, “I’m Not There” (2007), shows how Dylan turned the strategy



of shifting identities into what Haynes calls “a glorious life’s work.” A sort of patchwork of Dylan’s transformations, the movie has six actors playing different personae, including an extraordinary Academy Award-nominated performance by Cate Blanchett of Dylan’s tousled-hair sixties folk “ramblin’ man.”

Haynes hit upon the subject of Dylan’s shape-shifting as he himself was facing an identity crisis. “Velvet Goldmine” had been a critical and commercial disappointment. He had also been unmoored by the collapse of his long-term relationship with Jim Lyons and by other romantic tribulations. He was, he said, “bummed out and exhausted”: “I tried to take a break and paint and travel. I went to Hawaii alone and finished Proust. But I wasn’t very inspired.” Haynes’s Brooklyn apartment, on the outskirts of Williamsburg, was so seedy and messy that, in thirteen years, he never invited his parents to visit. By his own admission, he lived those years “mostly out of boxes,” in a room that he’d turned into a workspace, dominated by a flatbed editing machine. “By the end, there were rats,” he said.

In January, 2000, Haynes took a road trip to visit his sister in Portland, Oregon, where he planned to work on a script. As he drove west, he found himself craving Dylan’s music, which he hadn’t listened to seriously since he was a teen-ager. He was looking, he said, for “a great physical, emotional, and psychological change.” By the time he reached Portland, he was filled with the kind of excitement “that makes me want to make something,” he said. “I wrote ‘Far from Heaven’ in two weeks, started work on the Dylan movie, and by summer the landlord had taken over my apartment in Williamsburg.” Portland gave Haynes “a kick in the pants in every possible way,” and he began to envision a different life.

“I think Todd arrived in Portland at a good moment both for himself and for the town,” the novelist and screenwriter Jon Raymond, who worked with Haynes on the screenplay for “Mildred Pierce,” told me. “Portland was still a relatively undiscovered enclave, with a lot of good, bohemian energy.” In this laid-back world, where, according to Wendy, “everybody gets to let their freak fly”—signs

and bumper stickers proclaim “Keep Portland Weird”—Haynes blossomed. Although, for a long time, a portrait of him hung in Portland’s city hall, the low-key rhythm of the place allowed him some respite from the burden of acclaim. When Haynes arrived late to a huge Halloween party in 2002, he was refused entrance. “He was so delighted to be turned away,” Raymond said. “That would never have happened in New York.”

An old friend, the director Kelly Reichardt, was also living in Portland, and she and Raymond formed the collegial core of Haynes’s new creative life. “Just being friends with Todd is like being in a seminar sometimes,” Raymond said. (The two nicknamed him El Creador Seminal.) In 2002, when Haynes threw an Oscar party, he met his current partner, Bryan O’Keefe, then an aspiring writer. (He is now an archival producer on one of Haynes’s projects, a documentary about the Velvet Underground.) Portland’s other great gift to Haynes was to put him back in touch with nature and his own lightheartedness. Raymond remembers him “romping around the woods in a Bigfoot costume,” during a photo shoot on Mt. Hood, and “slathering himself with mud to scare his friends by some creek.” During the summer, Haynes swims in the Washougal River almost every day. He and Wendy often hike to Wahclella Falls, in the Columbia River Gorge. “You see the intellect fall away,” she said. “You see the creativity fall away. You see a peace come across him. He’s a very innocent human being on a lot of levels.”

Eventually, Haynes settled into a 1907 gray-blue Arts and Crafts cottage with boxed beams and dark-wood panelling; his furniture was salvaged from the set of “Far from Heaven,” which gives the place a cozy mid-century flavor. On the wall of his study, he keeps a gallimaufry of images—among them Dylan, Freud, David Bowie, his mother, and Brian Eno. Since 2005, he has shared the house with O’Keefe.

In 2010, Haynes’s mother, Sherry, choked on a cheese sandwich and couldn’t be revived. Within half an hour of her death, in Los Angeles, Haynes, who was in New York, had a stroke. “The whole thing was inexplicable. I had no real symptoms,” he said. (He later discovered that he had antiphospholipid syn-

drome, a hypercoagulable condition.) “The event was uncanny and frightening, but the loss of my mother is what survives,” he said. “He doesn’t like to talk about his losses,” O’Keefe said. “It’s not easy to know what’s going on with Todd emotionally a lot of the time. He is very careful about public display.”

At work, however, Haynes’s emotional radiance—what Raymond calls “the golden thing inside him that is untouchable and unvanquishable”—is palpable. There is no grandstanding: Ruffalo refers to him as “the consummate collaborator.” Fairness and equality are core values; in his mind, as Raymond put it, “we are all children together, we need to play fair, everyone deserves their turn.” On the set, Raymond added, “he creates environments where people don’t feel harmed. He’s very strict in his gentleness.”

Kate Winslet remembered that, while shooting “Mildred Pierce,” “his energy would never fail.” At one point, she added, “he had salmonella, and he just carried on working. We would do a take and he’d throw up. We would do another take, and he’d throw up again. He would sit in his chair, sweat for a bit, stand up, throw up again, and do another take. This lasted for four or five days. He was very, very unwell.” Winslet went on, “Then there was another day—oh, my fucking God. He had to have a dental surgeon come to the set and pull a tooth out. ‘Thank God, that’s out. O.K., let’s go!’”

On a stifling New York morning in mid-July, Haynes was sequestered in an editing room at a postproduction facility in Chelsea with his burly, bearded Brazilian film editor, Affonso Gonçalves, whom he affectionately calls Fonzi. They were down to the wire editing “Dark Waters” for an early test screening for the studio, Focus Features, and they worked away with the kind of steady intuitive understanding that’s usually reserved for a quarterback and his wide receiver. This was their fourth collaboration. Fonzi was hunched over the Avid console; Haynes sat on a sofa eight feet behind him, his production notes at his side, staring at a large monitor as they applied a fine filigree of rhythm and clarity to the scenes. The dizzying speed of the production schedule and the fact that

"Dark Waters" was Haynes's first film developed by a studio had him on edge.

They were tweaking a scene in which Bilott first tells his wife about DuPont's dumping drums full of toxic sludge into the Ohio River and the Chesapeake Bay which soon began to wash up onshore. "So DuPont starts digging ditches," Ruffalo's Bilott says. "Huge open pits on the grounds of the Washington Works plant. And, in those pits, they dumped thousands of tons of toxic CH sludge and dust."

"I don't know if this is gonna track, Fonzi, but try 'started digging ditches,'" Haynes said. "We're cutting out 'huge open pits.' It's not much, but try it."

Fonzi reran the scene with the few words scrubbed out. "He's emphasizing 'ditches' so much," Haynes said. "You could do 'so DuPont started digging huge, open pits on the grounds of their plant, Washington Works.' Try that." Haynes thought for a moment. "Maybe 'ditches' is better. He says 'pits' in the next sentence."

"Let me show you," Fonzi said, swivelling back to the console.

"No, no, the other's better."

"The way we just had it?" Fonzi said.

"Yeah, I think that'll work."

Fonzi reinstated the previous trim, then briefly left the room. "I have more fun with Fonzi than I ever do on set," Haynes said. He compared the intimacy of editing to the process of painting together. "You're producing results. You're problem-solving," he said. "You have to be surrendering all the time, letting go, looking at what you have in front of you, which is not what you imagined." Haynes, who is concurrently editing his documentary on the Velvet Underground and developing a twelve-part TV series on Sigmund Freud, has contrived to keep himself almost continually in that climate of surrender.

As part of their process, Fonzi first edits a version of the film without consulting Haynes. Meanwhile, Haynes assembles his detailed notes to form a sort of outline of the film as he sees it. "What's really interesting is that he and I find our own favorite takes separately, and they're often the same," Haynes said. Once the two are in the editing room, they start again from Scene 1. From then on, the collaboration is more or less a mind meld. "Are you feeling



*"Remember when this used to be an Italian restaurant, and we weren't people who knew what every storefront used to be?"*

what I'm feeling?" Haynes asked at one point. "Uh-huh, uh-huh," Fonzi said.

Haynes subscribes to Rainer Werner Fassbinder's contention that revolution belongs not on the screen but in the world. "To provide an audience with a solution—to give them the revolution—is to deprive them of creating their own," Haynes said. His films ask viewers to contend with ambiguity, which is part of their sly subversiveness. In "Dark Waters," Bilott is not only an unlikely hero. He's an unlikely messenger for one of Haynes's most deeply held Freudian convictions: "There is no resolving of conflict. The conflict is the process of life." Haynes considers the movie "a primer on how to live with as much knowledge and awareness as possible." He added, "There's no silver bullet, no magic solutions. There's no way to just end corporate greed and corruption. But there are steps to take, and we just have to keep taking them."

Bilott's struggle to take those steps was what Haynes and Fonzi were trying to punch up next, in a terrifying scene: after deposing DuPont's C.E.O., Bilott walks slowly through a brightly lit underground parking garage to get to his car—Haynes's homage to the Deep Throat garage scene in "All the Presi-

dent's Men." As the camera tracks Bilott through the concrete pillars, for a split second a stranger appears against the back wall. "I don't think Rob literally had death threats," Haynes said. "But he really did have that experience in the parking garage. Rob said that, once the *New York Times* article came out, in 2016, he knew that he would at least not be killed. The cat was out of the bag." On the screen, Bilott sits at the wheel of his car, looking around with dread in his eyes, as he cautiously inserts the key into the ignition and turns it.

"Stay in the same low angle of him, intercutting with the key," Haynes said. "Going to another angle then back to the first angle breaks the tension for me."

"I think the tricky part is where he's closing his eyes," Fonzi said. "Because once he closes his eyes it's done. I'm using an extra shot to stretch the moment, delaying that action."

Haynes's cell phone flashed with a "Breaking News" alert, and Haynes, a news junkie, couldn't resist peeking at it. "The E.P.A. will not ban a widely used pesticide associated with developmental disabilities in children and other health problems," he read. "There you go!" He tossed his phone on the sofa and got back to work. ♦

# The Flier

JOSEPH O'NEILL

The whole business led my wife to suggest a conference with our dear friends Pam and Becky, who were discreet and worldly and kind. She wrote them:

Hey wonderful people! Can we drag you over for dinner Wednesday? Short notice—but there's something we'd like to talk over with you.

I prepared the meal—cucumber soup, grilled chicken breast, and a lentil-and-scallion salad. Cooking had been Viki's thing, not mine, but I'd been stuck at home for months and the kitchen had become a place of recreation. Also, my relationship with my body had changed.

Pam and Becky arrived on the dot, at seven. My illness had made me very small and very light, and they embraced me gently. "He looks so young," Becky said to Viki. "Where's Molly?"

Our daughter, Molly, aged five, was spending the evening with Viki's sister, Maya. Maya and Molly didn't know what was going on. Nobody knew, not even my physician.

I poured everyone a drink—purified water, in my case—and without further ado Viki announced, "Something strange has happened." This was planned. Viki is an inarguably sane and well-balanced person with no history of hoaxing or chain-yanking. She is the perfect person to break unfathomable news. It's not that I've ever been the class clown, but my physical weakness had for some reason lessened my authority. "This is all super-sensitive and confidential," Viki said.

"Uh-oh," Becky said.

"If we're going to have a top-secret discussion, I'm going to sit down," Pam said.

We joined her at the table. My wife said, "I don't know how else to put this." She moved her hand in my direction. "He's developed the ability to fly."

Our friends fell into a silence of incomprehension and alarm—as if we'd announced a religious conversion. Then Pam did a short laugh and said, "Fly how?"

"As in fly like a bird," Viki said. "Fly."

"Bird," I said, "is maybe taking it too far."

"I don't get it," Becky said.

At Viki's signal, I fetched my laptop. Everyone turned toward the screen. I played the nine-second clip that Viki had filmed with her phone.

"Let's see that again," Pam said.

We all watched it twice more. Both times it showed the same thing: me levitating in that very room and then sort of scooting from the kitchen to the windows of our eleventh-floor apartment with my arms defensively stretched out ahead of me. I reach up with one hand and touch the ceiling. The clip ends.

Pam said, "It's so, it's so—lifelike."

Becky said, "You know what it reminds me of? Mary Poppins."

They didn't believe, or understand, their eyes. Again, we had anticipated this. Viki gave me a little kiss of encouragement, because she knew that I was about to do something I found loathsome and embarrassing.

I pushed off with my toes and floated over to the aforementioned windows. It was a clear February night. Through the panes you saw the purposeless, dominating brilliance of the skyscrapers of New York.

When I came down, our guests were looking at each other with horror. Becky's hands covered her mouth.

Viki said, "We can't explain it, either. We can only think that it's connected to his illness." She said, "Are we ready for some soup?"

The soup went down well. We learned about Becky and Pam's trip to Maine, and Viki reciprocated with an update about Molly and her adventures in kindergarten. There had been issues with a boy named Andy, but Andy was now socializing more successfully.

This exchange did not involve me speaking or being spoken to. When I say that Pam and Becky were our dear friends, I really mean that they were Viki's dear friends. They were attached to me because I was attached to Viki.

I brought out the lentil salad. Becky picked up her fork, then abruptly stood up. "This is too much for me right now," she said. "I'm so sorry."

As our guests made their way out, Pam took Viki to one side and said, "He's going to need insurance. I'll e-mail you."

My volatility had become apparent three weeks earlier. On an errand to buy hydrogen peroxide to clean the bathroom grout, I sprang over a pool of melted snow—and rocketed

to the far sidewalk, passing in front of a car that was making a turn from York Avenue. I nearly got somebody killed. I immediately returned home, treading very slowly and very softly. After I'd sat down for a while, trying to calm myself, I decided to take an experimental little leap. I hit the ceiling.

The next two days I spent mostly in bed, too consternated to move. Luckily my presence was nowhere expected. Eventually I convinced myself that I'd experienced a powerful hallucination—a side effect of the medication I was taking, no doubt—and I decided to step out and complete my mission of buying grout cleaner. To be on the safe side, I first hopped on one foot. I took off.

There was no way around it: I'd undergone a transition, or translation. I wasn't dreaming—although it so happened that in my dreams I never flew. I didn't say anything to Viki right away. The relevant confession took place only the following week, after I'd spent some time familiarizing myself with certain parameters of my new state (getting airborne; hovering; landing). My kind of aerial motion felt like sideways falling: it was scary, slightly nauseating, and unpleasant, even after I'd worked out that, by a simple but mysterious exercise of volition, I could adjust my speed and elevation. It always felt unnatural and lonely to be up in the air.

One evening, when Molly was asleep, I overcame my dread and my shame, and I sat Viki down and tried to relate what had happened to me. Of course, it took a physical demonstration to bring the facts home to her. Language alone could not effectively represent a state of affairs contradicted by physics, biology, and the history of reality. Neither of us knew what to do about it, in the sense of how to cure me. There was no discussion of what use, if any, to make of my new potentiality. "I think we should talk it over with someone," Viki said. "Maybe Pam and Becky." All in all, it was extraordinary how quickly my wife adapted. I'd say that within ten minutes of hearing, or seeing, my epochal news she was asking me what else had happened that day.

"I'm finally done," I told her, referring to a project that had been plaguing me. I produced communications



*"I think what he'd like from you is a pledge to help fund his new nonprofit."*

materials for a financial group. I'd foolishly got involved in drafting the annual report, which wasn't something you could just wing, given the legal framework. Being away from the office, on account of my undiagnosable ailment, hadn't made it any easier. The substance of the job was handling various stupidities, my own included.

I was at that time a stupidist, and probably still am. Stupidism is the theory that people are stupid in the measure of their most powerful agency. They're stupid precisely when we need them not to be stupid. Much as I didn't want to be a stupidist—it's dispiriting, for starters—I recognized that it im-

proved my grasp on things. Whereas I used to listen with great respect to what the Treasury Secretary or the C.E.O. of a booming conglomerate or even your regular talking head had to say, now I presumed that they were full of it. It was revelatory. The world makes a lot more sense when you accept that it's run by dingbats. And once you've recognized the nature of stupidity—that it expresses a relation between a person and that person's situation; that it describes the gap between what ought to be understood and done and what is, in fact, understood and done—you begin to recognize the magnitude of the problem. Stupidity isn't inevitable

or constant, of course, but in the long run it almost always prevails. Alan Greenspan? Stupid, ultimately. Barack Obama? Not as smart as he needed to be, at the end of the day. Joe Schmo? Amazingly stupid.

The subject had a very personal relevance. There was something downright stupid about a flying human being. I felt, above all, stupid.

With this organizing principle in my mind—not to be stupid—I followed up on Pam's suggestion about insurance. She put me on to a friend of hers, Naomi Patel, who had one of those cute little offices in the Empire State Building. Naomi, according to Pam, specialized in boutique perils. I made an appointment. Viki said doubtfully, "I guess that makes sense."

It was my first excursion since that fateful near-miss on York Avenue. Viki, who had left work early, held my hand as we walked to and from the taxi. She did this in order to keep me anchored to the ground as well as to convey love.

Naomi Patel was our age—late-ish thirties—and had a very reassuring and competent manner. Her office was on the seventy-sixth floor and offered a view of a silvery and gleaming Hudson River and a silvery and gleaming New York Harbor. I cleaned my glasses to get a better look, because it was that order of spectacle—the order that reminds you of words like "argentine" and "numinous."

She listened conscientiously, making notes on a yellow pad. When I'd finished, she put down her pen and removed her glasses and said, to Viki, "Have I understood this correctly? Your husband"—a little ironically, it seemed to me, she checked her notes—"has the power of flight?"

"Um, yes," Viki said. She was making the face that we'd agreed she would make, namely, a face signalling to the insurance broker that she should humor the eccentric husband. We didn't want the broker to believe that I was truly an aeronaut.

Naomi Patel said, "That is unusual." She continued, "I've handled a lot of dangerous activities—skydiving, wingsuit flying, really far-out stuff—but never this. Huh."

She reflected for a moment, calcu-

lating whether my case would produce a commission and how much work it would involve. You could practically see her brow and mouth creasing into plus and minus and equals signs. Or she was thinking how best to get me out of her office. She said decisively, "You need to think of yourself as a car, or a helicopter. You're going to need protection against accidental damage to yourself—it's called A. D. & D., and covers death or dismemberment—and you need liability insurance, in case you cause loss to others. The tricky piece is assessing the risk. We're going to have to give the underwriters some guidance." She swivelled to her keyboard. "I'm sending you the application form."

It seems that nothing can proceed, at a certain point in life, without filling out a form—without boring a new hole in one's small bowl of time.

That's O.K. The older I get, the greater grows my respect for the underground deeds that make our lives persistently functional. Nobody told me, growing up, that in addition to a regular career one must embrace a secret administrative vocation. I can hardly believe that for years I lived in a fantastical world in which I gave no thought to ventilation solutions, health-provision networks, wood conditioner, bylaws, credit scores, automatic-payment dates, storage space, and propane.

When we got home, I ate some chocolate-peanut-butter ice cream, for the calories, then made use of the bathroom, then retreated to bed in order to fill out the insurance questionnaire. Viki and Molly were in the living room, cutting paper with tiny yellow scissors.

Please describe the activity for which you seek insurance coverage, specifying the scope of the activity, including frequency, locations, safety measures. State any relevant experience or qualifications.

The assumption, here, was that I would zip around of my own free will. But why on earth would I do that? Who knew how long I could stay aloft? What about the wind, rain, lightning, radiation, and cold? What would I wear? What about my glasses? What about drones and aircraft and wind turbines and electrical wires and chimneys and miscellaneous poles? Any siz-

able city would be a death trap, basically. As for the countryside, everyone out there was locked and loaded. Anything that moved in the sky they shot. They gunned down ducks and turkeys by the million. I'd have to fly at night, like an owl. No: I needed insurance only for involuntary or emergency flights. Who knew what lay ahead? I might fall out of an airplane. I might find myself caught in a fire or fleeing rising waters. Even then, even in extremis, I would fly only as a last resort. There were systems in place. The parachute had been invented. We had fire exits and flood alerts and evacuation plans. We had disaster preparedness. The great fray, in the real world, wasn't good versus evil. It was perils versus protocols.

From the bedroom doorway I said, "Hey, Molly. What would you do if you could fly?"

Molly stayed focussed on her work. Even a five-year-old could see that the question was absurd. She said, "I would fly to pasta."

I said, "What else?" I was convinced that she knew something that I could not know.

"I would fly to you," Molly said, to her mother.

A day or two later, there was a meeting at the office. The purpose of the meeting was to review the draft annual report. My bodily presence was required, and the C.C.O. himself was also going to be there. I was excited. It had been a long time since I'd gone in. I got dressed up. My one belt, I dis-



covered, was now too long for me, and like a teen-ager I had to punch an extra hole in the strap to accommodate the prong. Viki said, "Why don't you put on your blue sweater? It makes you look taller. I can't explain it, it makes you taller."

The meeting went well. "I have no idea what 'agile feedback loops' means,"

the C.C.O. said. "I like it." Everyone laughed. I waited for somebody to credit me with the phrase, but no one did. In fact, and I guess to my relief, I wasn't mentioned or called on at all.

Afterward I accompanied Valerie Acevedo and Alexis Chen, who were workplace buddies and funny, to the smoking balcony. I didn't smoke, but to hightail it home right after the meeting would risk giving the wrong impression. This balcony was on the thirty-second floor and had snow on it. The daylight was fading. Across the street, a lustrous tower was filled with white-shirted workers.

"What this place needs," Alexis said, vaping, "is Acapulco chairs."

"Which ones are they?" Valerie said.

"You know—with the bouncy vinyl cords. They're made for the outdoors. Hence 'Acapulco.'"

I started laughing. "Wait—'Hence Acapulco?'"

Alexis continued, "Well, how did last night go?"

"Fun. Good," Valerie said evenly.

Alexis made a listening noise.

Valerie, suddenly inspired, said, "It's like I'm like a restaurant. Like he liked me like he'd like a restaurant. Like, 'That was cool. I should come here again.'"

Alexis said quickly, "The osso buco was excellent."

They both laughed and drew on their e-cigarettes. I made a proximate sound, but quietly. I didn't feel like a party to the conversation; I felt merely privy to it. It surprised me that they were talking about this stuff, because I thought a masculine presence would be inhibitive. Maybe corporate-banter norms had changed in my absence.

Alexis said, "And?"

Valerie said, "Yeah, it was sweet. He was kind of . . . focussed on the details. On trend. What's that word? Artisanal."

Alexis said, "Yeah, the craft-brewer thing. Expert but traditional. I'm on the fence."

Valerie waited a beat, like an actual comedian, then said, very dryly, "Still, it's been a while since I saw penis." The two women laughed explosively.

It was at this moment that I did something stupid. I put my weight on my heels and, from my position next

to them, rose about three feet off the floor and floated backward into the building. I watched them for a moment. They were talking and vaping as before. They had failed to notice—I say this in all objectivity—one of the most wondrous occurrences in the history of humankind.

When I got home, Pam was sitting at the table. She had not removed her coat. Viki was on the sofa with Molly, fixing her up with headphones and an iPad. That wasn't normally permitted on weekdays. Something was up.

I decided to make green tea.

I overheard Pam telling Viki that Becky had physically attacked her; that it wasn't the first time this had happened; that on this occasion Pam had felt in mortal danger. "I'm scared she's going to come by here," she said.

"This is terrible," Viki said. She was wringing her hands, which wasn't like her. But the situation was unusually vexing. Her primary allegiance was to Becky, not to Pam. Viki had known Pam only since the moment, about five years before, when she had surfaced as Becky's first girlfriend. Viki's friendship with Becky went back to their undergrad days at Boston College, where they belonged to a Thomas Aquinas study group whose members had stayed in touch, more or less, ever since—"the old theology gang," Viki called them.

The first time I met Viki, I asked her what theology was, exactly. She answered that it was the study of the nature of the divine. She must have known that this was a very, very hot thing to say, particularly to someone like me, an atheist and a desperado. When I asked if she believed in God, she murmured, also hotly, "Would that I did." For years the subject didn't come up again. Then, one night, when I was beset by anguish at my deformation, I confided to Viki in the darkness of our bedroom that I felt overwhelmingly confused. "I just don't understand it," I said.

There was a pause. From out of the dark her voice said, "The ultimate end of man is to understand God, in some fashion."

"I'm sorry?"

The Viki voice whispered, "All things

## AUBADE

All night, my psyche comforts itself  
with you. It delights in watching your body

travel through landscapes so lush even the bidet  
is painted with twisting gouache flowers.

They frame a lady who rides an elephant,  
while a gentleman stands holding up a lotus

toward her saddle. Then we are in a city, climbing  
up a brownstone into the home of people you love.

I step behind you, smiling quietly into our bodies'  
clement warmth. Except, instead of the usual deflecting

skirt, in my dream I've dressed you in mildly tailored  
pants. Next, we are in a building, in a bazaar, in

a city inhabited by people subtle and endless  
shades of a dark cinnamon. We walk through

room after room, then stop when we come  
across two leather chairs with frames

exist in order to attain the divine likeness."

A third voice sounded: Molly had woken up with a shout of fear. We heard the rapidly thumping approach of a panicked little sprinter. The door crashed open, and then she was in bed with us, and then she was asleep in the space between her mother and father.

Pam wasn't part of the old theology gang. Pam was out of Peru, New York. When Becky had begun furtively dating her, she had referred to her as the Peruvian. Becky had always been straight, and Viki and I thought the Peruvian was a dude from the Andes. It was quite the thunderbolt when we were introduced to a woman, somewhat older and beefier than any of us, who worked as a purchasing manager in Long Island City. We liked Pam right away. She was warm and lively and had all these stories about hunting ghosts on Valcour Island and making out with Vermont girls on the banks of the Ausable River. In all honesty, we soon preferred her company to Becky's, not that anyone was making comparisons.

And yet, even if Pam was more fun, she was more detachable. It would have been easier for Viki if it had been Pam,

not Becky, who was the one doing the beating up.

I served Viki and Pam the green tea. I don't know why, but it bothered me that Pam hadn't removed her coat. It added to the disturbance.

Pam related that she'd started a breakup discussion—not for the first time—and Becky had flown into a rage. She started throwing things, including a glass paperweight that if it had hit Pam on the head would have brained her.

I had been in Pam and Becky's apartment many times. It was full of tchotchkes. If you wanted to throw things, there was no shortage of ammunition.

"Oh, my God," Viki said.

"She went to look for my gun," Pam said. "She knows I keep it in one of the shoeboxes. She had this look on her face. She wanted to stop me from leaving. I ran out before she could get me."

"Oh, my God," Viki said.

Pam showed us her phone. There were twenty-seven missed calls from Becky.

I was in the kitchen, throwing together some dinner. "You can get a restraining order," I said. "There are things that can be done."

carved from mangrove and mahogany.  
The goatskin is dyed so red the color sprints

back and forth across that thin, thin line  
between very elegant and exquisitely tacky.

We take both. Caramel and beige,  
we are the whitest things around.

The shopkeepers greet us with a fondness  
and familiarity that is also historical apology.

But we look back through our bodies completely  
pleased by what—for millennia—the cell has seen

and done—and sustained. Something between us  
refuses pity, because, of all the ancient masks

hanging from these walls, we are  
the only two still walking and talking.

—Robin Coste Lewis

Pam seemed not to hear. Viki was looking at Molly. Molly, still wearing headphones, was grinning and squirming as she interacted with her iPad.

The buzzer sounded.

Viki said, “Are we expecting a delivery?”

That was my province—online grocery shopping. “No,” I said.

Nobody moved. We listened.

The buzzer sounded again.

“It’s her,” Pam said. “I’m telling you, it’s her.”

I turned off the gas flame and put a lid on the saucepan. I wiped my hands with a dishcloth. Dinner was pretty much ready. The kale had been steamed and the chickpeas and onions had been sautéed.

“That’s strange,” Viki said, peering at the intercom video. “I don’t see anyone.”

I went over to see for myself. Nobody was visible at the entrance.

Viki said, “She might be inside already. Someone might have let her in.”

Our building had no doorman. In order to enter, a visitor had to be buzzed through two doors. However, if the

visit coincided with a person exiting the building, often the doors would be held open as a courtesy. This didn’t mean that the visitor could go right up, however, because the elevator was controlled by the host.

The intercom screen went dark, which was to be expected.

I said, “Look, it might not be her.” It happened sometimes—an impatient food-delivery guy buzzing multiple apartments.

Viki said, “She just texted me.”

Bring me up? In the elevator.

Our front door has two locks. I turned them both.

Viki said, “Let me talk to her.”

I got out three plates and served the food.

Viki made the call from the bedroom. We didn’t speak, Pam and I. I thought about putting an arm around her, but was deterred by the bulk of her coat. She didn’t touch her food.

Viki came out of the bedroom. She sat down at the table. Her face was exhausted or something. She said slowly, “She won’t leave. ‘I want to talk to her,’ she keeps saying, in this weird calm

voice. ‘I have a right to talk to her.’ She sounds off. She sounds really off.”

“Maybe we’re jumping to conclusions here,” I said.

“That stupid gun,” Pam said. “I’m scared, Vik.”

Viki said to nobody in particular, “She wanted to be a missionary. In college. You know—go to Africa. Convert everyone.”

Pam started crying. She displayed her phone: the calls were still coming.

I didn’t know if Pam’s assessment of the threat was reliable or not, but I did know that very specific situations are associated with murder and mayhem, and that a breakup is one such situation. I said, “There’s no way out of the building except through the lobby. We’re going to have to call the cops.”

“No,” Pam said, her face in her hands. “They’ll shoot her. No.”

I was filling my mouth with kale when I noticed that Pam was pointing a finger at me. “You,” she said. “You could do something. You know what I’m talking about.”

Viki was contemplating me with a strange expression. “Yes,” she said. “Yes. I forgot all about that. My God, yes.”

I took a sip of green tea. The important thing was not to do anything dumb.

As I was deliberating, as I was trying to determine exactly how an uninsured aerial intervention would help matters, I was blindsided by a feeling that I can describe only as a powerful sense of arrival—as if all my life I had been trekking, in a series of unconscious gradations and unconscious turns, on an imperceptible road that finally, at this exact moment, had delivered me to a new place and a new dimension of action.

Slowly, I stood up. I went to a window and opened it. Bright, enigmatic apartments were everywhere. As the cold entered the room, I turned toward the two women so that they could behold my face. I spread my arms as if they were wings. I rose into the air. “Tell me what I should do,” I said, and their visages filled with awe and dread.

Viki’s sister, Maya, is in the habit of dropping by without warning. In mitigation, she has a recognizable, superfluously insistent way of buzzing that functions as a heads-up. I was

still aloft by the window, my back to the flaming skyscrapers, when her specific buzz sounded. Viki immediately said, “Maya?”

I glided to the intercom. There she was, humorously blowing a cloud of breath and cigarette smoke into the door camera. Before I could react, she was looking through the glass front doors and waving at someone inside. That person had to be Becky, whom Maya had known for years. Maya was let into the building.

Viki said with sudden conviction, “Maya will handle her.”

I knew Maya to be a good-hearted if somewhat erratic person. She had a history of eccentric and disastrous sales ventures that she ran out of her basement apartment in the East Village. She owned a harp that she couldn’t play. She had opinions about yogurts and blue algae and the energies of rooms. It was all a bit silly, to my mind, but it was Maya who had astonishingly observed to Viki, “There’s something different about him. I don’t know what it is. But his energy has definitely changed.”

Who am I to scoff at extrasensory perception? Who am I to rule out the idea of a supernature? It was precisely Maya’s heightened atmospheric instincts that led her to detect (she later reported) a “funky aura” about Becky that night. Maya stated that she’d long had this funny feeling about Becky, who was “always sort of shrinking herself for no reason” and for this reason had to be “bottling up a lot of negativity and anger.” When she saw Becky loitering in the lobby, she knew straightaway that something was very wrong. “It was her ponytail,” Maya said. “It was so neat and vicious. She’s, like, ‘What a coincidence, I just got here,’ and in my head I’m, like, Learn how to lie, lady.”

Maya and Becky entered the elevator. They stood inside the brushed-steel box for a minute or two. “I guess they’re not in,” Maya suggested.

“Oh, they’re in,” Becky said. “Pam told me to come. They’re just not letting us up for some reason. I’m worried. I think there might be an emergency. I called them earlier, but got no response. We have to find a way up there.”

Maya said, “I’m going to text them.

If we don’t hear back quickly, I’ll start to worry.” They left the elevator and sat down on the lobby bench.

Maya’s text to Viki read:

Call 911. I’ve got this.

How did Maya understand the situation so swiftly and so correctly, without any of the facts? How did she see through Becky and her plausible story? How could she have been so smart?

Viki always does as her big sister says. She called 911.

About six minutes later, the red and white lights of squad cars were flashing in the street. Maya opened the door to twelve cops from the Nineteenth Precinct. They identified Becky and arrested her on the spot, evidently a compulsory procedure in domestic-violence cases. Becky went very quietly, like a little lamb, Maya said, just as Maya had figured she would.

Two of the cops, a woman and a man, came up with Maya. We all sat down. Maya said, “You found a weapon on her, right? I sensed a weapon.”

“I’ll come to that,” the woman police officer said.

Later it became known that Maya was right. Becky had been carrying Pam’s gun.

The woman police officer separately interviewed Viki and Pam and Maya. There was a lot of paperwork; everything was methodically written down. I wasn’t asked to make a statement. I hung out with Molly, who was interested in what was going on and kept trying to remove her headphones. The woman police officer explained to Pam what her options were, and recommended a “safety plan.” Pam said, “She’s dangerous. I want to emphasize that she’s dangerous. I don’t want to see her again.” The woman police officer repeated to Pam what remedies were available to her and what systems were in place to protect her. She gave Pam three brochures, which Viki and I leafed through, because our friend was in no state to retain information. The N.Y.P.D., I read, annually processes more than two hundred thousand domestic-violence calls. Pam, coat and all, went to hug the woman police officer. The officer accepted this with professionalism. She had been trained to handle hugs, too.

The thing that struck me was how orderly these cops were. It made me feel hopeful.

It was agreed that Pam would spend the night in a hotel a couple of blocks away and that Viki would walk her there. Maya went home.

Amazingly, Molly was still awake. She sat on the living-room floor surrounded by animal figurines and other objects. The big cats, her favorites, were arranged in a long line. There was a group of unicorns. There were green soldiers and there were glass beads and there were bears and there was at least one crocodile. A dinosaur, massively bigger than the other toys, lay on its side. Molly has very white skin and dark-brown hair. She was murmuring as she manipulated the creatures, and I tried in vain, from my chair, to make out what the creatures were saying to one another. Some kind of drama of cooperation seemed to be taking place. There was an imaginary obstacle, a crevasse or a river, and the animals were helping one another across. Then a battle started. A soldier battled a shark, who battled a unicorn, who defeated the shark, who reattacked. When the white tiger was imperilled by the lynx, some turtles and sheep flew to the tiger’s aid. One by one the combatants were downed, then picked up and revived by a girl’s giant hand. Would that, Molly seemed to be repeating. Would that.

She yawned.

“Let’s go to bed,” I said. I took her hand. “It’ll all be here in the morning.”

This was nearly two thousand mornings ago. Within weeks, I lost the power to fly, if that’s what the power was. My theory is that I regained weight and became too heavy, but who knows. I never again discussed this strange chapter with anyone, not even with Viki, and increasingly I find myself unsure that it happened. The video clip of my airborne self has been lost. But I have my confirmation. Molly’s toys are stored in a box under her bed, where they can easily be found. Once or twice a year she’ll wistfully resurrect them, the white tiger and his gang, and I see with my own eyes that there was once a flier. ♦

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Joseph O’Neill on the burdens of superpowers.

# THE CRITICS



BOOKS

## THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA

*The rise and fall of a literary reputation.*

BY ROBERT GOTTLIEB

A trick question: Can you name the only three writers who have won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction twice? Faulkner, yes; Updike. And? Hats off if you came up with Booth Tarkington. And yet his two prize-winners—“The Magnificent Ambersons” and “Alice Adams,” just reissued in one volume by the Library of America—are not even

the most commercially successful novels of his extraordinarily successful career. Nine of his books were ranked among the top ten sellers of their year (up there, pre-Stephen King, with Zane Grey and Mary Roberts Rinehart), and the outlandishly dissimilar “The Turmoil” and “Seventeen” were the No. 1 sellers in consecutive years. And then

there’s “Penrod,” probably the most beloved boys’ book since Tom and Huck, though I can’t recommend a stroll down that particular memory lane.

There are thirty or so novels, countless short stories and serials, a string of hit plays. And there were countless honors: Tarkington was not only commercial but *literary*—not just the Pulitzers

*In 1922, the writer Booth Tarkington appeared on the Times’ list of the twelve greatest American men.*

but in 1933 the gold medal for fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which Edith Wharton and William Dean Howells had won previously. As early as 1922, the *Times* had placed him twelfth (and the only writer) on a list of the twelve greatest contemporary American men. “Yes, I got in as last on the *Times* list,” Tarkington commented. “What darn silliness! You can demonstrate who are the 10 *fattest* people in a country and who are the 27 tallest . . . but you can’t say who are the 10 greatest with any more authority than you can say who are the 13 damndest fools.”

As for booksellers, in 1921 they voted him the most significant contemporary American writer. (Wharton came in second. Robert Frost? Thirteenth. Theodore Dreiser? Fourteenth. Eugene O’Neill? Twenty-sixth.) Nothing ever changes. Some forty years earlier, a comparable poll ranked E. P. Roe and Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth at Nos. 1 and 2, with scores of votes each. At the bottom of the list—with two votes—came Herman Melville.

How to explain this remarkable career—the meteoric ascent to fame, the

impregnable reputation over several decades, and then the pronounced plunge into obscurity? If you read all his fiction (which I strongly advise not attempting), you find a steady if uninspired hand at the helm. Slowly, painstakingly, Tarkington had taught himself to write reliable prose and construct appealing fictions; he was unpretentious—always literate but never showy. You could count on him to catch your interest even if he failed to grip your imagination or your heart. And he was always a gentleman.

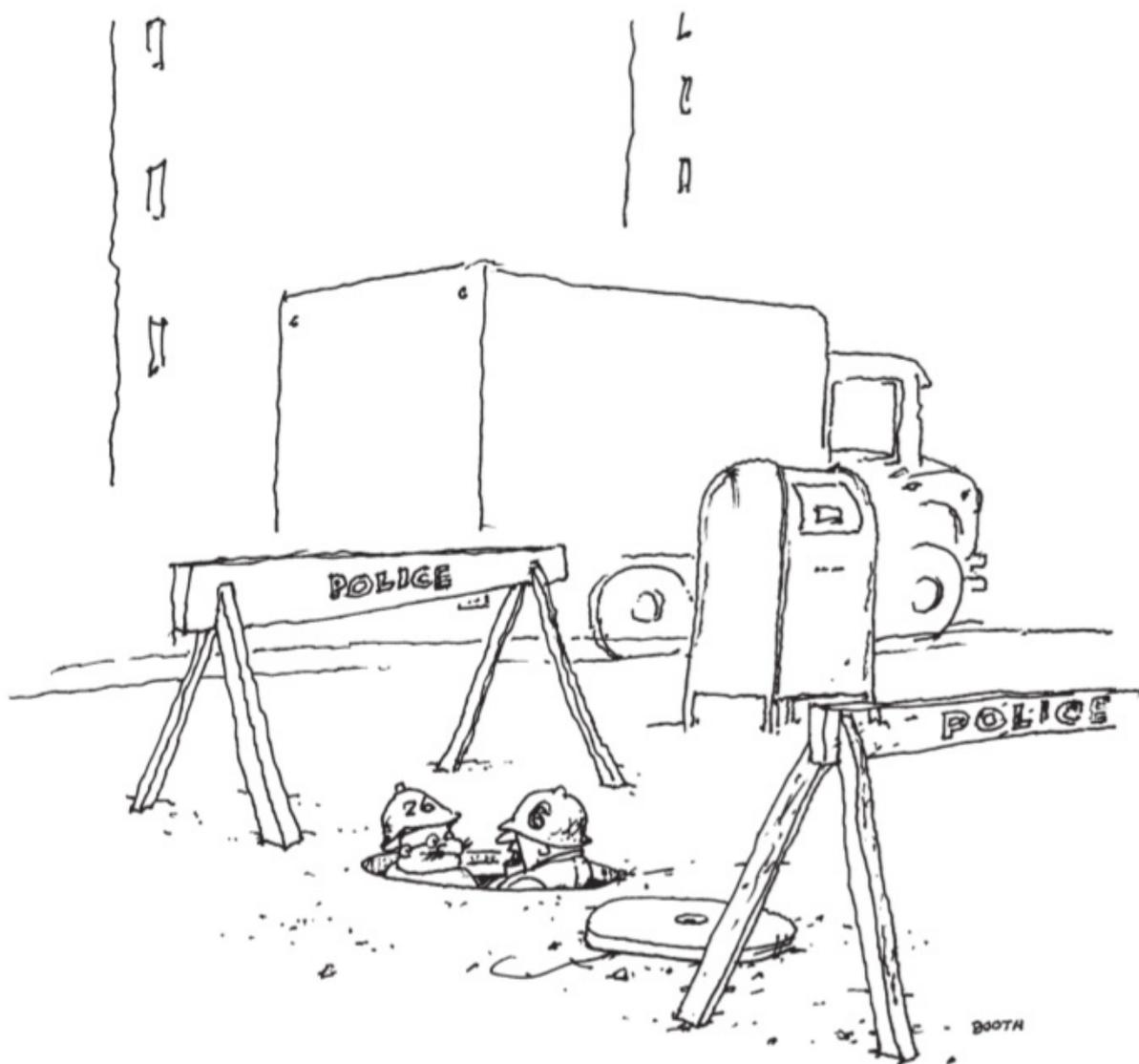
Newton Booth Tarkington was born in Indianapolis in 1869, his father a prosperous lawyer. But it was his mother who was the dominant figure in the family—she and her brother, Newton Booth, a flourishing merchant who became the governor of California and then a United States senator. Another powerful figure in the family was Tarkington’s sister, Hauté, a decade his senior and a force of nature.

A superficially conventional Midwestern family, the Tarkingtons didn’t always behave conventionally. When young Booth, halfway through high

school, was discovered to have been playing truant for nine weeks, his parents didn’t remonstrate or punish, they simply shipped him East to the Phillips Exeter Academy. Back in Indianapolis, he had been a fairly successful student, unathletic and bookish but also boyish and well liked. (He was always well liked.) He was fussed over at home by his adoring mother and sister, and he was at ease with family friends like President Benjamin Harrison and James Whitcomb Riley—“the Hoosier Poet”—who was an encouraging presence in his life. (Riley had once paid court to Hauté.) It was a comfortable world.

Booth thrived at Phillips Exeter, where the young men (he was eighteen when he arrived there) were more or less on their own. According to his biographer James Woodress, “Tarkington fancied himself a gay blade during his senior year, but his notions of devilry stopped at practical jokes, loud clothes, incessant smoking, and occasional champagne suppers. He was shocked by the sexual license of some of his classmates.” To a friend back home, he wrote, “What a hot-bed of foulness and muck! Portsmouth houses are full of them every night—Boston ones, every holiday.” Indiana, Woodress points out, “was not more saintly than the East in 1889, but to Tarkington and his friends in Indianapolis brothels existed only in books.”

He thrived yet again when he moved on to Indiana’s Purdue University, in pursuit of a young woman who happened to live in Lafayette. But his mother was determined that he go to Princeton, and there he went after a year at Purdue, despite his sense that it was time for him to start *doing* something. At Princeton, he more than thrived, he blossomed. He was an editor for three university publications; he was a star—writing, directing, and acting—of the Dramatic Association, which turned into the famous Triangle Club; he was an outstanding soloist in the touring Princeton glee club (famous for his rendition of Kipling’s “Danny Deever” set to music). He was also a prize orator; he was dashing off derivative verse and sketches; and he was forever drawing—he thought he might find a career in art. And he was



*“I would give anything for a bubble bath right now!”*

more or less the most popular man on campus, obviously special yet one of the boys. Everyone liked him because there was nothing not to like, and because he was so gregarious, so generous, and so much fun. No wonder that years later he wrote about these college years, "It never rained! It was always sunshine—then!"

By the time he left Princeton, he had determined to become a writer, and thanks to a modest bequest from Uncle Newton he was able to spend most of the next four or five years living comfortably at home and more or less paying his own way. As always, he was formidably industrious—churning out stories and drawings and launching them to potential venues. They came hurtling back as quickly as he could send them off. This apprenticeship went on and on with little encouragement except from the family, while neighbors and friends made it clear they thought he was loafing.

The family, however, remained staunch, and it was sister Hauté who masterminded the eventual breakthrough. In 1898, on a trip to New York, she took with her (without his knowledge) a manuscript of a short novel he had written—a historical romance called "Monsieur Beaucaire"—and an introduction to the magazine and book publisher S. S. McClure. In his memoirs, Tarkington recounts what happened. Hauté left off the manuscript at the publisher's office, and when she returned to hear the verdict she encountered one of McClure's colleagues:

"Did he read it?" my sister asked.

"Well—no," the associate admitted. "I read it."

"You did?" my sister asked. "Didn't you think the poetic quotations at the heads of chapters quite good?"

"Oh, very," he told her, for he wished to be as kind as he could. "The poetic quotations were excellent."

"There aren't any," she said. "Where's Mr. McClure?"

McClure appeared, agreed to read "Beaucaire" himself, hesitated over it, but, when Hauté mentioned that her brother was just finishing a long novel set in Indiana, asked to see that one, too. Booth sent off the manuscript, and two weeks later received a letter from the esteemed writer and literary ad-

viser Hamlin Garland. "Mr. McClure has given me your manuscript, *The Gentleman from Indiana*, to read," it began. "You are a novelist." "I couldn't imagine anybody's saying such a thing," Tarkington would write years later. He always recalled Garland's letter as the thing "that changed everything for me." He was just short of thirty years old.

Summoned by McClure to New York to reduce his novel sufficiently to make it practical for serialization, Tarkington was suddenly immersed in the literary/publishing world, meeting celebrities (Kipling, for one), being touted by the hyperbolic McClure to America's foremost muckraking journalist, Ida Tarbell: "This is to be the most famous young man in America." (Reporting to his parents, he wrote, "I felt like a large gray Ass!—and looked like it.")

"The Gentleman from Indiana" was published in late 1899, and was an instant success. "Monsieur Beaucaire" followed soon after (and equally successfully), and the contrast between the two books can stand for the two veins of Tarkington's early career as a novelist. "The Gentleman," despite its somewhat melodramatic plot about a crusading young journalist triumphing over vicious opposition in a small town, is an early venture into descriptive realism. "Beaucaire"—written at the height of the fashion for historical romance—is a clever pastiche of eighteenth-century derring-do: "The Duke's mouth foamed over with chaotic revilement." (Surprise! Beaucaire, posing as a barber, is in reality the prince Louis-Philippe de Valois, Duke of Orléans! He will be the only character ever to be played on the screen by both Rudolph Valentino and Bob Hope.)

Then, in 1902, everything happens at once. A new novel, "The Two Van-revels," is published—another historical romance and another best-seller. Two friends and partners are in love with the same girl, there's a big fire, one of the young men is shot by the girl's father, there's the Mexican-American War of 1846, there's a genial old "negro" and a robust older woman full of wisdom—in other words, there's plot, plot, plot, although Tarkington, a passionate admirer of Howells and Henry James, has already grasped that

plot is not the road to distinguished fiction. He can't help himself, though; he's conditioned by the plays he keeps turning out—plays that required either comic plots or melodramatic plots.

Somehow he finds himself (without campaigning) a candidate for the Indiana state legislature, and (barely campaigning) wins the seat: politics run in the family. More important, he finds himself a married man. There have been several misfires, but now he woos and wins Louisa Fletcher, the daughter of an Indianapolis banking family, a graduate of Smith College, and ten years his junior.

Although he's morbidly terrified of public speaking ("I would as soon be sent to jail as to have to make a speech"), he's active in the legislature, enthusiastically supporting a proposed law legalizing Sunday baseball. It lost by one vote, undone by what Woodress calls a "barrage of pulpit oratory," and wouldn't be enacted for half a dozen years.

The most significant result of his time as a legislator was a group of six well-observed and convincing political stories that were published in 1905, in a collection called "In the Arena" (generously included in the new Library of America volume). These stories attracted a great deal of attention, including a summons to the White House from President Theodore Roosevelt. At lunch, Tarkington wrote to his father, the President made "a long & generally favorable comment" about the stories. ("Of course, I just sat & purred—too pleased to eat.")

In 1903, Tarkington fell desperately ill with typhoid fever. To help him recover, his doctor prescribed "the healthiest place in the United States," Kennebunkport, Maine—a prescription that would change his life. Eventually, he would spend half of every year there.

Meanwhile, to further his recuperation, he set out for Europe on an extended version of the Grand Tour. For eleven months, he and Louisa—together with his parents!—explored the Continent, particularly attracted to Paris, Capri, and Rome, where he could indulge himself in his lifelong passion for acquiring paintings and objets d'art. One consequence of this marathon of travel was the stream of letters he composed (and illustrated) for Hauté's three

boys back in Indiana. Published as “Your Amiable Uncle” in 1949, three years after his death, the letters reveal him at his most winning, jocular and loving, especially when he’s tormenting the nephews with descriptions of the Christmas gifts they will soon be receiving: “We have bought you each a lovely, calfbound hymnal. You will be *mad* with joy,” and embroideries with mottoes like “Home, Sweet Home,” “Virtue Is Its Own Reward,” and “Honor Thy Uncle.”

A less happy aspect of this time abroad was what Woodress tactfully refers to as “marital storm warnings.” Eleven months spent with her formidable mother-in-law cannot have been amusing for young and fun-loving Louisa, and the prospect of returning to the Indianapolis of her close-knit in-laws—especially the daunting Hauté—clearly did not appeal. The Tarkingtons took up residence in New York, where Booth relished his immersion in the literary scene. New York, of course, was also the heart of the American theatre world, and in the years to come he was more engaged in writing plays than novels. In fact, he loved *everything* about the theatre—casting, rehearsing, directing, costuming.

Perhaps Louisa didn’t. In 1905, the Tarkingtons returned to Europe, where their only child, Laurel, was born early the following year in Rome. They then moved to Paris, eventually taking a long lease on an apartment near the Luxembourg Gardens. And there they settled.

Even so, the marriage deteriorated further, until in 1911, after some initial bitterness, an amicable divorce was granted. During these years, his mother had died, his father had quickly remarried, and he and his frequent collaborator, Harry Leon Wilson, had enjoyed a record-breaking triumph with the play “The Man from Home,” which ran for five years—in Chicago, in New York, and on tour—earning him a substantial fortune. (In one season, he had four plays running.) He also, however, had to face the fact that he had become an alcoholic. He had always drunk (and eaten) copiously, but after surviving a heart attack early in 1912 “I suddenly decided I preferred to die sober.” Knowing that he had to stop drinking, he just stopped. He put him-

self to bed for well over a week, and when he emerged he was through drinking forever.

Helping him to this resolution was the encouragement of a woman he had met years earlier and whom he now married. Susanah Robinson was a mature woman who had had some business success and was well equipped to create a cushioned environment in which her writer husband could flourish. She had no difficulties with his overprotective and interfering family, or with smoothly running the Tarkington homes in Indianapolis and Maine. In other words, she was every writer’s dream of a wife/nurse/manager/mother. The couple were blissfully happy from first to last.

Susanah was also the one who suggested that he write stories for boys: thus Penrod, Tarkington’s most famous (and lucrative) creation. A likable rascal, he’s always getting into trouble—disrupting the school pageant, eating himself sick at the county fair, driving his big sister and her beau crazy, sparking the Great Tar Fight. From the moment the first of the Penrod stories appeared, in 1913, they were overwhelmingly popular, and when the first batch was published in book form it was a big best-seller, and went on selling into the thirties and forties.

The material was close at hand—not only in Tarkington’s memories of his own happy boyhood but in the exploits of his three nephews as he lovingly observed them. He was paid thousands of dollars for each story as it appeared: the grand house that he and Susanah built in Kennebunkport was often fondly referred to as “the house that Penrod built.” Tarkington also enjoyed the countless letters he received as whole classrooms across the country were assigned to write to him. His favorite: “Teacher told us we must each write you a letter and she will send the best one. Well, how are you? Yours truly.”

The naïve charm and the fun of the Penrod stories are still palpable, but they are ruined for us today by the argot that spills from the mouths of the two African-American brothers who are pals of Penrod and the other boys who play in the back yards and alleyways and sheds behind the white boys’ homes.

The names of the brothers, I’m afraid, are Herman and Verman, and although they are on terms of total equality with the other boys, their language sounds like the worst kind of vaudeville black-face impersonation. (“I guess I uz dess *talkin’* whens I said ‘at! Reckon he thought I meant it, f’m de way he tuck an’ run. Hiyi! Reckon he thought ole Herman bad man! No, suh, I uz dess *talkin’*, ‘cause I nev’ would cut *nobody!* I ain’t tryin’ git in no jail—*no, suh!*”) Verman, it should be noted, has a severe speech impediment, and Herman lacks a forefinger because one day he idly held out his hand and said to his brother, “Verman, chop ‘er off,” so Verman chopped it off. How ironic all this is, given that from the start of his career Tarkington was singled out and praised for his affectionate interest in, and sympathy for, what he carefully called “Negroes.” No matter: this material is utterly unbearable today.

The gently comic carryings on of youngsters would be a constant vein in Tarkington’s fiction throughout the rest of his career, not only in two later Penrod collections but most spectacularly in “Seventeen,” centered on a Penrod-like seventeen-year-old named Willie Baxter, who falls hard for a visiting belle from out of town—the ultrafeminine Lola Pratt, with her maddening baby talk and adorable little dog, Flopit. Here is love-struck adolescence in all its embarrassing self-consciousness, and its tremendous sale made “Seventeen” the best-selling fiction of 1916.

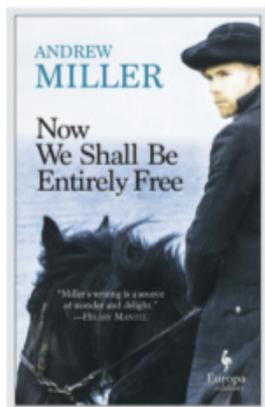
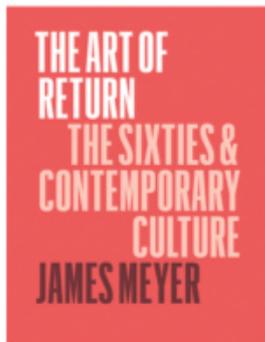
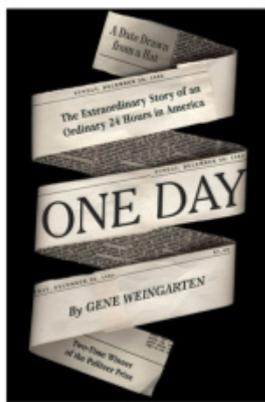
Sensible and appealing boys and girls as well as bratty younger brothers and sisters populate Tarkington’s later books, often stealing center stage from the purported leading characters. Tragically, his own child, Laurel, never a stable personality, grew increasingly disturbed as she got older. Her condition, diagnosed as dementia praecox (schizophrenia), worsened and she became violent, until one day in 1923 she threw herself from a second-floor window. She survived the fall but died of the pneumonia that followed—at the age of seventeen.

“Penrod” and “Seventeen” were collections of popular sketches masquerading as novels. Tarkington’s first serious novel—written as he was approaching fifty—was “The Tur-

moil" (1915). Ambitious and often impressive, it was greeted in some quarters as a candidate for that elusive grail the Great American Novel. For the first time, Tarkington addresses head on his major preoccupation, the relentless transformation of American small-town life (seen through rose-tinted glasses) into the ferocious and ugly world of Progress, dominated by ruthless businessmen who are supplanting the "best" families (like his own). The old stable town is lost to uncontrollable growth; the horse is replaced by the automobile; and omnipresent coal dust settles over, and soils, everything. The great mansions crumble and are replaced by squalid (to Tarkington) boarding houses, apartment buildings, "machine-shops." The well-to-do are forced to move farther away from the center of things.

In "The Turmoil," the irrepressible entrepreneur James Sheridan sees his two older sons destroyed by his ambition, his daughter lost to an unfortunate marriage, and his youngest son, the sensitive, poetic, and bizarrely named Bibbs, compelled to abandon the literary life for which he is suited in order to learn the family business and sacrifice himself by turning into a benign version of his father. An obligatory romance between Bibbs and a young woman from a First Family now so financially diminished that they even have to sell her piano (!) is no more convincing than any other Tarkington romance. What *is* convincing, beyond his consistently fine rendering of the details of time and place, is a new understanding and sympathy for his central characters, as father and son struggle to come to terms with who they are and what they have made of themselves and of each other. This is the first Tarkington novel to acknowledge and respect the fact that human beings not only have roles to play in a story but have developing inner lives.

The Sheridans of "The Turmoil" are interlopers. "The Magnificent Ambersons," which followed in 1918, approaches the same phenomenon of a changing society from a different point of view—that of a great family that not only has seen better days but has been routed by the forces of progress. The novel is suffused with nostalgia, but it



## BRIEFLY NOTED

**One Day**, by Gene Weingarten (*Blue Rider*). This absorbing snapshot of America draws on more than five hundred interviews about a randomly chosen day in 1986, a quiet Sunday just after Christmas. A nursing student goes in for a heart transplant; two fishing buddies survive a helicopter crash; a girl defies her religious mother to play Nintendo. Weingarten relates these events, and the stumbles and joys of dozens of other people, with compassion and humor. He finds that experiences of thirty-three years ago have shaped our lived reality today, and reflects that "we are more connected—to one another, and perhaps even to any single point in time—than we know."

**The Art of Return**, by James Meyer (*Chicago*). Blending criticism, memoir, and theory, the author explores the enduring influence of the sixties on art today. Analyzing works such as An-My Lê's photos of Vietnam military reenactments, Kerry James Marshall's enigmatic elegies to slain heroes of the civil-rights movement, and reimagined works by more than one artist of Robert Smithson's evanescent earthworks, Meyer notes the tendency both to interrogate the dreamy impulses of the "good Sixties"—"the last period of world revolution"—and to reflect the entropy, trauma, and war of the "bad Sixties." Many of the artists here, and Meyer himself, feel that they just missed out on something big: as children in the sixties, they were "imprinted with the imagery of a momentous period they barely glimpsed."

**Now We Shall Be Entirely Free**, by Andrew Miller (*Europa*). Escaping the Napoleonic Wars, the protagonist of this novel, an English captain named John Lacroix, adopts an assumed name and heads for Scotland. But he is followed by agents of the British Army, which is seeking someone to punish for a massacre of civilians in Spain. Miller acutely imagines the war-scarred psychology of his characters—Lacroix sees confusion in his soldiers' faces, "as though they were searching for what they might trust in"—and uses the historical setting to great advantage, as when Lacroix stops to admire a row of gas lamps: "The future, he decided, would be well lit. Light would be a moral force." Moments later, he is mugged under those very lights.

**The Next Loves**, by Stéphane Bouquet, translated from the French by Lindsay Turner (*Nightboat*). In a flâneur-esque mode reminiscent of Jacques Prévert and Frank O'Hara, this poetry collection traces the ebb and flow of intimacy in contemporary gay life. Bouquet's effervescent intellect lends a philosophical air to urban strolling and digital scrolling; hookup apps and YouTube catalyze meditations on time's indifference to human affairs, and even solitude is erotically charged. But the book's vitality is underpinned with grief: for Bouquet, the freedom and possibility of queer desire are tinged with isolation and with vulnerability to intolerance. Asked by a lover, "Why, for real, do you/do poetry?," he answers, "In fact it's very simple: it's because we must steal constantly/from absence."

understands that the Ambersons have reaped what they sowed.

Its central character, George Minifer—the grandson of the most magnificent of the Ambersons—is a thoroughly dislikable boy and young man: selfish, indulged, unkind. Only after he has cruelly destroyed the possible happiness of his adoring mother while the family fortunes are melting away does he begin to find redemption, in hard labor and newly assumed responsibility. Does this happen far too neatly? Unquestionably. But George is the most fully realized of Tarkington's characters to date, and the warped dynamics of the Amberson family are relentlessly exposed.

Our view of this deeply considered novel can't help but be conditioned by the fame of the film that Orson Welles made of it, in 1942—the follow-up to “Citizen Kane.” Notoriously disfigured by RKO before its release, the movie is nevertheless remarkably true to both the spirit and the text of the novel. (I'm sorry to have to acknowledge that I'm not as enamored of the heavy-handed Wellesian cinematic vocabulary as so many others are.)

In “Alice Adams” (1921), Tarkington actually succeeded in creating a complex and convincing adult character, as he charts the tragicomic failure of a young woman to penetrate the city's social upper crust. Her originality and quick mind and spirit are almost enough to get her there through a romance with a suitable young man—almost, but not quite. Her family's pretensions to gentility, exposed at a nightmare dinner party held to impress her beau, lead to disaster, and, at the end of the novel, Alice, facing reality, is seen mounting the steps to a dreaded secretarial school—a very different kind of heroine from the generally insipid or idealized Tarkington leading lady.

Alice has enough self-knowledge to make her not merely an effective heroine but a really interesting one, although if you know Katharine Hepburn's performance as Alice—to my mind, her finest work—it's hard to disentangle what she accomplished from

what Tarkington did. Hepburn, in fact, with her brash charm and unyielding determination, can be thought of as an Alice Adams who prevailed. (In the movie version, Fred MacMurray, defying plausibility, comes back to the rescue, so that clever, forceful Alice, who undoubtedly would have gone on to become a successful businesswoman, will not have to go to work.)

“Alice Adams” is by far Tarkington's most accomplished novel—worthy of being compared to Wharton's “The House of Mirth.” And he knew what he had written, describing it as “my most actual & ‘life-like’ work . . . about as humorous as tuberculosis.” But its unsentimental realism must have frightened him: it stands as the high-water mark of his career, before he slowly backs off to more comfortable scenarios.

The year before “Alice Adams,” 1920, was the year of “Main Street,” the crucial turning point in Sinclair Lewis's enormous career—one that immediately put Tarkington in the shade. “Babbitt” followed, and then “Arrowsmith,” in 1925, an annus mirabilis. That was the year of Hemingway's “In Our Time”; Dos Passos's “Manhattan Transfer”; Cather's “The Professor's House”; Dreiser's “An American Tragedy”; Fitzgerald's “The Great Gatsby”—to say nothing of Gertrude Stein's “The Making of Americans” and Anita Loos's “Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.” And Faulkner's first novel, “Soldiers' Pay,” was coming off the presses. Neither in that year nor in any year to come did Tarkington write anything remotely of their consequence. But remember: back in 1900, when he was publishing “Monsieur Beaucaire,” Dreiser—that other writer (but not gentleman) from Indiana—was publishing “Sister Carrie.”

Meanwhile, after this watershed moment, Tarkington went on writing novel after novel, series after series, story after story: a quarter of a century of fluent and polished work. Several of the novels are especially engaging: “The Plutocrat,” in which a crass but enthusiastic Midwestern millionaire sweeps through the Mediterra-

nean world like a benign Roman conqueror, and “Kate Fennigate,” the life of a superbly confident woman who overreaches in helping her husband fulfill his potential; but even these two novels are an unmistakable retreat from what he had achieved at his best. His work, most of it running in magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal*, was received with respect if not seriousness. And he always retained his readership—a best-seller until the very end. The harsh reality, though, is that the candidate for the Great American Novelist had dwindled into America's most distinguished hack.

His life, however, remained comfortable and satisfying, except for a terrible period in his sixties after his eyesight gave way and he had to undergo a series of five operations before it was more or less restored. During that time, he was totally blind for five months. But even the calamity of blindness did not keep him from writing—the only thing he not only knew how to do but *needed* to do. He had found the ideal secretary in a close friend, Betty Trotter, and he dictated at least eight hundred words a day to her, as well as dealing through her with his always teeming correspondence. Betty became part of the Tarkington household—already a household of women. Not only Susanah but Susanah's difficult sister lived with him. So there were now three women at home devoting themselves to him.

Through these later years, he never relaxed his interest in public affairs, although his politics were hardly consistent. He was an ardent internationalist, as passionate about the creation of the United Nations after the Second World War as he had been earlier about the League of Nations. He was an outspoken crusader for Roosevelt's crucial and embattled Lend-Lease policy in the face of Midwestern isolationism. And yet he loathed Roosevelt and the New Deal. It was a family joke. He had trained his beloved poodle, Figaro, to participate in the following dialogue at dinner:

Booth: Are you a miserable sinner?

Figaro: A low whine.

Booth: ARE YOU A MISERABLE SINNER?



Figaro: A louder whine.

Booth: Did you vote for Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

Figaro: A contrite groan.

Booth: Do you repent of your sin?

Figaro: A howl of misery.

Booth: Amen.

At which Figaro would be rewarded with the dog biscuit he knew was coming.

Tarkington's conservative politics were echoed in his attitude toward art, of which he was by now a substantial collector, especially of eighteenth-century English portraits: Reynolds, Gainsborough, Lawrence, Romney. His experiences acquiring these works led to one of his most entertaining later books, a series of stories called "Rumbin Galleries," about a roguish but honest art dealer. (There's also, of course, the diffident, well-bred young assistant who, like all such Tarkington heroes, addresses all older men as "Sir" and is so shy of the sparkling young woman who is his colleague in the gallery that he can barely bring himself to address her at all.)

Unfortunately, Tarkington's views on art begin seeping into his novels, where he is relentlessly scornful of anything "modern"—he had fought a (losing) battle to keep a Picasso out of the Indianapolis art institute, of which he was a trustee. In book after book, modern art and modern music are dragged into the story as an excuse to air these crotchety views. We are, however, offered an alternative to the lure of the modern in a short novel called "Young Mrs. Greeley." Young Mr. G. is on the fast track at work and Mrs. G. has to learn the hard way, and almost too late, that it's not enough to be very pretty and charmingly dressed. You have to know more than what she's learned in cheap magazines to fit in with the cultured atmosphere at a dinner party where the big boss's gracious wife says to you things like "I'll show you those missals my husband spoke of having collected . . . and those old loose sheets of Gregorian chants."

Tarkington even manages to slip his anti-modern-art crusade into his particularly puerile novel about Maine, "Mary's Neck." The nice, conventional—and rich—Midwestern Masseys come East for a vacation and try to figure out the social hierarchy of the



*"My gun's in the shop. Let's establish a dialogue."*

snobbish summer colony. Not only are they exposed to some slick, pretentious "artists" on the make but they come to know and appreciate local "characters" with names like Zebias Flick and Ananias Prinsh Sweetmus, who specialize in monologues crammed with Maine ruminations: "Once the goodness gits gone out o' fertilizer, why, the best you can say for it is it ain't hardly got no goodness left in it." There are pages and pages of this.

What was it, finally, that kept so capable a writer as Tarkington from producing so little of real substance? Yes, he lacked the fierceness and conviction of a Dreiser or a Lewis; his talent was descriptive rather than penetrating; and he was almost pathologically nonconfrontational. But ultimately what stands between him and any large achievement is his deeply rooted, unappeasable need to look longingly backward, an impulse that goes beyond nostalgia. He tries conscientiously to identify benefits that can be ascribed to the march of progress, but what he registers and mourns is the loss of tradition and civility. He also tries to celebrate the virtues of emotional maturity, but where he re-

ally wants to live is in his boyhood, with all its harmless escapades under the protective eye of a benevolent mother.

If he could not transcend these limitations in his art, he managed to live his life joyously within them. To the last, he was the most popular man on campus. In 1983, his grandniece Susanah Mayberry published a loving yet clear-eyed memoir of him called "My Amiable Uncle." (Her father, John, was the oldest of the "Your Amiable Uncle" nephews.) From her we get a convincing sense of his never-failing humor and tolerance, his joie de vivre. And of the effect he had on the people around him.

Her father, she tells us, once said, "We have so much fun with Uncle Booth that we forget he's a famous man."

On the day after Uncle Booth died, another of the nephews said, "This is the first day I can remember when I didn't think after I woke up, 'I wonder whether I'll get to see Uncle Booth today.'"

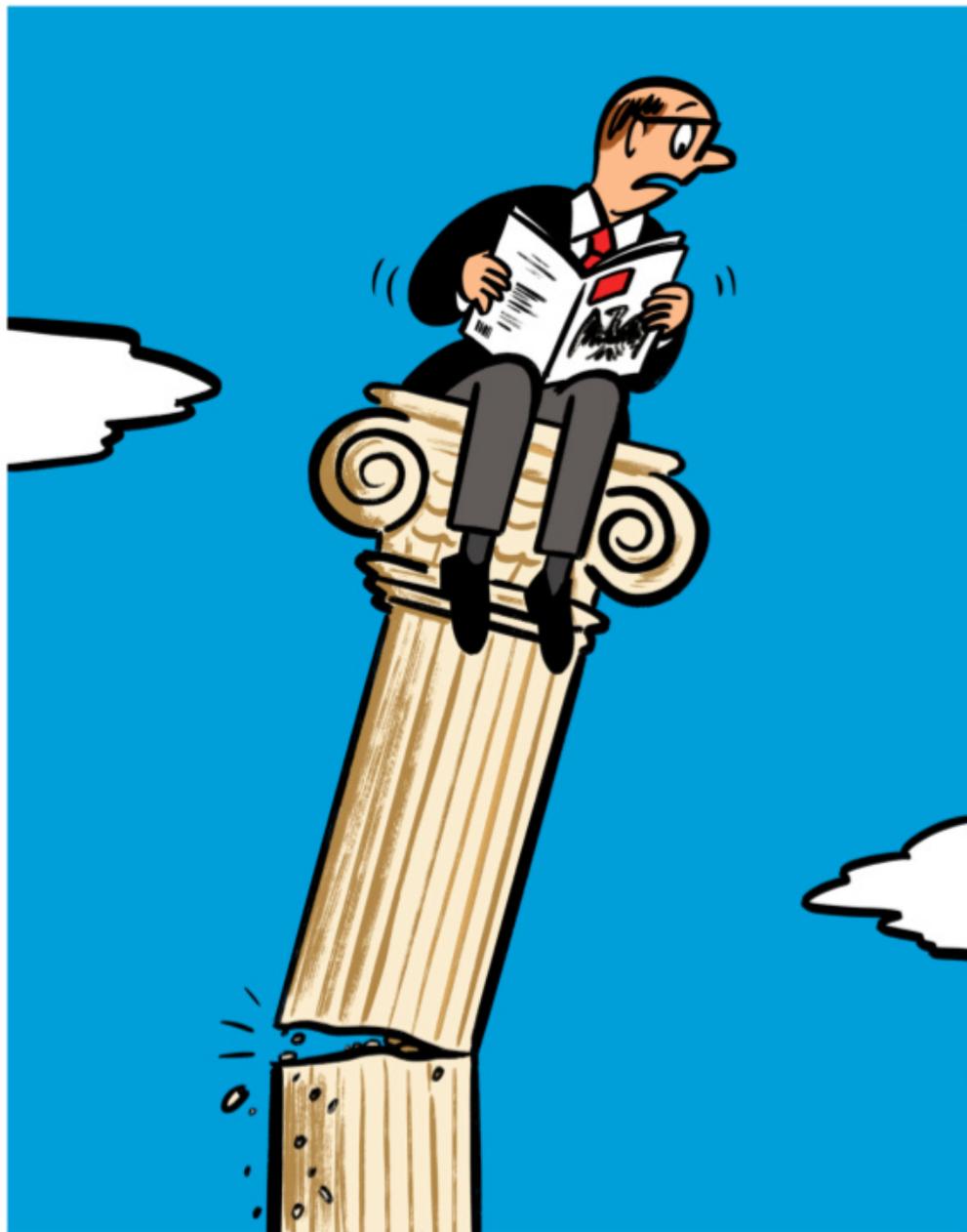
And his grandniece herself tells us that Uncle Booth "was the best entertainment, the most fun that I have ever known."

Who could ask for a happier epitaph? ♦

## THE INFLUENCER

*Liberalism according to The Economist.*

BY PANKAJ MISHRA



“Liberalism made the modern world, but the modern world is turning against it,” an article in *The Economist* lamented last year, on the occasion of the magazine’s hundred-and-seventy-fifth anniversary. “Europe and America are in the throes of a popular rebellion against liberal élites, who are seen as self-serving and unable, or unwilling, to solve the problems of ordinary people,” even as authoritarian China is poised to become the world’s largest economy. For a publication that was founded “to campaign for liberalism,” all of this was “profoundly worrying.”

The crisis in liberalism has become

received wisdom across the political spectrum. Barack Obama included Patrick Deneen’s “Why Liberalism Failed” (2018) in his annual list of recommended books; meanwhile, Vladimir Putin has gleefully pronounced liberalism “obsolete.” The right accuses liberals of promoting selfish individualism and crass materialism at the expense of social cohesion and cultural identity. Centrists claim that liberals’ obsession with political correctness and minority rights drove white voters to Donald Trump. For the newly resurgent left, the rise of demagoguery looks like payback for the small-government doctrines of technocratic neoliberal-

ism—tax cuts, privatization, financial deregulation, antilabor legislation, cuts in Social Security—which have shaped policy in Europe and America since the eighties.

Attacks on liberalism are nothing new. In 1843, the year *The Economist* was founded, Karl Marx wrote, “The glorious robes of liberalism have fallen away, and the most repulsive despotism stands revealed for all the world to see.” Nietzsche dismissed John Stuart Mill, the author of the canonical liberal text “On Liberty” (1859), as a “numbskull.” In colonized Asia and Africa, critics—such as R. C. Dutt, in India, and Sun Yat-sen, in China—pointed out liberalism’s complicity in Western imperialism. Muhammad Abduh, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, wrote, “Your liberalness, we see plainly, is only for yourselves.” (Mill, indeed, had justified colonialism on the ground that it would lead to the improvement of “barbarians.”) From a different vantage, critiques came from aspiring imperialist powers, such as Germany (Carl Schmitt), Italy (Gaetano Salvemini), and Japan (Tokutomi Sohō). Since then, Anglo-American thinkers such as Reinhold Niebuhr and John Gray have pointed out liberalism’s troubled relationship with democracy and human rights, and its overly complacent belief in reason and progress.

Yet the sheer variety of criticisms of liberalism makes it hard to know right away what precisely is being criticized. Liberalism’s ancestry has been traced back to John Locke’s writings on individual reason, Adam Smith’s economic theory, and the empiricism of David Hume, but today the doctrine seems to contain potentially contradictory elements. The philosophy of individual liberty connotes both a desire for freedom from state regulation in economic matters (a stance close to libertarianism) and a demand for the state to insure a minimal degree of social and economic justice—the liberalism of the New Deal and of European welfare states. The iconic figures of liberalism themselves moved between these commitments. Mill, even while supporting British imperialism in India and Ireland, called himself a socialist and outlined the aim of achieving “common ownership in

*The magazine was founded in 1843, to disseminate the doctrine of laissez-faire.*

the raw materials of the globe.” The Great Depression forced John Dewey to conclude that “the socialized economy is the means of free individual development.” Isaiah Berlin championed the noninterference of the state in 1958, in his celebrated lecture “Two Concepts of Liberty”; but eleven years later he had come to believe that such “negative liberty” armed “the able and ruthless against the less gifted and less fortunate.”

Because of this conceptual morass, liberalism has, to an unusual degree, been defined by what it wasn't. For French liberals in the early nineteenth century, it was a defense against the excesses of Jacobins and ultra-monarchists. For the free-trading Manchester Liberals of the mid-nineteenth century, it was anticolonial. Liberals in Germany, on the other hand, were allied with both nationalists and imperialists. In the twentieth century, liberalism became a banner under which to march against Communism and Fascism. Recent scholars have argued that it wasn't until liberalism became the default “other” of totalitarian ideologies that inner coherence and intellectual lineage were retrospectively found for it. Locke, a devout Christian, was not regarded as a philosopher of liberalism until the early twentieth century. Nor was the word “liberal” part of U.S. political discourse before that time. When Lionel Trilling claimed, in 1950, that liberalism in America was “not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition,” the term was becoming a catchall signifier of moral prestige, variously synonymous with “democracy,” “capitalism,” and even simply “the West.” Since 9/11, it has seemed more than ever to define the West against such illiberal enemies as Islamofascism and Chinese authoritarianism.

*The Economist* proudly enlists itself in this combative Anglo-American tradition, having vigorously claimed to be advancing the liberal cause since its founding. In “Liberalism at Large” (Verso), Alexander Zevin, a historian at the City University of New York, takes it at its word, telling the story not only of the magazine itself but also of its impact on world affairs. Using *The Economist* as a proxy for liberal-

ism enables Zevin to sidestep much conceptual muddle about the doctrine. His examination of *The Economist's* pronouncements and of the policies of those who heeded them yields, in effect, a study of several liberalisms as they have been widely practiced in the course of a hundred and seventy-five years. The magazine emerges as a force that—thanks to the military, cultural, and economic power of Britain and, later, America—can truly be said to have made the modern world, if not in the way that many liberals would suppose.

In terms of its influence, *The Economist* has long been a publication like no other. Within a decade of its founding, Marx was describing it as the organ of “the aristocracy of finance.” In 1895, Woodrow Wilson called it “a sort of financial providence for businessmen on both sides of the Atlantic.” (Wilson, an Anglophile, wooed his evidently forbearing wife with quotations from Walter Bagehot, the most famous of *The Economist's* editors.) For years, the magazine was proud of the exclusivity of its readership. Now it has nearly a million subscribers in North America (more than in Britain), and seven hundred thousand in the rest of the world. Since the early nineties, it has served, alongside the *Financial Times*, as the suavely British-accented voice of globalization (scoring over the too stridently partisan and American *Wall Street Journal*).

According to its own statistics, its readers are the richest and the most prodigal consumers of all periodical readers; more than twenty per cent once claimed ownership of “a cellar of vintage wines.” Like Aston Martin, Burberry, and other global British brands, *The Economist* invokes the glamour of élitism. “It's lonely at the top,” one of its ads says, “but at least there's something to read.” Its articles, almost all of which are unsigned, were until recently edited from an office in St. James's, London, a redoubt of posh Englishness, with private clubs, cigar merchants, hatters, and tailors. The present editor, Zanny Minton Beddoes, is the first woman ever to hold the position. The staff, predominantly white, is recruited overwhelmingly from the

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universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and a disproportionate number of the most important editors have come from just one Oxford college, Magdalen. “Lack of diversity is a benefit,” Gideon Rachman, a former editor who is now a columnist at the *Financial Times*, told Zevin, explaining that it produces an assertive and coherent point of view. Indeed, contributors are not shy about adding prescription (how to fix India’s power problems, say) to their reporting and analysis. The pieces are mostly short, but the coverage is comprehensive; a single issue might cover the insurgency in south Thailand, public transportation in Jakarta, commodities prices, and recent advances in artificial intelligence. This air of crisp editorial omniscience insures that the magazine is as likely to be found on an aspirant think tanker’s iPad in New Delhi as it is on Bill Gates’s private jet.

Zevin, having evidently mastered the magazine’s archives, commands a deep knowledge of its inner workings and its historical connection to political and economic power. He shows how its editors and contributors pioneered the revolving doors that link media, politics, business, and finance—alumni have gone on to such jobs as deputy governor of the Bank of England, Prime Minister of Britain, and

President of Italy—and how such people have defined, at crucial moments in history, liberalism’s ever-changing relationship with capitalism, imperialism, democracy, and war.

A capsule version of this thesis can be found in the career of James Wilson, *The Economist’s* founder and first editor. Wilson, who was born in Scotland and became the owner of a struggling hatmaking business, intended his journal to develop and disseminate the doctrine of laissez-faire—“nothing but pure principles,” as he put it. He was particularly vociferous in his opposition to the Corn Laws, agricultural tariffs that were unpopular with merchants. The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, three years after the magazine first appeared, and Wilson began to proselytize more energetically for free trade and the increasingly prominent discipline of economics. He became a Member of Parliament and held several positions in the British government. He also founded a pan-Asian bank, now known as Standard Chartered, which expanded fast on the back of the opium trade with China. In 1859, Wilson became Chancellor of the Indian Exchequer. He died in India the following year, trying to reconfigure the country’s financial system.

During his short career as a journalist-cum-crusader, Wilson briskly

clarified what he meant by “pure principles.” He opposed a ban on trading with slaveholding countries on the ground that it would punish slaves as well as British consumers. In the eighteen-forties, when Ireland was struck with famine, which was largely caused by free trade—the British insisted on exporting Irish food, despite catastrophic crop failure—Wilson called for a homeopathic remedy: more free trade. With Irish intransigence becoming a nuisance, he advised the British to respond with “powerful, resolute, but just repression.” Wilson was equally stern with those suffering from rising inequality at home. In his view, the government was wrong to oblige rail companies to provide better service for working-class passengers, who were hitherto forced to travel in exposed freight cars: “Where the most profit is made, the public is best served. Limit the profit, and you limit the exertion of ingenuity in a thousand ways.” A factory bill limiting women to a twelve-hour workday was deemed equally pernicious. As for public schooling, common people should be “left to provide education as they provide food for themselves.”

*The Economist* held that, “if the pursuit of self-interest, left equally free for all, does not lead to the general welfare, no system of government can accomplish it.” But this opposition to government intervention, it turned out, did not extend to situations in which liberalism appeared to be under threat. In the eighteen-fifties, Zevin writes, the Crimean War, the Second Opium War, and the Indian Mutiny “rocked British liberalism at home and recast it abroad.” Proponents of free trade had consistently claimed that it was the best hedge against war. However, Britain’s expansion across Asia, in which free trade was often imposed at gunpoint, predictably provoked conflict, and, for *The Economist*, wherever Britain’s “imperial interests were at stake, war could become an absolute necessity, to be embraced.”

This betrayal of principle alienated, among others, the businessman and statesman Richard Cobden, who had helped Wilson found *The Economist*, and had shared his early view of free trade as a guarantee of world peace.



India, for Cobden, was a “country we do not know how to govern,” and Indians were justified in rebelling against an inept despotism. For Wilson’s *Economist*, however, Indians, like the Irish, exemplified the “native character . . . half child, half savage, actuated by sudden and unreasoning impulses.” Besides, “commerce with India would be at an end were English power withdrawn.” The next editor, Wilson’s son-in-law Walter Bagehot, broadened the magazine’s appeal and gave its opinions a more seductive intellectual sheen. But the editorial line remained much the same. During the American Civil War, Bagehot convinced himself that the Confederacy, with which he was personally sympathetic, could not be defeated by the Northern states, whose “other contests have been against naked Indians and degenerate and undisciplined Mexicans.” He also believed that abolition would best be achieved by a Southern victory. More important, trade with the Southern states would be freer.

Discussing these and other editorial misjudgments, Zevin refrains from virtue signalling and applying anachronistic standards. He seems genuinely fascinated by how the liberal vision of individual freedom and international harmony was, as Niebuhr once put it, “transmuted into the sorry realities of an international capitalism which recognized neither moral scruples nor political restraints in expanding its power over the world.” Part of the explanation lies in Zevin’s sociology of élites, in which liberalism emerges as a self-legitimizing ideology of a rich, powerful, and networked ruling class. Private ambition played a significant role. Bagehot stood for Parliament four times as a member of Britain’s Liberal Party. Born into a family of bankers, he saw himself and his magazine as offering counsel to a new generation of buccaneering British financiers. His tenure coincided with the age of capital, when British finance transformed the world economy, expanding food cultivation in North America and Eastern Europe, cotton manufacturing in India, mineral extraction in Australia, and rail networks everywhere. According to Zevin, “it



*“And, for being careless with the environment, put tiny, hard-to-remove stickers on all their fruit.”*

fell to Bagehot’s *Economist* to map this new world, tracing the theoretical insights of political economy to the people and places men of business were sending their money.”

The pressures of capitalist expansion abroad and rising disaffection at home further transformed liberal doctrine. Zevin fruitfully describes how liberals coped with the growing demand for democracy. Bagehot had read and admired John Stuart Mill as a young man, but, as an editor, he agreed with him on little more than the need to civilize the natives of Ireland and India. To Bagehot, Mill’s idea of broadly extending suffrage to women seemed absurd. Nor could he support Mill’s proposal to enfranchise the laboring classes in Britain, reminding his readers that “a political combination of the lower classes, as such and for their own objects, is an evil of the first magnitude.” Not surprisingly, *The Economist* commended Mussolini (a devoted reader) for sorting out an Italian economy destabilized by labor unrest.

Nonetheless, by the early twentieth century, the magazine was groping toward an awareness that, in an

advanced industrial society, classical liberalism had to be moderated, and that progressive taxation and basic social-welfare systems were the price of defusing rising discontent. The magazine has since presented this volte-face as evidence of its pragmatic liberalism. Zevin reveals it as a grudging response to democratic pressures from below. Moreover, there were clear limits to *The Economist*’s newfound compassionate liberalism. As late as 1914, one editor, Francis Hirst, was still denouncing “the shrieking, struggling, fighting viragoes” who had demanded the right to vote despite having no capacity for reason. His comparison of suffragettes to Russian and Turkish marauders—pillaging “solemn vows, ties of love and affection, honor, romance”—helped drive his own wife to suffragism.

As more people acquired the right to vote, and as market mechanisms failed, empowering autocrats and accelerating international conflicts, *The Economist* was finally forced to compromise the purity of its principles. In 1943, in a book celebrating the centenary of the magazine, its editor at the

time acknowledged that larger electorates saw “inequality and insecurity” as a serious problem. *The Economist* disagreed with the socialists “not on their objective, but only on the methods they proposed for attaining it.” Such a stance mirrored a widespread acceptance on both sides of the Atlantic that governments should do more to protect citizens from an inherently volatile economic system. Since the nineteen-sixties, however, *The Economist* has steadily reinstated its foundational ideals.

In the process, it missed an opportunity to reconfigure for the postcolonial age a liberalism forged during the high noon of imperialism. The emergence of new, independent nation-states across Asia and Africa from the late forties onward was arguably the most important development of the twentieth century. Liberalism faced a new test among a great majority of the world’s population: Could newly sovereign peoples, largely poor and illiterate, embrace free markets and minimize government right away? Would such a policy succeed without prior government-led investment in public health, education, and local manufacturing? Even a Cold War liberal like Raymond Aron questioned the efficacy of Western-style liberalism in Asia and Africa. But *The Economist* seemed content to see postcolonial nations and their complex challenges

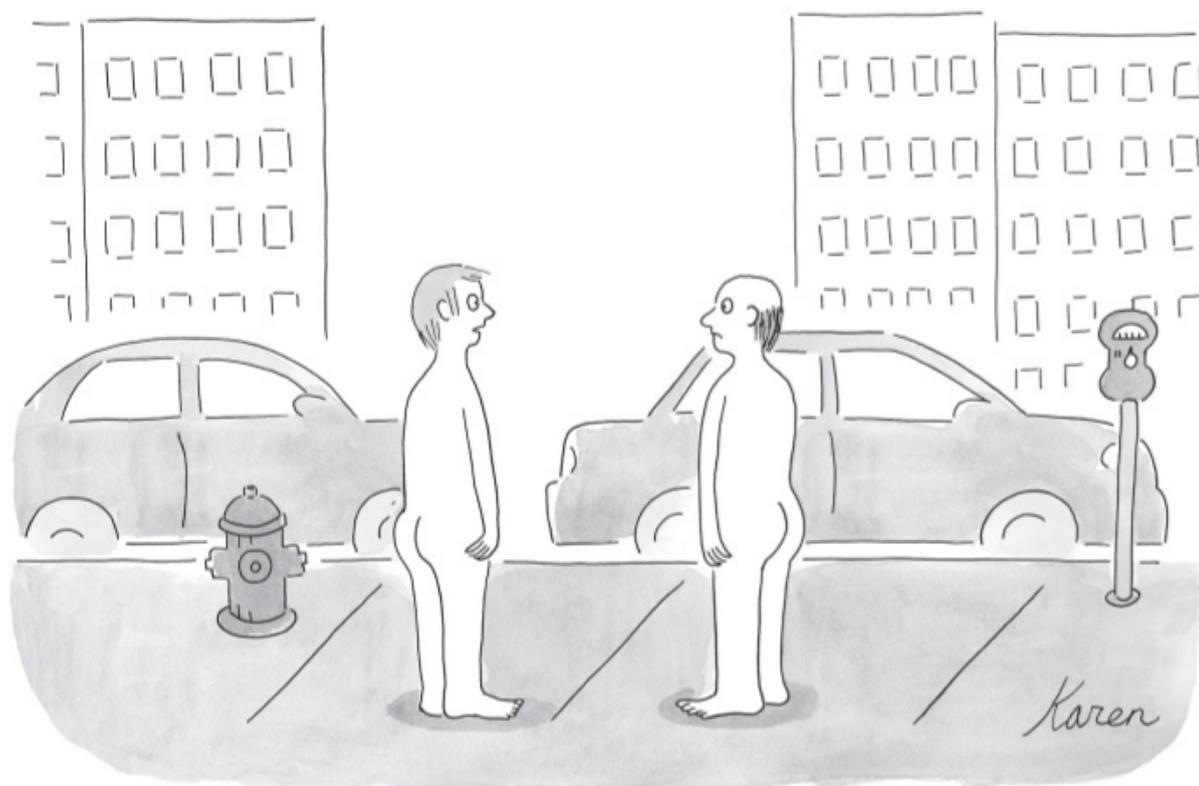
through the Cold War’s simple dichotomy of the “free” and the “unfree” world. In any case, by the seventies, the magazine’s editors were increasingly taking their inspiration from economics departments and think tanks, where the pure neoliberal principles of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek were dominant, rather than from such liberal theorists of justice as John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, and Amartya Sen.

In the nineteen-eighties, *The Economist*’s cheerleading for Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan’s embrace of neoliberalism led to a dramatic rise in its American circulation. (Reagan personally thanked the magazine’s editor for his support over dinner.) Dean Acheson famously remarked that “Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.” No such status anxiety inhibited *The Economist* as it crossed the Atlantic to make new friends and influence more people. After the Second World War, when the U.S. emerged as the new global hegemon, the magazine—despite some initial resentment, commonplace among British élites at the time—quickly adjusted itself to the Pax Americana. It came to revere the U.S. as, in the words of one editor, “a giant elder brother, a source of reassurance, trust and stability for weaker members of the family, and nervousness and uncertainty for any budding bullies.”

This meant stalwart support for American interventions abroad, start-

ing with Vietnam, where, as the historian and former staff writer Hugh Brogan tells Zevin, the magazine’s coverage was “pure CIA propaganda.” It euphemized the war’s horrors, characterizing the My Lai massacre as “minor variations on the general theme of the fallibility of men at war.” By 1972, following the saturation bombing of North Vietnam, the magazine was complaining that Henry Kissinger was too soft on the North Vietnamese. A policy of fealty to the giant elder brother also made some campaigners for liberalism a bit too prone to skulduggery. Zevin relates colorful stories about the magazine’s overzealous Cold Warriors, such as Robert Moss, who diligently prepared international opinion for the military coup in Chile in 1973, which brought down its democratically elected leader, Salvador Allende. In Moss’s view, “Chile’s generals reached the conclusion that democracy does not have the right to commit suicide.” (The generals expressed their gratitude by buying and distributing nearly ten thousand copies of the magazine.) Zevin relates that, when news of Allende’s death reached Moss in London, he danced down the corridors of *The Economist*’s office, chanting, “My enemy is dead!” Moss went on to edit a magazine owned by Anastasio Somoza, Nicaragua’s U.S.-backed dictator.

After the fall of Communist regimes in 1989, *The Economist* embraced a fervently activist role in Russia and Eastern Europe, armed with the mantras of privatization and deregulation. In its pages, the economist Jeffrey Sachs, who was then working to reshape “transition economies” in the region, coined the term “shock therapy” for these policies. The socioeconomic reengineering was brutal—salaries and public services collapsed—and, in 1998, Russia’s financial system imploded. Only a few months before this disaster, *The Economist* was still hailing the “dynamism, guile and vision” of Anatoly Chubais, the politician whose sale of Russia’s assets to oligarchs had by then made him the most despised public figure in the country. In 2009, a study in *The Lancet* estimated that “shock therapy” had led to the premature deaths of millions of Russians, mostly men of employment age. *The Economist* was unrepent-



“Uh-oh—we can’t both be dreaming.”

tant, insisting that “Russia’s tragedy was that reform came too slowly, not too fast.”

“Who can trust Trump’s America?” a recent *Economist* cover story asked, forlornly surveying the ruins of the Pax Americana. The political earthquakes of the past few years perhaps make it lonelier at the top for the magazine than at any other time in its history; the articles celebrating last year’s anniversary were presented as a manifesto for “renewing liberalism.” Ten years before, when the financial crisis erupted, the magazine overcame its primal distrust of government intervention to endorse bank bailouts, arguing that it was “a time to put dogma and politics to one side.” It also continued to defend neoliberal policies, on the basis that “the people running the system, not the system itself, are to blame.” Now, finally chastened, if not by the financial crisis then by its grisly political upshot, the magazine has conceded that “liberals have become too comfortable with power” and “wrapped up in preserving the status quo.” Its anniversary manifesto touted a “liberalism for the people.” But soul-searching has its limits: the manifesto admiringly quoted Milton Friedman on the need to be “radical,” resurrected John McCain’s fantasy of a “league of democracies” as an alternative to the United Nations, and scoffed at millennials who don’t wish to fight for the old “liberal world order.” A more recent cover story warns “American bosses” about Elizabeth Warren’s plans to tackle inequality, and revives Friedmanite verities about how “creative destruction” and “the dynamic power of markets” can best help “middle-class Americans.”

*The Economist* is no doubt sincere about wanting to be more “woke.” It seeks more female readers, according to a 2016 briefing for advertisers, and is anxious to dispel the idea that the magazine is “an arrogant, dull handbook for outdated men.” Whereas, in 2002, it rushed to defend Bjørn Lomborg, the global-warming skeptic, this fall it dedicated an entire issue to the climate emergency. Still, *The Economist* may find



it more difficult than much of the old Anglo-American establishment to check its privilege. Its limitations arise not only from a defiantly nondiverse and parochial intellectual culture but also from a house style too prone to contrarianism. A review, in 2014, of a book titled “The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism” accused its author of not being “objective,” complaining that “almost all the blacks in his book are victims, almost all the whites villains.” Following an outcry, the magazine retracted the review. However, a recent assessment of Brazil’s privatization drive—“Jair Bolsonaro is a dangerous populist, with some good ideas”—suggests that it is hard to tone down what the

journalist James Fallows has described as the magazine’s “Oxford Union argumentative style,” a stance too “cocksure of its rightness and superiority.”

This insouciance, bred by the certainty of having made the modern world, cannot seem anything but incongruous in the rancorously polarized societies of Britain and the United States. The two blond demagogues currently leading the world’s two oldest “liberal” democracies bespeak a ruling class that—through a global financial crisis, rising inequality, and ill-conceived military interventions in large parts of the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa—has squandered its authority and legitimacy. The reputation, central to much Cold War liberalism, of England as a model liberal society also lies shattered amid the calamity of Brexit.

For the young, in particular, old frameworks of liberalism seem to be a constraint on the possibilities of politics. It should be remembered, however, that these new critics of liberalism seek not to destroy but to fulfill its promise of individual freedom. They are looking, just as John Dewey was, for suitable modes of politics and economy in a world radically altered by capitalism and technology—a liberalism for the people, not just for their networked rulers. In that sense, it is not so much liberalism that is in crisis as its self-styled campaigners, who are seen, not unreasonably, as complicit in unmaking the modern world. ♦

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## MAKE IT OLD

*Charles Wright's poetry marches forward while looking back.*

BY DAN CHIASSON



Charles Wright's massive new volume of selected poems, "Oblivion Banjo" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), is assembled from nearly fifty years of his "small words, / Out of the wind and the weather." The poems are banked impressions, like snowdrifts after a blizzard, or deposits left by a receding tide. In them, "places swim up and sink back, and days do," leaving behind their residue. Amid the ordinary gains and losses of the calendar year arrive the vivid envois of the past: a country drugstore, the "kamikaze Fiats" of Rome, a statue of Dante under alpine snow.

Wright was born in 1935, in Pickwick Dam, Tennessee. He attended Davidson College and the University of Iowa and served in the Army, in Italy. He taught for many years at the University of Vir-

ginia, publishing volumes of poetry at regular intervals. Everything Wright touches takes on his style, a vernacular scavenged from place-names in Tennessee and Italy, the songs of the Carter Family and the cadences of the blues, and the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Li Po, Dante, Emily Dickinson, and others. The name of one of his works, "Poem Almost Wholly in My Own Manner," describes many of his others, too.

Even the title of this volume gives a taste of Wright's method of blending vocabularies: the word "oblivion" boasts a provenance in Western philosophy and literature, while the sound of the banjo brings back the "tinkly hymns" of Wright's Southern childhood. The resulting "country music" is the distinct twang of one mind, remarkably constant despite some-

times audacious changes of form. A prose poem, a sprawling free-verse composition, and a sequence of economical sestets: they sound little like one another, but they all sound like Wright.

Wright's second collection, "Hard Freight," from 1973, includes a prank manifesto that almost instantly entered anthologies and syllabi. "The New Poem" begins on a pugilistic note:

It will not resemble the sea.  
It will not have dirt on its thick hands.  
It will not be a part of the weather.

The poem is nine such statements in nine end-stopped lines. Although it is sometimes taken at face value, the new poem that Wright describes is certainly not "The New Poem," which, despite its austere rhetoric, is full of yearning. It's nothing like Wright's mature work, but it makes clear that he will be one of those poets, like Wallace Stevens, who bring sumptuous particulars into the world by negation.

Wright began to read and write poetry in Italy, while he was in the Army. It was, he later told *The Paris Review*, the "form that seemed suited to my mental and emotional inclinations." He said that he was "trying to write about what I'd been seeing—Italy—in terms of what I was reading." Above all, he was reading Pound's "Pisan Cantos," written while the poet was imprisoned, near Pisa, at the end of the Second World War. With Pound as his Baedeker, Wright experienced the landscape through one man's idiosyncratic emphasis. Wright adds to the sedimentary layers of description already settling on old places, rather than breaking fresh imaginative ground. A couple of years later, back in Italy, Wright encountered Pound himself, in Venice, staring at a church: Wright approached him, stood silently by his side, then skulked away. He didn't want an autograph or a blessing; he wanted to share his idol's point of view.

It was during this period that "I came to my senses," he writes, "with a pencil in my hand / And a piece of paper in front of me." In "A Journal of Southern Rivers," from 1990, he describes this birth:

What hast thou, O my soul, with Paradise, for instance,  
Is where I began, in March 1959—  
my question has never changed,



## REAL TIME

*Richard Nelson's family cycles capture the moment.*

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ



On November 9, 2016, I was alone, driving in the rain from Massachusetts to New York, weeping and muttering to myself before falling silent for long, baffled miles. I had made the reverse trip the day before, to report on an Election Night party at Wellesley College that had been planned to celebrate the historic victory of the school's alumna Hillary Clinton. As I drove now, I kept the radio on for bitter company. Hillary conceded and Donald Trump declared victory; the morning d.j.s were giddy with surprise as they parsed the news.

Eventually, I found myself listening to an interview with the playwright and director Richard Nelson, whose play “Women of a Certain Age” had opened at the Public Theatre the previous evening. Nelson explained that the play was,

in fact, set on November 8, 2016; like the opening-night audience, his nervous characters had no knowledge of what was about to happen. “Women of a Certain Age” was the third and final piece in “The Gabriels,” a cycle about a family in the town of Rhinebeck, New York, where Nelson has lived for more than thirty-five years. The first play had premiered in March, not long after Super Tuesday, and the second in September, tracking the campaign season in real time. Nelson had understood that women would be central to the election, and so he had made them central onstage—five out of a cast of six. The project sounded fascinating, and more than a little perverse. Nightly, Nelson’s characters would be on the cusp of the forever-changed present, as would the audience. I made a note to get tick-

ets, then promptly descended back into shock and forgot about it.

Fortunately, all three “Gabriels” plays were filmed by PBS and are available online. The magic of live performance is often lost onscreen, but whoever was in charge of capturing Nelson’s work did an unusually sensitive job. The plays, masterpieces of exquisite subtlety, are set in the round, in the kitchen of the home of Mary Gabriel, a retired doctor. At the start of the first play, “Hungry,” Mary’s playwright husband has been dead for four months, and the family has gathered to scatter his ashes in the Hudson River. Old tensions flare and subside; conversations unfurl and dissolve; stories are told, memories half uncovered; food is prepared, then actually cooked (a Nelson hallmark—these are true kitchen-sink plays, down to the running tap) and eaten.

As with Nelson’s previous, four-play cycle, “The Apple Family,” which was also set in a Rhinebeck house on politically resonant days—the 2010 midterm elections; the ten-year anniversary of 9/11—Chekhov hovers over the project, with its close attention to the loneliness, fissures, and comforts of communal life. My initial suspicion that the plays’ timely hooks would feel like gimmicks dissipated as I watched; they are more like magnifying glasses that focus and intensify the moment.

The Gabriels are white and slipping down the class ladder, and one theme of the cycle is their sense of being left behind—but by whom? After all, they generally share the politics of the wealthy weekenders from New York who, enticed by the scenery, flatter their town by pricing them out of it. The family’s frustration and fear of displacement don’t trace neatly onto the kind of reverse punditry that, following the election, sent journalists scrambling to find “forgotten” Americans to consult, like retroactive oracles. The Gabriels share a name with an angel sent as an emissary from God, but, like most of us, they aren’t sure what message they’re supposed to bear.

“Conversations During Difficult Times,” the first play in Nelson’s new, two-part series, “The Michaels,” has just opened at the Public (as usual, he directs). It’s also set in a house in

Rhinebeck, this one owned by Rose Michael (Brenda Wehle), a choreographer of modern dance. In her heyday, Rose had her own company and was on a first-name basis with her comrades and competitors: Merce, Twyla, Pina, Paul. She's still striking at sixty-six, tall and thin with long, slightly bowed legs, close-cropped white hair, and a fierce, hawkish gaze. She is also dying of Stage IV ovarian cancer, but resists conventional treatment, which her worried family understands to be an expression of fear.

Family, though, is not a straightforward concept here. Rose lives with Kate (Maryann Plunkett), a retired high-school teacher who once taught Rose's daughter, Lucy (Charlotte Bydwell). Rose and Kate have been together only six months; they met just before Rose's diagnosis, and what promised to be a late-in-life love affair has quickly become a patient-nurse relationship, with Kate cooking and caring for the stubborn invalid. Lucy's sweet-natured father, David (Jay O. Sanders), an arts manager and a producer, is now married to the spiky Sally (Rita Wolf), who used to dance in Rose's company. There is chosen family, too, in the person of Irenie (Haviland Morris), another former dancer of Rose's, who has arrived from New York for a weeklong visit that may double as a farewell.

Nelson builds characters who are rich in spirit and soul and sets them in motion like tops. Toward and away from one another they spin, in the nerve center of the kitchen, as Kate shuffles back and forth to the oven, making a quiche. (The pitch-perfect scenic design, with its familiar old stove and wooden table, is by Jason Ardizzone-West.) As the title tells us, conversation—distinct from its showier, stiffer cousin, dialogue—is the medium of exchange; Nelson's actors speak in an emphatically naturalistic style, and they are gentler with one another than we expect onstage families to be. They tease without sniping, and let one another finish sentences. All the actors are wonderful, particularly Wehle and the Nelson regulars Sanders and Plunkett, masters of gesture and nuance.

I saw "Conversations During Difficult Times" on the day it is set, October 27, 2019. Nelson had revised the play up to the last minute; it included ref-

erences to the morning's rain and to the just-announced assassination of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. That was the one line in this otherwise limpid show that sounded artificial, like a newspaper held up by a hostage as proof of the date—which, in a sense, it was. The unprecedented way in which Trump and talk of him have infected even the most intimate scenes of daily life poses a serious challenge to Nelson's vision. He can't ignore the man, but he doesn't want to give him oxygen, either; just mentioning him is a cliché. At one point, David riffs on a ghastly-sounding play that he saw in Paris involving Trump and Kermit the Frog. (He doesn't identify the playwright as Elfriede Jelinek; this is the theatrical equivalent of a subtweet.) Nelson is stuck swinging at the top of the national Ferris wheel along with everybody else, peeking through his fingers while trying not to look down, but he makes it clear that he is not willing to fight the grotesque with more of the same.

Like "The Gabriels," this first installment of "The Michaels" is concerned with the lines of transmission between women. Lucy, now in her early thirties, has followed in her mother's footsteps and become a dancer and a choreographer; she and her cousin May (Matilda Sakamoto) are preparing a retrospective of some of Rose's dances. In the scene at the heart of the play, Lucy whirls around the narrow kitchen, showing her mother what she's been working on. At the performance I attended, she started the dance with her back to the section where I was sitting; when she turned, her face expressed the exhilarating and impossible hope of being found worthy of real praise. Of course, Rose cuts her down; in the grand tradition of egomaniacal, domineering artists, she refuses to distinguish between tribute and challenge. How new it still is, though, for this dynamic to be depicted with powerful mothers and their striving daughters, rather than with fathers and sons. "She said—and this I found interesting—there are certain parts of women's lives that have never ever been danced," Kate reports of Rose. That is what Rose is working on, in the short time left to her: a dance that will reflect the ordinary work of living in a way that feels graceful and true. ♦

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ON TELEVISION

## BACK TO BASICS

*“Evil,” “9-1-1,” and the appeal of network TV.*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



In the pilot of “Evil,” a forensic psychologist and lapsed Catholic named Kristen (Katja Herbers) lies in bed, frozen in terror, her eyes open wide, as a demon—black and shrivelled, with bright-green eyes and long claws—taunts her. He ducks under her nightgown and says, “Hey, you got a scar down here. What is that, a Cesarean?” He skitters into a corner of her bedroom and urinates as she looks on, humiliated and paralyzed.

The next night, however, Kristen foils the demon, who has introduced himself as George. She tapes a sign on the ceiling above her bed, and, after George slices off one of her fingers, she stares

up. “I can’t read it!” she says in relief—he’s only a night terror, since, she explains, Wernicke’s area, the part of the brain that interprets language, is dormant during sleep. “Well, if I don’t exist, then this won’t hurt,” George says, raising his knife and stabbing her in the heart, as she wakes up gasping.

That’s the pattern on “Evil,” at least in the first few episodes. Every supernatural event has a practical explanation—but, then, every practical explanation has a sinister shadow as well, the suggestion that something very bad is going on, something that rationalists can’t quite escape. Maybe religious people are delusional, seeking meaning

where none exists. Or maybe the pragmatic ones are the real naïfs. Possibly both things are true, which is how the Devil builds power, in a world that feels designed to magnify malevolence, on-line and off, by blurring our ability to tell what’s real from what’s imaginary.

“Evil” is the latest series by Michelle and Robert King, the married showrunner team who created a triptych of complex, innovative series for CBS: the Obama-era drama “The Good Wife,” about a corporate lawyer married to a scandal-ridden politician; the experimental zombies-in-Washington satire “BrainDead,” which burned through its single nutty, politically prescient season in 2016; and “The Good Fight,” the spinoff of “The Good Wife,” a smart and savage (and, often, surreal) response to the Trump era. That last show is now entering its fourth season on the streaming service CBS All Access, a platform so poorly designed and badly marketed that it might as well be demonic, at least for anyone who wants her favorite show to become part of the political conversation.

“Evil” marks the Kings’ return to Original Famous Ray’s CBS, a network that people can watch for free—one of the remaining “big three” that used to be television. It’s a more straightforward sort of show than “The Good Fight,” but that’s interesting in itself. In a time when the critical conversation is dominated by cable and streaming, HBO and Amazon, the Kings are a fascinating rarity: normcore auteurs, diplomats on the publicity circuit, whose specialty is bending network formulas to subversive purposes. Earlier this year, word of an internal struggle leaked out. The Kings had planned to air an animated musical sequence on “The Good Fight,” about how readily the media self-censors in order to reach the Chinese market, only to have CBS demand that they cut it. The Kings threatened to quit. Then they insisted that CBS run a placard, reading “CBS HAS CENSORED THIS CONTENT,” in place of the sequence. In the end, the couple settled on a softer approach: the placard went up, but for eight and a half seconds, not ninety. As a result, many viewers perceived the situation not as a protest of real censorship but as a meta-joke. It was an ironic demonstration of a theme

*“Evil” is the latest series by the married showrunners Michelle and Robert King.*

that recurs on the Kings' shows: the appeal of pragmatism, and also its pitfalls. Sometimes the road to Hell is paved with compromise.

Like the two "Good Wife" shows, "Evil" is built on a familiar TV structure, the case-a-week procedural. It's a buddy-detective series about a skeptic and a believer, in the venerable tradition of "The X-Files," with a little (and sometimes a lot) of "The Exorcist" tossed in. In the pilot, Kristen, a frazzled mother of four, weighed down by student debt, her mountain-climber husband somewhat mysteriously abroad, takes a part-time gig with a priest-in-training, David (Mike Colter, who played Lemond Bishop on "The Good Wife"), who investigates possible demonic possessions. Kristen checks the subjects for mental illness; a third partner, Ben, played by Aasif Mandvi, is an I.T. expert/engineer/science guy, who figures out if the trouble is neither demons nor psychosis but, say, copper poisoning. Each week, the team investigates a new case, but there's a broader arc building, too, involving a sinister figure played by Michael Emerson, a rival psychologist intent on overturning cases in which Kristen testified in her former job as a prosecutor's expert witness. He may also be a colleague of her night visitor, George.

There's a bit of expositional throat-clearing, early on—and Emerson's threatening-nerd act can feel a little on the nose. (The Kings have always had a weakness for manifesto-shouting bad guys, like Michael Sheen's Roy Cohn-esque bully, on "The Good Fight.") But there's a seeping air of dread, right away, along with solid scares, oddball laugh lines, and smart character work. A clever plot about a tyrannical theatre producer destabilized by a demonic Amazon Alexa-like device delivers, down to its disturbing final shot. Another, about a psychotic nine-year-old, is more predictable—especially for fans of "Law & Order: S.V.U."—but it, too, has an ending that lingers. The refusal to come down on one side or the other could begin to feel like a bait and switch, but for now it's a flexible metaphor, allowing space for multiple forms of the uncanny.

The cast is universally strong, especially Herbers, who, with her warm

eyes and her air of wary dishevelment, makes Kristen feel strange and a little dirty, as if she were burying enormous, chaotic emotions. She's particularly good in scenes with her four daughters, who keep tumbling onto the sofa with her, chatting and giggling, with an organic family sweetness. This makes it all the more frightening when her kids are in danger, which they are pretty much all the time, whether they're being lured into a virtual-reality game or just wandering around their ramshackle house. A Halloween episode, with a scary little girl in a mask, nearly gave me a stroke.

The show lacks the mythic grandeur of ambitious horror movies such as "Us" and "Midsommar," but, despite its humbler aesthetic and its basic (in both senses) pleasures, it, too, feels soaked in modern anxieties, full of coded politics, with a special interest in the difficulty of distinguishing madness from amorality. Robert King is a practicing Catholic and Michelle King is a secular Jew; in interviews, they've said that the show grew out of debates about the sources of evil, which they see as being on the rise. The rationalist heroine, Kristen, has little in common with Diane, the glam litigator of "The Good Fight," but both women are unsettled by a sense that their value system—the idea that, through careful questioning, truth might emerge—is unmatched with the moment. There's no mention of Trump; this isn't a show that CBS needs to censor. Yet it's very much about how lies warp the world—and how tempting it is to adopt the liars' methods. When, in one plot, Kristen uses a "deepfake" recording on the stand, she can justify her behavior: the rival psychologist really *did* say those things; she's just re-creating them. But the moral line is fudged, the norm eroded.

In another scene, Ben, who is working a side gig on a cheesy "true horror" reality show, has a heart-to-heart with the show's producer. "We live in a world that is made up of bits and pixels," he says. "And it is so easy to manipulate them and create whatever we want. And I hate that—because it encourages superstition and conspiracy theories and . . . It's actually been eating at me—" She cuts him off, as he starts to get more personal, but not

unkindly. What he doesn't get is that the mike is still on. Everything is part of the show.

Would it be interesting to see what the Kings might do if they were on cable? Sort of, yeah—"BrainDead" was, at times, a mess, but it had the experimental heat rarely visible on the Tiffany network. But cable and streaming are not guarantees of quality, either. Take Ryan Murphy's misbegotten "The Politician," the first show under his new deal with Netflix. A glossy satirical series about sociopathic ambition, it has all the problems of late "Glee"—bad continuity, grab-bag characterization, dubious teen Sondheim productions—despite being only eight episodes long, and made with complete creative control.

Luckily, Murphy is producing other shows, including one for plain old Fox: "9-1-1," a giddily absurd procedural set among first responders in Los Angeles, which he came up with as a favor for his friend the executive Dana Walden, who needed a hit. Three seasons in, "9-1-1," which is run by Tim Minear, is breathing down the neck of "N.C.I.S.," another show that mints money but never gets written about. "9-1-1" is sleekly constructed competency porn, about diverse hotties who fix worst-case scenarios—like a baby in a toilet pipe or a beauty influencer with a "face maggot"—but who can't fix their own lives. I guess I could theorize about how the show's madcap pace mimics our crisis-ridden news cycle, but some days silly just hits the spot.

This season's two-part opener upped the ante hilariously: on the Santa Monica Pier, we glimpse an assortment of blissful scenes, from a cute kid winning a prize to an elderly sketch artist drawing a young girl. It's a rare day out for the twitchy trauma-addict firefighter Buck, who watches for an emergency that fails to emerge. But the reprieve is an illusion: once the camera pulls back, we see what's up. As these sweet dummies were relaxing, the sea has drained dry. In the distance, a blue blur glimmers. A tsunami! It's a tearjerker; it's a chain-yanker; it's both. It's the sort of network algorithm destined to replicate itself. "9-1-1: Lone Star" débuts in January. ♦

## END TIMES

*“Terminator: Dark Fate” and “Marriage Story.”*

BY ANTHONY LANE

Of the many charms of the “Terminator” franchise, the most delightful is the emergence of a new etiquette. Once *Homo sapiens* and *Homo roboticus* begin to interact, and once time ceases to be something that you waste or spend and becomes a portal through which you pass, the language of social custom shifts accordingly. Thus, in the latest in-

The action starts with a grainy clip of a scene from “Terminator 2: Judgment Day,” in which the heroine, Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), ranted about a looming apocalypse. Thanks to her intervention, it was averted, but we now learn of a reloom—a second-generation disaster, in which cyborgs spawned by an A.I. program called Legion will get se-

Grace (Mackenzie Davis), who is like any other human, only more so, having been “augmented,” as she says, with superior powers; and a grizzled old geezer named Carl (Schwarzenegger), who lives near Laredo, Texas, with his family and runs a business making drapes. When you hear how decisive Carl can be with his customers—“The guy wanted solid-color blocks for his little girl’s bedroom, and I said, ‘Don’t do it’”—you wonder vaguely what he did before.

Schwarzenegger is oddly touching and funny here, but don’t take my word for it. Take his. “I’m reliable, I’m a very good listener, and I’m extremely funny,” he says, with a face of steel. Having been a killer in the first film and a protector in the second, he is now steered into a wholly novel groove. I don’t buy those changes for a moment, though I applaud the effort, whereas poor Rev-9 is, if anything, a downgrade from T-1000, the villain in “Judgment Day.” Both can assume any guise and, when smashed or shredded, mold themselves back into shape; the difference is that, whereas the earlier model was like quicksilver, the new one appears to be made of molasses. If you attacked him with self-rising flour, two eggs, and a handful of raisins, you could turn him into a fruitcake.

Despite the déjà vu, there is plenty to savor in Miller’s film, and the final third, in particular, is quite the light show. Any fool can, say, jump from a Lockheed C-5. To be inside a Humvee, however, as it drops out of a flaming C-5 whose rear end has been sheared off, and to have your chute deposit you on the lip of a hydroelectric dam, gives you so much more to talk about at parties. As Sarah, Dani, and Grace join forces to trounce their sticky foe, you realize that this is what used to be known as a woman’s picture, propelled by female sacrifice and pluck, and that Mackenzie Davis—tough but not invincible, and wise to her own frailties—is at the core of the propulsion. Meanwhile, for anyone still clinging doggedly to the primacy of the male warrior, the most pressing question is “Will it be curtains for Carl?” Wait and see.

Going to the movies on a date, especially a first date, is a risky business, and many a tender romance must have foundered, in the late nineteen-seventies, during showings of “I Spit on



Tim Miller’s film marks James Cameron’s return to the “Terminator” series.

stallment, “Terminator: Dark Fate,” one character says to another, “When are you from?” Better still, because it’s uttered by Arnold Schwarzenegger, is the exquisite line “May I ask what you are?”

The director is Tim Miller, though the name that shines out from the credits is that of James Cameron, who is listed as a producer and as one of five contributors to the story. The first two “Terminator” films, in 1984 and 1991, were directed by Cameron alone, and, after his departure, the ensuing movies—“Terminator: Rise of the Machines” (2003), “Terminator Salvation” (2009), and “Terminator Genisys” (2015)—are widely held to have suffered a process of gradual decay, like unrefrigerated fish. Much is expected, then, from the return of the king.

riously futuristic on the world’s ass. The good news is that Sarah’s back, and hell-bent, once again, on stopping the horror before it happens. What she’s been doing in the interim is unclear, though my guess is that she’s been rehearsing her heavy-weapons drill and, to judge by her voice, smoking forty Camels a day.

The plot consists of heated-up leftovers from the first three “Terminator” films. An unrelenting android, Rev-9 (Gabriel Luna), is dispatched from the years to come and lands in the present day, his duty being to destroy a young Mexican woman, Dani (Natalia Reyes), for reasons as yet unrevealed. Against him are arrayed the following: Sarah, who brings along a rocket launcher as you or I would pack an energy drink;

Your Grave.” Never before, though, have I seen anything as openly destructive as “Marriage Story,” the new film from Noah Baumbach, which ought to come with a warning from the M.P.A.A.: “Contains scenes that may wreck your relationship.”

Charlie (Adam Driver), a theatre director, lives in New York with his wife, Nicole (Scarlett Johansson), an actress, and their eight-year-old son, Henry (Azhy Robertson). We start with two declarations of love. Nicole tells us what she loves about her husband, and he returns the compliment. Each praises the other’s warmth as a parent, plus a variety of respective quirks—Charlie’s tidiness, or Nicole’s knack for opening jars. Notice, by the way, that both parties are described as “competitive.” For a second, we glimpse what lurks ahead.

Baumbach is toying with us. Those declarations, it transpires, are part of a mediation session, which goes badly; the marriage is melting. Nicole flies to Los Angeles to film a pilot for a TV show, taking Henry with her. They stay with Nicole’s exuberant mother (Julie Hagerty). Also around is Nicole’s sister, Cassie (Merritt Wever), who pulls off the funniest and most flustered sequence in the movie—serving Charlie with divorce papers when he arrives. Not funny at all, for him.

That blend of tones, with near-farce and emotional brutality blitzed together, is pure Baumbach, and he dishes it up for two hours straight. Not that his comedy is black. Rather, the damage to hearts and minds is somehow inflicted with a terrible buoyancy of spirit, and at an unbearable cost—literally so in the case of Nora Fanshaw (Laura Dern), the

top-rate lawyer who represents Nicole in the split. “Sorry I look so schleppy,” she says, sashaying across her office in lofty scarlet heels, curling up beside Nicole, and offering tea and cookies (“I’ll give you the recipe”). Dern is in devilish form, right down to the little moue of sympathy that she gives when Nicole says, “I don’t want any money or anything.” Yeah, sure.

In the opposite corner is Jay Marotta (Ray Liotta), a bruiser in a suit the color of rain clouds, whose basic retainer is twenty-five thousand dollars. Initially, Charlie goes for the cheaper option, employing Bert Spitz (Alan Alda), who operates out of a crummy joint with a microwave and a cat, and who seems, at least, to register the vandalizing of human dignity on which his trade relies. When the fight gets dirty, however, Bert isn’t up to scratch. “I needed my own asshole,” Charlie says, switching his allegiance to Jay.

Something should be pointed out here, something that you hardly realize as you revel in the expertise of “Marriage Story,” and in the gutsy panache of the performers. It may be something of which the movie is itself unconscious, so steeped is its creator in the world that he describes. This is a frighteningly first-world piece of work. Viewers in countries whose litigious instincts are less barbaric may watch it in amazement, as if it were science fiction. We laugh at Jay’s astronomical fee, but the real joke is that Charlie pays it—that he can *afford* to pay it—when it comes to the crunch. How about the vast majority of husbands and wives, especially wives, who cannot abide the misery of their union but lack the funds to either

solve or dissolve it? The crunch will slay them. In court, it’s true, a judge refers in passing to people with fewer resources than Charlie and Nicole; but one line barely leaves a dent.

Now and then, Baumbach tips his hat to Bergman. “Scenes from a Marriage” is the headline on a magazine article about Charlie and Nicole, and she even plays Electra onstage, as Liv Ullmann’s character does in “Persona” (1966). To be honest, though, we are leagues away from Bergman, and “Marriage Story” belongs more to the long and hissy saga of antagonism between Los Angeles and New York. Nicole’s Off Broadway endeavors are dismissed in California as “downtown shit,” and Charlie protests, with ardor, that “we’re a New York family, that’s just a fact.” Hence the devastating shot of him alone on Halloween in L.A., dressed as the Invisible Man, with a bandaged head, and gazing forlornly at the TV. Late-capitalist anomie in a nutshell.

And yet, to be fair, both players are given their say, and their clamorous voice, in equal measure. Johansson unfurls a long and demanding soliloquy, persuading us that Nicole’s role in Charlie’s existence had dwindled to “feeding his aliveness.” Driver, inflating his lungs, responds with a glowing rendition of “Being Alive,” from Stephen Sondheim’s “Company,” which sends you reeling and should—but does not—bring the movie to a close. So, which half of the couple is in the right? Neither of them. And both. And who is more alive? It’s a tie. ♦

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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 Benjamin Schwartz, must be received by Sunday, November 10th. The finalists in the October 28th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 25th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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### THE FINALISTS



*“Four-story brownstones? They'll never catch on, not in a million years.”*  
Stephen Peretti, Wellesley, Mass.

*“It scrape sky.”*  
Keith Huie, Mineral Point, Wis.

*“I guarantee he brings up the whole discovering-fire thing within the first five minutes.”*  
Theo Gresh, Washington, D.C.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*“You pinch me one more time and you're going to find yourself in hot water.”*  
Janet Doherty, Isleton, Calif.

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