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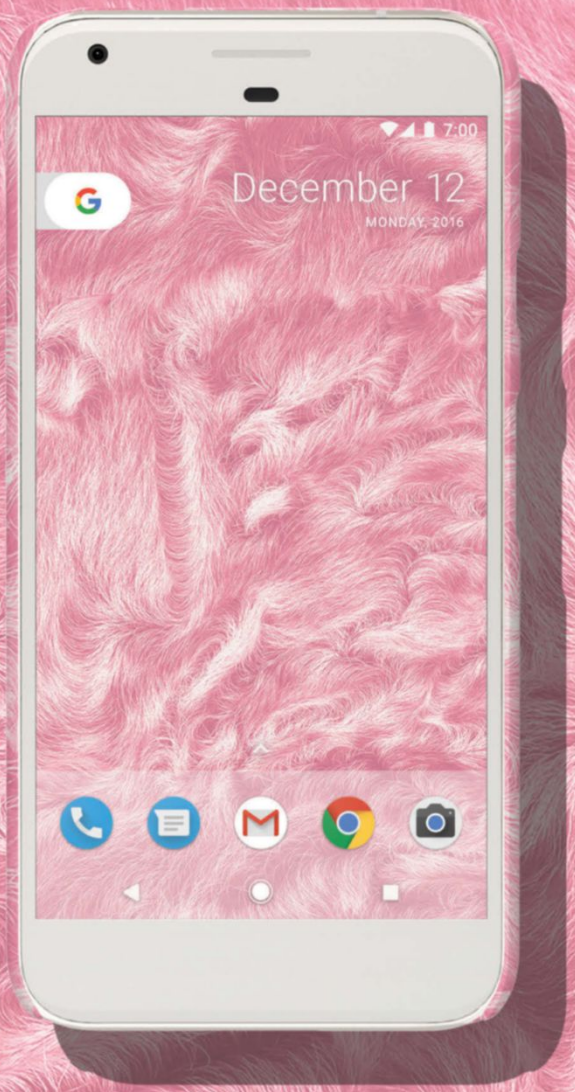

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The Spirit of Travel

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George Booth (*Sketchbook, p. 59*) has been a *New Yorker* cartoonist since the nineteen-sixties. "About Dogs" is one of his many books.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

The artistic director of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre discusses the historical role of the arts.

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LEFT: EMILY RHYNE

THE MAIL

AFTERSHOCKS

That was quite an assemblage of articulate voices you brought together to respond to Trump's election ("Aftermath," November 21st). None of the sixteen writers, however, represented the perspective of either an active-duty service member or a veteran. Combined, we number more than twenty-one million, nearly ninety-four per cent of us veterans. Many of us are concerned about a Trump Presidency, which will directly affect our benefits and our health care. We worry, too, about the threat of even more saber-rattling and war waging, the burden of which will be borne by our children and grandchildren. Our nation has had other Commanders-in-Chief who have not served in the military. But none of them, I daresay, invoked five draft deferments during a war (Vietnam), when each and every time another young man was drafted to serve in his place. Nor has a Commander-in-Chief ever publicly insulted a P.O.W. such as Senator John McCain, or bragged about wanting a Purple Heart but didn't want to make the sacrifice necessary to earn one.
Doug Bradley
Spec. 5, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Madison, Wisc.

George Packer tells us that Richard Nixon "nearly got away" with the various crimes we collectively refer to as Watergate, and that "democratic institutions"—the press, the courts, and Congress—are what stopped him. But, just as a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, Nixon's downfall was set in motion not by institutions but by a single person: Frank Wills, the Watergate Hotel security guard who found the taped-open door and called the police. Suppose the burglars had chosen another night for their mission, when a less observant or conscientious guard had been on duty? Nixon and his confederates might indeed have got away scot-free. Wills validates the proposition that sometimes one individual really can make a difference.
David English
Somerville, Mass.

I'd like to hear from L.G.B.T.Q. writers in *The New Yorker* on their outlook on the future under a Trump-Pence Administration. We're an American family with a gay son who is about to start medical school in the U.S. in the fall; our younger child is a freshman in college and identifies as transgender. Both are terrified, and angry, in the wake of the election, the recent Administration hires, and the medieval look of the future in a country built, supposedly, on human rights. Do Trump and his followers realize that when you build a wall you imprison those inside, too?
Ami Sands Brodoff
Montreal, Quebec

As Atul Gawande writes, a college degree cannot be the only option that we, as a nation, value. He notes that the seventy per cent of Americans who lack a college degree have been forsaken. That's because we've created a college-for-all culture, where alternatives to "professional" work are not respected or encouraged, instead of supporting programs that would give high schoolers vocational paths strategically aligned with both evolving and steady workforce needs. College for all has resulted in an inadequate education for most. We've boosted high-school-graduation rates at the expense of rigor, resulting in sixty-eight per cent of community-college students requiring remedial classes, and most of them dropping out. Meanwhile, all over the country we have aging plumbers earning a good living, with few prepared to take their places. The path to the American dream needs to be rerouted.
Sheela Clary
Housatonic, Mass.

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

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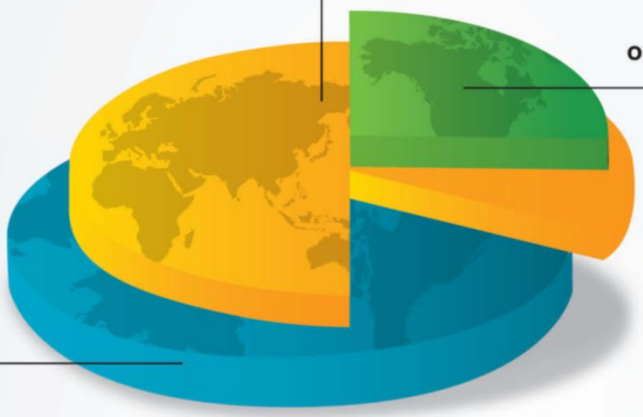

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[1]Source: MSCI All Country benchmark returns 1986–2015.

[2]Source: Nominal GDP in current U.S. Dollars via the IMF World Economic Outlook Database—April 2016.

[3]Source: FactSet as of 03/31/2016. Data presented for the MSCI AC World Index, which represents 23 developed and 23 emerging market countries and contains 2,480 constituents, covering approximately 85% of the global investable equity opportunity set. The index is not intended to represent the entire global universe of tradable securities.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Andrew Bird whistles well enough to consider the skill an instrument, implying that words can get in the way. "You used to be so willfully obtuse, or is the word 'abstruse?'" he asks on the title track to his latest album, "Are You Serious." "Semantics like a noose, get out your dictionary." Bird, who performs at Carnegie Hall on Dec. 12, has excelled at such skull-chipping lines throughout his twenty-year career. And a lifetime of violin playing has trained his ear for melodies that ground his lyrics and jostle them into flight.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID BLACK

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera
Plácido Domingo more or less gets carte blanche when it comes to choosing his roles at the Met, and this season the beloved Spanish tenor continues his vocal descent into baritone territory as the king of Babylon in Verdi's **"Nabucco."** The soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska and the mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton sang the opera with Domingo in London, earlier this year, and join him again at the Met; James Levine, who has a magic touch with early Verdi, conducts. *Dec. 12 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** The charismatic Anna Netrebko, the star of the Met's revival of Puccini's **"Manon Lescaut,"** cedes the title role to the excellent Kristine Opolais, who took on the part when Richard Eyre's staging (which moves the setting from the rarefied world of eighteenth-century Paris to the German occupation during the Second World War) débuted last season. Marcelo Álvarez (a powerful Des Grieux) and Christopher Maltman (a vigorous Lescaut) are also on hand; Marco Armiliato. (These are the final performances.) *Dec. 7 and Dec. 10 at 8.* • Puccini's evergreen romance, **"La Bohème,"** continues its long run at the house. The heavy hitter Piotr Beczala—and a beloved house veteran, Hei-Kyung Hong—lead a cast that includes Brigitta Kele, Massimo Cavalletti, and Ryan Speedo Green; Armiliato. *Dec. 8 at 7:30.* • Patricia Racette, one of the most versatile and accomplished sopranos on the Met's roster, has added the title role of Richard Strauss's **"Salome"**—a notoriously difficult part, demanding an ample voice, fine musicianship, and over-the-top theatrics—to her repertoire. She leads a cast that includes Željko Lučić, Gerhard Siegel, and Nancy Fabiola Herrera; Johannes Debus. *Dec. 9 and Dec. 13 at 8.* • The Met's production of Kaija Saariaho's acclaimed **"L'Amour de Loin"** is the first opera by a woman presented by the house in more than a century. The Met has entrusted the staging to Robert Lepage, whose "Ring" flopped but who has certainly done excellent work on other occasions. Susanna Phillips, Eric Owens, and Tamara Mumford take the leading roles in this mysterious and alluring work; Susanna Mälkki, a widely admired young Finnish conductor, is in the pit. *Dec. 10 at 1. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)*

Manhattan School of Music Opera Theatre: "La Clemenza di Tito"
With its somewhat inert pacing, Mozart's final opera seria may not seem apt for a conservatory production, but its series of noble character studies rewards close attention. Dona D. Vaughn directs, and George Manahan conducts. *Dec. 8-10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11 at 2:30. (Broadway at 122nd St. msmnyc.edu/tickets.)*

LoftOpera: "Macbeth"
The imaginative company continues to partner with local non-opera outfits to present classic works in original ways. Laine Rettmer's staging of Verdi's first Shakespeare adaptation takes place at the Mast Brothers' new chocolate factory in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and the design firm DDG is helping to build out the space. Sean Kelly conducts a thirty-three-piece orchestra, the largest in the company's history. *Dec. 8, Dec. 10, and Dec. 12 at 8. Through Dec. 18. (Building No. 128, Brooklyn Navy Yard, Flushing Ave. at Cumberland St. loftopera.com.)*

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic
Jiří Bělohlávek, an authoritative conductor of Czech repertory, has recorded all the works that he'll be leading with the orchestra this week, including Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto, a vehicle for the Philharmonic subscription début of the Korean pianist Kun Woo Paik. The program opens with Janáček's Overture to his searing final opera, "From the House of the Dead," and closes with Dvořák's Symphony No. 6 in D Major, a work that should especially benefit from the conductor's experienced hand. The Saturday-matinée concert replaces the Beethoven and Janáček works with chamber music by Hindemith (including the "Kleine Kammermusik"), performed by several of the orchestra's principal winds. *Dec. 8 at 7:30, Dec. 9 at 11 A.M., and Dec. 10 at 2 and 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

The Tallis Scholars: "A Renaissance Christmas"
The British chamber choir, renowned for its elegance of style and purity of sound, has enjoyed a longtime collaboration with Columbia University's Miller Theatre series. The Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Miller's midtown home, will be the perch for the Scholars' return to Gotham, a concert rich with sacred polyphony by Josquin, Victoria, Taverner, and other masters. *Dec. 10 at 8. (145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799.)*

The Knights: "Schubertiade"
The dynamic Brooklyn chamber orchestra bows to the trend for "salon" concerts by offering an evening of music and poetry that emulates, in a very contemporary fashion, the magical evenings organized by Schubert and his friends. In addition to songs by the Viennese master himself, there will also be performances of works by Piazzolla, Ravel, and Dvořák and a variety of poetry readings—including "Cathedral of Salt," in which Paul Muldoon (the poetry editor of this magazine) will recite his poem to the improvised accompaniment of the musicians. *Dec. 10 at 8. (BRIC, 647 Fulton St., Brooklyn. bricartsmedia.org.)*

RECITALS

Daniil Trifonov
The brilliant young pianist, a Russian musician whose work has worldwide respect, comes to Carnegie Hall to play favorites by Schumann ("Kinderszenen" and "Kreisleriana") as well as a batch of Preludes and Fugues by Shostakovich and Stravinsky's exciting Three Movements from "Petrushka." *Dec. 7 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

"NYFOS Next: Christopher Cerrone and Friends"
The New York Festival of Song, an invaluable but deeply traditionalist organization, has for several years operated a smaller-scale series of concerts designed to highlight new music. Cerrone, a stylish young postminimalist and a winner of the Rome Prize, hosts a salon-style evening that features songs by such composers as Timo Andres, Erin Gee, Ted Hearne, and Cerrone (set to texts by Rumi, Michelangelo, Dorothea Lasky, and others). *Dec. 8 at 7. (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

S.E.M. Ensemble: "Musica Elettronica"
All those who have ever wanted to hear Stockhausen's electronic masterpiece "Gesang der Jünglinge"—one of the most influential works in the history of music—in a space more atmospheric than their headphones ought to catch this concert at the Paula Cooper Gallery, where abstract sculptures by Mark di Suvero are currently on view. It's the Ensemble's annual holiday program, which will also include acoustic and electronic works by Phill Niblock (a première), Petr Kotik, and Laurie Spiegel. *Dec. 9 at 8. (534 W. 21st St. brownpapertickets.com.)*

World Music Institute: "Steve Reich Celebration"
Performances of Reich's "Drumming," a signal work of American minimalism, are hardly rare, but this one, in honor of the composer's eightieth-birthday year, will be particularly special. It's a collaboration between Mantra Percussion and the Ghanaian master drummer Gideon Alorwoyie, who was Reich's musical mentor in the year before he wrote the piece. Excerpts from "Drumming" will be performed alongside examples of the West African music that originally inspired it. *Dec. 10 at 7. (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

Diana Damrau and Xavier de Maistre
The incisive soprano and the virtuoso harpist have carefully curated their song program to favor composers—Debussy, Strauss, and Duparc, among others—whose shimmering late-Romantic styles lend themselves to dreamy arrangements for harp. *Dec. 10 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500.)*

Peoples' Symphony Concerts: Dover Quartet
The young ensemble, which powerfully carries with it the Romantic tradition of the Curtis Institute of Music, performs two concerts in the low-price, high-quality series this season; the first offers renditions of string quartets by Mozart, Britten (No. 2 in C Major), and Beethoven (in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3). *Dec. 10 at 7:30. (Washington Irving High School, 40 Irving Pl. pscny.org.)*

Peter Serkin
The 92nd Street Y is a natural venue for the great Serkin, a pianist whose playing teems with intellectual as well as physical excitement. His recital treads familiar but no less cherished paths, mixing Renaissance works by Byrd, Sweelinck, Dowland, and Bull with the more modern visions of Reger, Takemitsu ("For Away"), Wolpe, Oliver Knussen (the Variations, Op. 27), and Schoenberg (the Suite, Op. 25). *Dec. 10 at 8. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)*

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "Italian Splendor"
The concerti of the Italian Baroque period offer a zest—and, sometimes, an ecclesiastical mood—that aligns well with the winter holiday season. The Society's annual survey of the genre includes works by Corelli, Marcello, Geminiani, Torelli (the "Concerto in Forma di Pastorale per il Santissimo Natale"), and Vivaldi (three works, including the Mandolin Concerto in D Major, RV 93). The evening's soloists include the trumpeter Gábor Boldoczki and the young Israeli mandolin star Avi Avital. *Dec. 11 at 5 and Dec. 13 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)*

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Brooklyn Museum
"Beverly Buchanan: Ruins and Rituals"
After an early career as a public-health educator, the American sculptor (who died in 2015, at the age of seventy-four) turned her considerable talents to art, casting coarse blocks of concrete that have the air of relics. The smaller examples here suggest evidence of a prehistoric society; larger blocks, which Buchanan situated outdoors, are represented in videos, backed by the ambient sound of cicadas. (The footage was shot by this show's organizers: the curator Jennifer Burris and the artist Park McArthur, who, like Buchanan, was born in North Carolina.) In the nineteen-eighties, these stone sculptures, which the artist conceived as markers for unmemorialized black lives, gave way to less noteworthy mixed-media assemblages. But later in her career Buchanan found a new theme: the shacks and lean-tos built by African-Americans in the South, whose forms she translated into fragile, festively painted masses of wood, accompanied by prose poems. Like Buchanan's earlier stone works, these poetic structures feel haunted by history. *Through March 5.*

Jewish Museum
"Pierre Chareau: Modern Architecture and Design"
In the nineteen-twenties, the French furniture designer made a small name for himself with elegant, spare furniture in Macassar ebony and other exotic woods, somewhat reminiscent of Adolf Loos's unadorned luxury. This wonderful exhibition, the first in the U.S., gathers Chareau's love seats, telephone tables, and floor lamps along with archival material from his interior-design shop and art owned by his family, including a Romanesque caryatid by Modigliani, hewn from one block of stone. Untrained as an architect, Chareau nevertheless built one of the great houses of the twentieth century: the Maison de Verre, a fractured town house with walls of frosted-glass blocks, hiding in a courtyard next to Paris's Sciences Po. Here, after poring over sketches and photographs, you can don a V.R. headset and lose yourself in that house and other Chareau interiors, translated into immersive three-hundred-and-sixty-degree panoramas. So many recent attempts to bring high tech into museums have fallen flat; this one, masterminded by the architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro, is a rare achievement in exhibition design. *Through March 26.*

Studio Museum in Harlem
"The Window and the Breaking of the Window"
This sampling of protest art, much of it from the era of Black Lives Matter activism, takes its title from a 2004 drawing by the performance artist Pope.L. Emblazoned in marker on graph paper, a splotchy orange-and-yellow text includes the evocative adage. Slogans also feature in Kerry James Marshall's relief prints from 1998: quotation marks bracket bold graphic treatments of such phrases as "We shall overcome" and "Black is beautiful," as if holding them at arm's length for fresh appraisal. Other artists eschew words in favor of sharp, distilled imagery in a wide range of mediums. Devin Allen's black-and-white photographs capture tense moments of civil-rights outcry; Rudy Shepherd's cheerful watercolor portrait of Mike Brown, wearing headphones, belies the teenager's tragic end; Dave McKenzie's disconcerting self-portrait takes the form of a bashed-in piñata; EJ Hill's terribly beautiful collage "Surrendered (A Harrowing Descent)" illuminates a bitter divide. Atop a mountain constructed from pieces of tattered sky, the raised arms of gleeful white people in a cresting roller coaster almost blend in with those of black protesters in the "Hands up, don't shoot" posture of outraged resistance. *Through March 5.*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Sylvain Couzinet-Jacques
Two years ago, the French artist bought a dilapidated schoolhouse for a thousand dollars in Eden, North Carolina, and began to restore it. Here, Polaroids and tinted photographs of Southern foliage are accompanied by vitrines filled with historical materials, sculptures by Eden's residents, and even a relocated porch. What emerges is a complex, if at times inscrutable, portrait of the American South that intentionally breaks from the long tradition of European photographers arriving here to sing the same old song of the open road. Couzinet-Jacques's is a profoundly local engagement; his clapboard house is not simply a portal to a specific place but a commitment to its future. *Through Jan. 19. (Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555.)*

Jim Hodges
Imagine a cross between the rose windows of Chartres Cathedral and Monet's late "Water Lilies" and you'll be somewhere near this American artist's gorgeous, gallery-filling installation of colored glass. Panes of green, blue, silver, and black are incised with curving, interlocked contours that recall camouflage patterns and cohere into a four-wall panorama, shifting from monochrome to parti-colored and back again. You can catch your reflection in some of the panels, but put down your phone and take it all in: Hodges's glass box is less spectacular than salutary, a therapeutic intermission in an art world that sometimes seems to have forgotten the power of form. *Through Dec. 21. (Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606.)*

Pádraig Timoney
The keystone of this terrific, eclectic show by the Irish-born, Brooklyn-based artist is a photograph of a convex security mirror, obscured by graffiti that reads "Blurred for a reason." Timoney is intent on obscuring boundaries that divide a camera from a paintbrush, or a group of pictures from their installation. Moiré-patterned paintings (derived from photographs of mechanical subjects) combine oil, ink, and developer chemicals; they're counterposed with smudgy abstractions and big, churning, colorful works that incorporate shards of comic-book imagery. If such experimentation sounds rootless, some ground-

ing arrives in the form of a photograph that conveys both the charms and the failures of mimesis: a plant is trapped between glossy car doors, whose surfaces provide a concatenation of reflections. *Through Dec. 23. (Kreps, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)*

"Impasse Ronsin"
For more than four decades, the Romanian-born sculptor Constantin Brancusi crafted his birds in flight and endless columns in a studio in the dead-end alley in southwest Paris that gives this show its title. (The atelier is reconstructed in a permanent installation at the Centre Georges Pompidou.) This show, untidy but not unappealing, supplements Brancusi's sketches, interior photos, and one of his coyly phallic "Princess X" bronzes (note that the sculpture is newly cast and dated "1916–2016") with works by the artist's friends and visitors, including Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, as well as by subsequent residents of the Impasse Ronsin. William N. Copley had a studio there, in which he painted his post-Surrealist nudes. So did Niki de Saint Phalle, represented here by a riotous abstraction bestrewn with ivy. She might have been one of the alley's noisier neighbors: for one notorious series, she fired guns at paint-filled balloons. *Through Jan. 14. (Kasmin, 515 W. 27th St. 212-563-4474.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Rob Pruitt
The mischievous Conceptualist, best known for Warholian paintings of pandas, had originally planned to exhibit his hilarious Instagram series of art-world luminaries and their celebrity doppelgängers (John Baldessari and Papa Smurf, Lawrence Weiner and Charles Darwin). But after the election, he changed his tack. The gallery is filled, instead, with his rote but now gut-wrenching portraits of President Obama. Every morning since 2009, Pruitt has committed a Google-sourced image of POTUS to canvas, showing him on the phone or on the tarmac, at a podium or at leisure, shaking hands with a dignitary or smiling at the First Lady. Speedily rendered in white paint on pale backgrounds of red and blue, each image is two feet square—the size of a compact protest sign. *Through Dec. 18. (Brown, 291 Grand St. 212-627-5258.)*

Iiu Susiraja
Susiraja shoots her confrontational self-portraits—color photographs and short, single-take videos—in her parents' modest home in Turku, Finland. Everyday objects (bananas, a broom) become props in her absurdist vignettes. The artist's body seems like a prop, too: her face is invariably impassive as she poses or performs strange, sometimes masochistic, actions. In one short video, made this year, Susiraja stands in a sunny corner and squeezes ketchup from a bottle between her breasts into a mixing bowl on the floor; in another she bends a wire hanger around her face and hooks herself to a hat rack. Susiraja is fat, and the matter-of-fact display of her culturally unwelcome body is itself a transgression of sorts, but this is not a simple statement of pride. With her inscrutable demeanor and haunting bright images, Susiraja establishes a disconcerting equivalence between her body and the trappings, or entrapments, of domesticity. *Through Dec. 18. (Ramiken Crucible, 389 Grand St. 917-434-4245.)*

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Band's Visit
David Cromer directs a new musical by David Yazbek and Itamar Moses, based on a 2007 Israeli film about an Egyptian orchestra that gets stranded in the Negev Desert. *(Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens Dec. 8.)*

The Dead, 1904
Kate Burton stars in Paul Muldoon and Jean Hanff Korelitz's adaptation of the Joyce tale; the Irish Rep's production roams three floors of a historic town house and includes a holiday meal. *(American Irish Historical Society, 991 Fifth Ave., at 80th St. 212-727-2737. In previews. Opens Dec. 8.)*

Elements of Oz
The Builders Association's multimedia piece, created by James Gibbs and Moe Angelos, uses augmented-reality technology to tell the stories behind the film "The Wizard of Oz." *(3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 800-838-3006. Opens Dec. 7.)*

His Royal Hipness Lord Buckley
Jake Broder wrote and stars in this tribute to the mid-century comedian, who drew on bebop rhythms to create an outré countercultural persona. *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. In previews. Opens Dec. 13.)*

In Transit
This new a-cappella musical, directed by Kathleen Marshall and written by Kristen Anderson-Lopez, James-Allen Ford, Russ Kaplan, and Sara Wordsworth, traces the intertwining lives of New York commuters. *(Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens Dec. 11.)*

Martin Luther on Trial
Fellowship for Performing Arts presents this play by Chris Cragin-Day and Max McLean, in which Luther's wife defends him against the Devil, and the witnesses include Hitler, Freud, and Pope Francis. *(Pearl, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261. In previews.)*

Othello
David Oyelowo plays the title role in Sam Gold's production of the Shakespeare tragedy, opposite Daniel Craig's Iago. *(New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. In previews. Opens Dec. 12.)*

The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart
The National Theatre of Scotland stages this immersive musical fable at the home of "Sleep No More," transforming its speakeasy space, the Heath, into a Scottish pub. *(McKittrick Hotel, 530 W. 27th St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens Dec. 13.)*

Tiny Beautiful Things
Nia Vardalos stars in a stage adaptation of Cheryl Strayed's book, a collection from her stint writing the advice column Dear Sugar. Thomas Kail directs. *(Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Opens Dec. 7.)*

NOW PLAYING

A Bronx Tale
Chazz Palminteri's semiautobiographical portrait of the old neighborhood has been conjured twice before, first as a 1989 one-man show and then as a 1993 film directed by Robert De Niro. Now it's a misty-eyed musical, co-directed by De Niro and Jerry Zaks. Even if you haven't seen a previous incarnation, the show feels as familiar as marinara sauce. Calogero (Bobby Conte Thornton) brings us back to Belmont Avenue in the sixties, an Eden of hanging salamis, doo-wop, and homicide, where his younger self (Hudson Loverro) finds a father figure in Sonny (Nick Cordero), a local wise guy, alarming his actual father (Richard H. Blake), a bus driver. The score, by Alan Menken and Glenn Slater, bends toward trite sentimentality, as if refusing pepper on a plate of day-old spaghetti. But the show has two saving graces: Cordero, who gives Sonny a layer of self-aware cool, and the zingy Ariana DeBose, as the black classmate Calogero pines for in Act II. *(Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)*

The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World
This exceptional production of Suzan-Lori Parks's 1990 work is directed by a great new talent, Lileana Blain-Cruz. The play, which borrows elements from Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange, tells the story of Black Man with Watermelon (Daniel J. Watts), who is married to Black Woman with Fried Drumstick (Roslyn Ruff). Various characters—Prunes and Prisms (the wonderful Mirirai Sithole) and Lots of Grease and Lots of Pork (Jamar Williams), for instance—take the stage individually but also move en masse: they are ideas about blackness clustering together, then separating, like beautiful molecules, as we learn that Black Man with Watermelon is, in fact, dead. What Parks is saying—and not saying—is that the marginalization of black men means that their lives can be trivialized and forgotten if there is no one around to remember them. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/28/16.) *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)*

Finian's Rainbow
Charlotte Moore has returned to the 1947 Broadway musical—which she first directed twelve years ago—with a new, jewel-box adaptation. Condensing the dialogue and putting the ensemble of piano, harp, violin, and cello onstage accentuates the magical, musical elements of the show, which involves a stolen pot of gold, a leprechaun, and the no less fantastical American setting of Missitucky. The songs of Burton Lane and Yip Harburg (including "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?," "Old Devil Moon," and "If This Isn't Love") are melodic, lyrical, and comedic gems, and it's a rare pleasure to hear them sung and played without electronic amplification. Melissa Errico, Ryan Silverman, Ken Jennings, and Mark Evans lead an outstanding cast of thirteen; when the actors raise their voices in chorus, you may feel you've found that treasure at the end of the rainbow. *(Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)*

Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812
"There's a war going on out there somewhere" are the chilling first words of this rollicking Russophilic musical, which turns a seventy-page slice of "War and Peace" into an exuberant night on the town. After originating at Ars Nova and moving to a tent in the meatpacking district, Rachel Chavkin's production preserves its immersive flavor on Broadway—a remarkable feat, involving a set of winding runways (by Mimi Lien), a twinkling constellation of chandeliers (the lighting is by Bradley King), and complimentary pierogi (from Russian Samovar). Like an English major on a joyful bender, the writer-composer Dave Malloy homes in on Tolstoy's lovelorn aristocrats: schlubby Pierre (the singing star Josh Groban), refined Natasha (the angelic Denée Benton), and cocky Anatole (Lucas Steele, strutting like Zoolander). Molloy's script can't always keep it all on track—Tolstoy's omniscient, rock-solid narration is missed—but the show's eagerness to delight every last audience member is impossible to resist. *(Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Ride the Cyclone
MCC Theatre's musical, from the Canadian writers Brooke Maxwell and Jacob Richmond, depicts how a group of Saskatchewan choristers, killed when their roller coaster jumps the track, audition for a second chance at life. In an insistently spooky warehouse, the deceased teens discover a mechanical-fairground fortune-teller who promises to return one of them to earth. Then each gets a song explaining why he or she should win resurrection. So, yes, it's like an episode of "Glee" with metaphysical propensities, and it's also redolent of "A Chorus Line," "Big," and "Cats," if one of the Heaviside-layerbound cats discussed porta-potty sex with a carny. Under Rachel Rockwell's direction, the actors, including Tiffany Tatreau (a late replacement for Taylor Louderman), are immensely likable, but their quirkiness often feels forced, and the show rarely surrenders its pat-on-the-back pep ("Each and every one of you is a frickin' rock star!") to genuine weirdness. *(Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)*

Sweet Charity
As you watch the New Group's revival of Bob Fosse's 1966 hit, you keep hoping that, despite early signs of limpness, it won't be drained of all its energy and sentiment by the end. But the director, Leigh Silverman, is adept at throwing ash on soap bubbles. Sutton Foster, an endlessly exciting musical-comedy star, plays Charity Hope Valentine, a youngish girl who works at the Fan-Dango Ballroom, a dance hall near Times Square. She's besties with Nickie (Asmeret Ghebremichael) and Helene (Emily Padgett), who are as certain of their weariness with the entire scene as Charity is of her conviction that there is, as the trio eventually sings, "something better than this." It's a great part for Foster—she plays to what's best in her characters and, therefore, what's best in the world—but that affinity gets lost in Silverman's conception of the show, which has very little shine or imagination. (12/5/16) *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)*

The Winter's Tale
At the Next Wave Festival, the always inventive British troupe Cheek by Jowl stages Shakespeare's knotty late romance, which begins with a deadly case of jealousy run wild and ends, sixteen years later, with a redemptive dose of enchantment. Declan Donnellan directs. *(BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through Dec. 11.)*

The Wolves
When a show can brag about both fancy footwork and deft wordplay, it's usually a musical. But, aside from a team cheer—and even that's more of a howl—Sarah DeLappe's play, which is back for an encore run, is music-free. Rather, she turns her attention to an indoor soccer team made up of girls in junior high. We never see the Wolves compete; they stretch, warm up, and run drills on the Astroturfed set, all while gabbing about everything from menstruation to the Khmer Rouge. DeLappe has an uncanny ear for the lightning-fast way that teen girls ricochet among seemingly unrelated subjects, offense and defense, as they try to figure out how and where they fit: with themselves, with family and friends, or with community. Under Lila Neugebauer's assured direction, the ensemble cast is sensational, suggesting the sisterhood of a genuine team while letting each individual player shine. *(The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)*

Women of a Certain Age
Richard Nelson's quiet and sad trilogy of dramas chronicling the current political year in the life of a Rhinebeck family concludes with a play set on Election Day, before the outcome is announced. (Marathon performances of all three plays will be staged on Dec. 10-11, Dec. 14, Dec. 17, and Dec. 18.) Once again, the Gabriels sit around the kitchen table, chopping apples and letting the conversation meander, as Mary Gabriel (Maryann Plunkett) tries to forge a path through her grief over the death of her husband and the whole family reckons with the impending sale of the house. Aided by his extraordinary actors, Nelson is a master hyperrealist; there's little overt conflict, just the incidental humanity of overheard conversation. Nelson edited the script up to Election Day to include real-time details, and there's some skeptical yet forward-looking talk of Hillary Clinton that feels queasy in hindsight. More prophetic, perhaps, is the family's dread at losing the very floor they walk on. *(Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)*

ALSO NOTABLE

The Babylon Line Mitzi E. Newhouse. • **Chris Gethard: Career Suicide** Lynn Redgrave. • **Dead Poets Society** Classic Stage Company. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **The Encounter** Golden. • **Falsettos** Walter Kerr. • **The Front Page** Broadhurst. • **Heisenberg** Samuel J. Friedman. *Through Dec. 11.* • **Holiday Inn** Studio 54. • **Homos, or Everyone in America** Bank Street Theatre. *Through Dec. 11.* • **The Illusionists: Turn of the Century** Palace. • **Les Liaisons Dangereuses** Booth. • **Longing Lasts Longer** St. Ann's Warehouse. *Through Dec. 11.* • **Love, Love, Love** Laura Pels. • **"Master Harold" . . . and the Boys** Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through Dec. 11.* • **Notes from the Field** Second Stage. • **Oh, Hello on Broadway** Lyceum. • **Othello: The Remix** Westside. • **Party People** Public. *Through Dec. 11.* • **Rancho Viejo** Playwrights Horizons. • **Sweat** Public. • **Terms of Endearment** 59E59. *Through Dec. 11.* • **This Day Forward** Vineyard. • **Tick, Tick . . . Boom!** Acorn.

Blending bold camera moves and set design with provocative choreography, Berkeley lent musical production numbers a philosophical dimension.

EVERETT

Whorled Series

Busby Berkeley filmed dance scenes with an inventiveness that's still unsurpassed.

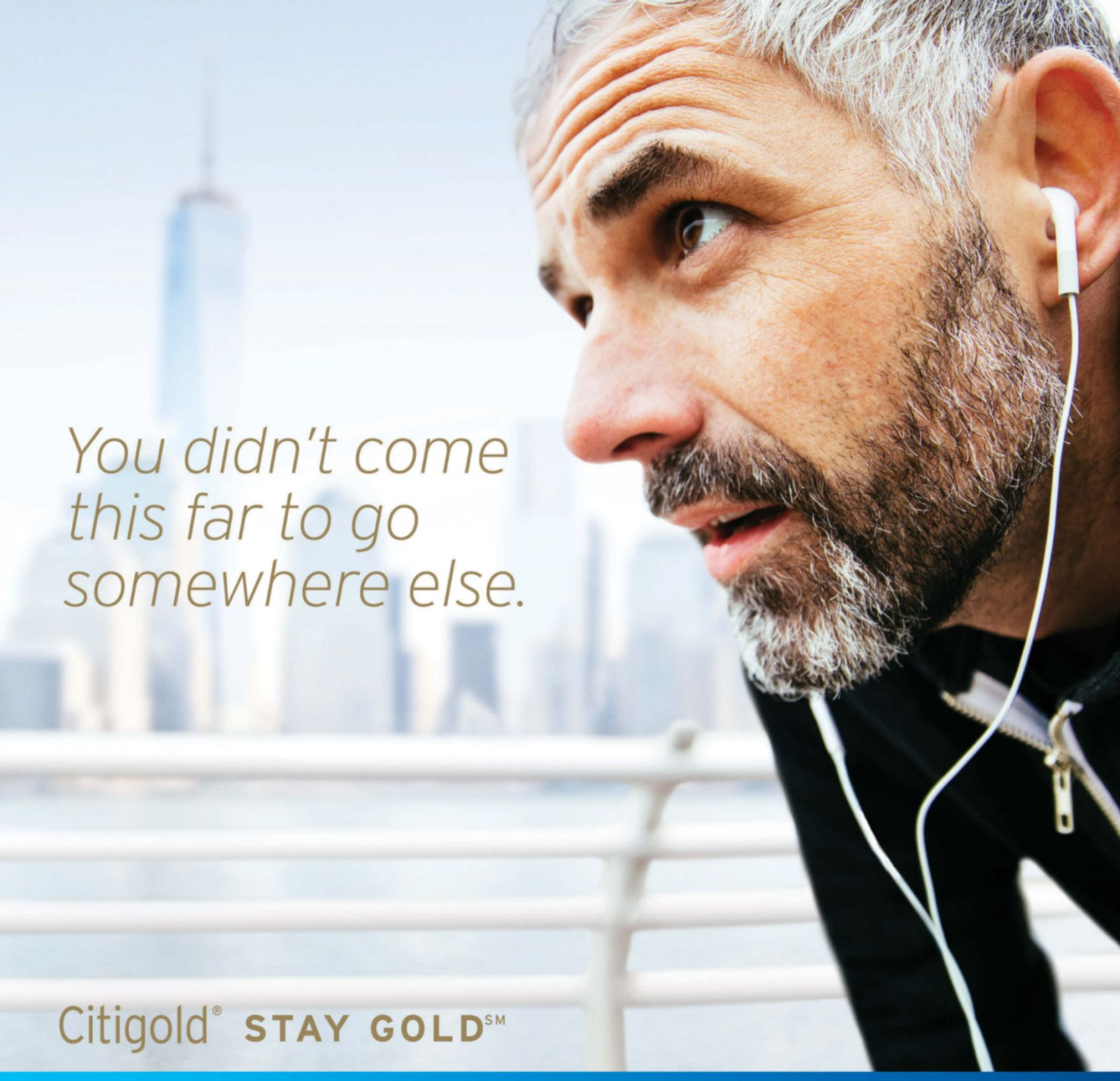
WITH HIS SPECTACULAR production numbers in "42nd Street," from 1933, Busby Berkeley resuscitated the musical genre. Lesser directors had been filming song-and-dance scenes with a dull, stage-bound fidelity; Berkeley—the subject of a Film Forum series Dec. 7-15—turned them into extravagant fantasies that could only be realized on film. He gathered hordes of dancers into erotically charged formations and undulations visible only to the cameras that he perched high overhead. He filled huge soundstages with gigantic mobile sets and props to achieve wondrous transformations; he unfolded grand melodramas and sly sex comedies in jazz-dance pantomimes that relied on space-bending and eye-tricking editing. When, in 1934, the musical reached new heights of popularity thanks to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, whose dance scenes lacked camera effects, Berkeley began to film dance solos and duos as well—and did so with an originality equal to that of his crowded spectacles.

"Gold Diggers of 1935" features one of Berkeley's most celebrated sequences, "Lullaby of Broadway," a bitter vision of the life and death of a New York party girl. The routine's central set piece starts with a couple who sweep and twirl through an impossibly vast, multitiered, stark white Art Deco ballroom that Berkeley covers in expressively disorienting angles, leading to a hectic stomping dance-off between opposing phalanxes of male and female dancers. In the same year, Berkeley directed the musical sequences for "In Caliente," an insipid comedy featuring the hit song "The Lady in Red," for which he crafted a ballroom dance on an oversized dance floor for Tony and Sally De Marco. Berkeley put a spotlight over them, a simple yet powerful device that he'd reuse for years: with the camera placed high above them, he rendered their gestures as graphic outlines on the floor while they appeared to be doing synchronized duets with their shadows.

For Berkeley, filming dancers was just one aspect of making music with the camera. He also filmed musicians with an inventive ecstasy, showing the Benny Goodman band in riff-like swoops and cuts in the otherwise mild "Hollywood Hotel" and in his masterwork, the Technicolor extravaganza "The Gang's All Here." Despite its identifiable techniques, Berkeley's cinematic style is inimitable; it depends as much on grace and tone, rhythm and gesture, as does the art of the performers he filmed.

The one great moment in the cornball-bland "Babes on Broadway," from 1941, shows the nineteen-year-old Judy Garland dancing with the shadows of unseen backup dancers. In this scene, Garland and a host of other singers and dancers are in blackface; it's just one of many such offensive displays in Berkeley's work, which also features yellowface and homophobic humor, as well as a relentless focus on women's largely exposed bodies. Berkeley didn't escape the prejudices of his times; just as the illusion of the Hollywood mainstream was defined by the absence of the people and perspectives it excluded, his own conceptual depth and power of expression are inseparable from the narrowness of his sensibility.

—Richard Brody



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OPENING

Frank & Lola Matthew Ross directed this drama, about a chef (Michael Shannon) who becomes obsessed with a fashion designer (Imogen Poots). *Opening Dec. 9. (In limited release.)* • **La La Land** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening Dec. 9. (In limited release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Allied

Trudging in the footsteps of earlier films, Robert Zemeckis's new movie finds a couple falling in love, in the Second World War, in Casablanca. Max Vatan (Brad Pitt) is a Canadian, employed by British intelligence, and his contact in the city is Marianne Beauséjour (Marion Cotillard). However romantic their destiny, their immediate mission is to slay a high-ranking Nazi and then get the hell out. Back in London, heedless of the bombs, they marry and have a child. But all is not what it seems—hardly a surprise, given that we are only halfway through the story. (The screenplay is by Steven Knight.) This is curious territory for Zemeckis, who made his name with the "Back to the Future" trilogy; if you specialize in high jinks, and in the pop and dazzle of special effects, why take on a smooth saga of glamorous duplicity? The pace is sluggish, the twists are visible from afar, and Pitt wears the look of a man who longs to retire to an air-raid shelter and wait for the all-clear. Only Cotillard, suavely robed, sustains the air of mystery.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 12/5/16.) (In wide release.)*

The Eyes of My Mother

At a secluded farmhouse, a mother and her young daughter are approached by a smiling stranger. He is invited in, and from that small act of kindness a history of nastiness unfurls. It's neither softened nor stunted by the years; on the contrary, the child grows into a self-possessed young woman (Kika Magalhaes) who continues to perpetrate savage acts as if they were social niceties. Unfamiliar cuts of meat are kept in the fridge. Nicolas Pesce's début feature, strikingly shot by Zach Kuperstein in black-and-white, is curt and crisp, running less than eighty minutes; yet it seems to crawl along, so punishingly grim are the details of bodily harm, and so intent is Pesce on the trancelike behavior of his heroine. Although we are in America, both the place and the period feel vague and insecure, and the movie, for all its physicality, shrivels up at the slightest touch of logic. All of which, to be fair, is likely to lure rather than to repel any Poe-steeped addicts of horror; budding necrophiliacs, too, will find themselves instructed and entertained.—*A.L. (In limited release.)*

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them

What began as a short book by J. K. Rowling, published in 2001 in aid of charity, has led to this: the first of five planned movies spun off from the world of Harry Potter. The year is 1926, and Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne), a Hogwarts alumnus so dithering that he makes Hugh Grant look like General Patton, disembarks in New York, where a newspaper headline reads "Is Anyone Safe?" Newt has a suitcase full of magic—step into it and you find yourself in a menagerie of unearthly creatures. By accident, these are let loose in the city, and Newt must run around corralling them, with the help of a portly human, Jacob Kowalski (Dan Fogler). Also in the offing is a pair of wizarding sisters (Katherine Waterston and Alison Sudol), a witch hunter (Samantha Morton), and a menace named Percival Graves (Colin Farrell). David Yates's movie, with a script by Rowling herself, marks a welcome change from the cloistered settings and adolescent agonies of the Potter franchise, and offers more of an opportunity for the supernatural to knock against the humdrum. The subway can be scarier than a castle.—*A.L. (11/28/16) (In wide release.)*

Jackie

Natalie Portman plays Jacqueline Kennedy, and does so with such careful intensity that it will be hard for future actresses to take on the role afresh and make it theirs. No one, certainly, will capture the First Lady's voice with quite such breathy precision. Much of Pablo Larraín's film, scripted by Noah Oppenheim, is set after the death of John F. Kennedy (Caspar Phillipson), although we are led a sorry dance between the period of mourning, the day of the assassination, and some of the brighter times that went before—Jackie's televised tour of the White House, say, in 1962. That narrative restlessness owes something to an interview that she gives, when newly widowed, to a visiting reporter (Billy Crudup), but more to the frailty of her grieving mind, and Larraín often compounds the mood by trapping her, with no means of escape, in the center of the frame. Respectful viewers may find the results tendentious and even tactless; do we really need to see inside the Presidential limo after the shooting? Still, Portman gives the film her all, assisted by Peter Sarsgaard, as Robert Kennedy; John Carroll Lynch, as Lyndon B. Johnson; and John Hurt, as a ruminative priest.—*A.L. (12/5/16) (In limited release.)*

The Love Witch

Anna Biller ingeniously tweaks some Hollywood conventions and clichés of the nineteen-sixties in this wild and bloody comedy about a young Wiccan named Elaine (Samantha Robinson), who uses her supernatural powers to attract the men of her choice, and, when they disappoint her, to kill them. The action parodies classic movie tropes—the drifter who returns to a small town, the flowing-haired professorial Adonis, the police officer whose investigation is compromised by divided loyalties, the burlesque bar where everyone meets and destinies play out. But the movie is less a matter of story than of style—it's filled with ornate period costumes and furnishings (which were handmade by Biller) as well as sumptuous swaths of color and old-school optical effects. Biller's feminist philosophy meshes with the freewheeling delight of her aestheticism. The film pulsates with furious creative energy, sparking excitement and amazement by way of its decorative twists, intellectual provocations, and astounding humor.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

John Ford's 1962 epic, the most romantic of all Westerns, is also the greatest American political movie. It evokes a vast swath of history through its painfully intimate story of two great men in love with the same woman. James Stewart plays Ransom Stoddard, a tenderfoot lawyer who goes west and is waylaid by a highway robber. Hallie (Vera Miles), the waitress who nurses Ransom back to health, is betrothed to Tom Doniphon (John Wayne), a gunslinging rancher who schools him in Western ways. Stewart is deeply moving as an idealist who learns the price of action, and Wayne's growling and strutting are tightly packed with purpose and passion. The printed word reigns throughout: the lawless Liberty (Lee Marvin) strews law books in the dust, the love story pivots on lessons in reading and writing, and a local journalist delivers his resigned credo, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Ford shows both the rousing myth and the humbling truth—about the violence on which law is based, about politics, and about love. His sense of a higher mission resounds each time Tom—with just enough sarcasm to mask his reverence—calls the lawyer "pilgrim."—*R.B. (Metrograph; Dec. 10.)*

Manchester by the Sea

Kenneth Lonergan's new film is carefully constructed, compellingly acted, and often hard to watch. The hero—if you can apply the word to someone so defiantly unheroic—is a janitor, Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck), who is summoned from Boston to the coast of Massachusetts after the death of his brother Joe (Kyle Chandler). This is the definition of a winter's tale, and the ground is frozen too hard for the body to be buried. Piece by piece, in a succession of flashbacks, the shape of Chandler's past becomes apparent; he was married to Randi (Michelle Williams), who still lives locally, and something terrible tore them apart. Joe, too, had an ex-wife, now an ex-drinker (Gretchen Mol), and their teen-age son, Patrick—the most resilient character in the movie, smartly played by Lucas Hedges—is alarmed to learn that Lee is to be his legal guardian. What comes as a surprise, amid a welter of sorrow, is the harsh comedy that colors much of the dialogue, and the near-farcical frequency with which things go wrong. Far-reaching tragedy adjoins simple human error: such is the territory that Lonergan so skillfully maps out.—*A.L. (11/28/16) (In wide release.)*

Nocturnal Animals

For fans of Tom Ford, this surely counts as a bonus: two films for the price of one. In the outer shell of the movie, Amy Adams plays Susan, a gallery owner in Los Angeles who's struggling with a life so empty that it contains nothing more than contemporary art, wealth, friends, support staff, well-cut clothes, a beautiful house, and a handsome husband (Armie Hammer). She has our sympathy. One day, Susan receives the manuscript of a new novel from her ex-husband; she opens it, reads, and is at once plunged into the story that it tells—the tale of a family that is terrorized and torn apart during a road trip across Texas. (The novelist and his beleaguered hero are both played by a long-suffering Jake Gyllenhaal.) The film looks sumptuous and dense, but neither section, on its own, is especially compelling—the social lampoon, in L.A., feels thin and obvious, while the Texan scenes are more like a stylized dream of violence than the real thing.—*A.L. (11/21/16) (In limited release.)*

Things to Come

Nathalie (Isabelle Huppert) is a Parisian philosophy professor in the thick of things. She teaches ambitious students; she's in an intellectually solid relationship with her husband of a quarter century, Heinz (André Marcon), also a philosophy professor; and their children, young adults, are thriving. Nathalie is the author of a perennial textbook, the editor of an esteemed scholarly series, and the mentor to Fabien (Roman Kolinka), a philosopher who's also a co-founder of a rural commune. Then things fall apart: Nathalie's husband leaves her, her elderly mother's health fails, she suffers major professional setbacks, and she must cope with a narrowed circle of activity. This drama, directed by Mia Hansen-Løve, weaves a dense web of connections around Nathalie and then, with a bittersweet romanticism, treats them ironically, like a cocoon from which the middle-aged woman must learn to fly free. Her flurry of outer activity is stronger than any sense of inner life, although Huppert feasts on the turmoil beneath Nathalie's composed surfaces, the emotional force of the philosopher's dialectical intelligence. In French.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

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NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Binx
Scrappy young hopefuls like Binx, who let us watch pop stardom develop in real time, are a step beyond competitive-television-show contestants, fuelling Jingle Ball dreams on junk budgets. The South African singer relied on crowdfunding from a small but growing fan base to self-release her single "Radiohead," last November; in the video, the blond starlet bops in and out of cabs downtown, with a voice like Gaga's. She's partial to yellow-and-black clothes and arena choruses, but most fascinating are her bows to her homeland: on "African Heart," she sings in Xhosa and Afrikaans, as well as in English. A small label showcase will place Binx in front of curious execs and fans alike this week. *(Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. Dec. 7 at 6.)*

Bon Iver
The sheepish singer Justin Vernon surfaces in New York for ten nights, performing songs from his new album, "22, A Million." As Bon Iver, he specializes in ambling, dramatic scores that blend Bruce Hornsby's wide gaze with Kanye West's towering gall, and the disparate elements gel well across this record, to the delight of diehard fans. In 2007, Vernon's style of woodland soul took off with the release of "For Emma, Forever Ago," which featured strolling guitar riffs under his distinct falsetto. The cagey, world-weary songwriter dragged in more ambitious arrangements this time, somehow still conjuring quiet. *(Pioneer Works, 159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn. 718-596-3001. Dec. 7; Hammerstein Ballroom, 311 W. 34th St. 212-279-7740. Dec. 10; Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. 800-745-3000. Dec. 12-13.)*

Diplo
Thomas Pentz, the Grammy-winning d.j. and producer, serves as a taut link between the various pillars of style, culture, and celebrity that drive Top 40 radio and Spotify hit lists. He is also a third of the electro-dancehall group Major Lazer and a collaborator, with Skrillex, in the duo Jack Ü. Last summer, Pentz was a fixture on playlists across the country, with Major Lazer's "Lean On" and Justin Bieber's "Sorry." Historically, he's been most effective as a translator of bumpy world sounds, as on M.I.A.'s breakout hit, "Paper Planes," from 2007; since then, he's skirted accusations of appropriation, including charges that the music video for "Lean On" borrows heavily from Indian imagery and culture. "When I grew up, no one told me what I was supposed to listen to," he said recently. "I didn't think, Oh, I'm white, I've got to play a guitar. I never had a guitar. I really fucked that up. I only had turntables. I wish I got a guitar, then I wouldn't have so much criticism." *(Output, 74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. outputclub.com. Dec. 9.)*

Mac Miller
Appearing relatable, even familial, is a primary task for new artists trying to attract fans, maybe more so now than in any previous era. The Pittsburgh native, born Malcolm McCormick, was barely eighteen when he released the breakout tracks "Senior Skip Day" and "Kool-Aid and Frozen Pizza," mirroring the sentiments of high-schoolers nationwide who streamed and shared him into sudden fame. Half a decade later, he's aged toward the avuncular: twenty-four and scruffier in frame, on last summer's "100 Grandkids," he rapped astutely about employing his friends and saving funds for his progeny. On his most recent album, "The Divine Feminine," he lets a fit of young love guide him to softer, more serious sounds. *(Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Dec. 12.)*

Yael Naïm
Steve Jobs handpicked "New Soul," the plucky, theatre-pop number from Naïm, for an Apple spot in 2008, when such a placement could make a single a smash. Bright and catchy, the song made sense as a herald of the marriage between music and technology: it seemed to fulfill the promise of an interconnected creative community where artists from around the world could share in real time, and where the best material would introduce local fanatics to new styles and cultures. Yael Naïm was born in France to Tunisian parents, and grew up in Israel before moving to Paris at age twenty-one. Years after her breakout song, she's still dishing out whip-smart folk, as heard on her third album, "Older," from last year, complete with touches of jazz and an operatic sheen. *(Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St. 212-414-5994. Dec. 8.)*

PC Worship
Rest easy, Bushwick: D.I.Y. is in good hands. Venues are healthily booked, and the most interesting acts are still prolific. PC Worship is among the best of them. The experimental project of Justin Frye recently released its "Basement Hysteria" EP, four truly extended tracks of ripping noise and creep-from-behind frequencies that skirt punk without fully taking the plunge. The particularly unhinged solos on the lead single, "My Lens," conjure images of a decrepit banjo fingered at by Tim Burtonesque appendages. If apocalyptic free grunge gets you going, don't miss their set at this venue, a former boiler room for a paper company, which takes its name from the television series "Trailer Park Boys." *(Sunnyvale, 1031 Grand St., Brooklyn. 347-987-3971. Dec. 8.)*

Uniique
Local sounds stay local without flag-bearers who are loyal enough to uphold stylistic principles while broad-minded enough to see the scope of their potential. The d.j. and producer Uniique has done just that for Jersey club, the riotous mid-Atlantic dance music built on strobing drums and vocal samples that stutter and splash. She rose from home-studio tinkering in Newark to scene notoriety with a sea of remixes and blistering club sets, carving out space from the amusement-park house music and Top 40 pop that dominated venues in her home town. Having grown out of the neighboring Baltimore club sound, she is more concerned with repurposed source material and speed, and has found far-reaching fans through her hypnotizing blend of insolent rap samples and heart-racing beats. Uniique appears alongside **DJ Sega,** the Philly pioneer whose "Magical Amount" remix is one of the better anti-smoking P.S.A.s of our time. *(Elvis Guesthouse, 85 Avenue A. 212-673-1775. Dec. 8.)*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Peter Bernstein
In 2013, in what turned out to be his last public appearance before his death, Jim Hall, the poet laureate of the jazz guitar, invited this experienced, if younger, six-string ace to duet with him. Continuing to live up to the accolades, the suave stylist employs his lustrous tone and harmonic resourcefulness to buff up durable mainstream fare. *(Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Dec. 8-11.)*

Frank Kimbrough
"Solstice" may well be this veteran pianist's masterwork. It's a sparkling consideration of favored pieces by such Kimbrough heroes as Paul Motian, Andrew Hill, and Annette Peacock, which also displays his telepathic rapport with two trusted associates: the bassist **Jay Anderson** and the drummer **Jeff Hirshfield.** Both join him at this album-release celebration. *(Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. Dec. 8.)*

Rosa Passos with Kenny Barron
If the legendary vocalist Sarah Vaughan hadn't already taken the appellation the Divine One, the glorious Brazilian singer Passos could now wear it with ease. As subtle and bracing as a morning drizzle, Passos keeps the bossa-nova tradition alive, sans kitsch or forced nostalgia. The superb jazz pianist Barron, whose refined taste for Brazilian music surfaces regularly, will be a special guest. *(Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Dec. 9-10.)*

Return to Forever Meets Mahavishnu
The fusion juggernauts Return to Forever and the Mahavishnu Orchestra, friendly rivals in the seventies, unite here, or at least the leaders from each band will, including **Chick Corea** (who is finishing up his extended residency here) and the influential guitarist **John McLaughlin.** The bassist **Victor Wooten** (from Bela Fleck's neo-fusion Flecktones band) and the drummer **Lenny White** (an original electric-version R.T.F. member) round out the unit. *(Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Dec. 8-11.)*

Sara Serpa and Ran Blake
Ensconced at the New England Conservatory in Boston, where he helped initiate the inclusive Third Stream program, the idiosyncratic pianist and composer Blake heads south to duet with a former student of his, the inventive singer Serpa. The duo's third recorded collaboration, a live album from 2015 titled "Kitano Noir," featured reconfigured standards and Blake originals that made use of Serpa's haunting wordless vocalizing. *(Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. Dec. 9-10.)*

Bobby Watson
It's always good news when the soulful alto saxophonist Watson, currently the director of Jazz Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance, hits town again. On this visit, he'll be joined by the pianist **Stephen Scott,** the drummer **Lewis Nash,** and the bassist **Curtis Lundy.** *(Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Dec. 9-11.)*

Announcing the Gradual Quit Approach, a new way to use CHANTIX.

Until now, you could set a quit date of either a week or up to a month after starting CHANTIX (varenicline). Now, there's another option. If you're sure you can't quit smoking that abruptly, there's the Gradual Quit Approach. You start CHANTIX, then cut your smoking in half each month with the goal of quitting at the end of three months, or sooner. Ask your doctor about these options and learn more at CHANTIX.com. CHANTIX, along with support, can help you quit smoking. Now the only question is: *What would you do with that ashtray?*

CHANTIX: THE #1 PRESCRIBED RX QUIT-SMOKING AID.

What is CHANTIX?

CHANTIX is a prescription medication that, along with support, helps adults 18 and over stop smoking.

Important Safety Information

Some people have had changes in behavior, hostility, agitation, depressed mood, suicidal thoughts or actions while using CHANTIX to help them quit smoking. Some people had these symptoms when they began taking CHANTIX, and others developed them after several weeks of treatment or after stopping CHANTIX. If you, your family or caregiver notice agitation, hostility, depression or changes in behavior, thinking, or mood that are not typical for you, or you develop suicidal thoughts or actions, anxiety, panic, aggression, anger, mania, abnormal sensations, hallucinations, paranoia or confusion, stop taking CHANTIX and call your doctor right away. Also tell your doctor about any history of depression or other mental health problems before taking CHANTIX, as these symptoms may worsen while taking CHANTIX.

Some people had seizures during treatment with CHANTIX. Most cases happened during the first month of treatment. Tell your doctor if you have a history of seizures. If you have a seizure during treatment with CHANTIX, stop taking CHANTIX and contact your healthcare provider right away.

Decrease the amount of alcohol you drink while taking CHANTIX until you know if CHANTIX affects your ability to tolerate alcohol. Some people experienced increased drunkenness, unusual or sometimes aggressive behavior, or memory loss of events while consuming alcohol during treatment with CHANTIX.

Sleepwalking can happen with CHANTIX, and can sometimes lead to behavior that is harmful to you or other people, or to property. Stop taking CHANTIX and tell your doctor if you start sleepwalking.

Do not take CHANTIX if you have had a serious allergic or skin reaction to CHANTIX. Some people can have serious skin reactions while taking CHANTIX, some of which can become life-threatening. These can include rash, swelling, redness, and peeling of the skin. Some people can have allergic reactions to CHANTIX, some of which can be life-threatening and include: swelling of the face, mouth, and throat that can cause trouble breathing. If you have these symptoms or have a rash with peeling skin or blisters in your mouth, stop taking CHANTIX and get medical attention right away.

Before starting CHANTIX, tell your doctor if you have a history of heart or blood vessel problems. If you have new or worse heart or blood vessel symptoms during treatment, tell your doctor. Get emergency medical help right away if you have any symptoms of a heart attack or stroke.

The most common side effects of CHANTIX are nausea, sleep problems, constipation, gas and vomiting. If you have side effects that bother you or don't go away, tell your doctor. Patients also reported trouble sleeping, vivid, unusual or strange dreams. Use caution driving or operating machinery until you know how CHANTIX may affect you.

You may need a lower dose of CHANTIX if you have kidney problems or get dialysis. Before starting CHANTIX, tell your doctor if you are pregnant, plan to become pregnant, or if you take insulin, asthma medicines or blood thinners. Medicines like these may work differently when you quit smoking. CHANTIX should not be taken with other quit-smoking medicines. Should you slip up and smoke, keep trying to quit.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Please see important risk information on the next page.

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Pfizer, PO Box 29356, Mission, KS 66201

IMPORTANT FACTS

CHANTIX® (varenicline) TABLETS (CHANT-iks)

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHANTIX?

Some people have had serious side effects while using CHANTIX (varenicline) to help them quit smoking, including:

New or worse mental health problems, such as changes in behavior, hostility, agitation, depressed mood, and suicidal thoughts or actions. Some people had these symptoms when they began taking CHANTIX, and others developed them after several weeks of treatment, or after stopping CHANTIX.

Before taking CHANTIX, tell your doctor if you have ever had depression or other mental health problems. You should also tell your doctor about any symptoms you had during other times you tried to quit smoking, with or without CHANTIX.

Stop taking CHANTIX and call your doctor right away if you, your family, or caregiver notice agitation, hostility, depression or changes in your behavior or thinking that are not typical for you, or you develop any of the following symptoms:

- thoughts about suicide or dying, or attempts to commit suicide
- new or worse depression, anxiety, or panic attacks
- feeling very agitated or restless
- acting aggressive, being angry, or violent
- acting on dangerous impulses
- an extreme increase in activity and talking (mania)
- abnormal thoughts or sensations
- seeing or hearing things that are not there (hallucinations)
- feeling people are against you (paranoia)
- feeling confused
- other unusual changes in behavior or mood

When you try to quit smoking, with or without CHANTIX, you may have symptoms that may be due to nicotine withdrawal, including urge to smoke, depressed mood, trouble sleeping, irritability, frustration, anger, feeling anxious, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, decreased heart rate, and increased appetite or weight gain. Some people have even experienced suicidal thoughts when trying to quit smoking without medication. Sometimes quitting smoking can lead to worsening of mental health problems that you already have, such as depression.
See "WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CHANTIX?" for more information about other side effects.

WHAT IS CHANTIX?

CHANTIX is a prescription medicine to help adults stop smoking.

WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE CHANTIX?

Do not take CHANTIX if you have had a serious allergic or skin reaction to CHANTIX. Symptoms may include:

- swelling of the face, mouth (tongue, lips, gums), throat or neck
- trouble breathing
- rash, with peeling skin
- blisters in your mouth

Some of these reactions can become life-threatening.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY DOCTOR BEFORE TAKING CHANTIX?

See **"WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHANTIX?"**

Before you take CHANTIX, tell your doctor if you:

- use other treatments to quit smoking. You should not use CHANTIX while using other medicines to quit smoking. Using CHANTIX with a nicotine patch may cause nausea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, upset stomach, and tiredness to happen more often than if you just use a nicotine patch alone.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY DOCTOR BEFORE TAKING CHANTIX? (continued)

- have kidney problems or get kidney dialysis. Your doctor may prescribe a lower dose of CHANTIX for you.
- have a history of seizures
- drink alcohol
- have heart or blood vessel problems
- have any other medical conditions
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if CHANTIX will harm your unborn baby.
- are breastfeeding. It is not known if CHANTIX passes into breast milk. If you breastfeed and take CHANTIX, monitor your baby for seizures as well as spitting up or vomiting more than normal.

Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbal supplements. Your doctor may need to change the dose of some of your medicines when you stop smoking.

WHAT SHOULD I AVOID WHILE TAKING CHANTIX?

- Use caution when driving or operating machinery until you know how CHANTIX affects you. CHANTIX may make you feel sleepy, dizzy, or have trouble concentrating, making it hard to drive or perform other activities safely.
- Decrease the amount of alcoholic beverages that you drink during treatment with CHANTIX until you know if CHANTIX affects your ability to tolerate alcohol.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF CHANTIX?

Serious side effects of CHANTIX may include:

- See **"WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHANTIX?"**
- **Seizures**
- **New or worse heart or blood vessel (cardiovascular) problems**
  - **Get emergency medical help right away if you have symptoms of a heart attack**
- **Sleepwalking** which can sometimes lead to behavior that is harmful to you or other people, or to property.
- **Allergic or serious skin reactions.** See "WHO SHOULD NOT TAKE CHANTIX?"

If you experience any of the above side effects, stop taking CHANTIX and get medical help right away.

The most common side effects of CHANTIX include:

- nausea
- sleep problems (trouble sleeping or vivid, unusual, or strange dreams)
- constipation
- gas
- vomiting

Tell your doctor about side effects that bother you or that do not go away.

These are not all the side effects of CHANTIX. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your health care provider for complete product information. This is only a brief summary of important information.
- Go to www.CHANTIX.com or call 1-877-242-6849 (1-877-CHANTIX) for information about CHANTIX, including the FDA approved product labeling.

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This brief summary is based on CHANTIX Prescribing Information LAB-0327-21.0 and Medication Guide LAB-0328-14.0

Revised: August 2016

Mark Morris Dance Group's "The Hard Nut" celebrates twenty-five years, at BAM.

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM TAYLOR

The Not Too Hard Nut

Kraig Patterson, as the maid, tries and fails to be a bitch.

THIS YEAR IS the twenty-fifth anniversary of "The Hard Nut," Mark Morris's version of "The Nutcracker." (It plays at BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House Dec. 10-11 and Dec. 14-18.) In that quarter century, almost all the original 1991 cast members have gone on to other jobs, other lives, or at least other roles in "The Hard Nut." (Morris, originally the party guest who kept getting his leg humped by the Stahlbaums' hormonal teen-age daughter, Louise, is now Dr. Stahlbaum.) Only one person from the starting lineup remains in place, and appropriately—since that character seems, from the curtain-call decibels, to be the most beloved—it is the Stahlbaum family maid, played, in drag, by Kraig Patterson. There she still stands, in her little French maid's outfit, plus black point shoes, on which she bourrées furiously when she needs to show someone who's boss. "I kind of fashioned her after Naomi Campbell," Patterson recalls. "Also the housekeeper in 'The Jeffersons'—the one who's always sucking her teeth at her boss." The uniform tells it all. In front, you see the white apron and the little doily of a cap. But turn her around and you find that the dress is backless.

The maid is the tutelary genius of "The Hard Nut," the one who embodies the spirit of the piece. Almost all the adults in the ballet behave badly most of the time, and it's not as though they don't mean to. Mrs. Stahlbaum takes drugs. The guests grab one another in inappropriate places. In one performance I saw, a neighbor, leaving for home, picked out a package from under the Christmas tree and took it with her. But often, in a Mark Morris piece, a sort of bumbling badness will be placed alongside goodness, and in the end goodness wins, even if in a humble way. The maid is the only person in "The Hard Nut" who selflessly enjoys small pleasures. When, at the party, the guests do the Stroll, she joins in and has a great old time, though her partner is the family's horrible little son, Fritz. In another scene—it opens Act II—the maid is watching over Marie, who is ill. (Her nutcracker got broken; there was a war between the rats and the G.I. Joes; she fainted; everything is awful.) While Marie sleeps, the maid thumbs through a fashion magazine, and she finds a scratch-and-sniff. She scratches! She sniffs! Free perfume! What joy!

To the maid, much of the time, the world is beautiful. When I proposed this to Patterson, he wasn't quite sure. "I'm still bitchy," he said proudly, reminding me that in the party scene he manages to steer his drinks tray past the guests he doesn't like. But yes, he said, "the maid is the only one, by the end, who understands everything." Marie wins the Nutcracker Prince, and Louise, who was all set to steal him, at least gets a new dress. The world is pretty bad, but sweetness goes on blooming.

—Joan Acocella

New York City Ballet / "George Balanchine's The Nutcracker"
Balanchine's classic 1954 ballet has a bit of everything: cozy family dances, conflict, drama—enter Dewdrop with her urgent leaps—and sugarplums, too. *(David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Dec. 7-11 and Dec. 13. Through Dec. 31.)*

Juilliard Dance / "New Dances: Edition 2016"
Juilliard holds its yearly showcase of new choreography. John Heginbotham, creating a work for the first-year students, is a former Mark Morris dancer who makes eccentric, often funny, and highly musical pieces; his work is set to the first movement of a Schubert string quintet (played live). Pam Tanowitz, an experimentalist strongly influenced by Merce Cunningham, will be using a spiky score by the young American composer Andrew Norman (also performed live). The other two works are by Katarzyna Skarpetowska and Matthew Neenan. *(Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-769-7406. Dec. 7-11.)*

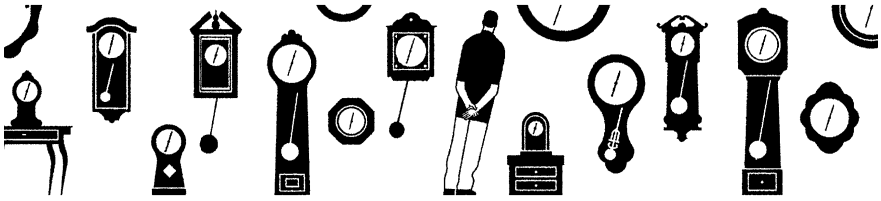
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre
In the second week of the season, the major premières are unveiled. First up is the full version of Kyle Abraham's "Untitled America," a three-part piece about mass incarceration that the company has been revealing in short installments. The first two sections, evocative but treading water, embodied the pain of separation; will the completed work add up to more? Also new is "r-Evolution, Dream" by the company member Hope Boykin, an inspirational effort with a jazz score by Ali Jackson and speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr., recorded by Leslie Odom, Jr. *(City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 7-11 and Dec. 13. Through Dec. 31.)*

Sonya Tayeh
Well known to viewers of "So You Think You Can Dance?," Tayeh wants to break into the concert world, too. "You'll Still Call Me by Name," her first evening-length effort, draws upon the ups and downs of a mother-daughter relationship. Tayeh's combative style should capture the anger in that story, at least. The score, by the indie-folk duo the Bengsons, is performed live. *(New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 9-11. Through Dec. 17.)*

Condors/Ryohei Kondo
The Japanese folktale "Hanasaka Jiisan" ("The Old Man Who Made Flowers Bloom") concerns a dog, gold, and the connivance and comeuppance of a greedy neighbor. In the hands of Kondo and performers from his company, Condors, a zany, all-male troupe from Japan, it's raucous fun with slapstick, lively music, goofy dancing, and a moral. *(Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Dec. 10-11.)*

"The Hard Nut"
Mark Morris's alternative to the holiday classic has none of the saccharine sweetness of many traditional versions, nor are there any adorable children. The setting is an outrageous version of American suburbia, circa 1970, stylishly done up in the cartoon–moderne style of Charles Burns. The grownups drink to excess and misbehave. Dr. Stahlbaum, the paterfamilias, is played by Morris himself. But Morris's response to the music, especially in the second act, is genuine. This is a "Nutcracker" with a heart, after all. *(BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 10-11. Through Dec. 18.)*

ABOVE & BEYOND



The Glass Room
This interactive exhibit looks like just another shiny retail space from the outside, but step in and you'll find an investigation of our digital footprint and how it might manifest in the physical world. On display are satirical works concerned with Web privacy and security, including an eight-book directory of real passwords gathered from a leak at a major online company, facial-recognition software that scans church pews to take attendance, and an "inGenious" bar, where visitors can detox their data. The space hosts daily talks and tours: highlights this week include discussions about how the Web works, tips for avoiding an increasingly omnipotent Google and its many services, and tricks for mobile-phone security that may be hidden in plain sight. *(201 Mulberry St. theglassroomnyc.org. Through Dec. 14.)*

Holiday Train Show
The New York Botanical Garden converts more than two hundred and fifty acres into a captivating train show, where models race through miniature landmarks made from bark, leaves, and other natural materials, including the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, and Rockefeller Center. The annual display expands this year to include a reproduction of Coney Island. *(2900 Southern Blvd., the Bronx. 718-817-8700. Through Jan. 16.)*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

It's that time of year, with shimmering lights on the tree and sparkling jewels at the auction house. The first of two sales at **Sotheby's** (Dec. 8-9) is centered around a private collection filled with flamboyant gems: a hand-size butterfly brooch encrusted with emeralds and sapphires, a massive choker in the shape of a garland of tulip blossoms, and a marquise-cut diamond of more than eighteen carats, large enough to cover an entire knuckle. Then, changing course, the house offers a selection of rock-and-roll memorabilia (Dec. 10) that includes the funky-looking upright piano on which John Lennon composed "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." *(York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)* • **Christie's** offers diamonds and sapphires—including an atypical brown diamond—at its jewelry sale (Dec. 7), which is followed by a day devoted to design objects (Dec. 12). One of these sessions will be dedicated to the contents of a Venetian palazzo, home to the Italian collectors Chiara and Francesco Carraro: the sale is particularly heavy on glass baubles, including an elegant fin-de-siècle mirror by Carlo Bugatti and an Art Deco vase by Gio Ponti that looks like it was lifted from Bertolucci's "The Conformist." *(20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)* • More chairs, tables, and sculptures go under the gavel in three sessions at **Phillips** (Dec. 13), with the priciest items (a Eugène Printz desk, a Marcel Coard drinks cabinet) grouped in an evening sale. For the smart set, there is an auction showcasing the minimalist collection of the high-profile architect Lee Mindel—the designer of Sting's London aerie—who is abandoning his light-filled Flatiron penthouse for a new tower of glass boxes in Tribeca. *(450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)*

READINGS AND TALKS

Symphony Space
The "Selected Shorts" series honors the short-story form by having actors read the work of well-known and emerging authors in front of a live audience. Guest readers are invited to choose a topically relevant theme or a slate of titles they enjoy—this week, Paul Giamatti reads favorites in fiction from the *New York Review of Books*, including pieces by W. H. Auden and Anton Chekhov. Giamatti is joined by Jane Kaczmarek ("Malcolm in the Middle"), Billy Porter ("Kinky Boots"), and Kathryn Erbe ("Law & Order: Criminal Intent") for a hybrid evening of literature and performance. *(2537 Broadway. 212-864-5400. Dec. 7 at 7:30.)*

Albertine
Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris adopted his moniker, Le Corbusier, to distance himself from his Swiss bourgeois upbringing. His contributions to the field of architecture and home design are far-reaching: the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, which distinguishes such locations as the Taj Mahal and the Serengeti National Park, recently admitted seventeen of Le Corbusier's buildings to its roster. The sites, in seven different countries, include the National Museum of Western Art, in Tokyo, and the Unité d'Habitation, in Marseilles. Jean-Louis Cohen, a professor at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, is joined by the architect Peter Eisenman and the historian and theorist Mary McLeod to discuss the lasting impact of Le Corbusier's work and the significance of this latest recognition. *(972 Fifth Ave. albertine.com. Dec. 7 at 7.)*

Word Bookstore
The novelist Zadie Smith débuts "Swing Time," about two young friends who are brought together by a love of tap dance and eventually distanced by incompatible ambitions. Spanning North London and West Africa, Smith's fifth novel draws from the author's own experiences in recent travels and stuns readers with shrewd cultural observations, a trademark of all her works. Smith signs copies after a short reading at this Greenpoint shop. *(126 Franklin St., Brooklyn. 718-383-0096. Dec. 9 at 7.)*

ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO AMARGO

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID WILLIAMS FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

TABLES FOR TWO

Sunken Hundred

276 Smith St., Brooklyn (718-722-1069)

IN 2012, WHEN Tom Coughlan, a twenty-two-year-old culinary student, plunked down two quarts of blood and a slab of pig belly on Illtyd Barrett's desk, as proof that he had slaughtered an animal, Barrett called his brother and said, "We got our guy." Barrett, an artist from Milford Haven, had been dreaming of opening the first Welsh restaurant in New York. Three months ago, Sunken Hundred was finally born, with a loyal Coughlan at the helm.

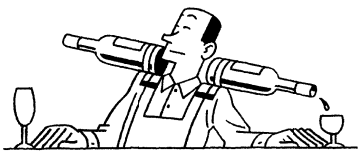
The Carroll Gardens space is infused with Barrett's wry sense of humor, equal parts punk and patriotic. The red dragon of the Welsh flag is reflected on the Dragon Wall, with its rose-tinted pictures of mothers and grandmothers. Posters of classic movies, modified for Welsh vernacular—"Dial 'M' for Merthyr"—hang over the cozy window booths. A silvery photo of tree stumps that look like surfacing sea monsters anchors the room. It's what's thought to be the Sunken Hundred, the mythical land that lay submerged for centuries until it was revealed by a storm system in 2014. "It was a sunken *kingdom,*" Barrett explains, on his rounds, charming customers.

The pub atmosphere and the barrage of My Bloody Valentine and the Clash are incongruous with how quietly thoughtful the food is. The Gwaun Valley trout is served with the restrained minimalism of a Japanese delicacy: four translucent rectangles of mushroom-cured fish, interspersed with parsnip medallions and finished with fried rosemary. "I'd argue anyone under the table that that dish is Welsh," Barrett says. "I showed Tom a picture of the valley just north of where I come from. A stream runs through it that's packed with trout. In that valley, you get mushrooms, parsnips, cabbages, hazelnut trees, wild rosemary, wild garlic. Everything that's in that valley is in that fish."

There are more classic items on the menu—a perfectly spiced lamb pasty and buttery braised leeks—but Barrett is determined to expand people's understanding of Welsh cuisine. Steamed mussels are piled up in a garlicky broth enriched with Calvados and pork belly; sautéed squid shines against an earthy-sweet backdrop of dried apricots, almonds, and a bright romesco. Seaweed imported from the beaches of Barrett's youth makes an appearance in the snacks that start the meal, in the wet smear of nori-like laver on the side of the gorgeous seafood stew, and as dusting on the rim of the Lost to the Sea cocktail, a bracingly oceanic elixir with extra-proof gin and kelp bitters. A waiter, perfectly embodying the good-humored coarseness of the place, warns with a wink that it tastes like getting intimate with a mermaid. What could be more Welsh? *(Dishes $7-$19.)*

—Becky Cooper

BAR TAB

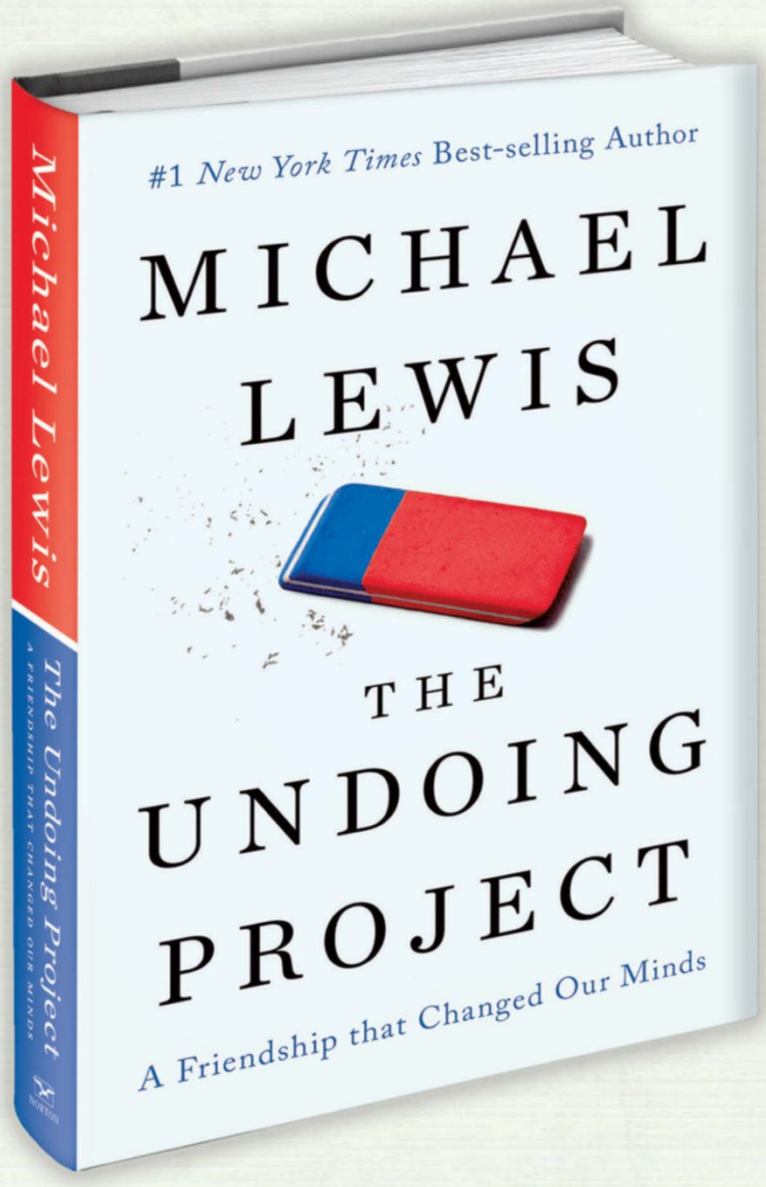


Otto's Shrunken Head Tiki Bar & Lounge
538 E. 14th St. (212-228-2240)

On a recent night at the door to Otto's Shrunken Head, the bouncer's lip piercing dangled into his snow-white beard, and he told a story: the name of the bar, he thinks, has something to do with a sailor who got lost at sea and went mad. Just past him, the fourteen-year-old establishment feels like an island haven for odd souls, with a dark, submarine air. The teal ceiling is crowded with paper lanterns and colored lights made from taxidermied puffer fish; hanging just above the front door is a yellow surfboard with a skeleton clinging to it, bony limbs locked around the board for better purchase. One Thursday, the d.j. Pat Pervert played punk's greatest hits, and the murmurs of patrons in black leather jackets sank beneath the throbbing rhythm of Turbonegro's "All My Friends Are Dead." A mosaic of ink was proudly displayed on the arms and legs draped over zebra-print bar stools and vinyl booths. The cocktails were as loud as the music. Adorned with tiki umbrellas, pineapple chunks, and festive straws, drinks are served in mugs shaped like skulls or glaring totems. The piña colada is strong and fiercely sweet, as are the Stormy Skull (dark rum, coconut, ginger) and the Shrunken Skirt ("Ladies Beware! Don't forget your underwear if you go for this mango elixir"). The specials deliver on uncomplicated promises: the Crème-A-Licious, while difficult to order straight-faced, is indeed, as advertised, like a Creamsicle. On the weekend, the back room, with its Hawaiian-printed walls, filled up with a clientele as outré as its décor: a five-person band took the stage, and in the sweaty final crescendo the audience joined in, drinks raised, for the chorus: "I'm just trying to be myself."—*Talia Lavin*

#1 *New York Times* Best-selling Author

MICHAEL LEWIS



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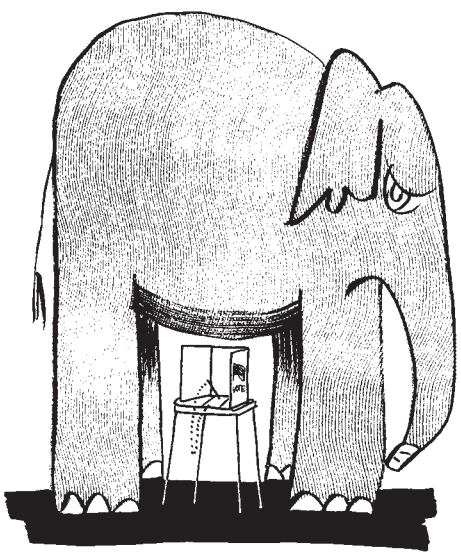
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE FIGHT TO VOTE

Students of political despair (a popular field these days) might consider the case of Robert Parris Moses. He was a twenty-six-year-old high-school math teacher in New York City, when, in 1961, he set off, alone, to register African-American voters in Mississippi. At the time, fewer than seven per cent of eligible African-Americans in the state were registered. Local officials kept the number low by means of literacy tests, poll taxes, and violence—aimed at those trying to register and, particularly, at those seeking to register others. They included Moses and a small band of colleagues in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee who joined him. He was beaten repeatedly, once nearly to death. A quiet, almost serene figure, he came to exemplify a special kind of civil-rights worker, who, as Taylor Branch wrote, in "Parting the Waters," "chose to isolate himself deep behind the lines of segregation for years at a time, armed only with nonviolence."

Moses understood that the franchise is the foundation of democracy, and, more than half a century later, that right is again under threat, often in the same places (mostly in the South) and always for the same reason (so that those in power can stay there). What makes the current controversy so dispiriting is the sense that the issue should have been settled by now. But, given the centrality of voting to our system of government, elections will always be battlegrounds, and votes are the weapons.



Some, though, are offering the wrong lesson about voting rights in this year's Presidential election. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by a substantial margin—more than two and a half million votes—but, under the baleful metrics of our Electoral College, the outcome was not especially close. Donald Trump gained surprising victories in the northern Midwest, and his margins in the dispositive states are well outside the range where recounts, which almost never result in a change of more than five hundred votes, might make a difference. Trump won Michigan by 10,704 votes, Wisconsin by 22,177, and Pennsylvania by 70,638. Still, Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate, has launched a successful fund-raising drive, collecting almost seven million dollars from grieving Americans, to underwrite official recounts. Wisconsin's is under way, although lawyers supporting Trump are trying to stop the effort in all three states.

Stein's demands for a recount reflect the same narcissism as her candidacy, whose primary function was to help Trump win. (Her roughly one per cent of the national vote included more than enough votes to swing two of the three states to Clinton.) Now she has exploited legitimate questions about interference by Russia, which, it seems, organized or backed a hacking operation that involved the theft of e-mails from the Democratic National Committee and from Clinton's campaign chair, John Podesta. This drew a curiously passive response from the Obama Administration, but there remains no evidence that Russia or any other outside force systematically intervened or altered the result in any state. The recounts will only give Trump an opportunity to claim victory again.

More important, they have turned attention away from the real voting-rights scandal of 2016. This was the first Presidential election since the Supreme Court's notorious Shelby County v. Holder decision, which gutted the Voting Rights Act. Several Republican-controlled states took the Court's decision as an invitation to rewrite their election laws, purportedly to address the (nonexistent) problem of voter fraud but in fact to limit the opportunities for Democrats and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

minorities (overlapping groups, of course) to cast their ballots.

In the words of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, which, before the election, struck down some of the changes instituted by North Carolina, "Although the new provisions target African Americans with almost surgical precision, they constitute inapt remedies for the problems assertedly justifying them and, in fact, impose cures for problems that did not exist." Likewise, a federal court in Wisconsin rejected some of the changes in voting rules there, but federal courts can't police every aspect of voting rights. Ultimately, the states determine such issues as early and absentee voting, photo-identification requirements, and the locations and hours of polling places.

It's difficult to count uncast votes, but there were clearly thousands of them as a result of the voter-suppression measures. In 2014, according to a Wisconsin federal court, three hundred thousand registered voters in that state lacked the forms of identification that Republican legislators deemed necessary to cast their ballots. (The G.O.P. likes some forms of I.D. better than others. In Texas, a gun permit works; student identification does not.) In Milwaukee County, which has a large African-American population, sixty thousand fewer votes were cast in 2016 than in 2012. To put it another way, Clinton received forty-three thousand fewer votes in that county than Barack Obama did—a number that is nearly double Trump's margin of victory in all of Wisconsin. The North Carolina Republican Party actually sent out a press release boasting about how its efforts drove down African-American turnout in this election.

The challenge of reversing these initiatives is formidable, not least because the President-elect also apparently believes in the myth of widespread voter fraud. (He tweeted recently, and falsely, that he "won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally.") Eric Holder, who did much to protect voting rights as Attorney General, will be joined by President Obama in a project to preserve Democratic and minority power in the legislative redistricting that will follow the 2020 census—a valuable project, if a daunting one.

The current situation is not nearly as bleak as the one that Bob Moses confronted. Eventually, the power of perseverance, and the unifying idea of the right to vote in a democracy, brought him a series of unlikely triumphs, culminating, in 1965, in the passage of the Voting Rights Act. But the Shelby County case, and the backlash it both reflected and accelerated, reminds us that the struggle for the right to vote, and the need to follow Moses, may never end.

—Jeffrey Toobin

SUGAR SUGAR
ASK-HOLE

Early in 2010, Cheryl Strayed got an e-mail from an acquaintance, Steve Almond, who wrote an advice column—Dear Sugar—for the literary Web site The Rumpus. Strayed was living in Portland with her husband and their two preschoolers, and had just turned in the first draft of her memoir, "Wild." She'd written Sugar a fan letter, not knowing that it was Almond. He asked if she was interested in taking over the column. "He said all the reasons I shouldn't do it," Strayed recalled the other day. " 'It doesn't pay, nobody's reading it.' And I said, 'I'll do it.' "

Strayed's approach was unconventional. She would answer each question with a winding personal anecdote—about her divorce, about her abusive grandfather. "It was very much the Age of Snark in the lit world," she said. "I had sincerity to offer." The column became wildly popular. Strayed wrote as Sugar anonymously for two years, then collected her columns in the book "Tiny Beautiful Things," which the actress and writer Nia Vardalos, of "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," has now adapted as a play at the Public Theatre. Vardalos plays Sugar.

"Because I have a giant family, I got unsolicited advice my entire life," Vardalos said the morning after the first preview, sitting with Strayed over coffee and pastries at the Public's second-floor restaurant. " 'Marry a Greek boy.' "

"No one ever told *me* to marry a Greek boy!" Strayed said. "One of the most important pieces of advice that my mother gave me, which I didn't understand at the time, was: 'Put yourself in the way of beauty.' "

"We all have those friends who ask for advice and never take it," Vardalos said. "It's called being an *ask*-hole." She recalled her years-long "infertility nightmare," which she chronicled in her memoir, "Instant Mom." "My best friend told me, 'Giving birth isn't what makes you a mother.' And I heard it and pursued adoption. After my book came out, she said, 'Well, I said that to you about four times through the nine years that you were struggling.' I never heard it until I heard it."

In the spirit of problem-solving, their interviewer had solicited some questions from friends. Both Sugars agreed to take a crack:

> I'm reasonably smart and competent and good at what I do, but I keep taking jobs I don't especially want and then ultimately getting fired from them. It's starting to feel like I'll never have a good, fulfilling job again. What the hell should I do with the rest of my life?
>
> —Without Work in the West Village

"I feel like this person is taking jobs that pay the rent but don't feed their soul," Vardalos said. "I think they're afraid to admit that they might

Nia Vardalos and Cheryl Strayed

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be an artist. What do you think, Sugar?"

"I would say two things," Strayed said. "What do you want? Explore that and pursue that path. And why are you getting fired? Make a list right now of all the reasons you've been given. If they're the same reasons over and over again, think about how to address that issue in your life."

Vardalos added, "And if you're being fired a lot because you're late or inattentive or moody, eat organic. Put down that cheeseburger!"

I'm a single woman living in the Upper Midwest and have not had much luck dating via online sites (and I have tried them all). Should I pretend it's pre-Internet and try to chat up men at the grocery store? I feel like I need to go guerrilla style.

—A Saint Paul Single Lady

"I knew she lived in Minnesota when she said the Upper Midwest," Strayed said. (She grew up in Aitkin County.)

"And that's close enough to Canada for me!" Vardalos (Winnipeg) said. "So let's talk."

"This is the most common question that I receive," Strayed said. " 'I want love and I can't find it, and I'm starting to feel that I'll never get it.' The only thing that I can say is that you're probably wrong. It might not be in the way that you expect or on the timeline that you desire, but you will probably find love." Both Sugars warned against dating sites.

How do I survive four years of President Trump?

—Freaked-Out American

"If a person is the President of the country that you live in, that person does not have to represent you," Vardalos said. "We're still who we are. You can continue to be the kindhearted, open-minded, non-racist, homo-loving vegetarian that you might be. I say, Wave your freak flag loud and proud."

"I've had hundreds of people ask me, 'What do we do?' " Strayed said. "They're kind of like those love questions. I don't have a crystal ball. I think each person has to do something different in the face of this moment. I think sometimes people ask questions not because they even believe there's an answer but because they want to be heard."

—*Michael Schulman*

HOUSE DIVIDED DEPT.
BALANCING ACT

Alan Dershowitz, an emeritus professor at Harvard Law School and a prolific author, has defended many unpopular clients: O.J. Simpson; neo-Nazis in Skokie, Illinois; Claus von Bülow; Jeffrey Epstein. It can sometimes seem that, whenever there is a public controversy, Dershowitz appears on TV explaining, with what he would call nuance and his critics would call cunning, why both sides are wrong.

So it wasn't surprising to see him surface recently amid the controversy surrounding Donald Trump's choice of Steve Bannon to be his chief White House strategist. Bannon, the former chairman of Breitbart News, has implied that Asian-born C.E.O.s threaten American "civic society"; he was accused, by an ex-wife, of calling Jewish children "whiny brats." But Bannon also seems to have pro-Israel, pro-Likud views. So, while his appointment provoked outrage from civil-rights groups, pro-Muslim groups, and gay activists, among American Jewish organizations the reaction was divided. The Anti-Defamation League denounced Bannon's appointment; AIPAC stayed silent; the right-wing Zionist Organization of America invited him to its annual gala as an honored guest.

Dershowitz, a staunch Zionist—and a lifelong Democrat, who voted for Clinton—had taken to the airwaves to stick up for Bannon, sort of. "I don't know whether he's an anti-Semite or not," he said, on MSNBC. "I just don't think you should toss that phrase around casually."

On a recent Sunday evening, Dershowitz took a cab to the Z.O.A. gala, at the Grand Hyatt, in midtown. Left-leaning Jewish groups were protesting outside. (Among the picket signs: "Fire Bannon"; "Shalom, Motherfucker!") Dershowitz was scheduled to speak. "I'm walking a fine line here," he said, sitting on a couch in the lobby. He wore a rumpled gray suit and a red tie decorated with the scales of justice and the phrase "Not Guilty." His wife, Carolyn Cohen, a psychologist, sat next to him, reading e-mails on her phone.

"I don't know that Bannon is *personally* anti-Semitic," he said, explaining his earlier statements. "He hires Jews. He seems to work well with them. That doesn't mean that I like Bannon, or Breitbart. Their coverage of Muslims? Their headlines about women? Horrible." He mentioned one headline: "Birth Control Makes Women Unattractive and Crazy." "Does Bannon really believe that, or is he just trying to sell papers? My wife was gorgeous when she was on birth control." Cohen glanced up from her phone and smiled, tolerantly.

"Look, I understand why people are outside protesting," Dershowitz continued. "Part of me wants to be with them. But—well, I'll tell you a story. I was teaching a class on affirmative action at Harvard, and we were discussing the phrase 'visible minority.' A student asks, 'Are Jews a visible minority?' My response: 'No, we're an *audible* minority.' " He paused, as if for laughter. "So, my way of being audible is: I show up. I confront. In the twenties, Jews were seduced by Communists. Now it's by a populist right that has elements of Fascism. I'm going to try to warn against that tonight. I don't know how well it'll go over, to be honest."

In the ballroom, the Y-Studs, a Yeshiva University a-cappella group, started things off by singing the national anthems of the United States and Israel. A table of Orthodox men, hands over hearts, sang loudly—an audible minority. A young boy got bored and sat down; his father yanked him up by his payes. "Thank God we have Donald Trump, who will fix the disastrous Iran deal!" Morton Klein, the president of the Z.O.A., bellowed from the podium. The audience cheered. "Those of us who believe that Yad Hashem, the hand of God, is in all things see this election result as being divinely directed," another speaker said.

Then Dershowitz spoke. "We must be as stalwart in condemning bigotry in our friends as we are in our enemies," he said. There was a smattering of applause. "Let's remember, in the clapping for Donald Trump, that this was nearly a tie election." The audience booed and hissed. A few people shouted, "We won!"

Dershowitz returned to his seat at the

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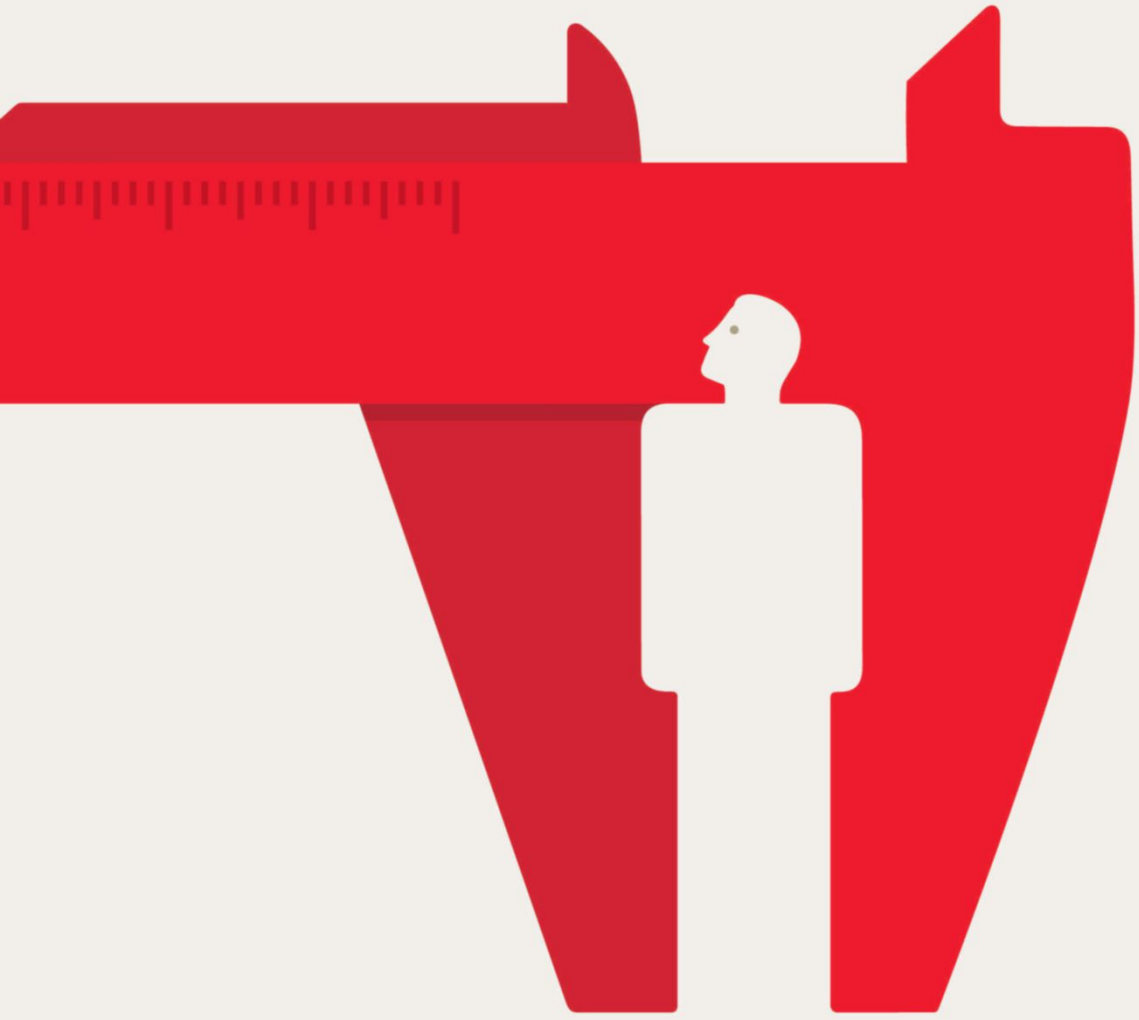

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table of honor, in the center of the ballroom, behind a velvet rope. The seat next to his was reserved for Senator Charles Schumer, who never showed up. Neither, in the end, did Bannon. "He didn't need to come," a man sitting at the press table said. "He just announced that he was coming and got his name kosherized in the press."

In the hallway outside the ballroom, Dershowitz took selfies with packs of college students. Cohen was gone. "She felt it was too much like a Trump rally, and she excused herself," he said. "I can't tell whether my message came across, but I hope I at least struck a note of caution." Servers wearing gloves carried away plates of uneaten short ribs. The P.A. system was playing Don Henley's "The End of the Innocence," the Muzak version.

—Andrew Marantz

UP LIFE'S LADDER
SUBURBAN SAFARI

A BLACK MERCEDES MINIVAN stopped in front of the H&M on Eighty-sixth Street, near Lexington Avenue, on a recent Saturday morning. Three youngish married couples got in. Their destination: the mysterious and occasionally scary territory known as the suburbs of Westchester.

"This is our luxury tour," Zach Harrison said, as the van merged onto the F.D.R. Drive and then sped over to the Hutchinson River Parkway. Harrison, an attorney who resembles Stephen Colbert, and his wife, Heather, a former TV news reporter who talks in rapid-fire bursts, co-founded Platinum Drive Realty. The company's mission is to convince millennials that the suburbs have soul.

The Harrisons know the territory. (Their Web site says, "We grew up here. We live here. We sell homes here.") Lately, the financial news has been helping them make their case. "A lot of millennials who have been delaying making the move, thinking interest rates would stay low forever, are coming around," Zach said. "One buyer from the city said she looked forward to avoiding all the Trump traffic around Manhattan."

The Harrisons ticked off towns on the tour: Scarsdale, Edgemont, Ardsley, Irvington. "You're not moving out to the middle of nowhere—it's basically a long subway ride," Zach told the group.

In the back seat, Elodie Di Palo Burrone, who works in e-commerce, and her husband, David Marr, a graphic designer and painter, chatted with Deena Weinhouse, another Platinum Drive agent. Weinhouse lives in Boulder Ridge, a gated community in Scarsdale.

"If someone had told me, when I was in your position, where I would end up living, I would be, like, 'Well, you're smoking crack!'" Weinhouse said. "Looking for a house—it's a lot of self-analysis."

"I really like dark woods," Marr said. "And bricks." Burrone described the stone house of her childhood, in Lyons, France.

"When was it built?" Weinhouse asked.

"The fourteenth century."

"We live in SoHo," Marr said. They share a loft with an elderly painter they met on Craigslist. "It's a little tight."

The van pulled into the Golden Horseshoe Shopping Center, in Scarsdale, where Platinum has an office, for a bathroom break. (Other tenants: Bank of America, Bagel Power, Seven Woks.)

"Can you find a lot of small shops?" Marr asked.

"There are a lot," Zach said. "We also do have chains."

"We have Trader Joe's, we have Whole Foods," Heather said.

In the back seat, Igor Vaschuk, a software engineer with a goatee, perked up. "Whole Foods is very important," he said. Vaschuk and his wife, Olga—also a software engineer—live in Midwood with their two-year-old daughter. Olga said that, before the baby, they used to trek into Manhattan to go to the Metropolitan Opera, but they don't have the energy now. "It ends so late!"

Sébastien Parsons, a muscular graphic designer, said that he and his wife, Iris Wang, an e-mail marketer, live in a one-bedroom in Elmhurst. They used to frequent night clubs, he said, but "we actually haven't been going crazy for a while."

"You slow down," Wang said.

"We have fortieth-birthday parties at Soul Cycle," Heather offered. "You go and you work out, and you drink afterwards!"

The van drove past schools, an equestrian center ("There's a horse!" Weinhouse said), a golf course, and the four Scarsdale pools (diving, adult, intermediate, and kiddie), and parked in the driveway of a peach-colored brick Colonial in Edgemont: fifty-five hundred square feet, with five bedrooms, six bathrooms, an in-ground pool, and a master-bedroom suite with its own private deck. Asking price: $2.59 million.

"Ooh!" Wang said, as the group walked through the house. "Walk-in closet."

"Great built-ins, tough to get this much space in New York City," Zach said.

Igor: "How much does it cost to heat this house?"

Zach, estimating: "Five to six hundred dollars a month."

Everyone gasped.

On to Boulder Ridge, a community of beige town houses that start at around seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Nothing was for sale, so Weinhouse invited the group to her home, a five-bedroom nestled on a winding street on a hill. "The openness is very nice," Marr said, as he walked from the dining room to the sunken living room.

Zach noted that the houses had small back yards, which made them affordable. "When you see a big jump, in terms of pricing, is once you to get to a half acre and above."

"I have no perception of how big an acre is," Marr said.

In the end, he and Burrone opted to move to Los Angeles. "The weather is much better in L.A.," he said. "In New York, it's *too* dark."

—Tom Perrotta

ONE MAN'S TRASH DEPT.
MEMORY MOTEL

It is certainly possible to view "Exhibitionism," the travelling show of Rolling Stones artifacts, costumes, and memorabilia which recently opened in the West Village, as yet another attempt by the group—whose most famous song is a stinging critique of consumerism—to wring every last dollar out of that big, lascivious tongue. (Tickets are thirty-five fifty; V.I.P. treatment is seventy-six fifty.) But for the true Stones fan "Exhibitionism" also gives satisfaction, and a good deal of it comes from the immersive environments created by the show's curator, Ileen Gallagher.

A few days before the show opened, Gallagher, wearing a leather motorcycle jacket, was wandering through the event space looking for somewhere to sit.

"I know just the place!" she declared. Seventeen thousand square feet have been given over to "Exhibitionism," which began at the Saatchi Gallery, in London, and will remain in New York until March. The idea was to create real-seeming historical rooms in which artifacts from the Rolling Stones' archives could be "situated," and to employ state-of-the-art sound, video, and set design to heighten the experience. The result is something between Madame Tussauds and Tracey Emin's bed.

Here is Olympic Studios, where "Sympathy for the Devil" was created—Gallagher based the room on the film that Jean-Luc Godard made of the sessions. Here is the backstage area, where guitars are racked in the order in which they will be needed that night, and a stage manager's tense voice is saying, over the intercom, "House lights down in five, four, three . . ." Geeky? Perhaps. Sneakily thrilling? Fasho.

Gallagher turned a corner and arrived at her re-creation of 102 Edith Grove, the one-bedroom flat in Chelsea where Keith, Mick, and Brian all lived together, with sleepovers from Charlie, for thirteen months beginning in the late summer of 1962.

Gallagher, who was born and grew up in Stuyvesant Town, has been a Stones fan since the early seventies. Finding the spot she was looking for, she perched on a couch in the Stones' old sitting room. A 1958 Muddy Waters album sat on the table in front of her; there were beer bottles, and an ashtray brimming with butts.

She explained that she had honed her skills in the museumification of rock history as the director of exhibitions at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in Cleveland, during the nineties. "The Rock Hall of Fame was the first to treat rock in a visual-culture way," she said. "And MTV made that possible, because you saw the clothes, and it became about *stuff*."

The problem with re-creating 102 Edith Grove was that there were no good photos of the interior. Gallagher relied mainly on her separate interviews with Mick, Charlie, and Keith, in which she recorded their memories of the place. (Visitors can hear these as they walk around the flat.) Mick recalled that "it smelled really bad and it was, like, people would be sick everywhere and they'd be, like, leaving dirty plates and dirty food." Charlie noted, of Brian and Keith, "They were the laziest buggers in the world. They would never pick anything up, so the sink was always full . . . penicillin was growing." That was because, as Keith explained to Gallagher, "we were too busy, you know, avidly learning how to be blues players and that was all we had time for." Also living in the flat was James Phelge, a beatnik, who was the foulest of the lot. "We'd get back from a gig and Phelge would be standing at the top of the stairs saying, 'Welcome home,' pissing on you," Keith told Gallagher. From this fecund bog sprang one of the greatest songwriting partnerships of all time.

So Gallagher made a mess. "But a period mess," she noted, curatorially. "The bottles and crisps are all period." The heaps of cigarette butts are not;

Ileen Gallagher

they were smoked by the workmen who built the exhibition in London, and were told to save them. The only item in the flat that is semi-authentic is a wooden guitar, a Valencia—a replica of one that Keith lost. (Several exhibitions could be mounted from things that Keith has lost.)

"When the band saw Edith Grove, they were thrilled," Gallagher said proudly. Richards, who has lived for some years on an estate in Weston, Connecticut, previewed the space in London. "I'm home!" he cried upon entering the pigsty. One note from Jagger, who now lives in a mansion not far from Edith Grove: "Get rid of some of those cigarette butts. It wasn't that bad."

Gallagher kept her eye on the workmen, who were putting the finishing touches on the squalor. "I just have to make sure they don't clean up the wrong stuff," she said.

—John Seabrook

ANNALS OF TERRORISM

AFTER THE ISLAMIC STATE

Where will jihadis take the war?

BY ROBIN WRIGHT

The quest for the caliphate will endure—with or without ISIS.

Last may, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, the second most powerful leader in the Islamic State, hinted that the caliphate was crumbling. "Whoever thinks that we fight to protect some land or some authority, or that victory is measured thereby, has strayed far from the truth," he said, in a long audio message that was released to fellow-jihadis. He also suggested a shift in strategy. "It is the same—whether Allah blesses us with consolidation or we move into the bare, open desert, displaced and pursued."

Adnani, a thirty-nine-year-old Syrian, ran the organization's propaganda shop and a secret foreign-operations unit that recruited, trained, and assigned élite forces to the toughest missions. He orchestrated the terror attacks at the Bataclan theatre, in Paris, last year, and at the Brussels airport, in March. By this summer, though, he was on the run, hiding for months in an apartment building with hundreds of civilians in Raqqa, a city in northern Syria that dates to antiquity and serves as the Islamic State's capital. The United States had picked up his trail, but had to use "tactical patience," a senior Pentagon official told me, to avoid heavy collateral damage. "He just didn't budge," a senior U.S. official added. "We waited."

Adnani finally emerged in August, after Syrian rebels drove the Islamic State out of Manbij, a small city that was a hub for its foreign fighters and a supply route to Turkey. The battle was decisive, costing the organization at least two thousand of its best fighters, including combat-hardened Chechens. In late August, Adnani left the apartment and sped west in an unmarked sedan to rally his forces in al-Bab, the city closest to Manbij. A U.S. drone picked him off with a laser-guided munition.

Since the Vietnam War, the U.S. military has shied away from body counts as a barometer of success, but Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland, the commander of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq, estimated in August that forty-five thousand fighters had been "taken off the battlefield" in the Islamic State. Although that count may be high, other U.S. officials told me, the Islamic State's losses have been staggering. It has surrendered fifty-seven per cent of its territory in Iraq and twenty-seven per cent in Syria—more than forty per cent of its total caliphate.

The Islamic State is now fighting to hang on to its two most valuable properties. On October 17th, Iraqi forces launched the long-awaited offensive to liberate Mosul, the largest city under Islamic State control, with two million residents. On November 6th, rebels in the Syrian Democratic Forces launched Euphrates Rage, an operation to free Raqqa, a city of some two hundred thousand. American airpower is backing both campaigns with daily bombing raids. Hundreds of additional fighters have been killed. The Islamic State's de-facto news agency, Amaq, boasted that in the first six weeks of the Mosul battle a hundred and fifty-seven suicide bombers leaped into explosive-laden cars and drove straight into oncoming Iraqi troops. It posted an infographic showing the types of vehicles used in the attack.

The Islamic State's emir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, first announced the creation of the caliphate in June, 2014, from the pulpit of Mosul's Grand Mosque. It was based on a utopian vision, dating back to Islam's founding, that was modernized by the Muslim Brotherhood a century ago, hijacked and militarized by radical ideologues, and globalized by Al Qaeda. The Islamic State rejuvenated the jihad after the United States forced Al Qaeda in Iraq underground, in 2007, and killed Osama bin Laden, in 2011. It blitzed across Syria and Iraq, and then recruited tens of thousands of Muslims,

ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER

from five continents, to govern and protect the new caliphate.

As a physical entity, the Islamic State's conceit was probably never sustainable, at least at the pace and scope it attempted. Within eighteen months, it began to lose territory. Nevertheless, the quest for a modern caliphate continues. The brand is entrenched.

In Adnani's final audio message, he described a fallback plan, which was reflected in the Islamic State's media this fall. Its slickest publication had been *Dabiq*, a magazine named for a Syrian town where, in the seventh century, Armageddon was prophesied to play out in an apocalyptic battle with infidel forces from the Roman Empire. Symbolically, the village was a potent recruiting tool, even though Dabiq today is of no strategic value, with only three thousand residents. It fell, in October, to the militia now advancing on Raqqa. The organization renamed its magazine *Rumiyah*, or Rome—an allusion to the prophecies foretelling the fall of the West and a signal that the Islamic State operations may increasingly shift from inside the caliphate to outside.

An article in the November issue, accompanied by a photograph of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, urged jihadis to attack outdoor festivals, markets, political rallies, and pedestrian-clogged streets: "The method of such an attack is that a vehicle is plunged at a high speed into a large congregation of *kuffar*"—non-believers—"smashing their bodies with the vehicle's strong outer frame while advancing forward—crushing their heads, torsos, and limbs under the vehicle's wheels and chassis." The article provided a list of vehicles best suited to killing. Next to a picture of a U-Haul, it said that the ideal truck is "double-wheeled, giving victims less of a chance to escape being crushed by the vehicle's tires."

In his message, Adnani appealed to the faithful to launch lone-wolf attacks. "Determination! Determination!" he urged. "The smallest act you do in their lands is more beloved to us than the biggest act done here."

On November 21st, the State Department issued an international travel alert, warning all Americans that "credible information" indicated "the heightened risk of terrorist attacks throughout Europe." The alert will be in effect for the next three months. Four days later, France announced the arrest of five Islamic State operatives who were planning an attack for December 1st. The targets reportedly included the Champs-Élysées and the Disneyland park outside Paris.

Adnani also envisioned an *inhiyaz ila al-sahraa*, a retreat into the desert. The term was meant in the strategic sense of regrouping in order to return to the battle. There is a precedent. After the U.S. troop surge in 2007, the jihadis slipped away into the remote plains, villages, farmlands, and, particularly, the vulnerable "seams" along the borders of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. The movement rebuilt, recruited, broke into prisons to bolster its ranks, and prepared for the surprise sweep into Syria and Iraq seven years later.

"O America," Adnani said. "Would we be defeated and you be victorious if you were to take Mosul or Sirte or Raqqa? . . . Certainly not! We would be defeated and you victorious only if you were able to remove the Koran from Muslims' hearts."

On a balmy autumn day, I drove through Lebanon's Bekaa Valley toward a front line with the Islamic State. The valley is Wild West territory, ruled by armed clans largely unchallenged by the government. For miles and miles, farmers were harvesting the willowy, thin-leafed stalks that make hashish, a mainstay of the local economy. From the valley, I headed north, on narrow, winding roads, to the Qalamoun Mountains, a voluptuous but rugged range near the Syrian border, known for its apricot trees and chalky limestone quarries. It is now a hub for more than a thousand militants—some locals claim the number is at least twice that—who have burrowed into the brown hills, bringing with them the wars in Syria and Iraq.

Fighters from the Islamic State and its rival, an Al Qaeda franchise, began infiltrating the area two years ago. Both groups have launched raids and rocket attacks on Christian towns along the border with Syria. They have fought each other for turf, too.

This year, the assaults on Christian cities near the border became more brazen. In one town I visited, Qaa—normally a sleepy place—eight suicide bombers struck the central square in a single day last June.

I couldn't get into the city of Arsal, a mountain enclave whose name is Aramaic for "God's throne," because the Lebanese Army has cordoned it off to outsiders. A predominantly Sunni city, it was seized in 2014 by ISIS and Al Qaeda fighters. They were eventually forced back to the outskirts, but both groups took dozens of Lebanese police and soldiers as hostages. A few were executed; after a year, several were released in a swap; some are still being held. Plagued with bombings and assassinations, the city, once known for its handmade carpets, is now better known as the underground channel for fighters, weaponry, funds, and supplies crossing into Syria. The goods include Captagon, an addictive amphetamine, produced in the Bekaa, that generates euphoria and enables fighters to endure long battles and painful injuries. Like the rest of Lebanon, Arsal has been flooded with refugees, more than tripling its population. One of every five people living in Lebanon today is a Syrian. An equivalent number of refugees in the United States would be sixty-five million.

On the approach to Ras Baalbek, a Christian town of some eight thousand, I heard artillery fire echoing nearby. Rifaat Nasrallah, the owner of a local quarry, was anxious and tired when I arrived at his mountainside home. A thickset Catholic businessman with silvering hair and bloodshot eyes, he was wearing a loose denim shirt. A revolver was tucked into the back of his jeans. He sat on the edge of a beige floral settee.

"How can I not be worried?" he said. "They're around the corner from me now." ISIS rockets had struck a church during a wedding in Ras Baalbek. Nasrallah's quarry was raided. Several of his employees were abducted. He has scars on his back from a mortar attack.

"The minute they showed up with this crazy ideology in Iraq, we felt the threat," he said. "To them, we all deserve the knife." To prevent the jihadis from taking over the town, Nasrallah formed a local militia. "We have churches here that date back to the beginning of Christianity. Even our wives and kids will grab guns and fight."

Nasrallah had little confidence that

"Go like this."

• •

the escalating U.S.-backed campaigns against the Islamic State and Al Qaeda—or any other actions by Western powers against extremists—would make much difference. "Look what happened in Brussels and in France," he said. "They can't even protect themselves." He was particularly angry at the Vatican for abandoning Christians in the Middle East. "The Pope never thinks about us now," he said. "The Vatican has done nothing for us. I am more Catholic than the Pope."

Near a fox pelt on a wall in his house, Nasrallah had placed a picture of Lourdes, the pilgrimage site, and on the fireplace mantel he'd put a larger photograph—of Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah (no relation), the leader of Hezbollah. Across the Middle East, the current complex of wars has spawned unlikely alliances. Lebanon's Christians historically had a political and social edge over other sects; Sunnis came in second, and Shiites a distant third. Now Nasrallah's Christian militia is armed, trained, and supported by a Shiite militia that has been on the U.S. terrorist list for two decades. "Hezbollah has done more for us than the Vatican," Nasrallah told me, adding that the Hezbollah leader promised that "these are Christian villages, and we will protect them better than Shiite villages."

I climbed a steep rocky path to the militia's main lookout, on a ridge above the town with a towering Madonna-and-Child statue. The jihadis were entrenched in the hills just across the way. From the lookout, using infrared night-vision equipment, the locals can spot fighters moving toward the town and call in Hezbollah artillery and rockets. Devout mountain Catholics now view militant Shiite Muslims as their protectors.

Across the Middle East, the political kaleidoscope is spinning at a vertiginous speed. The Islamic State has been both a cause and an effect. Wars in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen wrack the region, and virulent forms of extremism threaten all the other states. Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey are confronted with unprecedented humanitarian crises. From the Mediterranean to the Gulf, countries are fragile, regardless of the size of their security forces and arsenals. In the century since modern borders were delineated, the premises of power and politics—various forms of Arabism, oil wealth, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—have been upended. The big secular ideologies, from Nasserism to Baathism, are defunct. The Palestinians, whose factions offered a variety of ideologies, have been sidelined. Intellectual energy has been sapped on campuses, in parliaments, and in what little is left of public discourse. A demographic surge has produced a generation with limited job opportunities; up to a third of the young people across more than twenty Arab states are unemployed. Instability over the past six years has left a region in severe economic distress—costing Arab economies more than six hundred billion dollars, the United Nations reported in November. After past wars, societies eventually absorbed the shocks and got back to business. Now the long-term sustainability of some Arab states is in question.

Traditional warlords are at a loss as well. "The Arab world is desolate," Walid Jumblatt, a Druze chieftain (and a member of Lebanon's parliament), told me when I visited his family estate, a historic limestone manor in Moukhtara, an hour from Beirut. Jumblatt had been a pragmatic kingmaker, capable of brokering deals with Christian politicians, Sunni parties, Shiite Hezbollah, and even Syria's Assad dynasty. Now he rarely leaves Moukhtara. The Islamic State has threatened to kill him; so have others. Security around him is intense. Rifles, vintage and new, were lined up along a wall of his study. Jumblatt's main companion these days is an arthritic Shar-Pei named Oscar. In an anteroom, old maps reflect the region's shifting frontiers and masters. Even if borders remain the same, Jumblatt said, they may define different entities. "We will live in this mess for a very long time."

The Islamic State, which is run by a deviant strain of Sunni fanatics, has been a disaster for all Sunnis across the region. Sunnis account for as much as ninety per cent of the Arab

population and almost a fifth of the global population. They ruled Arab lands for most of the fourteen centuries since the faith was founded. Their dictators and absolute monarchs dominated the modern Middle East. Now their world is in ruins. They have suffered the largest losses in lives and property and make up the largest percentage of refugees. They are under attack from other sects and have little to fall back on politically, despite their numbers.

"Sunnis believe everyone is against them," Omar el Sayyed, a correspondent for the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation in northern Tripoli, told me. Tripoli is the bastion of conservative Sunni power in Lebanon. "Are we the only bad people in the world? Sunnis want to trust someone."

Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the traditional poles of Sunni power, are distracted by their own problems. Saudi Arabia is going through an awkward political transition, made more vulnerable by a costly war in Yemen and plummeting oil revenues. In Egypt, which accounts for almost a quarter of the Arab world's four hundred million people, the value of the currency fell by almost half in November. Staples like sugar are in short supply. Tourism and investment have dried up. Under the increasingly autocratic government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, tens of thousands of Egyptians—dissidents, journalists, lawyers, bloggers, human-rights activists, feminists, students, workers, and businessmen—have been detained or tortured or subjected to "enforced disappearance."

Sayyed said, "Do you want me to believe Sisi will help me when he's killing my brothers in Egypt?"

A few weeks after Adnani's death, I called on Nabil Rahim, a portly sheikh with a graying beard and a prayer mark on his forehead, who heads public relations for Irtiqaa Way Radio, an FM station in Tripoli. Irtiqaa means "elevation," as in elevating life to a higher state. The station airs continuous religious programming to promote Salafism, the ultraconservative interpretation of Sunni Islam. A video of pilgrims at the Kaaba in Mecca was playing on a large high-definition television on the studio wall.

"Daesh has distorted the image of Islam," Rahim said, using an Arabic term for the Islamic State. "Everything it's done—its videos of beheadings, burning prisoners alive, drowning them, the destruction of churches and places of worship—all of this has nothing to do with Islam. But I don't see any country or leading figure coming in and offering new breath for the Sunni world.

"It makes me very sad," he went on. "This is what makes me fear that Daesh may be defeated politically and militarily but the idea won't die. If the region were stable, there would be no place for Daesh to reëmerge. But it isn't stable. The same thing that happened in Syria or Libya could happen in Algeria or Morocco or someplace else in this chaos."

The turmoil has been a boon for Al Qaeda. As the Islamic State contracts, Al Qaeda is attempting to reclaim its primacy at the vanguard of global jihadism. The two groups were for many years part of the same movement, but they fell out over strategy. Al Qaeda advocated educating Sunnis to its message before building to a caliphate. "If our state is not supported by the proper foundations," bin Laden wrote in 2010, "the enemy will easily destroy it." Al Qaeda has exploited popular uprisings from North Africa to the Caucasus; it embedded senior leaders once based in Pakistan or Afghanistan with local movements to guide or direct them. The Islamic State had no patience for gradualism. Under Baghdadi, it raced for territory in Syria and Iraq, and was willing to coerce, rather than persuade, Sunnis to join its realm. Ayman al-Zawahiri, who succeeded Osama bin Laden in 2011, repeatedly tried to rein in Baghdadi, to no avail. The Islamic State was so aggressive, so bloodthirsty, and so defiant—so fast—that Al Qaeda severed ties and disavowed it in early 2014, shortly before the caliphate was declared.

"What made our hearts bleed," Zawahiri said in 2014, "is the hostile sedition, which has intensified among the ranks of the mujahideen of Islam."

The rival movements now compete for franchises. In two years, the Islamic State has won the allegiance of thirty-seven provinces, or *wilayats*, in eight countries. Pledging and gaining allegiance, or *bayat*, is a formal process in the world of jihadism. Some provinces—in Egypt's Sinai and Libya's Sirte—gained fame and controlled territory. The Sinai Province shot down a Russian Metrojet airliner in 2015. The Islamic State claimed its Libyan province as the caliphate's first colony in 2014, although it recently lost most of its land there, too. Other cells, notably in Yemen, are weaker or dormant.

Al Qaeda, for its part, has for more than a decade cultivated five transnational branches—in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, South Asia, the horn of Africa, and the Levant. The struggle for the soul of Sunni jihadism is one of at least five different wars playing out in Syria, and it is there that Al Qaeda may prove its long game. It has already wrested the allegiance of a group started by Baghdadi. In 2011, the Islamic State in Iraq sent seven fighters to Syria to facilitate logistics. The cell grew into the Nusra Front, in 2012. In 2013, it broke with Baghdadi, in a dispute over goals. Its priority was ousting the regime of President Bashar Assad, the first step in creating conditions for a caliphate, and it was willing to temporarily work with other Syrian rebels. The Islamic State has always been exclusivist, demonstrating less interest in Assad's future. The Nusra Front shifted its *bayat* to Zawahiri.

Nusra became Al Qaeda's most successful model—and the dominant rebel force in northwestern Syria—with almost ten thousand fighters. Last year, Zawahiri instructed Nusra's leader, Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, to "better integrate" within the Syrian revolution and to build "a sustainable Al Qaeda power base." In Idlib Province, Nusra established Islamic courts and started providing basic services, including water and electricity. As its support base burgeoned in Syria, its reputation soared across the Sunni world.

Salem al-Rafei, a popular Sunni sheikh in Tripoli, told me, "It's not like Daesh—it has not destroyed the image

of Islam. It is a Syrian organization to liberate the Syrian people."

In a kind of jihadi shell game, this summer the Nusra Front rebranded itself as the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, or J.F.S., which means the Front for the Liberation of Sham, an area that includes Syria and parts of neighboring countries. It announced that it no longer had ties with any external group. Al Qaeda publicly concurred.

"We direct Nusra's central command to move forward in a way that preserves the interests of Islam and Muslims and protects the jihad of the people of Syria," Al Qaeda's deputy leader, Ahmed Hassan Abu al-Khayr, said in a statement. "We have taken this step and call on the jihadist factions in Syria to unite around what pleases God."

In jihadi-speak, this is known as "marbling": local groups variegate their formal ties with global movements when strategically or financially convenient. In Syria, the separation was an expedient fiction. Al Qaeda had already embedded two dozen senior personnel. U.S. air strikes this fall killed two top Al Qaeda operatives there—Abu Afghan al-Masri, an Egyptian who served as a judge in a J.F.S. court in Idlib, and Haydar Kirkan, who was Al Qaeda's senior terror-attack planner for Turkey and Europe and had ties to bin Laden.

To Sunnis, the J.F.S. now seems less extreme than the Islamic State. Hundreds of Sunni youths from Tripoli, romanticizing its mission, have joined its ranks. "Its allegiance with Al Qaeda was a mistake," Rafei told me. "It has active members who understand Islam. They are good people."

On November 18th, which happened to be the day that the Trump transition team arrived at the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter reflected on the world that President-elect Trump will inherit. A large chunk of Indiana limestone, found in the rubble of the Pentagon after the 9/11 Al Qaeda attacks, was on his desk—handed down to every Secretary of Defense since 2001. The top priority, Carter said, will be finishing off the Islamic State. (The next four: containing Iranian influence, deterring North Korea, preventing Russian aggression in Europe, and encouraging stability in the Asian Pacific, in that order.)

U.S. policy is basically to eliminate all jihadis. "We will kill as many ISIL as we can in the Mosul and Raqqa battles," Carter told me, using another term for the Islamic State. "If they try to get out of town, we'll try to kill them. If they go somewhere else, then we'll continue to destroy them. So they may fight to the death, and they may try to survive, but we'll be after them in either case."

The initial purpose of the American reëngagement in Iraq was to avert genocide of the Yazidis, an ethno-religious minority trapped on barren Mt. Sinjar. "As Commander-in-Chief, I will not allow the United States to be dragged into another war in Iraq," President Obama vowed in 2014. But the mission quickly expanded across Iraq and, within a month, to Syria. The United States now has five thousand troops in Iraq and several hundred Special Operations Forces in Syria. The first American death in Syria occurred last month. U.S. warplanes have carried out more than twelve thousand air strikes—seven thousand in Iraq and more than five thousand in Syria. The cost averages $12.6 million a day.

The air strikes have eliminated some hundred and twenty leaders of the Islamic State, but U.S. intelligence estimates that there are still at least eighteen thousand fighters in Iraq and Syria. The number of new foreign fighters arriving has sharply diminished, partly because of the difficulties in getting there, but some are still showing up.

"We're going to destroy the idea that there is an Islamic State," Carter said. "They'll see that, before their eyes, it's not a place for foreign fighters, because there's no place to go. There'll be no training there. There'll be no welcome there. And that magnetism that two years ago brought many foreign fighters—there'll be no magnet left."

He acknowledged a major catch: "My principal concern at this stage of the campaign is that the stability, reconstruction, and political rehabilitation will lag behind the military campaign."

They are already—perhaps incurably—behind schedule. This has happened before. In 2006, the Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously warned the Bush Administration that a surge of troops to beat back Al Qaeda in Iraq could produce bigger problems after the troops withdrew. The military also feared that the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government would fail to enact reforms to address the grievances and alienation of its Sunni minority. Today, thirteen years after the ouster of Saddam Hussein, the government in Baghdad has still not found a formula to share power among its disparate sects and ethnicities. Instead, on October 22nd, five days after the Mosul campaign began, the Iraqi parliament passed a law banning the sale of alcohol. A month later, it passed a law conferring legal status on Shiite militias accused of extrajudicial killings and widespread abuses of the Sunni minority. The same militias, which now exceed a hundred thousand men, armed with tanks and heavy artillery, were tied to the deaths of hundreds of American soldiers during the eight-year U.S. intervention. The government, more broadly, suffers from political paralysis. Some say that corruption is worse than it was under Saddam.

"Iraq is not where it needs to be," a senior Administration official told me. "But did anyone expect that there will be this moment where Iraqi politicians suddenly transform themselves?"

Syria is even more complex. The Al Qaeda franchise there flourishes. "The new President coming in," the senior U.S. official told me, "will hear that this is the largest core Al Qaeda safe haven we have had—and I mean hard-core Al Qaeda."

The Islamic State could eventually lose control of Raqqa, but it is expected to regroup in remote areas, such as Al Bukamal and Al Qaim, along the Syria-Iraq border. The movement may be disrupted, but U.S. officials concede that it will be almost impossible to totally dismantle it. An end to Syria's wider six-year war—in any way that both stabilizes one of the most important geostrategic countries in the Middle East and favors U.S. interests—also seems increasingly remote.

And the quest for a caliphate goes on. "Al Qaeda might lay claim to it for a moment, and the Islamic State may lay claim to it, but there's always been this dream of recapturing and bringing back the caliphate," a senior U.S. counterterrorism official told me. "Who's going to tap into that next?" ♦

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

BY BILL FRANZEN

GREETINGS, DEAR FRIENDS! Hey—there's snow on the ground already! But the most beautiful thing about this season is the chance to touch base with you, my widely scattered friends! I just hope you'll still call me your friend after you finish reading this, my 2016 holiday greeting.

My self-esteem had hit rock bottom this time a year ago—which might explain all the misstatements that crept into my last Christmas newsletter. But I am determined to set the record straight now. Here are all my corrections:

1. I only wish I'd been able to organize a coat drive like the one I described in such detail. I think the divorce got in the way of all sorts of activities.

2. O.K., what I should have said was that I plan on being a regular blood donor *in the not-too-distant future*. Because, really, when they finally hit on a less barbaric method for extracting blood, I'm there!

3. I am not nor have I ever been so much as a volunteer for Meals on Wheels, never mind an "unpaid consultant."

4. When I stated that "my big new passion is the saxophone," I'm afraid I may have given some people the impression that I had been playing one.

5. While it may have been a stretch to say that I'd volunteered to tutor young readers at the local elementary school, I did once volunteer to give just such a volunteer a ride to the school. Twice, actually.

6. Yes, I did quit drinking cold turkey. But it was not, in fact, owing to the strength of my will power alone. The police-monitored attendance at the twelve-step meetings deserved much more credit.

7. I confess that it was misleading to say I'd donated my Volvo to the deaf. But, see, after the mechanic fixed the clutch—just like that!—it ran too well to suddenly surrender it to some charity. But it's probably only a matter of months until the out-of-control lurching returns, and then it goes right to those less fortunate.

8. While I am a potential organ donor—you can check my driver's license—I was getting a little ahead of myself when I implied that any kidney of mine had already saved a life.

9. I honestly did see a little terrier of some kind fall through the ice into a lake. But, in hindsight, I might have been glossing over the facts when I said that I'd rescued it.

10. I guess I was bending the truth when I wrote about devoting myself to looking after my elderly mother and enjoying hunting only in my spare time. The reality is that I enjoy hunting first and foremost. But, of course, every now and then—time and weather permitting—I don't hesitate to pop down to the basement and look in on ol' Mom.

11. Unfortunately, I was not able to honor my dying father's request to have his ashes scattered over Loon Lake, where he fished all his life. That's a two-hour drive in the best of times! But, boy, did I ever come up with a unique Plan B, involving an unlocked minnow tank at his favorite live-bait establishment.

12. Loath as I am to confess it, I did not exactly take all that time off "to mourn my favorite uncle." But I did paint my new rec room, and I think Uncle Lyle would have appreciated that, for sure.

I admit, dear friends, that I feel better now. It's nice knowing that *this* year's holiday greeting is really worth the paper it's printed on—which the old me would have said was one hundred per cent recycled, but I guess I've learned my lesson.

So best wishes to one and all in the New Year!

Sincerely, Bill

P.S.: I know I started out all excited about the snow. Truth is, we don't actually have any quite yet. But 'tis the season, right? And they say we could be in for a real dusting next week! ♦

GREG CLARKE

THE POLITICAL SCENE

BRONX TALE

A young progressive addresses poverty on his home turf.

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

Ritchie Torres represents one of the poorest City Council districts in New York.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAIT OPPERMANN

Ritchie Torres, the youngest elected official in New York City, grew up in a small apartment in Throggs Neck Houses, a public-housing project in the East Bronx, with his mother, his sister, and his twin brother. The complex is isolated—the closest subway station is a forty-minute walk away—so Torres and his friends found ways to entertain themselves. They staged W.W.E.-style wrestling shows on the playground, with fake blood, and Torres in the role of the Rock. His grandparents, who lived in a building nearby, had been among the project's original residents, moving in soon after it opened, in 1953. In the summer, his grandfather sat on a bench in front of his building, spraying kids with a hose, while his grandmother gave out icies from her third-floor window, putting them in a bag and lowering them by rope to the children below.

Across the street was a vacant two-hundred-and-twenty-acre expanse of land, the site of a former city garbage dump, which reached to the East River. In 1998, when Torres was ten, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani announced a plan to transform the site into an eighteen-hole golf course. There were repeated delays, and the course was still unfinished twelve years later, when the city chose someone to operate it: Donald J. Trump. Not long afterward, a rumor spread that Trump was going to buy Throggs Neck Houses, too, and evict everyone who lived there.

The development had about four thousand residents, who lived in thirty-six buildings, many of them in extreme disrepair. Water leaked through the ceilings and mold grew on the bathroom walls in Torres's apartment, and the elevators broke down so often that he had nightmares about being stuck in them. But rents were capped at thirty per cent of a household's income, and some families feared that if they were evicted they would be unable to find housing elsewhere, and might end up in one of the city's homeless shelters. In the end, Trump did not buy Throggs Neck Houses—the New York City Housing Authority still operates all three hundred and twenty-eight public-housing developments—but he did take over the land across the street, which is now Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point. The city built the golf course, at a cost of a hundred and twenty-seven million dollars. Trump agreed to build a clubhouse and create and maintain the grounds, and he does not have to share any revenues with the city until 2019. The *Daily News* called the course a "sand trap for taxpayers."

Torres, now twenty-eight, is a member of the New York City Council, where he represents the Fifteenth District, in the central Bronx, one of the poorest in the city. He lives in the Allerton neighborhood, but one afternoon in August he was back at Throggs Neck Houses to visit his mother, who still occupies the apartment where he grew up. Torres, who calls himself Afro-Latino—his family is originally from Puerto Rico—is tall and slim and dresses stylishly. Despite the eighty-six-degree heat, he wore a gray suit, a lavender dress shirt, a purple tie, and a City Council lapel pin. He stopped to look, through a tall black fence, at the golf course, which opened last year. The weekend rate to play a round there is about two hundred dollars, which is almost half the average monthly rent for

an apartment in public housing. To Torres, the course is an "egregious misallocation of resources." Even in casual conversation, he often sounds as if he's giving a speech. "New York is a tale of two cities," he said. "You have the gilded city and the other city, and the core of the other city is the New York City Housing Authority."

Torres was sworn into office in early 2014, at what seemed a propitious moment. Bill de Blasio had just been elected mayor on a left-wing platform, and the City Council had twenty-one new members (out of a total of fifty-one), many of whom, like Torres, identify as progressive. He was the only new member chosen to join the leadership, and was also appointed to chair the Committee on Public Housing. In the nearly three years since he took office, he has challenged the police commissioner, the mayor, and the governor on issues ranging from police reform to school segregation to public housing. Earlier this year, his photograph appeared in the New York *Observer* beneath the headline "COULD THIS 27-YEAR-OLD COUNCILMAN BE THE MAYOR OF NEW YORK ONE DAY?"

He is still wary of housing-project elevators, so he climbed the stairs to his mother's apartment and knocked on the door. He could hear her unbolting the locks—there are seven—and then she appeared. "Hi, Ritchie!" she said as he kissed her on the cheek. A gregarious woman of fifty-six, Debra Bosolet wore an oversized T-shirt and fuzzy pink slippers. "I made some little turkey-and-cheese sandwiches," she said, taking a plate out of the refrigerator. While Torres sat in a corner, checking his BlackBerry, she explained to me that she had named her son for Ritchie Valens, having seen the movie "La Bamba" when she was pregnant.

"She named me after a promising young man who died at seventeen," Torres said.

"But he is remembered to this day," Bosolet told him. "Lucky I didn't name you Reuben, after the sandwich." She gave that name to his brother, after discovering the sandwich at Roy Rogers during her pregnancy. Reuben still lives in the apartment, and works for a city agency; their sister, Melissa, lives in Manhattan, where she is a property manager.

Torres's father never lived with the family. Torres remembers spending a whole day with him only once, when he was fifteen and his father took him to a federal prison, in New Jersey, to visit his two half brothers, who were serving time for gang-related crimes. Torres's mother supported her three children by working low-wage jobs, including serving food in a cafeteria and delivering Domino's pizzas. She often told her children, "I don't want you to be like me. I want you to go farther."

Torres and his mother talked for a while, and then he told her that he had to leave. "I'm being honored tonight," he said.

"Again?" she asked.

The event, called "Young Gets It Done," was at Up & Down, a night club on West Fourteenth Street. The Manhattan Young Democrats were recognizing Torres for his efforts to expand jobs programs for public-housing residents, provide more mental-health services for L.G.B.T. people, and improve relations between the police and the community. He sat on a stage with Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul and Representative Sean Patrick Maloney. Several hundred people were in attendance, and the mood was ebullient. Hillary Clinton seemed comfortably ahead in the polls, and when Robby Mook, her campaign manager, walked onstage they cheered. Torres took gulps of red wine to calm his nerves as he waited for his turn to speak, but once he took the microphone he seemed at ease. "I'm a Bronx boy to the core," he said. "But it's an honor to accept an award from the Manhattan Young Dems."

He had just returned from the Democratic National Convention, in Philadelphia, where, he told the audience, a stranger had asked for his autograph: "I was flattered but confused. I said, This woman is from the opposite end of the country. Why would she want my autograph? And she kept pressing me and pressing me and pressing me. Then suddenly she realized, Wait a minute. You're not the real Trevor Noah!" The crowd laughed. Torres spoke about the challenges he had confronted growing up, and closed with a message for his fellow-millennials: "Even in our moment of greatest darkness, there is light. And there is hope. And there is hope not only for our own lives, but we should be hopeful about our ability to change the world."

TORRES ATTENDED Lehman High School, in the Bronx, which was then one of the largest public high schools in the city, with more than four thousand students. Even so, the principal, Robert Leder, knew Torres. "He was very bright and very involved," Leder told me. One day, during his sophomore year, Torres announced, during a school forum on the definition of marriage, "I'm proud to be a gay American." (As he put it, "I had a Jim McGreevey moment.") He had realized that he was gay when he was in the seventh grade, but he hadn't told anyone, for fear of being targeted. The news shocked his family. He says that he and his mother "never spoke about the subject again until I ran for public office."

Torres was not always a disciplined student—he regularly skipped class—but in the tenth grade he joined the law team. Each week, he and the other students made an hour-long trip to the offices of Clifford Chance, a corporate law firm in midtown Manhattan, where attorneys coached them, and he got his first glimpse of life beyond the Bronx. His mother bought him thrift-store dress shirts for these meetings; he ironed them at night in the kitchen. In his junior year, he became the team captain, and twice he led Lehman to the city moot-court championship, beating élite schools like Stuyvesant and Bronx Science.

Every year, James Vacca, the district manager of the local community board, invited a Lehman student to be his "district manager for a day." When Torres was sixteen, Leder recommended him. On the day he spent with Vacca, Torres spoke at a senior center, helped mediate a dispute between Lehman and a local gym over students' access to its facilities, and attended a community-board meeting that included a discussion of plans for the golf course near Throggs Neck Houses. By the end of the day, Torres knew that he wanted to work in politics. In 2005, Vacca ran, successfully, for the City Council, and Torres campaigned door to door for him.

Torres enrolled in New York University in the fall of 2006, but he fell into a severe depression and dropped out at the start of his sophomore year. He

moved home and took a part-time job in Vacca's office, but he was often late for work. He struggled to find mental-health care, which can be extremely difficult for low-income families in the Bronx to attain. Eventually, he was able to obtain an antidepressant, and began to recover. He started working seven days a week, and focussed on housing: he visited constituents' homes, took pictures of building violations, and pressed landlords to make repairs. In early 2013, when a council seat in a neighboring district opened up, Torres, then twenty-four, decided to run for it, with Vacca's support.

The Fifteenth District includes Fordham University and the Bronx Zoo. A hundred and sixty-eight thousand people live there, more than the population of New Haven. Nearly forty per cent of the residents are immigrants, and the median household income is twenty-three thousand dollars a year. The central Bronx had been badly underserved; since 2003, four state legislators had gone to prison, for crimes including bribery, embezzlement, and fraud. Ronn Jordan, a longtime activist, had been planning to work on behalf of another candidate, but a friend asked him to talk to Torres. Jordan recalls that, after they met, "I said, This is the guy who's going to be exactly what this community needs." He added, "Ritchie's time in Vacca's office served him well, because he was doing housing organizing. I think that is where politics needs to go now: to organize and be out in the communities that you represent, to give people the opportunity to get to know you. Because, other than that, most people don't know what a council member does."

Jordan, who is now fifty-two and uses a wheelchair, taped Torres campaign posters to his chair and sat outside a subway station each morning, asking strangers to sign a petition to get Torres on the ballot. "Who's going to say no to a guy in a wheelchair?" he said. "I collected a *lot* of signatures." When they campaigned together, Torres was occasionally mistaken for another famous person. "Sometimes kids would yell, 'There's Obama! There's Obama!'" Jordan said. "We'd have to tell them that he wasn't the President."

Although the Bronx is solidly Democratic, its residents tend to be more socially conservative than those in Manhattan or Brooklyn. Torres calls it the "Bible Belt of New York City." When his mother made campaign calls, one person told her, "Your son is going to Hell!" But Torres did not hide his sexuality; instead, he pledged to secure services for the borough's L.G.B.T. population. Almost every candidate who wins elected office in the borough has the endorsement of the Bronx Democratic Party, but in this race the Party stayed neutral. The City Council's Progressive Caucus supported Torres, as did the city's largest unions. He also had a knack for retail politics. He called on more than six thousand voters in the district, and was often told, "I've never had a candidate knock on my door before."

The Fifteenth District has an especially low voter-turnout rate, and Torres received fewer than twenty-eight hundred votes in the primary, but it was enough to beat five other candidates.

A NATURAL HISTORY OF LIGHT

I

A small bird cries *could-be*, *could-be*, above my head, mousy little thing,
one of those drab gray birds in this dry land, December sun streaming
in low, December rain jostling the arroyo.
Could-be, *could-be* calls Drab Gray.

The state of the universe, physicists say, is a cosmological
relic—a glass ark with hammered-gold seams, pip trapped inside, god's
knucklebone, nanosecond high-energy outward burst—*kaboom!*—

and space fills up with proto-stars. I crouch at the edge of the arroyo.
Wind strokes my hand with its map of rivers.

O helium, lithium, hydrogen, you comfort me, O carbon, you are my
flesh and bone.

II

*Here on the river's verge, I could be busy for months without changing my
place, simply*
leaning a bit more to right or left. So says Cézanne. And now the sun
leans
west like Cézanne, striking a rippling mirror of water
refracting into a mirror of granite.

Light pouring into matter; let us praise their equivalence, if only my
mind
didn't flicker so—how you interpolate, my complicated friend,
suddenly back
in touch. Ah, gray bird, do you ever get confused?
And the theorem that what is lost is lost?

Light shining on water's skin, flowing tremors …

III

Color is the place where our brain and the universe meet. And what would
Cézanne
make of this verge—oak-gold water, river stones, wet, tawny leaves
and this impossible shade of deep and jade where water

slides over the shadow of a tree trunk,
runnelling body of darkness, is it *sable-green*?

And the universe of patterns on granite—light as lattice, lacework,
loose
weave, a dress knit of light Madame Cézanne wears, skein unravelling,
nakedness inside—bedazzlement—his complicated friend—
surface and depth,
grazing mouth on stone, light's long kiss,
light's ripple, unruly, water unspooling, spooling
down from the mountain, threads weaving together,
coming undone …

And the theorem that nothing is lost?

IV

We are, Cézanne reminds me, *an iridescent chaos*. And perhaps he speaks of the nature of light, or the coils in my mind, or
Hortense with her hair loosened, alone, Hortense implacable
in red, his family would not receive her, she bore his only son,
raised him living apart, desperate for funds, they judged her,
surface and depth, light on watered silk, how carefully she
composed her pain through all those hours, all those
portraits, twenty-nine of them, how marriage confounded
them both, confounds us,

every
marriage
spanning a ravine of time
down
at the crossroads where stream and light and stone are one
flame,
yes, fire ascendant in water, fire paramount,
water catamount,
puma water, plum-colored in its darker parts …
I hear somewhere close
that bird calling *could-be*, *could-be*—

tell me, Bird, how soul inhabits the place of fire,
how soul dwells there in its trembling?

—*Marsha de la O*

He won the general election with ninety-one per cent of the vote, and became the first openly gay person to hold elected office in the Bronx.

Before Torres took office, City Council members were already maneuvering for committee assignments. While his new colleagues sought more prestigious posts, such as the chair of the Committee on Finance or of the Committee on Land Use, Torres made it known that he wanted to head the Committee on Public Housing. The job had traditionally been a low-profile position, with little power. Other committees have legislative authority over city agencies, but the public-housing committee cannot pass bills dictating how the New York City Housing Authority operates, because NYCHA was created by the state. The council's speaker appoints the committee chairs, and when Melissa Mark-Viverito, one of the leaders of the Progressive Caucus, assumed the role, Torres was given the job he wanted. "It seemed so obvious that I don't think we gave it that much thought," Brad Lander, who represents Park Slope and is a co-founder of the caucus, said. "It was already clear that he would not only bring his passion about the issue but his smarts to figuring out how to make that committee as relevant as it possibly could be."

NYCHA oversees the largest public-housing program in the country, and the chair of the City Council's Committee on Public Housing oversees NYCHA. "At some level, it's absurd," Torres told me. "At age twenty-six, I was chairing the committee that oversees the largest landlord in New York City." More than four hundred thousand people live in the city's public housing; ninety per cent of them are African-American and Latino, and the average household income is twenty-three thousand dollars a year. The income from rents doesn't cover the cost of operating the buildings, and so NYCHA depends on funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to make up the difference; this year NYCHA will receive $1.2 billion to operate and repair its complexes. In the nineteen-eighties, President Ronald Reagan slashed HUD's budget, and its contribution to NYCHA shrank significantly. The state and the city, which helped to fund the housing authority, cut their contributions, too. By now, the buildings have been neglected for so long that, by NYCHA's own estimates, it would cost seventeen billion dollars to make all the necessary repairs.

Council committees typically hold public hearings once a month. Torres found his first hearing subject shortly after he took office, when he toured Red Hook Houses, which were built in 1938 and are the largest public-housing complex in Brooklyn. When Hurricane Sandy hit the city, in the fall of 2012, seawater destroyed most of the boilers. NYCHA installed temporary boilers, which resembled tractor-trailers and were connected to the buildings by pipes. They emitted black smoke, and often broke down. Carlos Menchaca, the newly elected council member for the area, showed them to Torres. As it turned out, more than a year after the hurricane, temporary boilers were still being used in sixteen projects, in three boroughs. In February, 2014, he and Mark Treyger, who chairs the

Committee on Recovery and Resiliency, held a joint hearing.

Council hearings tend to be routine events, and Torres decided to do some things differently. The Committee on Public Housing always held its hearings at either City Hall or across the street, at 250 Broadway, where the council members have their legislative offices. Torres and Treyger arranged for their hearing to take place at Carey Gardens, a project in Coney Island that had also been damaged in the storm. More than a hundred people filled a community room, and Torres made sure that reporters were there, too. "This hearing is coming to order," he said, banging a gavel. "Before I begin, I would just like to note that everyone here today will be able to look back and say they were part of history. Today's hearing will be the very first hearing of the Committee on Public Housing to be held in public housing." The audience members applauded. "We in government so often ask you to come to us. Now it's time for us to come to you." Torres then addressed NYCHA's explanation for the delay with the boilers: it couldn't get new ones until it came up with a resiliency plan for future disasters, but it couldn't make a resiliency plan without knowing how much money they would get from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other sources.

"Think about that for a second," Torres said. "NYCHA is saying that they can't make plans without funding, and they can't get funding without plans. If that's really the case, then what we have here is an unresolvable situation. A Catch-22. I, for one, refuse to accept that." He insisted that the housing authority needed to provide a clearer explanation "here and now." Then he and Treyger changed the customary format. Rather than letting the NYCHA executives speak first, they gave the floor to three female tenant leaders, who spoke about the constant lack of heat and hot water, and about how elderly residents had to turn on their ovens to keep warm. "We shouldn't have to live like this," one of them said.

Shortly afterward, a staff member in Senator Charles Schumer's office called NYCHA to discuss how the Senator could expedite negotiations with FEMA. Last year, Schumer and Mayor de Blasio announced that FEMA had agreed to give the housing authority three billion dollars to replace the boilers and to repair buildings damaged by the hurricane—one of the largest grants that FEMA has ever made. Repairs are under way at four projects, and the first temporary boilers are scheduled to be removed before the end of the year.

In addition to his legislative office, downtown, Torres has a district office in a small storefront just off Fordham Road, across the street from a White Castle. Ronn Jordan manages the office, and there are eight other employees, all of them in their twenties. When I visited the Bronx office last summer, Torres and his staff were in a back room, holding a meeting. They discussed an upcoming book-bag giveaway for school kids; a crime surge in one neighborhood; a constituent's suggestion that Andrew Jackson Houses, near Yankee Stadium, be renamed Harriet Tubman Houses ("I like it," Torres said); and a recent spike in calls from Mexican and Dominican immigrants asking for help in becoming citizens—a phenomenon that the staff members called the "Trump effect."

Housing, however, remains Torres's primary focus. On a wall of his downtown office, there is a photograph of the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe project, in St. Louis. When it was completed, in 1956, it was one of the largest public-housing developments in the country; within two decades, it had become so dilapidated and unsafe that the city tore it down. Chicago, Newark, and Philadelphia, among other cities, have since demolished some of their housing projects. Torres considers it his job to help insure that this never happens in New York City.

He studies housing policy in his spare time, and on a shelf in his Bronx office he keeps "The Power Broker," Robert Caro's book about how Robert Moses built modern-day New York, and "Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century," by Nicholas Dagen Bloom. "Even though public housing failed catastrophically elsewhere in the country, it has largely been successful here," Torres says. "NYCHA has endured for more than eighty years, and for most of those decades it was a success." He likes to name famous alumni of the projects: Lloyd Blankfein, Whoopi Goldberg, Sonia Sotomayor. "If you're a progressive, you believe every American deserves safe, decent, and affordable housing, and there's no institution in American life more dedicated to that proposition than the New York City Housing Authority," he says. If the city were to lose its housing projects, "we would have hundreds of thousands of people overflowing our homeless shelters." He adds, "My mother would be homeless without it." That's true, she told me, "but I wish he wouldn't say it so often. I don't need the whole world to know that."

In recent decades, NYCHA gained a

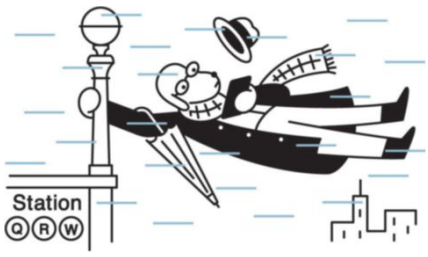
"Try to ignore the hot-dog smell."

reputation for chronic mismanagement, and Torres has continued to try to hold the agency accountable. In 2014, he called a hearing after Akai Gurley was killed by a stray bullet fired by a police officer at night in a stairwell with a broken light in the Pink Houses, in Brooklyn. He held another hearing, in 2015, after a malfunctioning elevator in Boston Road Plaza, in the Bronx, jolted upward when Olegario Pabon, an eighty-four-year-old tenant, tried to step in. He fell and hit his head and died a few days later. At times, Torres's hearings have the feel of a trial. "Believe me, we spend a lot of our time prepping for his hearings, because we know that he takes it seriously," Brian Honan, a NYCHA executive, told me. "It definitely shines a light on an issue and makes us focus on it, and oftentimes we've changed as a result."

James Vacca, Torres's former boss, is now his colleague on the City Council. "Every committee is only as good as the chair. I think Ritchie has used the oversight function we have in a very consequential way," Vacca says. "We have formal powers and we have informal powers"—like drawing media attention to problems that are often overlooked—"and how you use both is an indication of your effectiveness."

The fight over funding for public housing occasionally calls for compromise. Mayor de Blasio had made improving housing for the poor a central part of his campaign, and after he took office he pledged to steer a hundred million dollars a year for three years to NYCHA to address what it had determined was its most pressing need: replacing the roofs in the worst condition. Last year, de Blasio and NYCHA's chair, Shola Olatoye, announced a ten-year strategic plan for the agency. The most controversial part of the plan involved leasing NYCHA land to private developers to build apartment buildings right next to the projects. Not only would the buildings occupy open spaces, such as playgrounds and parking lots, but the rents would be higher than many NYCHA residents could afford. Torres has been critical of some of de Blasio's policies; after the Mayor proposed that seven hundred and fifty NYCHA apartments be set aside for homeless families, Torres said that the number was "too timid." But he did not fight the private-development proposal, calling it a "tragic necessity," because "we need to generate revenue."

In 2015, New York State decided to make its first significant contribution to NYCHA in years, giving it a total of a hundred million dollars. But a battle broke out between the city and the state about how to spend the money, and Torres found himself opposing the governor, Andrew Cuomo. NYCHA had planned to use the funds to replace roofs, but Cuomo asked State Assembly members to submit



smaller funding proposals, for things such as playgrounds and landscaping, in housing developments in their own districts. The Governor's spokesperson defended the decision to the *Daily News*, blaming NYCHA for its own "previous failures to identify and make needed repairs." Torres held a hearing, in which he accused Cuomo of using the money as a "political slush fund." He said, "Of all the physical needs plaguing public housing, none is more urgent and none has a greater return on investment than replacing dilapidated roofs that strike at the root cause of chronic living conditions like mold growth and water leaks." A year and a half later, forty-two million dollars has been spent on security, including cameras; the rest will be spent on upgrades, such as repairing trash compactors and improving community centers. None has been spent on roofs.

Forty-eight of Torres's fifty colleagues in the City Council are Democrats, and before New York's Presidential primary, last April, nearly all of them had endorsed the state's former U.S. senator, Hillary Clinton. But Torres was interested in Senator Bernie Sanders's progressive agenda. On March 31st, Sanders held a rally in St. Mary's Park, in the South Bronx, and Torres arrived early. The moment he met Sanders, he started telling him about the conditions in the housing projects, and the seventeen billion dollars required to repair them. Torres says that Sanders looked shocked and asked, "Is that billions, with a 'b'?"

On April 17th, Torres, with the council member Jumaane Williams and the Brooklyn borough president, Eric Adams, took Sanders to visit Howard Houses, in Brownsville. Afterward, Torres decided to endorse Sanders. One former elected official told him, "You had a promising career, but now it's over." Torres told me, laughing, "My stock fell in some corners of the Democratic Party, which hardly keeps me up at night."

Torres supported Clinton once she became the nominee. He was invited to her Election Night party at the Javits Center, in Manhattan, but decided to watch the returns on television at home. He stayed up until 3 A.M., to see Trump give his acceptance speech. Now he thinks that his constituents may be among those who will suffer the most under a Trump Administration. Some of them "live in a state of fear" at the prospect of being deported, he said. The city's budget relies on seven billion dollars a year in federal funding, for services from welfare payments to rental subsidies and childcare vouchers, all of which would be imperilled if spending is cut. In addition, NYCHA is perhaps the most vulnerable agency in the city, since it gets nearly all its government funding from HUD. Torres is equally troubled by Trump's suggestion that Ben Carson run HUD. Carson grew up poor, in Detroit, the son of a single mother who sometimes relied on public assistance, but he has said that he is "interested in getting rid of dependency." Torres worries that NYCHA is a "natural target."

A few days after the election, he was in a slightly better mood, when the city's Department of Homeless Services reported that it would open a shelter, in his district, for L.G.B.T. young adults. Torres had fought hard for the facility, which will have eighty beds, and will serve as a refuge, providing counselling and access to medical care.

There was some other news in the borough that week: executives for Trump Golf Links at Ferry Point had been trying to lease an additional twenty acres of city land, including part of the waterfront, in order to extend the course and qualify to host the U.S. Open and other major tournaments. The city had decided to reject the request. ♦

Around eleven o'clock on the night of October 10, 2015, Samson Arefaine learned that he had been selected to play on the national soccer team of Eritrea, a sliver of a nation in the Horn of Africa. For two months, he had been in a training camp in the capital, Asmara, with thirty-three other men, vying for ten open spots on the Red Sea Camels. Now the team was due to fly to Botswana in less than two hours, to play in a World Cup qualifying match. Arefaine needed to pack quickly, so he ran to his room, in a house that team officials had arranged for players to use during the camp. The house had no electricity, and he struggled to see in the dark, but he managed to throw some shirts, shorts, and sandals into a bag. On the way to the airport, he called his parents and told them the exciting news.

At twenty-six, Arefaine is lean and wiry, with bright-copper skin, tight-cropped curls, and a narrow face with a faint beard. On the team, he was known for being outspoken and funny, a reliable source of jokes and stories, and also as sensitive and watchful. "He knows how to read faces," one teammate said. Though he played on the defensive line, at right back, he was the fastest member of the team, and he often rushed forward to score unexpected goals. His teammates described him as one of Eritrea's best players.

When Arefaine boarded the plane, he had never been outside the country. For Eritreans, this is not unusual: Eritrea is one of the few nations that require an exit visa. An isolated, secretive state of some four million people, it has been under emergency rule since 1998. The United Nations has accused its military and its government—including the President, a former rebel leader named Isaias Afewerki—of crimes against humanity toward their own people, including indefinite conscription, arbitrary arrests and torture, and mass surveillance. "There are no civil liberties, there is no freedom of speech, there is no freedom to organize," Adane Ghebremeskel Tekie, an activist with the Eritrean Movement for Human Rights, said. "The regime can do anything it wants." According to the U.N., as many as five thousand people flee the country every month, making it one of the world's largest sources of refugees. Last year,

Samson Arefaine (center) was ecstatic when he was invited to try out for the national

LETTER FROM ERITREA

THE AWAY TEAM

A young soccer star plots an escape.

BY ALEXIS OKEOWO

soccer team. "It was a dream come true," he said. "One day, I would be able to leave the country."

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR

• •

thirty-eight hundred people drowned while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea; many of them were Eritreans.

Despite its self-imposed isolation, Eritrea wants to be seen as a normal country, and international sporting competitions are a way to present a good face to the world. Eritrean athletes—runners, cyclists, and soccer players—are sometimes permitted to compete in other countries. The Red Sea Camels are a particular source of pride; Eritrea is no less soccer-mad than Italy or Brazil. But, embarrassingly for the government, members of the national soccer team have repeatedly defected after games abroad: Angola in 2007, Kenya in 2009, Uganda in 2012.

After the last defection, the government disbanded the team. Then, in the fall of 2015, it came up with a solution. It would form a team mostly of Eritrean athletes who lived abroad and held dual nationality, and therefore had no incentive to defect. The remaining positions could be filled with loyal athletes living in Eritrea. "They have to trust you," Yohannes Sium, one of the chosen local players, said. "Trust was the main thing, not skill."

When Arefaine and his teammates landed in Nairobi for a layover, the foreign-based players wandered through the terminal, shopping and eating. The local athletes sat at their gate in hard blue plastic seats, uncomfortably eying one another, while their coaches and the president of the Eritrean National Football Federation sat behind them, holding their passports. The players felt like hostages. "The others can do anything they want, but you just sit and wait," Henok Semere, a striker, said. Then a representative from the Eritrean Embassy in Kenya arrived at the gate and began talking with the officials. While they were distracted, Arefaine turned to Alex Russom, a baby-faced left back, sitting next to him, and told him that he wanted to escape. "He asked if I want to join him," Russom recalled. "I said, 'How did you know I was also thinking that?'"

Arefaine had been contemplating escape for years. He had kept in touch with several players who defected in Uganda, and after they resettled, in Holland, he had asked them for advice on how to get asylum. The most important thing, they told him, was to persuade the entire team to go with him. Any one of his teammates who refused to go could betray him.

It was hard to know whom to trust. Some of his teammates later confessed that Eritrean security officials had asked them to inform on the others in case of an escape plot. "There was no closeness among the ten of us—we were not friends," Arefaine said. "I just took the risk." It turned out that many of his teammates were interested. But Nairobi wasn't a good place to defect: there was nowhere to run at the airport, and they had only two hours before their next flight. Besides, his friends in Holland had given him a second piece of advice: don't escape until after the game. "If you escape without playing, no one will notice you, because you are not on the media," they explained. "You need radio, television."

After landing in Francistown, the sleepy city in Botswana where the match was being held, the team members took a nap, had practice, and went to dinner. Then Arefaine gathered the local players in a hotel room, to determine who wanted to join the escape. Everyone enthusiastically agreed, except Semere, the striker. He had another way out: as the only college graduate and the only one fluent in English, he could apply for graduate programs abroad. The idea of leaving his family and friends made him nervous, and he knew that his father, a successful farmer, would not approve. "Henok was scared at first," Arefaine said. But he was also afraid of going back. What if he didn't get accepted at a foreign university, or the government didn't allow him to go? The other option—crossing through the desert to Sudan, Libya, or Ethiopia—was too dangerous. Finally, he agreed to join. In the hotel lobby, Arefaine helped the others purchase SIM cards and exchange their money for pula, the local currency. He asked the manager to arrange for a taxi to pick them up at 4 A.M., explaining that they wanted to go on vacation after the match.

They lost the game that evening. "Our minds were elsewhere," Arefaine said. Back in their rooms, the team's captain, a Swedish-Eritrean, turned on some music to help everyone relax, but the mood remained tense. Eventually, one of the dual-nationality players asked what was wrong, and Arefaine revealed the escape plan. The player gave Arefaine two hundred pounds, and some of the

other foreign-based teammates contributed dollars and euros.

At 4 A.M., Arefaine and the others assembled in the hall and packed their belongings into a single bag. They moved quietly; a Botswana policeman who was escorting the team was asleep in an adjacent room. Arefaine was in a fog. He had brought T-shirts, shorts, sandals, and track pants but had forgotten his phone. "We left the hotel in a rush—we didn't want to waste time," he said.

When they got to the lobby, there was no taxi on the street. They paused, wondering if they should wait for one. A few of the players went to the reception desk and asked where they could find the U.S. Embassy or the Red Cross. The hotel staff wasn't sure, but told them that they could catch a minibus into the center of town. The players decided to try to find the offices on foot. As they walked out of the lobby, security guards watched with surprise. "We told them we were just going on a walk, relaxing," Arefaine said. "When we went out, there was nothing. It was dark, dark. We didn't know where to go."

ERITREANS THINK OF their sovereignty as hard-won, and with good reason. The country's modern borders were set in the late nineteenth century, when Italy invaded a funnel-shaped area of highlands and arid plains on Africa's northeastern coast and named it Eritrea, from the Latin phrase Erythraeum Mare, or Red Sea. The colonists could not have picked a more inhospitable environment: erratic rainfall, a desert-like coast, dry riverbeds, mangrove swamps, and valleys sunk below sea level. Their policies segregated Eritreans from Italians, in a precursor to South African apartheid, and forbade them to attend secondary school, even as they were drafted to fight Italy's wars. When Italy lost the colony to Britain, in 1941, the new administrators stripped Eritrea of much of its naval, rail, and industrial infrastructure, and then, with little use left for the colony, turned it over to the United Nations.

At the time, Eritreans had high hopes that they would finally be able to govern themselves. Instead, their neighbor Ethiopia intervened. The two countries share common ethnic groups, languages, customs, and historical origins, in the ancient Christian empires of the Horn of Africa. They also share a border, and, for centuries, Ethiopians looking across the frontier have coveted the territory, which offers both fertile farmland and a pathway to the sea. Emperor Haile Selassie, who believed that the land was his by right, lobbied the U.N., and Eritrea was designated an autonomous territory under the Ethiopian crown. In the coming years, Selassie replaced Eritrea's flag with Ethiopia's, supplanted the national languages of Tigrinya and Arabic with Amharic, and finally abolished the federation, erasing the Eritrean state.

"Eritreans who were living under the Ethiopian occupation never felt at ease," Abraham Zere, an Eritrean journalist who lives in exile in the United States, told me. "It has always been 'us' and 'them.'" When resistance movements formed, in the north of Eritrea, the crown's Army punished their supporters, killing villagers, burning homes, and slaughtering livestock. By 1961, Eritrean fighters had gathered in the mountains near the Ethiopian border, in a maze of underground bunkers that contained hospitals, a school, and living quarters. It was an uneven fight: Ethiopia's population was more than ten times that of Eritrea. Ethiopia had arms and equipment from the Soviet Union and the United States, while the Eritreans were forced to capture munitions from their enemies. The war affected everyone, Zere said. "My family was often hiding from the continuous bombings."

In 1991, the Eritreans, with the help of a rebel group in Ethiopia, finally defeated the occupiers. After thirty years of fighting, Eritrea had lost as many as sixty-five thousand people in combat, and two hundred thousand more to famine and the effects of war. But, with almost no support or recognition from abroad, the Eritreans had won, and they emerged proud and defiant. When I visited Asmara recently, a national festival was celebrating twenty-five years of independence. On the sprawling Expo Grounds, among food venders and historical displays, the government has preserved the fuselage of an airliner, which an Ethiopian fighter pilot had strafed on the runway. Across town, in a vast place called the Tank Graveyard, the rusting remains of Ethiopian tanks stand as a monument to the war.

After the victory, Isaias Afewerki, a hero of the struggle, became Eritrea's leader, and his party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, or P.F.D.J., promised to lead the country toward a constitution and democratic elections. Two years later, though, another dispute erupted between Ethiopia and Eritrea, over a border town called Badme. Both sides quickly escalated the conflict; Ethiopia cut off trade, and Eritrea's economy stagnated. When Afewerki decided to go into battle, Eritreans, accustomed to war to preserve their homeland, enlisted to fight. One of Arefaine's older brothers went, and was killed—one of an estimated nineteen thousand Eritreans who died in two years.

In 2002, a commission in The Hague ruled that Eritrea had legal rights to the disputed territory, but Ethiopia has continued its occupation. As the war dragged on, people around Afewerki began describing him as severe and brutish, given to autocratic tendencies. "The P.F.D.J. is Eritrea, and I am the P.F.D.J.," he proclaimed. After members of the Party's central council questioned his handling of the war—had there been no diplomatic alternative to the huge loss of life and the economic devastation?—Afewerki had eleven of them thrown in prison. He also shut down independent media, jailing editors. In 2010, after an Al Jazeera interviewer challenged him, he called her questions "a pack of lies." Then, according to Zere's reporting, he returned to his office and slapped Ali Abdu, the information minister, while his staff looked on. Two years later, Abdu defected while on a trip to Australia. Afterward, his fifteen-year-old daughter, his brother, and his elderly father were put in prison.

Afewerki has used the threat, real or imagined, of renewed war with Ethiopia to keep his citizens in a precarious state that they describe as "no war, no peace." Now, Eritreans say, they can be detained for crimes as slight as harboring ill will toward the government. There is usually no trial; detainees are often not told the offense, or for how long they will be held. Zerit Yohhanes, a midfielder on the national soccer team,

told me that his father has been in prison for more than twenty-five years. The family has no idea why. Maybe he was detained by mistake.

Asmara, where Arefaine grew up, is a serene city of half a million people, set on a plateau at almost eight thousand feet. There are broad streets with peach-toned Art Deco buildings; on Harnet Avenue, lined with palm trees, people stroll past cafés, bars, bakeries, and cinemas. In the middle of the street stands a red brick cathedral, where, during my visit, teen-agers sat flirting on the steps. The city is slow-placed, and crime is low. Western diplomats say, with evident relief, that Asmara is "not like an African city."

Because the government restricts permits for new construction, there is a housing shortage in the city, and people build homes in unregulated settlements on the edge of Asmara. Arefaine grew up in one of these quarters, named Godaif; a paved main street gives way to dirt roads into the neighborhood, where the homes range from pastel-painted brick houses to lean-tos with laundry hanging outside. His father, a judge, owned land there, and so he built an orange house with four bedrooms for the family—four boys and four girls. Arefaine's mother didn't go to school, dedicating herself to caring for their children. Arefaine still sometimes cries when he talks about her. "My mom is the sweetest person, because she devoted her life to us," he told me.

Arefaine's neighborhood was known for producing skilled, if rowdy, athletes. He described the local pastimes as playing soccer, fighting, and drinking *suwa*, a kind of beer made from sorghum. Arefaine wanted to be a professional soccer player from the time he could stretch his legs. His father, who was strict and controlling, pressured him to excel in school, and they argued. Arefaine wasn't serious enough, he said. He preferred the cinema and night clubs to school, and he was always the first one on the dance floor at weddings. But his talent for soccer was evident. As early as high school, scouts began inquiring about him. He joined a club team called Tesfa, and sneaked out of the house to play matches.

School wasn't that interesting, anyway. In history classes, his teachers spent most of the time on the country's perpetual struggle against Ethiopia. In geography, Arefaine learned the names of the other countries in Africa, but that was about it. "Our knowledge about the outside world until we finish high school is very limited," he said.

Arefaine grew up surrounded by support for the Afewerki regime. During the liberation struggle, his father had spied on the Ethiopian occupiers, and then been caught and imprisoned for seven months; he never relinquished the revolutionary spirit. In Arefaine's classes, Afewerki was described as a modest, nearly omniscient man, focussed on his people's well-being. On state-run media, he gives hours-long lectures, in which he spins connections among far-flung episodes in world history and politics; local channels feature him in multipart epics about the independence struggle.

At Santa Ana Secondary School, where Arefaine studied, Eritrea's national anthem is printed on a bulletin board at the entrance: "The pride of her oppressed people proved that truth prevails." But Arefaine began to see soldiers violently round up people who had been caught without identification papers. In his second year at Santa Ana, soldiers came to take the oldest students in each grade, saying that they were going to a vocational school. Instead, they were sent to military training camps.

Afewerki had instituted the camps in the mid-nineteen-nineties, as part of a national program of mandatory military service. The term of service, beginning after the third year of high school, was originally eighteen months. It is now indefinite, and the program has become the country's dominant employer, shuttling recruits from camps into a wide range of occupations. A fortunate few, like children of government officials and generals, can get civil-service positions or white-collar jobs—though even they have to attend drills and guard government buildings. The rest are in a standing military of some three hundred thousand, who work on government projects in construction, farming, and mining, or are deployed to the border with Ethiopia. Most are paid roughly four hundred nakfa, or thirty dollars, a month. Everyone has a gun at home.

A trainee's experience is determined by his unit and location: generally, the more remote your station, the worse the conditions. "The one thing that is constant is the abuse," Yohannes Woldemariam, an Eritrean who taught international relations for a decade at Fort Lewis College, in Colorado, said. Arefaine's older siblings came home complaining about the camps; their parents told them to be patient, that everyone went through it. But Arefaine saw people he knew, students and teachers, fleeing Eritrea. Some walked to refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan, braving gunfire from border guards. Others paid smugglers thousands of dollars to lead them through the Sahara to Libya and then Europe. In 2012, Eritrean Air Force pilots flew a government plane to Saudi Arabia to seek asylum.

As people left the country, the regime began a more aggressive campaign of surveillance; in some cases, Eritreans told me, you could be detained for "thinking about escaping." In Arefaine's neighborhood, a woman named Saada reported evaders to the authorities, and boys avoided walking by her house. "I started being cautious whenever I talk about the government, about other things, with friends, because someone could report me," Arefaine said. Zerit Yohhanes, the midfielder, told me that, when he dropped out of school to avoid the camps, a friend's mother reported him. She even delivered the letter recalling him for duty. Yohhanes was baffled; the woman's own son had fled to Sudan in order to dodge service. "I told her, 'Your son is somewhere else. Why are you doing this to me?'" he said. She replied, "I'm just the messenger." Suspicion is so widespread that even long-acquainted neighbors can be wary of one another. "The system has created an atmosphere of mistrust among Eritreans," Ghebremeskel, of the Eritrean Movement for Human Rights, told me. "You can't trust your own brother."

In 2004, Arefaine's older brother fled through the desert to Sudan, eventually making his way to England. "He was angry because of the national service," Arefaine recalled. "That's why he left." Still, their father encouraged the other children to volunteer for service. It was their duty, he said. The government told

them that the service and the roundups were necessary, because of the threat from Ethiopia, and they believed it.

As arefaine finished his third year of high school, he wondered which camp he would be sent to. Many of his classmates would spend their last year of high school at Sawa, an enormous military complex about a hundred and seventy miles northwest of Asmara. Children of the well connected were often allowed to attend Sawa because of its proximity to Asmara. If you managed to find the time amid your duties to study there, you could gain entrance to a college.

Arefaine's teammate Semere, the son of the prosperous farmer, had lived in one of the hot, poorly ventilated hangars that function as dormitories for Sawa's thousands of trainees. In the mornings, he attended a school nearby, and then supervisors took him and the other recruits to do hard labor at commercial farms, digging and plowing for no pay. "You think, I don't deserve this at this age," he said. "You come just as a child. That's why they take you at that age—you don't know anything, and you just follow them. You are terrified."

Men and women trained together; during the independence struggle, an idea had taken hold that women should be equally involved in all national activities. But Asia Abdulkadir, an Eritrean-German gender consultant for the U.N., told me that the women were often abused. "The senior commander would always choose the best-looking girl and bring her to his unit to wash his clothes, cook his food, make sure his house is always clean," she said. "And there is a pressure for the girls to offer sexual services." At Sawa, Semere knew girls who had been impregnated by commanders.

The base was close to the border with Sudan, and thirty of Semere's hall mates eventually escaped. He stayed, and studied as much as he could, poring over math and physics textbooks in the hours before a 4 a.m. wakeup call. If trainees failed college-entrance exams, they would be immediately drafted back into service. "So you end up in the military for the rest of your life," Arefaine said. Eritrea has only seven colleges, and there is a shortage of qualified teachers, according to Tadesse Mehari, who heads the National Commission for Higher Education. The government spends five million dollars a year to hire expatriate faculty, mostly Indians. It has sent students abroad for advanced degrees, in the hope that they would return to teach. But, Mehari said, "that's not faring very well, because many of the youngsters this time do not want to come back."

Those who graduate college have little assurance of working in the area that they studied; most seem to end up back in national service. One afternoon, at a breezy, secluded café in Asmara, I had tea with a young woman who had gone to Sawa and then completed a degree in engineering. The government assigned her to teach English at a school in Asmara for three years, with the understanding, she said, that "after that maybe they can put you in your field." She now worked part time at a restaurant; other graduates she knew were working in kindergartens. "You try to be flexible," she said, laughing. "You have to, in order to live. You can even clean the streets." She went on, "Just waiting to be an engineer is losing time. I have to do my duty to my family."

Outside Asmara, I drove past a guard post manned by soldiers. There was a cluster of zinc shacks serving as a residence, but there was nothing to guard: no ammunitions depot, no intelligence post, nothing. "If you are not on a farming or a construction project, breaking stones, it's about keeping you in check," Ghebremeskel, the activist, said. In Asmara, a man who had worked for decades in the civil service told me that he was sometimes assigned to duty as a prison guard. "What's frustrating to the youth is that there is no end to national service," Woldemariam, the professor, said. "The suspense—you can't plan your life."

Because arefaine was a gifted athlete, the Eritrean Sport and Culture Commission offered a deal: if he went to a remote camp in the east, called Wi'a, he would be allowed to leave after just six months and play for a club team in Asmara. He packed jam and peanut butter, a sorghum drink, a little money, a blanket, and a few changes of clothes. He felt ready to go.

To get to Wi'a, he and about a hundred and fifty other recruits rode for three hours in the back of a giant truck, so crammed together that they could barely find room to stand. When they arrived, Arefaine was stunned. The camp is in a volcanic area on the Red Sea coast, a sun-blasted expanse of white sand. "There is just plain ground," he recalled. "There is no housing except for small shelters made out of sticks." Soldiers hustled the recruits out of the truck and told them to kneel, then divided them into groups. In a long shelter covered with branches and leaves, they dropped their things. A soldier was serving stale bread and watery lentil soup, ladled out from a cavernous pot. "You could barely see the lentils," Arefaine said. He ate some of the food he had brought from home,

"I can't deal with your fear and paranoia."

"Sorry, but it's store policy to remove man buns by any means necessary."

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already regretting the decision to come.

That evening, the commander, a man named Jamal, laid out the rules: trainees had to obey whatever instructions their superiors gave them, and they would be shot if they tried to escape. "Immediately after the meeting, people started running," Arefaine said. Soldiers swarmed the remaining recruits, telling them to kneel. Arefaine could hear vehicles moving over the sand and guns firing into the air. No one knew if any of the runners were caught. If they were, they would be put in the camp prison, a hole in the ground that felt like a coffin.

At night, the recruits slept in the open, surrounded by a ring of sleeping soldiers. Arefaine poured water on the sandy ground to cool it, and then laid down his blanket. Each day, he and the other trainees had to wake up at 4 A.M., quickly stow their bedding and change clothes, and then jog to a clearing a mile away, where they could relieve themselves, under close watch by the guards. For the remainder of the day, they marched and had target practice, with a rest in the early afternoon to avoid the high sun. Every thirty minutes, a whistle shrieked, and everyone had to line up in formation. Their superiors were checking to make sure that no one had escaped.

The recruits were beaten for failing to show up on time, or for falling out of formation, or for stealing water. "You were treated like an animal," Arefaine said. At breakfast, they were given a cup of black tea, six rolls, and five litres of water to last the day. Lunch and dinner were more lentil soup. There were about two thousand men in the camp, and every Wednesday afternoon they all went to the river to bathe. (The women went on Tuesdays.) People unfailingly tried to escape across the river, and Arefaine watched as they were shot down, their legs collapsing beneath them in the water. The ones who made it disappeared into the scrubland. Later, when soldiers dumped corpses on the ground in front of the recruits, Arefaine saw that many of them had been mauled by hyenas.

A man in the camp was tattooing recruits, using a thorn and kohl, and although religious practices were forbidden, Arefaine had a cross imprinted on his right forearm. "We were stressed and worried, and we wanted to think of our God," he said. When the tattoo became infected, he went to a medic to have it treated. The medic scolded him: "Why did you do this?" When Arefaine came for follow-up treatments, the medic beat him with a stick.

After six months, it was clear that Arefaine wasn't going to be allowed to leave early. Around that time, his parents were permitted to make a one-hour visit. His mother looked at the camp and at Arefaine, who was frighteningly thin, and sobbed uncontrollably. "I was telling her not to cry," he recalled. "From then on, whatever happened to me I kept to myself."

When his year of training was done, he was assigned to a military base in the village of Gelalo, in the south. He was often on the move, sent to man checkpoints or guard telecommunications infrastructure, or, worse, to carry out roundups. He and his platoon were dropped off in surrounding villages to look for evaders, grabbing boys who didn't have permits off the streets or from their homes. They searched under beds, in cupboards, and even took girls, herding them into a prison or a stadium for questioning. If someone resisted, Arefaine could end up having to shoot him. "I felt very bad," he said. "No one wanted to do it." He knew that, if he protested, his treatment would worsen.

Like many men in national service, Arefaine hoped that soccer would provide a way out. The club teams are owned by the military, the ruling party, and state companies, so coaches can recruit anyone they want. When he joined the service, he wrote on his entrance forms that he was a soccer player, but nothing had come of it. At last, three years into his service, he got a call telling him to come to the city of Assab to try out for a military-sponsored club team.

Arefaine wanted to play, but he was desperate to get home. If he tried out for the team and didn't make it, he knew, he'd have to go back into national service. Instead, he sought out a relative who lived in town and, with his help, bought a forged permit that said he was on medical leave. Early one morning, he heaved himself into the back of a transport truck, and, sitting on top of the cargo, rode north. When the truck reached its destination, several hours later, he got on another one, and then another, paying the drivers small bribes. At checkpoints, he showed the fake permit. When he got home, his family greeted him with happiness and surprise; he didn't tell them that his papers had been forged. He put his belongings down in his familiar bedroom, with posters of the Barcelona soccer team. He took a bath.

On Harnet Avenue, I visited an ornate, four-level theatre called Cinema Impero, where people often gather to watch soccer games. In midafternoon, fans were scattered across the seats,

engrossed in an English Premier League match that played on the giant screen. The fans sat in rapt silence, periodically bursting into shouts and cheers. Soccer is immensely popular in Eritrea, featured prominently on state media and dominating the discussion in public spaces. "It is a way of escape from the frustrating reality," Zere, the exiled journalist, said, "and a refuge to discuss safe issues that will not draw attention from state security."

In Asmara, there is much that critics can't comment on. The streets are filled with decades-old bicycles and cars, and the electricity goes out frequently. The state-run mobile-phone network is spotty, and people resort to pay phones. The ruling party's company, Red Sea Trading Corporation, is the country's primary legal importer, but most of what's for sale in Eritrea's small shops is smuggled into the country in giant suitcases—a practice that is tolerated, perhaps even sanctioned, by the government. On the outskirts of the city, police cars driving to Adi Abeto prison pass a thriving black market for diesel.

According to the U.N. Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, P.F.D.J. officials skim millions of dollars a year from party-run companies, but the charges are difficult to investigate because the government never discloses its budget. Eritreans joke that Afewerki runs the country as if it were a small grocery store. Hagos Ghebrehiwet, the President's economic adviser, told me that the budget had to be kept secret, to protect against "economic sabotage" by Ethiopia and its supporters. A former treasury chief, quoted in Martin Plaut's book "Understanding Eritrea," gave a simpler explanation: no budget has ever been committed to paper.

Eritrea has resources—gold, copper, zinc, and potash—but the majority of the population depends on subsistence farming. Ghebrehiwet told me that the problem was a limited workforce: "A small country with a lot of resources in agriculture, mining, and fisheries—I don't think we will have enough manpower to be able to exploit the potential here." Bronwyn Bruton, the deputy director of the Africa Center at the Atlantic Council, was more direct. "The government is broke," she said. "They can't pay people to do jobs that would normally be civil-service posts. So what they're doing is conscripting people." In 2016, the government increased the monthly pay to between two and five thousand nakfa. But Eritreans are not allowed to withdraw more than five thousand nakfa a month from a bank without approval. "You take it to the market and it's gone in five days," an Eritrean in Asmara told me.

Eritrean officials insist that the threat from Ethiopia forces them to divert resources to the military. Berhane G. Solomon, the chargé d'affaires at the Eritrean Embassy in Washington, D.C., complained that the international community has done nothing to compel Ethiopia to withdraw its troops. "It has put the burden on us to protect our independence," he said. "Eritrea is only twenty-five years old. We are just crawling, trying to stand on our own feet."

Publicly, the U.S. has hesitated to criticize Ethiopia, a key ally in regional anti-terror efforts. Between 2006 and 2009, Ethiopia sent troops into Somalia to fight Islamists, including the terror group al-Shabaab. In 2009, the U.N. placed sanctions on Eritrea, for allegedly supporting al-Shabaab in order to undermine Ethiopia. But the U.N.'s own Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea has found no evidence to support that claim. (The group does say that Eritrea has ties to Somali arms traffickers.) When a U.N. report alleged persistent human-rights abuses, the government called the claims "an unwarranted attack not only against Eritrea,

but also Africa and developing nations." Amid the continuing dispute, Afewerki has barred the monitoring group from the country since 2013.

Eritrea and the United States are in a kind of standoff: a Western diplomat whom I spoke to acknowledged that Ethiopia is behaving thuggishly, but thought that the onus is on Eritrea to allow the monitoring group to inspect again. If the country were cleared of the allegations raised by the U.N., the international community would be more amenable to helping resolve the border issue. Eritrean officials regard the U.S.'s reasoning as nearsighted. "Why should good relations with Ethiopia mean hostility toward Eritrea?" Yemane Gebreab, the P.F.D.J.'s head of political affairs, said.

In Asmara, Arefaine knew that he had to protect himself from informants, so he went to see Saada, the neighborhood spy, and told her that he was on medical leave and going to a military hospital in town for treatment. Without release papers from the military, he couldn't join a club team, so he got a job at a shop in the city. When he wasn't working, he stayed indoors to avoid the military's sweeps for evaders. After a few months, though, he reconnected with a high-school friend, Mikal, and started going with her to Harnet Avenue at night, strolling from café to café or going to Cinema Hamsien, where they could watch Indian movies for a few nakfa.

Late one night, about a year later, he heard his father shouting for him to wake up. A contingent of soldiers had jumped the gate of their house and announced that they were looking for him. Arefaine recognized the men: three were platoon mates from Gelalo, and the fourth was the platoon leader. All were holding guns. They handcuffed him and led him out of the house, as his mother and sisters cried.

Arefaine spent the night in a local police station, and then was taken to a prison near his old base in Gelalo. He was confined, along with some sixty other men, to a cell where the only light came from small, high windows. The men weren't allowed out, so they had to relieve themselves in a corner. They all became infested with fleas. "I was about to lose my mind," Arefaine said. "You think about the way you've been taken from home. You think about your mom, your dad, how they feel."

After six months, prison authorities told Arefaine that he was being released: the military wanted him to play soccer again. It was true that he had briefly evaded service, but so did many other men. Evasion was normal, almost expected—and Arefaine was unusually talented. Arefaine immediately called his parents, who thought

WITH MOTHER IN THE KITCHEN

Let us pause. If you could be saved then yes, ok. If you could be contained
    in life then yes.
But diligent, foolish, I count off the dates—your days, your breaths—
as if this mistrust of the natural were not enough—
looking for the starting point—
one of these will be your last word—
what will we have just said when you stop—
what will the phrase be which is interrupted by your final breath—
did they warn us about this freedom—
that there are no regulations—
that we do not run out of patience, we run out of time—
they wrench out the life, just like that—
everything is innard and then it is not—
that one day you are no longer at home here—
also that there is no room left, your room runs out—
the next move is no move—
who told us to feel we could settle in—
today they will ask me for your home address, I have one to give—
my beloved unknown, you pour out—
where you arrive is *too far*—
is not an entrance, not an exit—
you have to stop being—
I don't know if it's formless—
no there is no longing—
a bird chirps firmly from the porch—
the genes chirp firmly in the blood, it still flows—
there is still body heat, honor the body heat—
you ask for the meds, honor the meds—
you have gone too far, you cannot turn around,
the flame of the candle blooms, exceedingly if I stare, I stare,
be glad, inauguration of, say little, save breath,
I will press your hand now and there it is—life—it comes in waves,
it will disappear, it has not disappeared,
accept destruction, *accept*, the word quivers…
You passed inspection, can I tell you that.
You were fully searched. Every option. Every cavity.
At every checkpoint, you were. You were not saved.
This is the final one on this side.
I watch your hands. One is lifting a spoon, one is holding onto the folded cloth.
An iridescence—a crazed green—out the kitchen window, spreading *forever*.
A puddle just there at the foot of the tree from last night's rain.
Now sun. Crusty light, gravelly with pocking shadow, excited by wind.
    New leaves.
First wind today for these new leaves.

he had been killed, and told them that he was free. He cut his hair to get rid of the fleas.

Back in Asmara, he practiced with the team in the mornings, went to a mandatory political-education center in the afternoons, and worked as a guard at a national-service office on some nights. He made four hundred and fifty nakfa, about twenty-eight dollars, a month. "Once you go to the camp, you are the property of the government," a former journalist in Asmara told me. "Whether you work in a highly professional position or as a security guard, everybody gets four hundred for life." On nights off, Arefaine bribed his commanders to let him broker houses and cars on the informal market, so that he could make ends meet.

Arefaine was sitting in a café when he got the news that he had been called to try out for the national team. He shouted so loudly that he startled the other customers. "It was a dream come true," he said. "One day, I would be able to leave the country." When he told his parents he wanted to escape, they were

Is it this week. We drink our tea.
The knives and forks glitter in their dark drawer.
They will be there after. Hands will lift them as if nothing.
May I cut your meat, may I stir your soup?
"Sometimes walking late at night /I" and
"let us pause on the latter idea for a minute."
First wind new leaves—no, new wind first leaves.
They came out day before yesterday.
Those intervening days, unbroken stillness settled.
Look, it's May I said. They grow. No wastage of energy. Love. Molecules.
Now they flip up, fly back. One is ripped off and slaps against the windowpane.
Still citrine-green-new—it sticks fast to the glass.
For a while. We see it.
Do you want to hang out a bit now, here? Do you want to talk about it,
shall we continue?
It just happens this way, you bend to the cup,
the sea-reaching stream runs down
somewhere below our angle of view—
though on a good day you hear it, I see you
hear it—straightening itself as it goes, going down to go faster,
at some point merging and merging, splitting its waters, gathering, a
slope will help it.
I'd take my bucket, may I have a sip of you, river, I am so parched.
We wait for it to come, the time.
We are so glad for this wind, it delivers.
The mind too, whirling, vectoring, reaching short but at least
reaching, rising, consigning—towards and towards. Terrible. You've got to
love it, dark mess of words and winter-
unwinding—blaze, gleam, build, tear down. I put the kettle back on. We are on
pause. The change of scale in our thinking has occurred. Planetary death so
what is yours. How big. Where do I put it. You were born. You were in
time, were
ahead of time all this time and now we are waiting
for it to go on without you in it. That.
When time will go on and you
will not be in time.
What is it we were just
talking about. Your years. There were mornings dew moon highways
nation-states
shame law. I was born. That was just yesterday. *Far far away* you said
opening up
the book. I am three. I look at the page. Your hand knows how to turn it
so the next thing
comes about. All will be buried in dirt.

—*Jorie Graham*

against it. The government has sometimes required families of national-team players to turn over the deeds to their houses as a guarantee in case their sons fled, and if Arefaine defected his family could lose their home. He assured them he wouldn't leave. But, he said, "I made up my mind—I would do it anyway."

The team members based abroad—in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and elsewhere—were flown in and put up in a five-star hotel. The local athletes moved into a guesthouse with no electricity and no running water, where they slept four to a room. While the foreign-based players were paid in dollars, the rest were told that they would receive nakfa—and then were given nothing. They trained for two months, and, as Arefaine and his teammates watched the coaches lavish praise on their foreign-based counterparts, they grew resentful. "There was a double standard," Minasie Solomon, the goalkeeper, said. Solomon, the oldest member of the team, had loved his country enough to volunteer for the war effort against Ethiopia, but now he

was disillusioned. By the time the team got to the airport in Nairobi, nearly everyone was ready to join Arefaine's attempt to defect. "Samson is brave and smart," Yohhanes, the midfielder, said. "He knows what he's doing."

The night of their escape, after the players left the hotel, they walked for half an hour down a wide avenue called Marimavu Road. A police car drove up to them; a policewoman had recognized them from coverage of the match. "Are you O.K., guys?" she asked. "What are you doing?" Semere spoke first. "We are refusing to go home because we don't have human rights," he said. All around him, his teammates began talking at once in Tigrinya, asking him to translate. "I told them, 'Keep quiet, please—give me time to think!'" he recalled. Semere asked the officer if it was safe for them to stay in Botswana. "Yes, it's safe—don't worry," she said, and then drove away.

Not long after, several police cars pulled up to the group, and officials from the team stepped out. The players backed up as if they were going to run. "Where are you going?" a coach said. "Please don't do this." The players shook their heads. "We said we are not going back—we have decided," Semere recalled. "We have been waiting for this time." As the police discussed the situation with the team officials in English, several of the players tried to convey their desperation without words. They mimed guns and made shooting sounds and grabbed the necks of their shirts.

Finally, the officers told everyone to go to the police station, a few minutes away. The Eritrean Ambassador to Southern Africa, Saleh Omar, who had come to Francistown for the game, met them there. In a holding room, he pleaded with the players to return to Asmara, promising that he would protect them. "I'll take you home myself," he said. "Nothing will happen to you." When they didn't answer, he threatened that the Botswana police would arrest them if they stayed.

Filmon Berhe, another midfielder, had been quiet, listening as his teammates did the explaining. Bearded, with wary eyes, he was usually not much of a talker. But he was getting frustrated. The Ambassador didn't understand what they were telling him. "Where are your children?" Berhe asked.

Omar paused. "They are living with me at the moment," he said.

"That is why you don't feel for us," Berhe said. "You don't understand what we are going through."

Omar angrily left the room and destroyed their passports. When he returned, he said, "I'm not responsible for you. You're on your own."

The mass defection was a humiliation for the government, and if the players were deported back to Asmara they could face severe punishment. (Refugees who have been forced to return speak of being tortured, and of being held for years in windowless shipping containers with little food and water.) Gebreab, the P.F.D.J. official, suggested that the soccer team had been deliberately lured away. "How about our runners and our cyclists who compete and come back?" he said. "For me, this is cherry-picking. In Botswana, they were given cause—they said if they stay there they will be given green cards and they will be going to the United States, so most of them decided to stay. It shows that there are certain people in this country who will take any opportunity to leave."

At the police station, though, Arefaine became convinced that they had made the right decision. "It was like I was born again—I had been given a second chance," he recalled. As the teammates pleaded with the police chief,

he softened, and admitted that they had the right to apply for asylum. After waiting a week in jail, they saw a Botswana lawyer, and were allowed to call their families. Arefaine told his that he was safe.

One sunday afternoon in Asmara, I went to see Adulis, the Asmara municipal team, play Red Sea, owned by the Red Sea Trading Corporation. The players, wearing crisp uniforms in yellows and reds, warmed up on a wide green field, surrounded by a red-brown track. Old men in corduroy blazers sat on concrete bleachers, alongside boys in sweatshirts with headphones plugged into their ears. Everyone was talking and laughing with excitement.

The defection of so many good players in the past decade had left a dearth of talent. These were two of the best teams in the country, but the players' footwork was sloppy, and passes kept going out of bounds. "It's like the ball is moving on its own," one spectator said. Another, a bald man in a camel-colored blazer, looked on in disgust. "I'm not happy with this team," he said.

After halftime, Adulis scored a goal—but the ball trickled out through a hole in the side of the net. The stadium erupted. "How can that be a goal?" a bearded young man in a blue button-down shirt yelled in front of me. (The man asked not to be named, fearing retaliation from the government, so I refer to him as Freselam.) Freselam told me he had been a finalist for the national soccer team that had competed in Botswana but had narrowly missed the cut. Now he was playing for another club team. It was a decent life, he said: he practiced twice a week and got paid sixteen hundred nafka a month, along with room and board at the clubhouse.

As the game went on, the fans' frustration gave way to scuffles in the stands, and then to an all-out fracas. In the last minutes, a referee called a foul on Adulis, and Red Sea scored on a penalty kick, winning the match. Policemen wielding batons had to escort the referee out of the stadium amid fans shouting threats. "I'm going to kill you," Freselam shouted at a man who was hassling the referee. "People like you shouldn't even be here!"

After the match, Freselam headed to a pizzeria to celebrate with some of the winning athletes and fans. He had become friends with several national-team players who are now in Botswana, and had been saddened when he learned that they weren't coming back. "I was disappointed that I wouldn't see them again," he said. "But it was their choice."

When I asked about Arefaine, Freselam smiled broadly. "He was one of the strongest players, especially with his speed," he said. "He scored a lot of points."

"He's a nice guy," another player said. "We miss him a lot."

The two players said that they hadn't been surprised when Arefaine defected. It was just something that happened in Eritrea. But they were surprised to hear that he had been dissatisfied with his life there: he always seemed happy, they said. Later, Arefaine told me, "You don't want to seem to anyone that you are not happy in Asmara. Because if you do, they may arrest you."

A few months ago, Arefaine and Russom, the left back, took a minibus from the refugee camp where they have been staying to Galo Shopping Center, a fashionable mall in Francistown. An airy, light-flooded complex with an attached supermarket, it was filled with late-afternoon shoppers. The men were relieved to be away from the camp, an uncomfortable place with limited electricity and running water. "It's not what we expected," Russom said. Unaccustomed to the local food, the players had grown skinny. They had little money, scrounging what they could from sympathizers in the Eritrean diaspora and trading their food rations with local shops to buy pasta, as well as minutes for the phones they shared. They had nothing to do and nowhere to be.

"Most Eritreans—refugees and those inside the country alike—are living in extended limbo," Zere, the exiled journalist, said. "Home has turned into a source of deferred dreams and destitution, characterized by brutal dictatorship, while fleeing is becoming equally challenging." Refugees who flee the Horn of Africa face the risk of torture, rape, and murder by smugglers in the Sahara, and then a treacherous journey by sea. Yet those who make it fare much better than those who stay in Ethiopia and Sudan, who can get stuck in desolate camps. Some of the players who defected in 2008 have reconstituted their team in the Netherlands, and Arefaine and his teammates talked dreamily of their compatriots' new lives. At the camp, they ran and kicked around a ball when they could, but they were worried that they wouldn't get a chance to play professional soccer again. An official at the U.S. Embassy in Gaborone, Botswana's capital, told me that the worldwide exodus of refugees, from Syria and elsewhere, had made the team a low priority for resettlement. The U.N., which administers the camp, is turning it over to Botswana in a few weeks, and the government has expressed a desire to send refugees home.

A sister of one of the soccer players lives in the U.S., and she contacted John Stauffer, the president of an advocacy group called the America Team for Displaced Eritreans. Stauffer had been worried that the "astonishing" reach of the Eritrean government would thwart the team's asylum application. "The Eritrean regime strives to control the diaspora, including through agents operating out of the embassies, in order to punish refugees and defectors," he said. Refugees who wish to obtain an Eritrean passport are pressured to sign a "form of regret," admitting that they have committed an offense and agreeing to accept any punishment. They must also disclose the names of family members back home, who may become subject to fines and imprisonment. Sometimes Eritrean security forces seize refugees from camps and residences in Sudan and return them to Eritrea.

At the mall, the players tried to stay cheerful. In the parking lot, Russom gazed at the people walking toward the entrance. "I'm trying to find Samson a girlfriend," he said, laughing. But at times they still seemed disoriented by their situation. Arefaine mentioned that he had recently gone to Gaborone to meet with Eritreans living there, and they visited a huge, gleaming shopping mall called Game City. "I was confused. I thought, Is this Europe?" he said, half-jokingly.

The players missed eating *injera* and *fata* and hanging out at the cafés on Harnet Avenue. They missed their friends and families. Arefaine's older sister Helen told him on Facebook Messenger to be strong, and sent him photos and updates from home. "It makes me homesick, but it's better than not having any news at all," he said. Their families have yet to experience repercussions from their defections; the players hope that the team's high profile will prevent the government from retaliating, but they can't be certain. "My family was angry I left them, and they were afraid," Arefaine said. "The government is going to do something. I am still afraid."

Outside the supermarket, Arefaine surveyed the mall: a stretch of boutiques selling clothing, shoes, books, electronics. "There's nothing like this in Asmara," he observed. "It's nice." After a moment, he corrected himself. "The cafés in Asmara are better. There's nothing nicer than the streets of Asmara." At last, though, he had managed to leave Eritrea. When I asked how it felt, he said, "We are one step ahead from where we were." ♦

DEPT. OF HIGHER EDUCATION

OUT AND UP

At Berkeley, ex-con undergrads are building a prison-to-school pipeline.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

THE FIRST DAY of his first semester at the University of California, Berkeley, Danny Murillo walked into the Cesar Chavez building and saw a white man with tattoos on his arms. Something about the man felt familiar. He could tell from the tattoos that the man was, like him, from Los Angeles, and he was around his own age, mid-thirties, but it was something else that he recognized. He went up to the man and said, "Damn, I feel old around all these youngsters." The man said, "Yeah, me, too." Murillo said, "I haven't been in school for a long time." The man said, "Yeah, me, too." Murillo said, "I was on vacation." The man said, "Yeah, me, too." Murillo said, "I was in the Pelican Bay SHU." The man said, "Yeah, me, too."

The Pelican Bay SHU—Security Housing Unit—is where California sends some of its most recalcitrant inmates. Both Murillo and the white man, Steven Czifra, had spent much of their lives in prison, including many years in solitary confinement, but by the time they met they were pretty sure they were never going back. Neither had finished high school—Czifra got sent to juvenile hall at twelve—but now they were undergraduates at U.C. Berkeley. They knew that although most people who had lived lives like theirs were still in prison, many were capable—given the right advice, incentives, and money—of making it to college and leaving prison forever. They started talking, and during the next few months they formed a plan to get those people out.

It was not such a long shot as it sounded, because the qualities that had got the two of them into the SHU were not so different from the ones that had got them into Berkeley. "I've always been somebody who went out and got what I wanted," Murillo says. "Fifteen years old, I was selling crack cocaine and making close to fifteen hundred dollars an ounce. I was a very resourceful individual." But what switch—what new thought, or new chance—had deflected Murillo and Czifra from one track to the other? The trick was to go back over their lives and figure out how they'd done it.

Murillo grew up in Norwalk, in southeast L.A. His older brother and sister were born in Mexico, but he was born in the United States, in 1979. For a while, his parents were living in Tijuana and his father had a permit to cross over the border and work in construction, and then they moved permanently. When he was growing up, his father beat his mother, and there was a lot of shooting in the neighborhood. The first time he was put in handcuffs, he was eight—he was carrying three spray cans, and a cop assumed that he had stolen them. He was determined to avoid gangs, because he was scared of getting shot, but then everyone he knew was doing it, it looked like it was just part of growing up, so he joined a gang at thirteen.

Not long afterward, he started selling crack. He liked getting high, but he liked money more than drugs. His father had a maniacal work ethic, and Murillo was the same way. He found someone in South Central who would sell him fifty-dollar rocks that he could sell for a hundred in Norwalk, and he plowed the profits back into the business. The first day of tenth grade, he got kicked out of school for fighting, and he never went back. By the time he was fifteen, he was making six thousand dollars a week. But then he was arrested for kidnapping, carjacking, and robbing a drug dealer. He was tried as an adult and sentenced to fifteen years. As a validated gang member, he was put in solitary confinement at High Desert State Prison, in Susanville, and ended up in the SHU at Pelican Bay. He was in solitary for five years, from 2005 to 2010.

When he was still in juvenile hall, a friend who was in prison elsewhere sent him the "Mexica Handbook"—a tiny book, the size of a cell phone, about the Spanish conquest of the Americas, and the colonial plantations that had conscripted and subdued the native populations. Murillo began to understand that his people had a history, and he read that the Mayans were not primitives: they had astrologers and architects and high priests. After he read the "Mexica Handbook," he decided to read whatever he could get his hands on. At first, he read the kind of genre fiction that was available in the SHU: Dean Koontz, James Patterson, Dan Brown. But one day when he was out in the yard—in solitary, the "yard" was a small concrete enclosure that had high walls but was open to the sky—a man on the other side of a wall told him that he should stop reading crap and get some good books from the prison library. After that, Murillo had many conversations with the man about books, although he never saw his face.

The man told him to start with Voltaire's "Candide." Murillo read it, and was amazed at how resonant it was—its depiction of the slave sounded very similar to what he'd heard about sweatshops. He came across a list of American novels with social-justice themes, and he read "To Kill a Mockingbird" and "The Grapes of Wrath." He read "Don Quixote" and "Les Misérables." He read about the Zapatistas, and about how the Spanish had pillaged Latin America.

When he first got to Pelican Bay, he became enthralled by a book called "The 48 Laws of Power": "I was thinking,

The qualities that get people into prison may not be so different from the ones that get them into college.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA PARINI

Yo, I'm gonna be a fucking smart-ass criminal. When I go home, I'm gonna set up this drug empire and I'm gonna fucking make bank." But, as he read more deeply in the book, he began to hate it. He still wanted power, but he no longer wanted to get it by stomping on another guy's neck. He read about Zen Buddhism, and that made him feel that he didn't need money anymore. And, as he started reading more about the history of Latin America, he stopped believing that his life was a random card dealt to him by fate: he started to think about politics, and about how the way his life had unfolded was partly the consequence of systematic inequality.

He decided that he wanted to get out of prison and stay out. He had a big advantage—he wasn't an addict—but he needed credentials to balance out his criminal record, so while still in prison he got his G.E.D. and started taking courses by mail. He had always had trouble with math, but he found an inmate on the same pod who agreed to tutor him: they worked for two hours after dinner nearly every day for nine months, yelling to each other back and forth from their cells. Though the man was the only white man on the tier—everyone else was Latino—the Latinos took care of him, they gave him soap or deodorant or coffee, because they knew he didn't have family sending him any money from the outside, as most of them did.

When Murillo was released from prison, he enrolled in Cerritos College, in Norwalk. One day, he ran into a childhood friend who had also been away in prison for many years. He told the friend that he was finishing his associate-in-arts degree, to be a youth counsellor. The friend said that was fine but he didn't need to stop there—the friend said he had just received his A.A. and was transferring to U.C. Irvine to do pre-med: he wanted to be a brain surgeon. At first, this sounded wild to Murillo. Then he remembered that the friend had been known for being good with his hands, and that he used to raise animals in the barrio. They talked for nearly an hour, and the friend explained everything that Murillo needed to do to transfer to the U.C. system. Murillo applied to Berkeley and got in. And then on the first day of his first semester he walked into the Cesar Chavez building and saw a white man with tattoos on his arms.

"We tell no one."

When Murillo and Czifra met, it was a revelation to both of them—neither had imagined that there would be another student at Berkeley who'd been in the SHU. Maybe there were more. Czifra had planned to keep his history to himself, but now he changed his mind. He and Murillo decided to organize, with the help of several Berkeley students and faculty, a group for formerly incarcerated students: they called it the Underground Scholars Initiative, or U.S.I. Sure enough, people started turning up. They would hold meetings where there were ten, twenty, thirty people—and those were the ones who were open about their time inside.

Murillo and Czifra wanted U.S.I. to be a place where former inmates could talk and help one another, but, more than that, they wanted to figure out a way to recruit more people from prison. The idea of going to college had sounded ridiculous to them, but now they knew that, even if you had dropped out of elementary school, you could still make it. They modelled themselves on a San Francisco organization, Project Rebound, that had been started, in 1967, by a man named John Irwin, who, in his twenties, did time in Soledad for armed robbery. Irwin had gone on to become a professor at San Francisco State, and Project Rebound got former inmates into San Francisco State, where California residents were guaranteed entry if they had a G.P.A. of 2.0 in high school or community college.

But Murillo and Czifra knew that a lot of people in prison could aim higher and get into the U.C. system—you just had to know what to do. Tuition was free for any California resident whose household income was less than eighty thousand dollars a year, but you had to know about financial aid and when to apply for it. You had to know the right courses to take in community college—real academic ones, not the business-certificate classes that sounded practical but were actually

useless. You had to do extra stuff that might seem pointless, like joining clubs and going to office hours. You had to write a scintillating personal statement. Yet all that became relevant only after you'd decided to go to college. Getting to that point in the first place—that was harder.

The idea of going to college did not even cross Czifra's mind when he was growing up. He was a delinquent before he was in kindergarten—he cut up his dad's Barcalounger when he was four or five. His father was Hungarian: he fled the crackdown after the Hungarian uprising, in 1956, when he was sixteen, and ended up as a roofer in L.A. Czifra's mother was from St. Louis. "She met my dad because he was a son-of-a-bitch biker kind of guy, and she was a Catholic runaway schoolgirl," he says. "She didn't finish high school, and my dad was illiterate. They were both partyers." His parents fought violently all the time. "Where I come from, if you're mad at somebody you throw boiling water on them," he told someone later. Czifra was born in 1974, and grew up mostly in Hollywood and Highland Park, about twenty miles north of Norwalk, where Murillo grew up. His parents divorced when he was six or seven; his father died at fifty-nine and his mother at sixty, both of complications from alcoholism. "My father was a scary motherfucker," Czifra says. "He was so cold that he wished for death."

Czifra reacted to all this by going wild. He broke into a house when he was eight or nine, and started doing drugs. In fifth grade, he was bored in school, so he stopped going. He joined a Mexican gang, and because he was the only white guy he figured he had to prove himself by being especially crazy. He wasn't a very skillful criminal, though, so he always got caught. One evening when he was fourteen or fifteen, he was standing, drunk, on the corner of Hollywood and Bronson. A friend walked up and gave him a fake gun and pointed at a truck. In his drunken haze, Czifra took this to mean "Go steal that guy's truck," so he stuck the fake gun in the truck driver's face and told him to get out. The trouble was, it was cruising night on Hollywood Boulevard, and from the freeway all the way to the Chinese Theatre there were bumper-to-bumper lowriders; he was stuck in a traffic jam. The truck driver walked over to a cop who was directing the traffic and told him he'd been carjacked by a white teenager with a shaved head. Another cop said, "Oh, that's Steven Czifra." He was promptly arrested and sentenced to ten years.

Because of his age, he was sent to the California Youth Authority, C.Y.A., at the El Paso de Robles School for Boys. Y.A., he discovered later, was far worse than prison, because, while there were sane adults in prison, kids in Y.A. tended to act as they imagined violent incarcerated men did, which was often worse than the reality. He never heard of any rapes in adult prison, but in Y.A. there were rapes. People were always getting stabbed. One kid was tortured all night and then murdered by his cellmate. Suicides were frequent.

At Y.A., Czifra was put in solitary almost immediately, because he refused to participate in the drug program. He'd been told that if he behaved he might get out after a year, but he figured that, if he couldn't behave for even two weeks, a year was impossible. He was in solitary from when he was sixteen to when he was twenty—a kind of solitary where you couldn't even shout to the person next door.

The one good thing about solitary in Y.A. was a big box there containing hundreds of books. He read until all that was left was a volume of Shakespeare, with four plays in it. At first, he found the language nearly impossible to understand, but he had nothing else to do, so he kept at it. He gradually realized that it was better than anything he'd read before, and he looked for more. He decided that his favorite play was "Richard II," because of the way it forced you to confront a disagreeable man-child who ruined his life and killed people, and yet, by the end, made you feel compassion for him. When he finished with the Shakespeare, he wrote to a librarian, who sent him ancient-Greek literature in translation. He read Milton and Wordsworth and Dickens.

When he was twenty, he was expelled from Y.A. because he kicked an officer, and sent to Level 3 prison. Compared with Y.A., prison was a holiday: he was put in the general population, and he had a TV in his cell, he was playing horseshoes and pinochle, he had a job. Then, two weeks from his release date, he got in a fight and spat in the face of an officer. He was twenty-four, and he stayed in prison for the next six years, several in solitary. Since he was twelve, he'd been in and out of juvenile hall, where he was alone in his cell except for a couple of hours a day. "I was hardwired for solitary by then," he says. "Healthy adults kill themselves there, but I was lucky."

When it came time for him to be released, he was told that he was going to Placerville, in the Sierra foothills. He was dropped off in front of the parole office on a February night, with a pair of prison sweatpants and forty dollars. It was very cold, and everything was closed, but a homeless man shared his sleeping bag with him. When the parole office opened the next day, Czifra was placed in an S.R.O. with another parolee. He was told that he could live there free for a month, and then he would be on his own. He looked hard for a job, but nobody wanted to hire him. When his month at the S.R.O. ran out, he knew only one place where he would be welcome, so he went to the local dope house. There he found lodging, people he could relate to, a way of making money, and dope. But then one day at a party he started talking with a seventy-year-old biker about life. The biker offered him a job dragging brush for seventy dollars a day; he also told Czifra that he didn't know shit about life, and that he was never going to have a life if he didn't stop getting high. Czifra had never tried to get clean before. "Why would I stop getting high?" he recalled thinking. "Getting high was the only good thing that I had in my life!" But then he saw the biker living a different sort of life: he was accountable, he was honest, he was generous. Czifra went to a recovery meeting and saw people who looked like him and sounded like him,

only these men weren't dirt poor and lonely—they had new Harleys and cute girlfriends and you could see right away that, even if they had been in prison, they weren't going back. Czifra got clean and stayed that way.

After a while, he heard that if you went to community college you could qualify for a federal Pell Grant, worth a little over five thousand dollars, and nine thousand more in loans. That was more than enough for him to live on, so he stopped dragging brush and signed up. He didn't make the connection between community college and the reading he did in prison—he just needed the cash. But when he got to college and looked at a literature syllabus he realized that he'd read almost everything on it. One day, he walked into an English class wearing a Slayer T-shirt, and the teacher said to him, "Nice shirt." That told him that the teacher was a Slayer fan, too, so right away he liked him. Then the teacher taught him how to read "Paradise Lost" like a literary critic—how to analyze it, how to take it apart—and Czifra realized that this was his thing, this was what he wanted to do.

Czifra started reading Shakespeare because it happened to be in the Y.A. book box, but adults in prison tended to read Shakespeare for a different reason. Shakespeare plays were handed around by white inmates to bolster racial pride, being a testament to European culture. "Julius Caesar" was a favorite—Caesar had many lines that they felt expressed their code, such as "I love the name of honor more than I fear death" and "A coward dies a thousand times before his death, but the valiant taste of death but once." White inmates tended to think of themselves as imprisoned warriors, like modern-day Vikings, and they particularly liked violent epic sagas, such as the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and Beowulf.

These books were optional reading in the white gangs, but some of the black and Mexican gangs had curricula that you were expected to read, to educate yourself in the history of your race. There was a long black political tradition in the California prison system, transmitted through the Black Guerrilla Family gang, or B.G.F., which was founded in the sixties by several prisoners, including George Jackson—a Black Panther who was shot dead at the age of twenty-nine while trying to escape from San Quentin. B.G.F. members passed around a set of books, forbidden in prison, which included Frantz Fanon, Iceberg Slim, Donald Goines, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali, and Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu. Rodney Scott thought it was pretty funny that several of the books that in prison could get you thrown in solitary, because they were a sign of membership in the B.G.F.—"Blood in My Eye" and "Soledad Brother," by George Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver's "Soul on Ice"—were required reading in courses at Berkeley. Many years before Scott ended up at Underground Scholars, he had been told by his uncle Joe, a B.G.F. member incarcerated in Folsom, to read from the books that he called collectively the Broader File.

Scott was older than the other Underground Scholars. He was born in 1960, and grew up in Watts, in a shack with rats and snakes in it. Later, his mother moved the family to Hayward, near Oakland. Although he left Los Angeles when he was eleven, he had an attitude that he was from Watts and the kids in Hayward were square. He sought out the bad kids and found them. Once, at a party, he saw two of his friends dancing with blood on their shirts—he discovered that they had just killed two people with a hammer. But somehow he managed to stay out of trouble: he graduated on time, in 1978, and enlisted in the Marines. When he came home again, he got a job as a security guard, keeping gang members out of the parking lot of a Taco Bell. Then one evening he saw the manager counting out stacks of money, ready to take to the bank the next day. He thought, I have to have some of that money. A few days later, he robbed a Taco Bell in another neighborhood and got away with it, and after that his life was very different.

He started hanging out with older gangsters and pimps and con artists. They called him Robbin' Rod. He had a '77 Cougar that was nice and clean. He dressed in suits and jewelry. He went to all-night parties with hookers. Older con men would sit him down and tell him that he had to stop robbing, he was going to get caught—and that, besides, you could talk people out of way more money than you could take from them. One man used to print out brochures after a disaster and solicit donations for the victims; then he'd take the cash. But Scott was too revved up to do something so crafty. "I'm sitting there getting drunk with him, thinking, Hell, what y'all talking about? I'm taking what I want. I'm taking it."

He robbed and robbed. He would hold up restaurant workers at gunpoint and lock them in the freezer, take the money from the safe, and then call the cops to tell them about the people in the freezer when he was a mile or two away. One evening, he got into a car chase with the cops and shook them. He drove home and went to sleep, not realizing that the police had seen his license plate. He woke to find a policeman standing next to his bed, pointing a gun at him. He had done so many robberies in the area that his arrest was written up in the newspapers. They called him the Taco Bell Bandit. He liked the name.

Scott spent twenty-five years in prison. He did his last stint in San Quentin, where he got his associate degree taking in-person classes with the Prison University Project. (Most classes offered in prisons are online or by mail.) That changed everything for him. By the time he got out, in 2015, he was in his mid-fifties, and he was not the same person he'd been almost thirty years before, so when he found his way to Underground Scholars and sat on a sofa with white skinheads and other former inmates of all kinds he found that he could deal with them. Getting former inmates with different affiliations to sit down together had become a part of U.S.I.'s mission. "We've got north siders"—Norteños (Mexicans from northern California)—"and south siders," Sureños, David Maldonado, one of the leaders of Underground Scholars, says. "We got black, white. It goes on and on and on."

In prison, white gangs were allied with Sureños and black gangs with Norteños. This didn't mean that whites


BOOTH

and southerners never fought—everybody fought—but it meant that they ate together, and shared cells, and different etiquette applied between whites and southern Mexicans than applied between whites and blacks. "As a white person, I can't use or touch anything that a black person has used or touched," Czifra says. This was not a matter of personal preference—it was a rule that carried extreme consequences for any violation. "If I drop my soap on the floor next to my bunk, I have to throw it away"—because a black person might have touched the floor—"and if I don't, I'll get battery-packed," he says. "They'll put batteries in a pillowcase and attack me in my bed in the middle of the night.

"Prison etiquette is like a law," he says. "Outside, if somebody does something that's uncouth you think, Ah, well, you're just a dick, you don't have any social graces. But lack of social graces in a prison is life and death. Like doing something stupid like sitting on the black bench. I'm sitting on the black bench because I don't know any better. There are no blacks on the black bench, but it's their bench. So they come up and they tell me to get the fuck off their bench. But they're not polite about it. So what do you do? You're in the wrong, because it's their bench, but you have to save face, because they were impolite. So then I reclaim my honor by standing up for myself, maybe stabbing them or fighting them, and then they kill me, or they don't kill me, and then I go to the hole and somebody else kills me in the hole, or just fucks me up with a razor, or whatever. So that's how social graces play out. And there's no way to fix that."

Underground Scholars was aiming for racial harmony outside prison. Racial harmony *inside* prison was probably not worth even thinking about until a lot else had changed first. This was something that Czifra had tried to explain to people at Berkeley. "I work with a lot of softhearted lefty types now, and I tell them that racial hostility will never cease to exist inside, because prison is still prison," he says. In 2013, a multiracial coalition that had never existed before mobilized a hunger strike in several prisons, which Czifra and others joined on the outside, to protest excessive solitary confinement. For a while, it worked: people started getting out of the SHU, and the Berkeley activists got hopeful about racial coöperation. But, soon after one of the best-known strikers, a forty-three-year veteran of solitary confinement named Hugo (Yogi) Pinell, got back into the general population, he was murdered on the yard. The lefties Czifra knew wrung their hands and said that they didn't understand, and he told them, "When I lived in prison, I didn't give a fuck about justice. I thought, I'm going to live through this ordeal, and I'm going to do everything I can to facilitate that." When, last September, an even larger multi-prison strike got going, to protest virtually unpaid inmate labor, U.S.I. didn't take an official position.

David Maldonado was a northern Mexican from Berkeley—his father grew up in a family of migrant farmworkers, then made it to U.C. Berkeley on the G.I. Bill. By the time Maldonado got back to Berkeley, after fifteen years in and out of jail, many of the friends he'd grown up with were in prison. Three were dead—one murdered, two overdosed. One had been deported. One friend who was still around was Mark Johnson. Johnson and Maldonado had met at parties, and lived together later when they were both into hard-core partying and things were going pretty badly. Later still, they ran into each other in jail, and Johnson greeted him happily, but Maldonado explained that even though they were friends on the outside, they couldn't talk to each other there: inside, Maldonado was a northerner and Johnson was white, and that made them enemies.

Johnson was a rich white kid from the hills, a type of person that Maldonado normally avoided. His father was a cardiologist. His older brother was very good at baseball (he went on to play professionally), and Johnson started getting in trouble early on, trying to make a different kind of name for himself. He was caught selling weed in seventh grade and got expelled, and his parents sent him to a brutal live-in reform school. In tenth grade, he dropped out of school for good, and, after that, his parents decided that they wanted him out of the house, in order to save his younger brother from his influence. He came home one day to find the locks changed and a bag outside the house with a note attached saying that whatever was in the bag was his but anything that wasn't in the bag was not

his, and please don't come back. He barely saw his parents for ten years.

He went to live with his girlfriend and sold weed and worked at coffee shops and managed to make an O.K. living through his twenties. Then he discovered meth. At first, he did it only on the weekends, but he had a job finding foreclosed homes for escrow agents, and he realized that he could work a lot faster on amphetamines. Around this time, he started showing up at family gatherings, trying to repair relations with his parents, telling them that he had his life together now, but they didn't believe him. After his attempts at reconciliation failed, he fell into a deep pit. He became a full-blown meth addict and lost his job. He lost his apartment and his car, and started crashing in tweaker houses. His old friends saw him on the streets, homeless and dumpster-diving for pizza. He started stealing and scrapping copper—breaking into buildings and taking copper wire—and got arrested.

In many ways, jail was good for him. He got three meals a day and didn't have to worry about where to sleep. He didn't have the money to buy drugs in jail, so he got clean. He started to exercise. He called his mother for the first time in four years—she hadn't known if he was alive or dead. He was in his cell twenty-three hours a day and he wasn't high, so he started reading—New Age spirituality books and Native American ethnographies and back issues of *National Geographic.* But when he got out of jail he had nowhere to go except crash houses where people were using, and he never lasted four hours before he was high again. For six years, this cycle repeated itself, and then he was in his mid-thirties and starting to lose his teeth.

Finally, while he was doing six months in Santa Rita, he signed up for a G.E.D. program and the teacher was fantastic. He got his G.E.D., and this gave him confidence. He used to play cards every day with an older man, and would talk about all the fine things he was going to do when he got out of jail. One day, the older man threw down his cards and told him to stop bullshitting, he was sick of hearing him sit there saying how he was going to change his life, when in fact nothing was ever going to change until he went to rehab. Johnson was startled and offended—it had not occurred to him that he had a drug problem. But this time when he got out of jail he spent a year in an in-patient rehab program, and took classes at Berkeley City College. He invited his mother to his rehab graduation and they both cried.

After a couple of years of junior college, he ran into Maldonado on the street, and Maldonado told him that he was going to U.C. Berkeley. Johnson could hardly believe it—the last time he'd seen him was in jail. Maldonado told him about Underground Scholars and gave him a pamphlet. He applied to Berkeley and got in. He felt that, for the first time in his life, his family was proud of him. But, even years after he got clean, he sometimes dreamed that he had used again and destroyed everything.

The summer before Johnson started at Berkeley, he was terrified that he wouldn't be able to cut it, but once he got onto campus he felt happy, and walked around with a big smile on his face. He tried to catch the eyes of other students, to share with them the camaraderie he felt at being with them on this wonderful campus, but nobody would look at him. He wasn't sure if it was because they were all on their phones, or if it was him—did they sense something weird about him? He knew he had to be careful to keep his past self hidden. "I have a group of friends that I hang out with on campus, and they're smoking a cigarette after a class," he says. "A homeless guy comes up and aggressively starts accosting one of the girls, and my old behavior snaps right back in—I get in the guy's face and tell him to get the fuck outta here. I thought it was justified—I felt they were in danger—but I scared the girls I was with."

In class, though, he soon lost his fear and started to talk. He realized that he knew so much more than the younger students did—such as what it was like to be poor. He got all A's from the start, and made plans to go to graduate school in anthropology. He thought there was a need there for people like him: "People are getting out of high school, going straight to Cal, and then straight to grad school, and these people are creating theories and models about a world they've never lived in." This was one of the things that got talked about in U.S.I. meetings:

the incarcerated should not only be objects of study; they should write about themselves.

Danny Murillo never worried that he wouldn't be able to cut it—he started working Berkeley the minute he got there. He moved to campus two weeks early, introduced himself to his future teachers in the Ethnic Studies Department, and told them that he was interested in researching the school-to-prison pipeline. They put him in touch with others on campus who were working on that issue, and he told those other people that he had been incarcerated and needed advice, and they became his supporters. He cut his long hair and shaved off his beard, to look younger and blend in. He had wanted to live in a dorm, but he was still on parole and the university insisted that he live in a studio by himself. He tried to make friends with the graduate students nearby but found them condescending, so when he could he moved into Rochdale Village, a co-op with many students of color, and joined MEChXA, an undergraduate Chicano group, and found friends there. But he rarely talked about his history.

He graduated in 2015. He wanted to teach history or sociology in college, but he also wanted to teach in prison. He won a fellowship that he used to go to New York for a year, where he counselled former inmates who were headed to college, and worked at the Vera Institute of Justice. He started meeting formerly incarcerated people from the East Coast and talked with them about building a national network. While he was in New York, he won a Soros fellowship to try to create a group like Underground Scholars in every university and community college in California. He had his pitch down already. "A lot of times, the complaints that I hear are, I don't got the money," he says. "I want to tell people, You got to learn to live cheap. If I came out here thinking, like, Yo, I need that iPhone, I need that bimmer, I need to look fresh every day—no. I took whatever my brother wasn't wearing no more. I went to Goodwill stores. What I was wearing didn't define who I was, and it never will again."

When Czifra first got to Berkeley, he went looking for his people, by which he meant ones who had grown up poor, but they were hard to find. He told an adviser he wanted to work with the incarcerated, particularly children—he believed that imprisoning a child for any kind of crime was counterproductive and wrong. The adviser suggested that he volunteer, but the sign-up form mentioned background checks, and he never went back.

He found big classes hard to take. For a long time after he left prison, he'd had a raw, aggressive energy about him that scared people. He still had to remind himself when he entered a new situation that nobody was going to attack him; he didn't have to be constantly on his guard. When he walked into a crowded classroom, he felt a rush of paranoia: he felt that everyone was looking at him, and that if they knew what he'd done and where he'd been he would not be welcome. And, in fact, he was not always welcome. He went to see a professor early on to ask why he was getting B's. "The professor made some kind of comment like he knew I was a gang banger who was trying to change my life," he says. "He was, like, I got your number—not in an accusatory way, but not in a warm, Kumbaya way, either. He said, If you get an A-plus, I'll write you a letter of recommendation, if you get an A, you're grad-student material, and if you get A-minus or below, forget it."

He liked the seminars better: "My peers were highly skilled analysts of literature, and I enjoyed being around that kind of smartness. It was off-putting when the twenty-year-old entitled white male know-it-all would do his thing and be acknowledged for it, and I'm thinking, You are just a self-serving piece of shit. But luckily I have a mentor, a former professor at Stanford, and he told me, 'Don't worry, that guy is suffering, and that way of being in the world is pretty awful,' and that helped me a lot." Czifra graduated with Murillo, in 2015. Underground Scholars had put together enough grant money to pay Czifra to work part time for a year as the group's director; during that time, he won a Soros fellowship to work on recruiting former inmates from community colleges.

By this time, he was living with a woman with whom he had two children. The longer he was out of prison, and the longer he spent living with his family, the more he felt himself changing. All those years in prison, and particularly in solitary, he had survived because he was ice cold. "I didn't have the grief that comes along with missing people," he says. "The first time I missed another human being in my whole life, I was many years clean. It wasn't until about five years out of prison that I had my first selfless thought. I thought, I wonder how that person's doing, and I called them to ask how they were, and afterward I was, like, Whoa! This is what real people do! I can't imagine going to prison now. I would fucking kill myself immediately. I miss my kids already, and I saw them this morning."

Rodney Scott applied to Berkeley for the fall of 2016 with the coaching of other Underground Scholars, but he didn't get in. He was disappointed, but he didn't feel too bad about it. "If I was twenty years younger, maybe," he says. "But, hey, my grade-point average isn't a 4.0. I have an extensive criminal history. And I'm fifty-five years old—we got a lot of kids coming up who could make more of this opportunity than I can. Two years ago, I was sitting in a prison yard with no future, so just to be out here, I'm grateful for that. It's not the end of the world because I can't go to Berkeley. There's San Francisco State. The world ain't over, far from over."

He wanted to be a drug counsellor, particularly to the formerly incarcerated, because who knew more about addiction and prison than he did? Meanwhile, as he mulled his next step, he had started mentoring young guys coming out of Santa Rita, trying to get them to go to college. He told them that education was not only a way to get a job; it was also a way to understand your life. "It allowed me to see how I got to the point where I was sitting in the hole in Tracy with some cop with a baton playing with my butt cheeks," he says. "How did I get here?

When you're at the disposal of another human being, and you find yourself walking with a hundred dudes in chains. How'd the brother say? That if you don't use your mind somebody else will. 'I'm a young black dude, my pants need to sag, I got to have gold teeth and dreadlocks, I got to be thugged out'—is that what somebody's telling you you should be, or is that who you are? Because if you just following along blindly and you wind up in prison with a baton up your butt, don't say nothing."

Changing how you saw yourself was the first step, and the most crucial one. "When you're about to get out of prison—when you start getting shorter to the house, as they call it—you start envisioning that first day," Maldonado says. "And if you can see yourself as a student, as an intellectual, that's a very, very powerful thing." That transition had been easier for him, he knew, than it was for most guys in prison: his parents had both gone to college, and he grew up reading. But he also knew that you could make it even without those advantages. "It's just discipline," he would tell people when they came out. "You got up every morning and did burpees all day when you were in jail, you can read a hundred pages."

That was what he told people, because thinking about discipline was useful, but from a political point of view he believed that it was all wrong. In fact, discipline was not enough, and lack of discipline was not the reason that people ended up in prison. "There are people who did a bunch of time and who are running around the country charging people to do this whole self-help reëntry shit, and I am so opposed to that," he says. "*Build your human capital, make investments:* that's what's wrong with neoliberalism—it focusses on the individual. But it's not about the individual. It's about us having solidarity to make changes in the system."

There were several changes in the system that U.S.I. was working on. Pell Grants of a little over five thousand dollars were in many cases the only reason that the Underground Scholars had gone to college. A criminal record did not prevent you from getting a Pell Grant, but the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which Congress passed in 1994, forbade awarding Pell Grants to people who were still incarcerated. The Underground Scholars had heard that the Obama Administration was working on lifting that ban for some prisoners, and they were trying to spread awareness about the issue. They were also working on the Ban the Box campaign—a movement to get rid of the box on employment applications that you have to check if you have a criminal record. It was no good getting a college degree if you couldn't get a job when you graduated, and if you couldn't get a job you were far more likely to turn to illegal means of supporting yourself and end up back in prison. Already, twenty-four states and more than a hundred and fifty cities and counties had banned the box, and some large corporations had joined them.

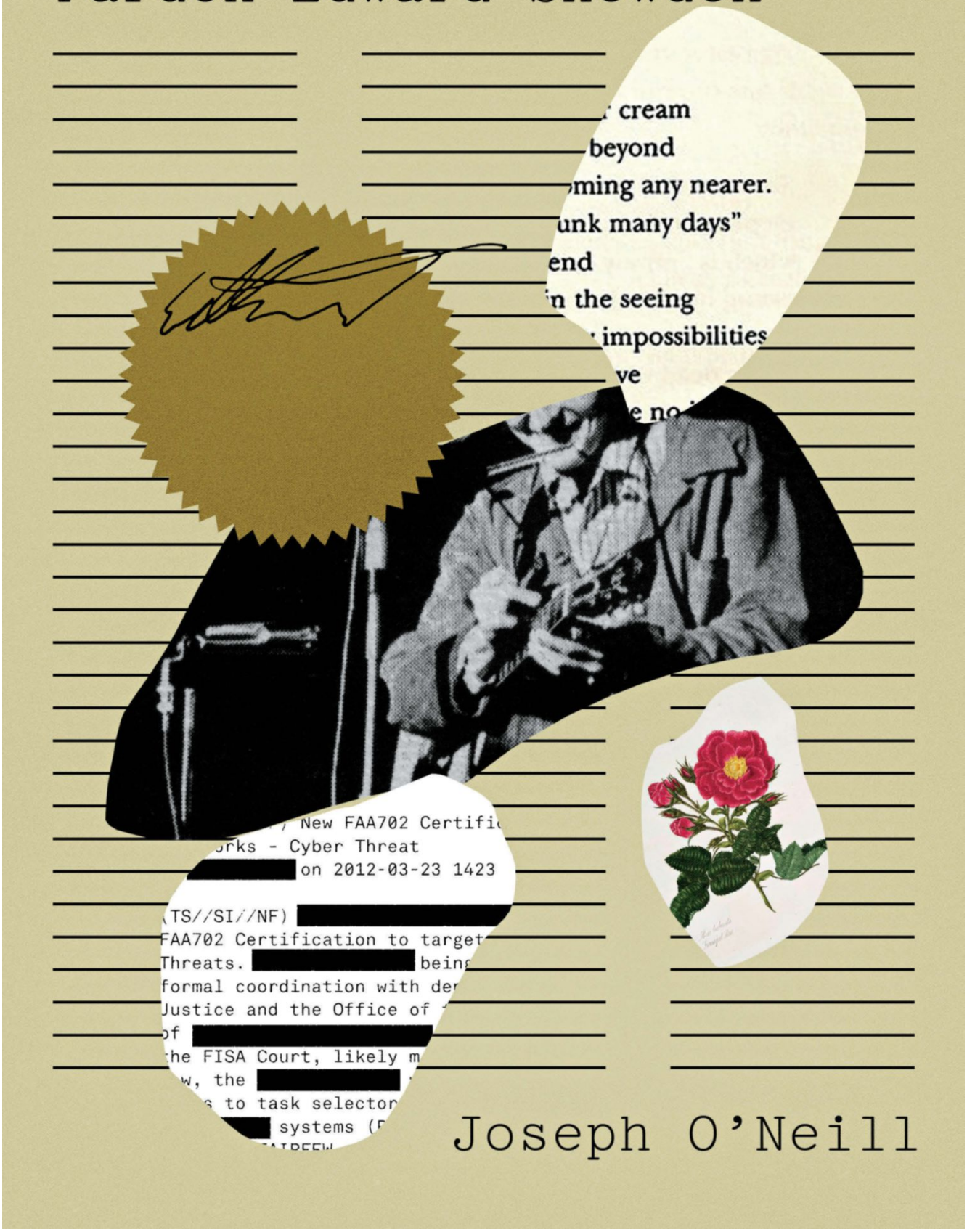
The key was to think politically, turning the discipline and solidarity of gang politics to better uses. Thinking politically also meant not falling in love with your own story and letting yourself imagine that, because you had made it to U.C. Berkeley when millions of others had not, you were special. "I know exactly why I'm here," Czifra says. "I got lucky. The reason I was able to take advantage of those opportunities is that I wasn't getting high anymore, but that has nothing to do with me. I have a brain that can read—why the fuck does that make me deserve any of this? When someone reads a story about someone who made good—the redemption narrative—what that does is that lets society off the hook. Because we can say, Oh, look, it works! The system isn't racist."

"It's this bootstraps thing," Maldonado says. "*You, you, you,* you're exceptional. No, I'm not. There are a million people inside. I left behind people who are dead, or who are doing long prison terms, or who are burned out and lost their minds, who are way smarter than me. It's a roulette wheel: sometimes it lands on your number. Everyone in Underground Scholars got their number through the roulette wheel. We're just changing that now to where maybe two balls land instead of one." ♦

"I'd know my tinnitus anywhere and this isn't it."

• •

Pardon Edward Snowden



Joseph O'Neill

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX MERTO

The poet Mark McCain received an e-mail, which had been sent to numerous American poets, inviting him to sign a "poetition" requesting that President Barack H. Obama pardon Edward Snowden. The request took the form of a poem written by Merrill Jensen, whom Mark knew to be twenty-eight years old, a full nine years his junior. The poem-petition rhymed "Snowden" with "pardon." And "pardon" with "Rose Garden." And "Rose Garden" with "nation." And "nation" with "Eden." It rhymed—or, as Mark preferred to put it, it echoed—"Putin" and "boot in" and "Clinton" and "no disputing." "Russia" echoed "U.S.A."; and "U.S.A." "Thoreau"; and "Thoreau" "hero."

Mark forwarded the e-mail to the poet E. W. West. He wrote:

> Am I crazy to find this enraging?

Within seconds Liz wrote back:

> No.

They arranged to have coffee that afternoon.

In preparation for the meeting, Mark tried to organize his thoughts. His first point, of course, was that the very idea of poem as petition was misconceived. A poem was first and last a *Ding an sich*. It definitely wasn't a message that boiled down to a single political-humanitarian demand. It made no sense for an agreeing multitude, or mob, to undersign a poem: you could no more agree with a poem than with a tree, not even if you'd written it. Of course, the signers of the poetition would argue that they were associating themselves with the text's petitionary substance and not with its formal properties; and that in any case poetry is a sword of lightning that consumes its scabbard. But, accepting all that, Mark mentally counterclaimed, why not just have a petition in the form of a petition? Why drag the poem into the muck? Well, the undersigned might reply, a versified petition was likely to attract more attention and be more consequential than the alternative. To which Mark would answer, The good of poetry resides not in the—

He began to feel a familiar dialectical dizziness. He set off to meet his friend, even though it meant that he would get there twenty minutes early.

Liz was waiting for him when he arrived.

They hugged. The moment they took their seats, Liz said, "Well, are you going to sign it?"

Mark said, "I don't know. Are you?"

Liz said, "Not my problem. Nobody's asked me to."

Mark paused. This was a complexity he ought to have foreseen. With extravagant bitterness, he said, "Oh, they'll rope you in."

Liz mused, "I did a reading with Merrill in January."

Mark had attended the event, as Liz well knew. "I felt bad for him," he told her. "You really showed him up. Without meaning to, of course." He went on, "Look, I do think this thing is chaotic. They're basically shooting out e-mails at random. And I don't think Merrill is a vengeful, petty guy. Far from it. I think his heart's in the right place. Ish. But you know what? I could be wrong. He's obviously interested in a certain kind of success." Mark stopped there and was glad he had, even though he loathed Merrill Jensen. Whenever he badmouthed a colleague, however justifiably, he invariably regretted it. (Strange, just what a draining effort of tact was required to get through the day without bad-mouthing another poet.) In this instance, he felt, he hadn't thrown Merrill Jensen under the bus. He'd dissed him only in order to express solidarity with Liz, and only to that extent.

Liz doubted that Merrill had overlooked her because she'd shown him up at their reading; in all probability, Merrill's recollection was that he'd shown *her* up. No, she had been overlooked because she was a woman. Whenever a stand needed to be taken and the attention of the public needed to be endured, the peacocks huffed and squawked to the fore en masse, idiotically iridescent.

She decided to say, "We need people like Merrill. Somebody's got to be interested in being prominent. Otherwise we'd all disappear."

Mark said, "I expect Dylan has been contacted."

Liz laughed. The singer's Nobel Prize in Literature had bothered her, yes. Literature was in the first place reading matter, after all, and Dylan's lyrics were mostly unreadable—and not even listenable to without the music. Even his supposedly best stuff would be torn apart if presented to the poetry practicum she taught every Tuesday, not only on account of its wordy, clichéd, hyperactive figuration but, more fundamentally, because of the soothsaying persona that the singer so readily deployed, a trope that worked fine in a pop song but on paper came off as a shtick. All that said, Liz had not taken the news as a personal hit. Mark, though, in common with many men of the pen she knew, had been knocked flat. For two days he had not been able to leave his apartment or even to post on Facebook. Only after this period of grieving had he managed to discuss the matter with Liz, at the same table where they now sat. At that meeting, Mark had reported that the night before he'd found himself thinking back to the seventeen-year-old who, wandering the public library of Forsyth, Missouri, inexplicably leafed through a tattered Norton Anthology and for the first time came truly face to face with a poem's mysterious verb-visage. He still remembered the one that did it for him—Roethke's "The Waking," funnily enough. *So take the lively air,/And, lovely, learn by going where to go,* he recited to Liz. And that was the moment he'd set off on a delightful clueless journey in language, and for years he never once felt lonely or even singular, because at all times he felt this breeze, he said to Liz, on which the poems he would read and write might be accepted and held firmly aloft, and the air of the culture seemed filled with such breezes and such poems. Yes, Liz said, I know exactly what you mean. Frank O'Hara did it for me, she said. Which one? Mark asked. She said, "Animals," to which Mark replied, *We didn't need speedometers/we could manage cocktails out of ice and water,* and Liz wanted to hug her friend. Anyhow, Mark continued, the damn thing is, it's so hard to keep believing. And there's so much you need to believe in. Does that make sense to you? It does, Liz said. Mark said, You become aware that what you're doing is almost nothing. That it's just a few atoms away from nothing. And now, with this scandal, I feel that what we do *is* in fact nothing. I feel like it's officially nothing. Liz saw that Mark had other things he

planned to say but was too emotional to speak. Liz, they're calling him a poet, he finally got out. You know? They're not calling him a novelist. They're not calling him a songwriter. They're saying he's a poet, Liz. I know, sweetie, Liz had said.

"Seems like he's finally accepted the honor," she now stated.

Mark said, "Of course he accepted it. A guy with that much vanity? He was always going to accept it."

In fact, during the couple of weeks that Dylan had not responded to the news of his award, Mark had hoped that the singer would tell the Swedish buffoons where to stick it; that Bob had the integrity to recognize that an ultra-celebrated multimillionaire who deals in concerts and extra-paginal iconicity is not playing the same game as a writer who sits down in a small college town and, with no prospect of meaningful financial reward, tries to come up with a handful of words that will, unless something untoward should happen, be read by a maximum of a hundred and forty people and be properly appreciated by maybe fifty-two of these, of whom maybe six will be influenced. Make that two. Once a year, a small beam of honor, reflected all the way from Stockholm, faintly brightened the dim endeavors of such writers. And now even this glimmer had been removed from their small and dark corner of the sky and tossed like a trinket into Bob Dylan's personal constellation.

This sidereal imagery made Mark uneasy—stars were almost always cheesy; doubly cheesy, in the context of a "pop star"—but he had nothing else. Language was hard. And poetry, he'd always felt, was language at its hardest.

He had recently expressed this point of view to his friend Jarvis, a writer of short-form fiction. Jarvis said, "Really? Poetry is hard, sure. But good prose is just as hard, man."

"Poets can generally do what prose writers do," Mark, a little drunk, declared. "The reverse? Not so much."

A day later, he received an e-mail from Jarvis with a poem attached:

EASY PEASY

It seems that what's
Keeping what is as it is, the whole thing
thing, is physics, whatever
That is. Let's see: the fizz of the river, *l'hiver*,
that Swiss
Watch thing. Liver.
Every frisson, everything that's
Alive or that was once aliver. The leaf. The
leaver.

He forwarded this to Liz:

What do you think?

She wrote back:

So great that you're writing again! This is good—best thing you've done in a while. So effortless. "Physics" and "fizz" is a pleasure. And don't think I haven't noticed that the English-language contractions erase "i" and "u." In a poem drowning in materialism, that's just such a smart, playful way to raise the issue of subjectivity.

Mark didn't get back to Liz. Or to Jarvis.

Re the Dylan Nobel, Liz said, "It's depressing. I can't separate it from the Trump phenomenon."

The election was a week away.

"Yes," Mark said. "And hypercapitalism, too. The reader as consumer. It's an interesting question."

He kept secret, even from Liz, the fact that he'd already written on this question. It was a secret because what he'd written wasn't a poem. For some months, Mark had worked surreptitiously, and exclusively, on a series of prose reflections that he termed "pensées."

How doable pensées were! The most difficult thing about making a poem, in Mark's judgment, was figuring out the text's relation to its own knowledge; figuring out, to quote from Liz's one anthologized work, the poem's "claim to saying." There was no such problem with a pensée: you wrote as a know-all. Apparently—and here Nietzsche and Cioran and above all Adorno were Mark's masters—the trick was to simply put to one side all epistemological difficulties and just steam ahead into the realm of assertion and opinion and emphasis. Boy, it felt good. With great gusto Mark had knocked out, apropos of the hypercapitalistic reader:

As class-based *submissiveness* justly evaporates, appropriate *deference*—to expertise, rationality, and even data—also disappears.

This results from a state of affairs in which one's autonomy consists primarily in a freedom to consume. Objective realities are inspected like supermarket apples and accepted only if they tickle the fancy. If they don't, it's not sufficient merely to reject the apple. The apple tree itself must be cut down. And then the orchard. Hell hath no fury like a consumer inconvenienced.

In this way, shopping is confused with resistance;

The year was 2000, and cell phones, portable music players, laptops, cameras, as well as the cords, chargers and batteries needed to run these items were complicating my hectic life-on-the-go. Millions of travelers, parents, outdoorsy people and tech-lovers faced the same problem – how to carry all their stuff without a backpack, briefcase, fanny pack or man-purse.

We All Have the Same Problem

Several days later, while my wife Laura and I were walking our dogs, I found myself in the same frustrating situation; my hands full, juggling a water bottle, poop bag, ball, keys and wallet ***and*** trying to control my very excitable dogs. I asked Laura for the hundredth time if she could carry my stuff in her purse and she had finally had enough – informing me that I **had** to start carrying a backpack. At this point, I realized there had to be a better way to organize and carry my belongings and gadgets.

A Solution: Hands-Free Carrying

While researching the problem, I realized the solution was more and better-placed pockets in clothing.

With the help and guidance of my wife, we set out to create fashionable, functional garments that addressed this need. The result? SCOTTeVEST, a full line of men's and women's clothing that offers hidden pockets to carry whatever you need – wherever you need it.

Travelers fueled our company's growth, but we found dozens of other ways SCOTTeVEST apparel could be used to neatly and discreetly carry your stuff. Soon photographers, parents on the go, and commuters looking for an easier way to manage their daily essentials were all "SCOTTeVESTing"!

A Pocket for Everything

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Scott E. Jordan

-Scott Jordan
CEO and Founder of SCOTTeVEST

a bogus egalitarianism prevails; a vicious man-on-the-streetism becomes dominant. The *tricoteuses* make their return, clicking not needles but touch pads. Need one add that the poem is the first to be dragged to the guillotine?

Who knew that writing this stuff would be such fun? The voice—at once pedantic and forceful, and strangely aged and pampered—was the most fun of all. It was the voice of the irritable Central European professor whose wife's principal domestic project is to insure that her husband enjoys peace and quiet in his study.

Mark had not had a wife or a study in six years. Liz and he became close during the chaos of his divorce, when he was outed as a cuckold and outed from his house. His male friends, he was a little shocked to learn, were ineffectual, indiscreet, and bizarrely merciless confidants. Liz listened to him sympathetically—and honestly, too. When Mark said to her, I was blindsided, Liz said, Yeah, maybe, and he said, What do you mean, maybe? and Liz said, Quarterbacks are blindsided. You weren't blindsided. You were myopic.

Liz's criticism of Mark's poetry was similarly sensitive and forthright, and he was very grateful for it and happy to reciprocate. Her work wasn't right up his alley—it was a bit too academic and sexual—but there was no querying its intelligence and carefulness. In any case, Mark mistrusted his own alley, which at this point, as he'd remarked to Liz, was overrun by the rats of resentment. And the cats of confusion, Liz suggested. Not to mention the dogs of disillusionment.

If Mark envied Liz at all, it was for the growing kudos that E. W. West enjoyed as a writer who disturbed edifices of gender and sexuality. But it wasn't Liz's fault that her biologically and culturally determined homoerotic inclinations were now in vogue, just as it could hardly be held against her that she'd grown up in bourgeois luxury on the Upper West Side of New York City. (Liz often complained to Mark about finding herself in Virginia, a dislocation that she experienced, as any reader of her "Sappho in Sicily" quickly grasped, as an exile.) Nor did he hold it against Liz that, in an unpublicized complication of her biographical profile, she was for the first time romantically involved with a man. His name was Pickett, apparently as a tribute to Wilson Pickett. Did anyone call their children after poets anymore? Mark doubted that there'd ever be a kid named McCain out there in the world. Or, if there were, the kid would certainly be named for the political weasel John McCain. Mark had long felt defamed by this echo.

Every word is a prejudice, Nietzsche famously points out. One might add: Every word *prejudices*. Nowhere is this truer than in the nominal realm. One's name cannot be separated from one's good name.

He cared deeply for Liz and was her biggest fan and cheerleader. He felt bad that she had not been contacted about the Snowden poetition.

"So what should I do?" he asked her. "Sign it? Rewrite it?"

"Ah," Liz said. "The patriarch's quandary."

Mark did the work of smiling sympathetically. He saw that Liz was peeved, and hurt, and with good cause. The problematic situation of women was not to be underestimated, not that Liz was in danger of committing this error. In her most recent sonnet, "mandate" had been displaced by the neologism "womandate." Now Liz was, as she liked to say, lady-pissed. Mark totally got it.

But in the meantime he had a problem of his own, and an itch to explore the problem in writing. They had finished their coffees and their refills. It was time to go.

The two friends stepped outside. It was a lovely November afternoon. They hugged and separately went off.

As soon as he got back to his apartment, he wrote:

We attribute to Bertrand Russell the following notion, that to acquire immunity from eloquence is of utmost importance for citizens of a democracy. We are curious about the notion because Stevens was. And we connect Russell's statement, thanks to Denis Donoghue, to this one, by Locke: "I cannot but observe how little the preservation and improvement of truth and knowledge is the care and concern of mankind, since the arts of fallacy are endowed and preferred."

If we grant Russell's words a merely provisional validity, we can ask: What is a verse petition if not fallacious eloquence? What is poetry if not a riposte to the forces of fallaciousness? What are these forces if not power's language?

Mark wondered if he should explain that, by "fallacy," Locke meant "deception." He decided not to. The reader would connect the dots.

Not for the first time, Mark asked himself who this notional reader was. He had never, not once, met a disinterested party who had even heard of his poetry, never mind read any of it. Maybe his pensées would gain him a reader he could physically touch.

He felt a wavelet of nausea. The feeling had a certain etymological justice: he had jumped from one ship to another. But what was the alternative? Write nothing? It had been months since he'd produced, or even wanted to produce, a word of poetry.

Mark wrote:

How little I associate writing, properly undertaken, with the generation of the written. The more someone writes, the more suspicious I am of his credentials—as if this person had neglected his actual vocation in favor of the meretricious enterprise of putting words on the page.

Then:

Sometimes I sit down to write and feel the internal presence of . . . bad faith. Therefore I desist from writing. On the other hand, what would it mean to write in good faith? That sounds even more suspect.

He ate a cheese sandwich with mustard and olive oil. That was dinner. He went to his armchair. He wrote:

It is assumed that the writer's first allegiance is to language. This is false. The writer's first allegiance is to silence.

Now it was dark out. Usually the poet would read a book, but tonight he lacked the wherewithal. He opened a can of beer and went online. For a while he skipped from one site to another. Everything was either about the election or not about the election. He checked his e-mail. Nothing new. Then he went on Facebook, then back to skipping around the Internet. He found himself reading, without interest but with close attention, about persimmon farmers in Florida. He rechecked his e-mail. Hello, Merrill had written him again.

Actually, Merrill had written Merrill—Mark had been bcc'd. The e-mail brought "exciting news": funding had been secured (from whom, Merrill didn't say) to buy half a page in the *Times* for the poetition. This moves the needle, Merrill stated.

Mark's reaction involved three thoughts. One: "Move the needle"? Two: What an operator Merrill Jensen was. What a maestro of fallacy. Mark knew for a fact that Merrill not only disliked Bob Dylan's lyrics but also disliked Bob Dylan's songs, which he'd once sneeringly characterized to Mark, who did like them, as "Pops' music." But, sure enough, the minute the Nobel was announced, the prick was at the forefront of the congratulators and imprimatur-givers, arguing that Bob Dylan was an unacknowledged legislator of the world; ergo, Bob Dylan was a poet. It made Mark want to puke: the pseudo-reasoning, so right wing in its dishonesty; and the big lie that Dylan somehow lacked acknowledgment. The big truth, not that anyone dared to mention it, was that Shelley's dictum needed to be revised. Poets were the unacknowledged poets of the world.

Had Mark been among the scores of writers contacted by the media for their reaction to the prize—which he hadn't been—he would have spoken up for his comrades in verse. He would have faced down the wrathful online barbarians who vilified any perceived anti-Dylanite. (Their favorite disparagement, tellingly, was the epithet "nobody.") He would have stated:

> The status of poet is not to be worn like one of those fine ceremonial gowns sported by recipients of honorary degrees for a single, sunny, glorious afternoon. Not even by Bob Dylan. If there is such as thing as a poet's mantle, it is a $4.99 plastic poncho: useless for fashion but good in the rain and the cold. And in an emergency.

His third thought about Merrill's e-mail was that his name had never appeared in the *Times* and that if he signed the poetition it would.

His apartment was on the third floor of a Victorian only minimally maintained by its owner. There was a bedroom and a kitchen-living room equipped with an armchair, a desk, a desk lamp, a small sofa, and bookcases that entirely covered two walls. No television. There were two windows. When Mark wanted to pace about the apartment, his one option was to walk to and from these windows. This he now did.

It was a journey that he'd made thousands of times, and thousands of times he had viewed the shingled rooftops of the houses across the street, and, beyond them, in the town's small business district, two brown glassy towers. At night, you couldn't see much beyond the glare of the street light directly in front of the window. And yet evidently there was an inextinguishable need to approach an opening built into a wall for air and light, and to look through it.

Somebody down there was walking a dog. That was a poem, right there—the master, the leash, the joyful dog, etc. But the territory had been covered: there was that Nemerov poem, just for starters. And the one by Heather McHugh, with that all-time-great dog line—*doctor of crotches*. A poem by Mark McCain would be water poured into a vessel that was already full: superfluous.

He kept looking, which was another poem—a poem about the peculiar percipience of the one who gazes out a window. The poem would do for the window what theorists had done for the threshold: it would offer the idea of the fenestral as a consort to the idea of the liminal. He wouldn't write it. The automatic metaphoric associativity of "the window" was just too much. He could always play with the associations, of course. But surely there had to be better things to do than play with the associations of "the window."

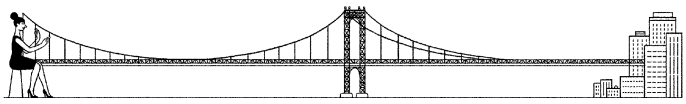
He returned to his chair and wrote, in less than half an hour, a poem that deviated from his previous work. The poem masqueraded as notes for a possible poem. It was titled "Meditation on What It Means to Write?" It read:

> Problem: "a meditation on" is a cliché.
> "What it means to" is a cliché.
> The very notion of a problem, colon, is a cliché.
> "The very notion of" is a cliché.
> "Cliché" strikes one as a cliché.
> As does "strikes one."
> And "As does."
> Ditto inverted commas.
> Ditto "ditto."

He did not write Merrill back. He did not put his name to the poetition.

As soon as he had not done these things, he rose up from his chair. He went not to the window but to the area between the chair and the sofa. He stood there with hands balled into shaking fists. Silently and exultantly he roared, Never give in. Never not resist. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Joseph O'Neill on why poetry is the hardest form.



POP MUSIC

WEIRD WAR

Donald Glover wrestles with his instincts.

BY CARRIE BATTAN

"I LIKE MUSIC A ton, but the problem is I like weird stuff," Donald Glover said during a filmed standup-comedy performance in 2011. "I like weird, crazy music. Weird people making music." He went on, repeating the word "weird." "But, as an adult, we're not really allowed to be weird anymore," he said. "The older you get, the less you can take weird stuff." Glover, the restless polymath who launched his career as a writer on the TV show "30 Rock" and eventually made a fitful migration to the world of hip-hop, was expressing a timeworn sentiment that falls into the same category as "I don't even own a television." It was a posture that looked like self-deprecation but was meant to signal taste.

Since then, Glover's assessment of our lamentably low tolerance for weirdness in music has been mostly disproved. Earlier this year, Frank Ocean's "Blonde," part of a sprawling multimedia project that features ambient sound collages and a long video in which he builds a wooden staircase, reached No. 1. Other dominant artists of our era, like Kendrick Lamar, Beyoncé, and Kanye West, have used their fame to get across art that is certifiably weird—dense, genre-bending projects, with little hope of radio play, that are designed to be consumed in a single sitting. And Glover, who makes music under the name Childish Gambino, is taking part in the debunking of his own theory. This September, he débuted a new album at an event called Pharos—for a Greek lighthouse that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—which he threw in the desert at Joshua Tree. In order to hear Glover's latest musical experiment—"Awaken, My Love!," a slow-burning collection of songs steeped in early-seventies psych-funk—guests had to lock up their smartphones and agree to a "no irony" rule. Tickets sold out in six minutes.

At the time his standup performance aired on TV, Glover had just released his proper début album, "Camp," a foray into the growing realm of music that is positioned between rap and jokes about rap. As rap has moved closer to the heart of popular culture, the genre has become a comedic playground: Andy Samberg's group the Lonely Island uses hip-hop as a vehicle for satire; Aziz Ansari's bits about rappers have made him an honorary member of the hip-hop élite. Meanwhile, the most successful rappers can consider themselves well-rounded entertainers—Drake has hosted "Saturday Night Live" multiple times.

Glover, best known for the character Troy on the TV show "Community," began rapping without drawing a clear line in the joke-rap sand. "Camp" attempted to position Glover as a consummate outsider; it hinged on the double bind of being, as Glover and others have termed it, a "black nerd." "Black male in short shorts, I'm double suspect," he rapped, on "Backpackers." As a novice, Glover seemed drawn to exposing his insecurities while preëmpting detractors with bursts of verbal gymnastics and the aggression of a battle rapper. "Ballin' since '83 / Half of 'em say he gay / Maybe that's the reason I like Lady What-babies-say," he continued on "Backpackers," framing his love of Lady Gaga as an act of defiance. "I'm a problem, I'm lame as fuck, homie / But I rap like these niggas ain't got shit on me."

Was this self-laceration, self-expression, or self-parody? As a rapper, Glover has made a point of blurring the line between himself and his alter egos, between self-awareness and self-consciousness. And even this distinction is explicitly confronted: "I mean, where's the line between Donnie G and Gambino?" he asks on his second album, "Because the Internet" (2013). Glover's raw talent is obvious, but his obsession with explaining himself has often obstructed his ideas and undermined his jokes. And his fixation on his role as an iconoclast has, at times, rung hollow.

By the time he began making music, hip-hop was primed for figures who softened standard perceptions of black masculinity. In a world ruled by Kanye West and Drake, hyper-confessional lyrics, roving artistic appetites, wounded outsider mentalities, and unconventional backgrounds had become the default. These were qualities that pushed Glover closer to mass audiences, not away from them. "Because the Internet," which broke up Glover's blunt blocks of rap with shades of electro-pop and left-field R. & B., went gold and was nominated for a Grammy Award, as was his single "3005," which went platinum.

RECENTLY, GLOVER HAS taken a turn toward the understated. His new TV show, "Atlanta," which he created and stars in, has the kind of light touch that he has never been able to bring to the microphone. The show is ostensibly a comedy, but at its finest it's a paean to Atlanta—Glover grew up in the city's suburbs—and to its flourishing hip-hop ecosystem. (These days, Atlanta is to hip-hop what Nashville is to country.) The show centers on a rapper named Paper Boi (Brian Tyree Henry) and his cousin Earn (played by Glover), a college dropout who becomes Paper Boi's manager. Unlike Childish Gambino, Earn

ABOVE: LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

On his new album as Childish Gambino, Glover abandons his long-standing battle between self-awareness and solipsism.

ILLUSTRATION BY MVM

is a mumbly smart-ass who observes his surroundings in quiet exasperation. Filled with lush, dreamlike shots, the show often resembles a music video.

Paper Boi, who hasn't yet begun to reap the financial benefits of his local popularity as a rapper, sells drugs. In one episode, he and his sidekick, Darius, go to restock their supply. They'll be buying from a Mexican drug ring, Paper Boi explains, called the Migos. Migos is a wildly popular rap trio from Atlanta, but the show resists acknowledging that fact—one of many musical inside jokes. "Atlanta" telegraphs its hip-hop familiarity with restraint, allowing snippets of meticulously chosen music to waft from car speakers and headphones. Paper Boi and Darius arrive to complete the deal at a trailer in the woods, where "Gang," a song by the small-time, unsigned rapper Max P, is playing quietly from the speakers. There to supply the drugs are the three members of the real-life Migos acting as the fictional Migos. Later, "Atlanta" closes the loop: Earn has a date with the mother of his daughter, and after it goes awry he mopes on a back porch, chugging champagne. "Spray the Champagne"—a song from Migos' most recent album—begins to play as the credits roll.

For viewers in the know, the sequence is a gratifying, absurdist wink. For everyone else, it's an uncannily appropriate song to close out an entertaining episode. "Atlanta" shows that Glover doesn't need to write verses in order to make a profound impact in rap—after all, one of this year's greatest hip-hop success stories has been that of DJ Khaled, a masterly connector of people and a savvy Snapchat user, who made a No. 1 album not by rapping or producing but by assembling his most powerful musician friends for a compilation. Similarly, Glover's message is clearer when he leads from behind.

Glover has begun to carry this sensibility over to his work as Childish Gambino. "Awaken, My Love!," the album he played at Pharos, is an ode to the fantastical funk of the seventies, which drew his attention when he was a child. Heavy on distortion and on long, swirling tangents, the record recalls an ostentatious era of weirdness in pop music—a time when artists like George Clinton and Sly Stone assembled large, ramshackle groups of collaborators and exploded previous notions of race and sexual identity. "Awaken, My Love!" is not pure homage—Glover softens the outré funk with lighter soul and surf-rock touches, and uses Auto-Tune—but he is not attempting to conceal his influences. And while this is a reinvention for Glover, it feels more like a stepping stone than a destination. The many elements of his career have in common the desire to complicate preconceived notions of the myriad textures of black life and art. In "Atlanta," Earn is not laser-focussed on hip-hop, either—in one scene, he wakes up on a couch, with music by the indie-pop band Beach House drifting from his headphones. Another episode closes with "Hit It and Quit It," from Funkadelic's 1971 record "Maggot Brain."

We're used to hearing Glover dissect himself, but on "Awaken, My Love!" he directs his gaze outward. He cultivates a garish creepiness, using motifs that wouldn't have been out of place during the heyday of Afrofuturist funk. "All I see is zombies / Hear them screaming out," he sings, his voice drawn out and croaking. "They can smell your money / And they want your soul." A chorus of female voices stands in as the zombies, singing sweetly, "We're eating you for profit." These days, Glover prefers storm clouds of metaphor to soul-baring specifics.

When Glover is not using extravagant imagery, he's addressing his infant child. As with Earn, a child is the only force that can release Glover from his solipsistic bubble. Vocally, he's graduated from loud, fast, and hoarse. On "Awaken, My Love!," his voice oozes from underneath the songs. Everything has been slowed down. During a rare moment when he is not obscuring his voice or modulating it to outlandish glam-rock effect, he speaks sombrely and directly. "There was a time before you, and there will be a time after you," he tells his son, on "Baby Boy." "Though these bodies are not our own / Walk tall, little one / Walk tall." This is probably a song about the sense of perspective instilled in new parents, particularly parents of a black son, but it could be about almost anything. Glover used to announce his every belief and intention. Now he has turned to the more satisfying task of letting people read between the lines. Of course, a clear message remains: Glover wishes to be taken seriously. There's hardly anything less weird. ♦

SCRUTINY

An Australian writer's unsparing vision.

BY JAMES WOOD

Helen Garner inspects both herself and her subjects with savage honesty.

In the early nineteen-sixties, when the Australian writer Helen Garner was a student at the University of Melbourne, she had a brief relationship with a twenty-four-year-old man who was her tutor. With characteristic briskness, she tells us that she learned two things from him: "Firstly, to start an essay without bullshit preamble, and secondly, that betrayal is part of life." She continues, "I value it as part of my store of experience—part of what I am and how I have learnt to understand the world." A writing lesson and a life lesson: Garner's work as a journalist and a novelist constantly insists on the connection between writing about life and comprehending it; to try to do both responsibly and honestly—without bullshit preamble, or, for that matter, bullshit amble—is what it means to be alive.

"Honesty" is a word that, when thrown at journalism, unhelpfully describes both a baseline and a vaguer horizon, a legal minimum and an ethical summum. Too often, we precisely monitor the former and profligately praise the latter. In Helen Garner's case, we should give due thanks for the former and precisely praise the latter. As a writer of nonfiction, Garner is scrupulous, painstaking, and detailed, with sharp eyes and ears. She is everywhere at once, watching and listening, a recording angel at life's secular apocalypses—"a small grim figure with a notebook and a cold," as she memorably describes herself. She has written with lucid anger about murder cases, about incidents of sexual harassment, about the experience of caring for a friend dying of cancer.

But Garner is, above all, a savage self-scrutineer: her honesty has less to do with what she sees in the world than with what she refuses to turn away from in herself. In "The Spare Room" (2008), her exacting autobiographical novel about looking after that dying friend, she describes not only the expected indignities of caring for a patient—the soaked bedsheets, the broken nights—but her own impatience, her own rage: "I had always thought that sorrow was the most exhausting of the emotions. Now I knew that it was anger."

There seems to be almost no episode from her own life that she has not analyzed. It is characteristic that her reference to her affair with her tutor appears in "The First Stone" (1995), her account of a 1991 sexual-harassment case, in which two female students at the University of Melbourne accused the master of one of the university colleges of making inappropriate advances: that book is both a report and a deep self-reckoning. Garner's readers are familiar with Mrs. Dunkley, her fifth-grade teacher; the failure of Garner's three marriages; her two abortions; her dismissal from a teaching job at a Melbourne school (for daring to talk to her thirteen-year-old pupils about sex); her struggles with depression; her feelings about turning fifty; and the complex stitch of fury and liberation at being, now, in her seventies.

Her new book, "Everywhere I Look" (Text Publishing), selects essays and shorter journalistic pieces from the past fifteen years. The no-bullshit-preamble rule is sparklingly employed. "At the turn of the millennium I reached the end of my masochism, and came home from Sydney with my tail between my legs. Single again." So begins a gentle reflection on learning, once more, how to live alone. "My First Baby" opens thus: "This isn't really a story. I'm just telling you what happened one summer when I was young. It was 1961, my first year away from home. I lived at Melbourne University, in a women's college on a beautiful elm-lined boulevard. I was free

ILLUSTRATION BY RUNE FISKER

"Dad, your basement is flooded with over ten inches of left-wing hoax."

• •

and happy. Everyone was clever and so was I." There are tender, funny sketches of literary friends (the novelists Elizabeth Jolley and Tim Winton), portraits of her grandchildren, reminiscences of childhood, and, as ever in her work, lovely, loitering descriptions of Melbourne, the city she knows best.

Garner is a natural storyteller: her unillusioned eye makes her clarity compulsive. In one of the longer pieces in this book, "Dreams of Her Real Self," she recalls her late mother and illuminates with relentless candor her mother's shadowy presence. Her father, she tells us, is easy to write about; he was vivid, domineering, scornful, and babyishly quick to anger. One of Garner's husbands, having been subjected to a paternal inquisition, described him as a "peasant." He was "an endurance test that united his children in opposition to him." But she finds it difficult to write about her mother, in part because her father "blocked my view of her," and in part, we learn, because she was willing to be blocked.

So Garner's reminiscence breaks into short, discontinuous sections, as she appraises, from different angles, the unassertive enigma that was her mother. She did not easily show affection, she was patient, timid, unconfident, law-abiding—and, probably, Garner decides, "she was afraid of me."

> She did not sense the right moment to speak. She did not know how to gain and hold attention. When she told a story, she felt a need to establish enormous quantities of irrelevant background information. She took so long to get to the point that her listeners would tune out and start talking about something else. Family shorthand for this, behind her back, was "and then I breathed."

What gives the memoir its power, as so often in Garner's writing, is that she is unsparing, in equal measure, of her subject and of herself, and that she so relishes complicated feelings. She chastises herself for not being more responsive while her mother was alive; posthumous connection is, after all, too easy. She longs for her to return, but has difficulty regarding the woman's life with anything but horror. She was about twelve, she recalls, when she realized that her mother's existence was divided into compartments: "None of them was any longer than the number of hours between one meal and the next. She was on a short leash. I don't recall thinking that this would be my fate, or resolving to avoid it. All I remember is the picture of her life, and the speechless desolation that filled me."

In some ways, it is a familiar portrait: an educated and liberated intellectual, the beneficiary of higher education and modern feminism, measures, with gratitude and shame, the distance between her mother's opportunities and her own. But it is made singular by Garner's almost reckless honesty, and brought alive by her mortal details: "She used to wear hats that pained me. Shy little round beige felt hats with narrow brims. Perhaps one was green. And she stood with her feet close together, in sensible shoes."

"Dreams of Her Real Self" is ultimately an essay about gender and class, categories that have absorbed Garner for much of her work—precisely, it would seem, because gender and class are not categories so much as structures of feeling, variously argued over, enjoyed, endured, and escaped. Her first book, "Monkey Grip" (1977), is an intelligent, tautly written novel that chronicles some of Garner's own experiences from the nineteen-seventies, in particular her life in what she has called "the big hippie households" of that era, "when group dynamics were shaky and we were always having to split and start anew."

But she established her reputation as a nonfiction writer, and established the characteristic Garner tone, with "The First Stone." A twenty-one-year-old law student, whom Garner renames Elizabeth Rosen, levelled charges of sexual assault against the middle-aged master—"Dr. Colin Shepherd," in Garner's telling—of Ormond College, the largest and most prestigious residential college of the University of Melbourne. She alleged that during a private, late-night talk in his office Dr. Shepherd told her he fantasized about her, and that he put his hand on her breasts. Rosen and another student testified that, later in the evening, at a college dance, Dr. Shepherd groped them while dancing with them. Shepherd forcefully denied all the allegations. He was convicted of a single charge of sexual assault, which was overturned on appeal; he resigned anyway, in May, 1993.

Garner first read about the case one morning in August, 1992, in the Melbourne *Age*. Her early reactions were instinctive. She was puzzled by the young women's recourse to the law. Why didn't the students just sort it out locally, immediately, or get their mothers, or friends, to mediate? Garner's own friends, she tells us, "feminists pushing fifty," were in agreement. Seasoned victims of such fumbled advances (or of far worse), they didn't doubt the veracity of the allegations, but "if every bastard who's ever laid a hand on *us* were dragged into court, the judicial system of the state would be clogged for years." Garner wrote to Dr. Shepherd, sympathizing with his treatment at the hands of "this ghastly punitiveness."

"The First Stone" is subtitled "Some Questions About Sex and Power," and, in ways both conscious and unconscious, it obsessively pursues the questions raised by Garner's reflexive response to the case. She defends that initial reaction, but spends the entire book worrying away at it. "The First Stone" attacks and retreats like a baited animal. Garner persists in faulting the students for not acting pragmatically; these were not "earth-shattering" offenses, so why not deal with them swiftly, then and there? A repeated line of attack is that the students and their defenders use the word "violence" where, she believes, "it simply does not belong." To insist on abuses of institutional power, Garner suggests, nullifies the fact that all relationships contain asymmetries of power, and that there are "gradations of offence." And power is always complex. She seems irritated by Rosen's testimony that Dr. Shepherd's advances left her feeling "humiliated and powerless to control what was happening to her." Why so powerless? When Dr. Shepherd got down on his knees and grasped Rosen's hand, as she alleged, "which of them does the word *humiliated* apply to, here?"

But at other moments, in retreat, she worries that she herself has changed. An aging but committed feminist, a child of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, she's perturbed that she finds it so easy to side with the man and so hard to sympathize with the women. Perhaps she's punishing the students "for not having *taken it like a woman*—for being wimps who ran to the law to whinge about a minor unpleasantness, instead of standing up and fighting back with their own weapons of youth and quick wits." She enriches this rhetorical back-and-forth in other ways. She tells us about her short affair with her tutor, and about an incident in the early nineteen-eighties when a masseur, in the middle of a private session, bent down and kissed her on the mouth. Looking back, Garner is clearly astounded that she said nothing to the man. Above all, she was merely embarrassed. And, when the massage was over, she said goodbye, went to the reception desk—"*and I paid*."

She usefully explains that Ormond College was for decades a bulwark of male institutional power: women, admitted only in 1973, were not always made to feel welcome. She conducts revealing interviews with some of Ormond's most entitled male graduates, who talk casually about their bad behavior—food fights, public drunkenness, running around naked. After a particularly squalid battle in the dining hall, the master upbraided the young diners with these telling words: "The Hall's been raped—you promised me this wouldn't happen." Garner lets that verb hang, or hang itself.

"The First Stone" quickly became controversial enough that the author felt compelled to write a formal reply to her critics. The two victims refused to speak to her, a decision hardened by the revelation of Garner's letter to Shepherd. It is a refusal that Garner returns to with mounting frustration; her book takes on a curiously blocked, repetitive, almost *victimized* quality, as if she were herself responding to a violation. She attacks modern feminism ("priggish, disingenuous, unforgiving") as if it had put her on trial. Which, in a sense, it had: the victims' allies and defenders soon made up their minds. Garner was on the wrong side; it was understood that she was writing "the pro-Shepherd version." Some feminists boycotted the book when it came out. University professors reportedly told their constituencies to avoid it.

"The First Stone" is, certainly, a very parental book: a woman old enough to be the mother of the two students looks on bemusedly, with the advantages of experience and hardened wisdom, and finds herself disappointed that the youngsters just aren't a bit tougher. And, even as she writes about the complexities and hidden potencies of gender, Garner comes to the scene—again, like a certain kind of parent—with rather stubborn ideas about male and female roles. She upbraids the victims for avoiding conciliation, a "feminine—almost a motherly—way of settling a dispute," and instead accuses them of charging past conciliation into "the traditional masculine style of problem-solving: call in the cops . . . hire a cowboy to slug it out for you in the main street at noon, with all the citizenry watching." Of course, the gun smoke of essentialism reactivates the very warfare that Garner seeks to heal. When she rhetorically asks that question about who is truly humiliated, the man on his knees in supplication or the woman somewhat distressed in the chair, couldn't the reply be—both?

Yet, more than twenty years after its publication, "The First Stone" also seems a brilliantly prescient book—in its complexity, in the tense torque of its self-argument, and in its very vulnerability and stunned intolerance. Feminism had indeed changed between the nineteen-seventies and the nineteen-nineties, and Garner's narrative registers, with often uncomfortable honesty, a generational shift. Sexual harassment was coming to be seen as, invariably, a matter of institutional power. There was no narrative space left for Garner's blithe admission of her youthful affair with an older tutor, and certainly not for her appreciation of its educative richness.

In similar ways, Garner's most recent full-length work of nonfiction, "This House of Grief" (2014), makes its complexity out of an honest vulnerability. It recounts the two murder trials of Robert Farquharson, who was charged with murdering his three small children, in 2005. On the way to return the kids to his ex-wife after a Father's Day visit, he swerved off the road into a deep pond. The children drowned but Farquharson escaped, abandoning the car in the icy water and hitching a ride to his ex-wife's house. Farquharson was convicted of

murder in 2007, won a retrial in 2009, and was convicted again in 2010. He was given a life sentence.

Garner's book is superbly alive to the narrative dynamics of the case; she tells a grim story of unhappy marriage, limited social opportunity, bitter divorce, and spousal grievance. Again, as in "The First Stone," what consumes her are the difficult questions that seem to lie beyond the reach of formal narration: the deepest assumptions of class and gender and power; the problem of how well we ever understand someone else's motives. In her reply to the critics of "The First Stone," she describes "eros" as "the quick spirit that moves between people—*quick* as in the distinction between 'the quick and the dead.' It's the moving force that won't be subdued by habit or law."

That quick spirit is the free devil, the human surplus that she tries to capture in all her best work. The law's fine calibrations are coarsely related to this kind of narrative work: the evidence that helps us make sense of a catastrophic or a complicated incident is often not the same evidence that helps the law make *its* sense. Paradoxically, the legal process tempts writers (notably Janet Malcolm, Garner's admired model) because trial machinery appears to operate like the machinery of narrative, pumping out its near-simulacra for the benefit of reporters, TV journalists, voyeurs, and jurors. Garner quotes Malcolm: "Jurors sit there presumably weighing evidence but in actuality they are studying character."

At the heart of the Robert Farquharson case is a large narrative question that frequently abuts but finally diverges from the smaller legal question before the jury: Why? Attracted and repelled, Garner circles around the unspeakable, abysmal horror. Can any story "explain" why a man might murder his children? She doesn't pretend to possess the explosive answer, and frequently confesses appalled stupefaction, but her book walks us along an engrossing and plausible narrative fuse. Robert Farquharson emerges from Garner's account as limited in intelligence, expression, and will. He lived in the modest town of Winchelsea (not far from Geelong, where Garner was born). He worked as a window cleaner, and had three children with the much more forceful Cindy Gambino, who told the court that Farquharson was "pretty much a softie. He always gave in to what I wanted." Though he was a "good provider," she found it hard to stay in love with her husband. Cindy eventually left him, and soon began a new relationship with a contractor, Stephen Moules, a man more vigorous and successful than Farquharson. She kept the children, and Farquharson had to move out. He was jealous of Moules's access to the children, fearful of being displaced, and angry that the new lover got the better of the Farquharsons' two cars. An old friend testified that he threatened to kill his children and rob Cindy of her dearest gifts; Garner wonders if Farquharson was really trying to commit suicide.

Her narrative is lit by lightning. Hideous, jagged details leap out at us: the old, child-filled car swerving off the road and plunging into dark water; the trapped children (the youngest was strapped into a car seat); Farquharson's casual—or shocked—impotence at the crime scene (his first words to Moules, when he arrived, were "Where's your smokes?"); the slack, defeated, anguished defendant, weeping throughout the trial; the wedding video of the happy couple, Gambino gliding "like a princess in full fig, head high," and Farquharson, mullet-haired, "round-shouldered, unsmiling, a little tame bear"; the first guilty verdict, Farquharson's vanquished defense lawyer standing "like a beaten warrior . . . hands clasped in front of his genitals."

Garner is a powerful and vivid presence in her nonfiction narratives: she intervenes; she weeps and laughs with the evidence; she is scornful, funny, impassioned, and gives honest expression to biases and prejudices. (She also avails herself of the full, meaty buffet of Anglo-Australian demotic: "bloke," "sook," "sent to Coventry," "dobbing in," "spat the dummy," "bolshie.") She powerfully sympathizes with Farquharson's thwarted opportunities and flattened will, but she cannot hide her distaste for his weakness, which she expresses in tellingly gendered jabs. In court, she compares Stephen Moules physically with Farquharson ("I was not the only woman" to do so), and admits that Moules "gave off that little buzz of glamour peculiar to the Australian tradie." She wonders if there was something in Farquharson, by contrast, that brought out "the maternal in women, our tendency to cosset, to infantilise." In a striking image near the end of the book, she sees the accused as a big baby, "with his low brow and puffy eyes, his slumped spine and man-boobs, his silent-movie grimaces and spasms of tears, his big clean ironed handkerchief." It is hard to resist the conclusion that Garner, in full maternal mode, is arraigning him for not being *more of a man.* Is it unfair to wonder if this tough-minded writer was not also unconsciously demanding of the two University of Melbourne women that they, too, act more like men?

Some of Garner's prejudices are less conscious than others, but I suspect she understands perfectly well that narrative truth—what Elena Ferrante calls "authenticity" (as distinct from mere verisimilitude)—proceeds from a kind of dangerous honesty that is not always conscious but is, rather, half disclosed, imperfectly controlled. Garner's gradual awakening to her unadmitted anger is what gives her best book, her novel "The Spare Room" (2008), much of its shattering power. Nicola, an old friend who has been diagnosed with Stage IV cancer, comes from Sydney to Melbourne to stay for three weeks with the narrator, who is named Helen. (The novel is closely based on Garner's experience in caring for a terminally ill friend; typically, she said that she kept her first name in the text so that she would be forced to admit to all the shameful, "ugly emotion" she had actually felt.) Nicola is charming, elegant, and maddening. She pretends to be much healthier than she is—she gives "a tremendous performance of being alive," in Garner's savage phrase—and is committed to a kind of social fraudulence that saddens and then gradually enrages her host. Helen longs for Nicola to abandon her bright laugh and fixed smile, a smile that seems to say "*Do not ask me any questions.*" Worse, she has come to Melbourne to seek alternative therapies—Vitamin C injections, ozone saunas, coffee enemas—that seem nonsensical to Helen and which only make her friend sicker.

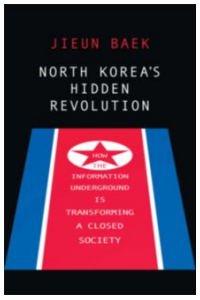
The novel tenderly catalogues that labor of caring which is also the labor of mourning. Helen spends her days and nights washing bedsheets that Nicola has sweated through, bringing morphine pills and hot-water bottles, listening outside the bedroom door to Nicola's snoring, which sounds "like someone choking," driving her friend to the bogus "Institute" where she undergoes her hopeless remedies. The simple beauty of the novel's form has to do with its internal symmetry: the two women are locked into a relationship that they can escape only if each admits what she finds most difficult to say. Helen must confess to her exhaustion, her despair at not being a better friend and nurse, her anger at Nicola's terrible, terminal time-wasting. And Nicola must admit that time is fading, that she is going to die, that her alternative therapies are an awful distraction, and that she needs proper help, a kind of assistance that Helen is not equipped to give. Nicola says, "I've never wanted to bore people with the way I feel."

As in "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" (Garner's book is a contemporary version of Tolstoy's novella), the mortal victim must be brought to comprehend her mortality: Helen tells Nicola, "You've got to get ready." There is a deeply moving scene toward the end of the book, when the two friends tearfully embrace in Helen's yard. "I thought I was on the mountaintop," Nicola says. "But I'm only in the foothills."

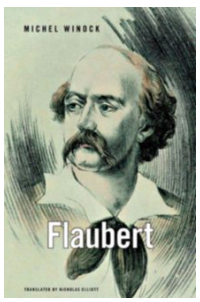
> All day long she kept dissolving into quiet weeping. Sometimes I would put my arms around her; sometimes we would just go on with what we were doing. The hard, impervious brightness was gone. Everything was fluid and melting. There was no need for me to speak. She looked up at me and said it herself, as I put a cup into her hand.
>
> "Death's at the end of this, isn't it."

After the anger and the tears, the book ends peacefully. Helen flies with Nicola to Sydney, and transfers her to Nicola's very competent niece. The novel closes: "It was the end of my watch, and I handed her over." Helen has done as much as she can do. It is a typical Garner sentence, a writing lesson (all novels should end as completely) and a life lesson: spare, deserved, and complexly truthful, both a confession of failure and a small song of success. ♦

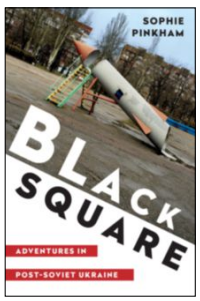
BRIEFLY NOTED



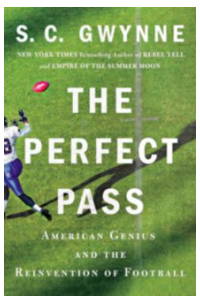
North Korea's Hidden Revolution, *by Jieun Baek (Yale)*. This account of North Korean life focusses on the porous nature of the regime's information infrastructure, showing a country that isn't quite as closed off as we assume. Drawing on interviews with dozens of defectors, Baek asserts that more than half the country's adults make money in private markets (selling everything from rice to perms), and keep up with shifts in demand via foreign radio broadcasts and South Korean TV programs that are smuggled in, sometimes by balloon. Though punishments for disseminating foreign media are extreme, many defectors estimate that up to eighty per cent of the people they know have access to foreign media, which can be an impetus to defection. Baek draws the guardedly hopeful conclusion that even the most oppressive regime cannot quash human curiosity.



Flaubert, *by Michel Winock, translated from the French by Nicholas Elliott (Harvard)*. "I believe that if happiness is to be found, it is in stagnation," Gustave Flaubert wrote. "Ponds do not have storms." Unfortunately for his biographers, the attempt to lead a boring life was successful; he lived quietly near Rouen and wrote fourteen hours a day. But this generous study ingeniously builds a narrative around Flaubert's own words—from not only the novels but also voluminous correspondence and unpublished work. Adding light background and analysis, Winock allows the mind of the Master to shine. In writing itself, Flaubert's grim view of human society found both outlet and balm: "Let us intoxicate ourselves with ink, since we lack the nectar of the gods."



Black Square, *by Sophie Pinkham (Norton)*. This intimate portrait of contemporary Ukraine gracefully combines history, political analysis, and memoir. Pinkham, who has been visiting the country since 2008, sometimes as an aid worker, encounters families displaced by war, tepee-dwelling nudists, and ultranationalists bedecked in fatigues and balaclavas. Regrettably, she misses the 2014 revolution, owing to graduate work in New York, and her attempt to relate the crisis at second hand creates an absence at the center of the book. Nonetheless, her eye for the idiosyncrasies of post-Soviet life and language is special: the word *nedoperepitsya* means "to drink more than you should, but less than you'd planned."



The Perfect Pass, *by S. C. Gwynne (Scribner)*. When football legalized the forward pass, in 1906, there was a hope that it could curb the sport's violence. But, as this illuminating history shows, coaches, doubting its efficacy, remained reluctant to employ it until the nineteen-eighties, when two coaches at a small college in Iowa successfully developed an offense structured around passing. As such offenses proved their worth against running attacks, they spread through every rank of the game and enhanced the role of skilled positions, like quarterback. There is a cautionary tale of unintended consequences, however: although the forward pass made football more efficient and skilled, it also increased the speed of the game and therefore, perhaps, the concussive force of collisions.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Two faces of American publishing.

BY LOUIS MENAND

While "Catch-22" was taking off for Robert Gottlieb at Simon & Schuster, Barney Rosset and Grove Press were fighting a ban on "Lady Chatterley's Lover."

PHOTOGRAPHS: WARING ABBOTT/GETTY (LEFT); BOB ADELMAN (RIGHT)

Contrary to what, Googling around, you might assume, obscenity is not protected by the First Amendment. "There is a bone in my prick six inches long. I will ream out every wrinkle in your cunt." Those sentences are from the opening pages of Henry Miller's first novel, "Tropic of Cancer," which was published in France in 1934. Are they obscene? It took thirty years, but American courts eventually decided that they are not, and therefore the book they appear in cannot be banned. To get to that result, judges had to ignore the usual understanding of "obscene"—most people probably think that if "cunt" isn't obscene, what is?—and invent a new definition for constitutional purposes. But the decision changed the way books, and, soon afterward, movies and music, are created, sold, and consumed. Depending on your point of view, it either lowered the drawbridge or opened the floodgates.

"Tropic of Cancer" is not a verbal artifact to everyone's taste, but it made a deep impression on two people in a position to advance its fortunes. The first was Jack Kahane. Kahane was born in 1887 in Manchester, the son of Romanian Jews who had settled in the North of England and made, then lost, a fortune in the textile business. He was a Francophile, and, when the First World War broke out, in 1914, he went off to France to fight for civilization. He was gassed and badly wounded in the trenches at Ypres. But he had fallen in love with a Frenchwoman, Marcelle Girodias, from a well-off family; they married in 1917, and remained in France. In 1929, he decided to go into the book business.

He had plenty of company. Between the wars, Paris was home to many English-language presses. There were two basic types. The first specialized in modernist writers. Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare & Company, which published James Joyce's "Ulysses" in 1922, is the most famous, but there were also outfits like Three Mountains Press, which published Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and Ford Madox Ford; the Black Sun Press, run by the glamorous expats Harry and Caresse Crosby, which published Hart Crane and William Faulkner; Contact Editions, which published Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams; Black Manikin Press, which published D. H. Lawrence; and the Hours Press, which published Samuel Beckett.

The other type of English-language press had a different specialty: pornography. Pornographers are the gypsies of the culture industry. They are sensitive to changes in the legal climate, and they generally find it more convenient to move than to fight. In 1857, the British Parliament passed the Obscene Publications Act, also known as Lord Campbell's Act, after the justice who described pornography as "poison more deadly than prussic acid, strychnine, or arsenic." The act authorized the use of search warrants to seize pornographic materials. Subsequent acts of Parliament made it illegal to advertise pornography, send it through the mails, or bring it into the country from abroad.

For pornographers, these laws meant that their main worry was no longer the local constable or anti-vice society. The national government was now on the case. They responded by moving operations offshore. They set up shop first in Amsterdam, but Britain, by putting diplomatic pressure on the Dutch government, managed to make life difficult for them there, so they relocated again, this time to Paris. By 1910, there were virtually no English-language

ILLUSTRATION BY TAMARA SHOPSIN

pornography publishers in Britain. They were all in Paris.

Paris was an excellent choice for two reasons. One is that it was hard to prosecute books for obscenity in France. Laws passed in the early years of the Third Republic had established the freedom of the press. They stipulated that expressions "contrary to good morals" remained criminal, but gave books special treatment. A conviction for publishing an immoral book could be obtained only by a jury trial in the nation's highest court. (The French may have felt embarrassed that, in 1857, the government had prosecuted two of the country's most famous writers, Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire. Flaubert got off, but six of Baudelaire's poems were banned, a prohibition not officially lifted until 1949.) The French were also not terribly concerned about books published in English, since they were bought mostly by foreigners.

Another reason Paris made sense for English-language publishers was that, after 1919, the city was a magnet for British and American writers, artists, tourists, and expatriates. This was not because of some sort of cultural fairy dust, though that is how people have always liked to imagine it. It was because, if you had dollars or pounds, the exchange rate made Paris a ridiculously cheap place to visit or live in. People who could afford little could afford Paris. In 1925, four hundred thousand Americans visited the city. While they were there, they could buy books that were difficult or impossible to get at home. Some were modernist classics, and some were pornography (often, books whose titles were a lot more titillating than their contents).

The Shakespeare & Company edition of "Ulysses" provided the model for the kind of books that Kahane wanted to publish: high-prestige literature with a reputation for salacious bits. "I would start a publishing business that would exist for the convenience of those English writers, English and American, who had something to say that they could not conveniently say in their own countries" was how he explained his thinking. "The next Joyce or Lawrence who came along would find the natural solution of his difficulties in Paris. And, of course, if any book that had reached publication . . . met with disaster, my publishing house would automatically publish it in France. . . . I worked out details, and examined the project on all sides to see if there were any flaws in it. But it seemed to me an impeccably logical conception."

Happily for this business model, British and American censorship had become draconian. In 1929, Kahane published "Sleeveless Errand," by Norah James, a novel that had been banned in Britain solely because its characters lead bohemian lives. There is no sex or obscene language (apart from curses) in it. People just talk, endlessly. In 1933, Kahane published Radclyffe Hall's "The Well of Loneliness," which had been banned in a notorious trial, and after its first Paris publisher, Pegasus, went out of business. The most risqué words in that novel are: "And that night they were not divided." But it is the story of a lesbian relationship, and what made it obscene, according to the presiding magistrate, was that lesbian sex "is described as giving these women extraordinary rest, contentment, and pleasure; and not merely that, but it is actually put forward that it improves their mental balance and capacity."

Kahane got "Sleeveless Errand" and "The Well of Loneliness" on the rebound from publishers who had to eat their costs in Britain while he made a profit in France. But he yearned for a Joyce of his own, and in 1932 he found one. An American literary agent based in Paris approached Kahane with the manuscript of "Tropic of Cancer." Kahane had never heard of Miller. Few people had. But he read the book in a day and was blown away. "I had read the most terrible, the most sordid, the most magnificent manuscript that had ever fallen into my hands," he recorded in his autobiography, "Memoirs of a Booklegger"; "nothing I had yet received was comparable to it for the splendor of its writing, the fathomless depth of its despair, the savor of its portraiture, the boisterousness of its humor." It was exactly the mix of the ambitious and the scandalous that he was after.

Kahane got the book but delayed publication. He had a cash shortage—the Girodias family had lost its money in the crash—and it was the middle of the Depression. He was rescued by Miller's friend Anaïs Nin, who, after shopping the manuscript around and finding no one else who was willing to print it, offered to subvent publication. (She got the money from her analyst, Otto Rank, with whom she was having an affair.) In September, 1934, Kahane's Obelisk Press published "Tropic of Cancer." The book came with a wraparound band stating, "Must not be taken into Great Britain or the U.S.A."—catnip to the tourists. In subsequent printings, Kahane added blurbs from T. S. Eliot ("a very remarkable book") and Ezra Pound ("at last an unprintable book that is fit to read"). The cover art was a crude rendering of a crab drawn by Kahane's fifteen-year-old son, Maurice, whose services, since he was a family member, were pro bono.

Miller wasn't crazy about the cover, but he was thrilled finally to be in print—he was already in his forties—and he published several more books with Obelisk, including "Black Spring" and "Tropic of Capricorn." You couldn't buy those books legally in the United States or Britain. You had to go to Paris. By 1939, Obelisk had three thousand copies of "Tropic of Cancer" in print. Kahane died that year, two days after the start of the Second World War; nine months later, the Germans occupied Paris and censorship of a different kind went into effect.

And that's when "Tropic of Cancer" found its second great champion, a Swarthmore freshman named Barney Rosset. Eleven years later, Rosset became the owner of Grove Press and began the campaign to make Miller's book legal.

Rosset did this during a period of exceptional prosperity in the American book business. The thirty years after the Second World War was a boom time, and almost everyone who was in publishing back then seems to agree that it was a golden age. Quite a few of those people have written memoirs; "The Time of Their Lives," "The Best of Times," and "The Party's Over Now" are sample titles. In gross numbers: in 1945, around five thousand new titles were published; in 1970, it was well over twenty-four

thousand. Paperbacking made the product affordable to millions, and there wasn't much competition for leisure dollars from movies (which you couldn't watch at home) or television (which was programmed for the lowest common denominator).

Most important, American laws and customs were becoming more permissive, so that the prospect of reading a book began to seem something more than a promise of genteel diversion. Even popular books might be sexy, gritty, shocking, subversive, morally provocative. Rosset was a rebel, but he would not have been able to accomplish what he did at Grove if the whole industry hadn't been riding high. It was, possibly, the last hurrah of print.

Robert Gottlieb's "Avid Reader" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) is a spritz of that postwar elixir, the memoir of a man who seems to have loved (with a few amusing exceptions) every author he edited and every book he published. Before he replaced William Shawn as the editor of *The New Yorker*, in 1987, Gottlieb worked at Simon & Schuster and then at Knopf, at both houses becoming editor-in-chief at a time when fictional cocktails mixed according to a certain recipe—two parts literature to one part entertainment—led the industry. The ambition in publishing those books was not to win the Pulitzer or the Nobel (although one of Gottlieb's authors, Toni Morrison, won both). It was to get a front-page review in the *Times* and then go on the best-seller list.

Before the war, book publishing was a business backwater. Distribution channels were meagre; there were not enough bookstores in the United States, and publishers relied on book clubs to sell the product. There were, of course, a few big-name editors, but most editors didn't actually edit. The practice was to acquire a finished manuscript from the agent; print and market it; and then do it all over again the following year. Publishers didn't paperback, and most houses did not maintain a back list. They might as well have been selling soap—as they readily conceded. "I sell books, I don't read them," said Nelson Doubleday, Jr. Doubleday was founded in 1897 and by the late forties was the largest publisher in the world.

Simon & Schuster was founded in 1924, and it made its money mostly, and happily, with subliterary fare. Among its biggest sellers were "The First Cross Word Puzzle Book," the first title it published; "Ripley's Believe It or Not!," which sold thirty million copies; Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People," which has sold fifteen million copies and is still in print; "Peace of Mind," by Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman, which was a nonfiction best-seller for three consecutive years, and is also still in print; "Bambi"; and Walt Kelly's Pogo comic-strip books.

To say that the founders were unpretentious understates the matter. Richard Simon's motto was "Give the reader a break"; Max Schuster said that a good book is like a woman's dress, "long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to be interesting." This is the house that Gottlieb started out with, in 1955. He caught the wave just as it was beginning to rise.

Gottlieb was the publishing equivalent of a showrunner, a role that, if he did not invent it, he made into an industry model. He shepherded books all the way from the author's typewriter to the reader's hands. He not only acquired and edited books; he promoted them. He wrote advertising copy, sent out advance copies, generated word of mouth. "The act of publishing," he says in his memoir, "is essentially the act of making public one's own enthusiasm."

Gottlieb made his name by masterminding one of the biggest success stories in postwar publishing, Joseph Heller's "Catch-22." Heller was a young man working in advertising when, in 1953, he began making notes for his novel. In 1954, he wrote the first chapter of what he was calling "Catch-18" and sent it to an agent, Candida Donadio (herself something of a publishing-industry legend). Donadio began showing around a longer typescript in 1957, and, in 1958, Gottlieb persuaded Simon & Schuster to acquire it. Heller got a fifteen-hundred-dollar advance.

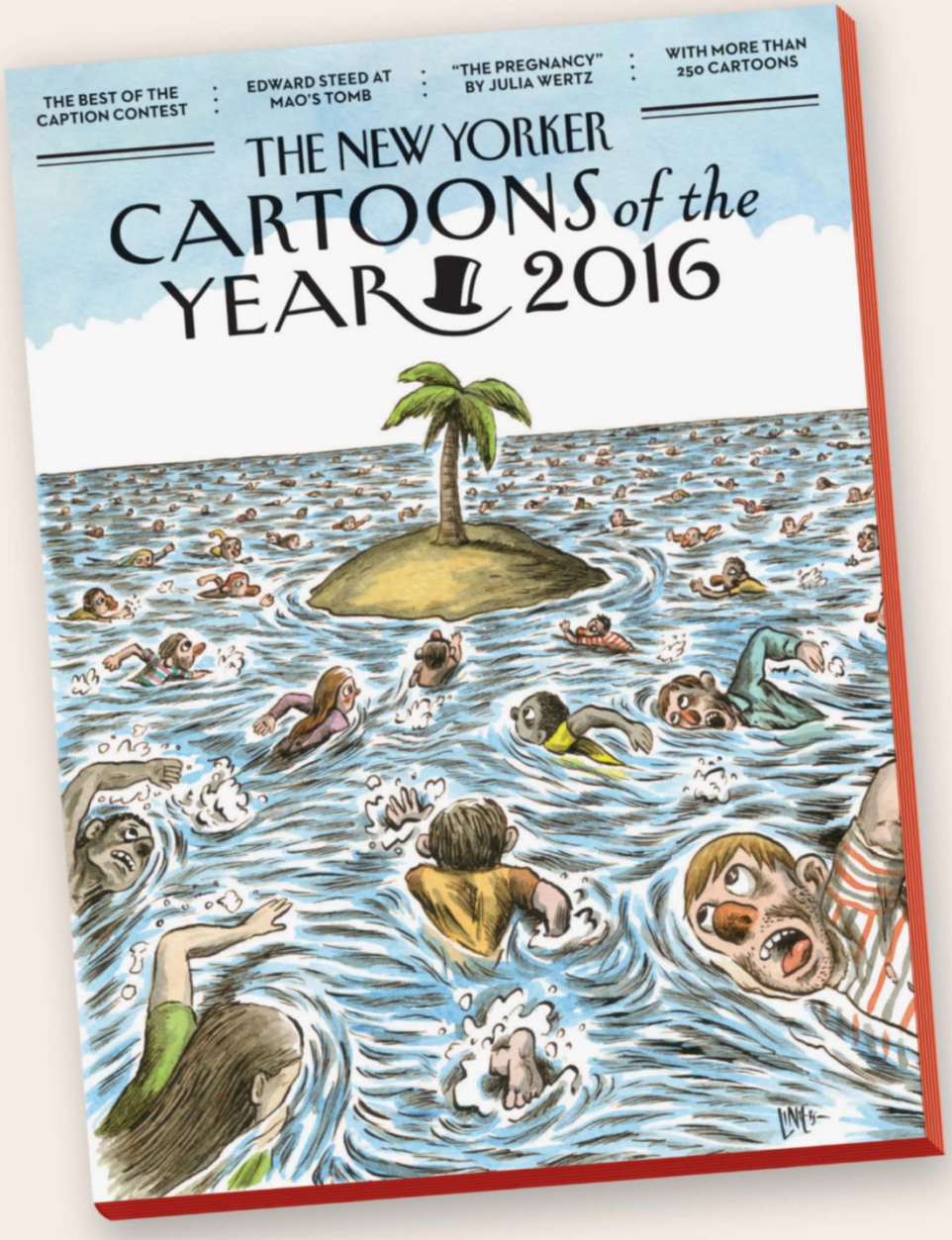
Completion took three years, and, since Heller was incapable of editing himself—he was a compulsive adder and fixer—Gottlieb was heavily involved in shaping the text. Finally, just as the book was about to go to press, it was learned that Leon Uris was scheduled to published a new novel called "Mila 18." Uris was, in those days, a reliable best-seller, and Heller was an unknown. Many brain cells were burned through pondering alternative titles, until, late one night, Gottlieb came up with "Catch-22." He excitedly called Heller. "It's funnier than '18'!" he exclaimed. Somehow, it is.

Simon & Schuster published "Catch-22" in the fall of 1961. Gottlieb and the advertising manager at S.&S., Nina Bourne, came up with the campaign. They ran pre-publication teaser ads in the *Times* and wrote what Bourne called "demented governess" letters—letters expressing crazed enthusiasm for the forthcoming book—to well-known critics and writers. On publication, S.&S. ran a full-page ad in the *Times*, quoting their responses.

But the book did not do well. It was panned in the *Times Book Review* (even though Gottlieb and Bourne had tried to influence the editor about the assignment), and it failed to break out of the New York market. It was nominated for a National Book Award, but lost to Walker Percy's "The Moviegoer." Gottlieb doubled down. S.&S. offered to pay bookstores the shipping expenses for "Catch-22" and to cover the costs of returns. Gottlieb and Bourne ran a six-column ad in the *Times*, headlined "Report on 'Catch-22.' " By the fall of 1962, there were forty thousand copies in print. But the hardcover edition never made the best-seller list.

Then, after a year of disappointment, all the promotion started to pay off. Dell, which had acquired paperback rights for $32,500, brought out its edition in September. A new round of reviews appeared, and by Christmas Dell had sold eight hundred thousand books. "Catch-22" caught on with college students, and it was especially popular during the Vietnam War, whose absurd unwinnability the novel seemed to predict. By 1975, "Catch-22" had passed

What's the best way to survive the holidays?



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THE NEW YORKER

"The Great Gatsby" on the all-time list, with sales over six million. It is the book that made Gottlieb into an industry superstar.

"Catch-22" is what Gottlieb calls "superior popular fiction," and that was to be his genre—ambitious, stylish, smart, and not quite canonical. In his career, Gottlieb published all kinds of books, from "Miss Piggy's Guide to Life" to "The Journals of John Cheever," but the books he lists as his favorites are all in the "Catch-22" mode: Charles Portis's "True Grit" (twenty-two weeks on the best-seller list), Chaim Potok's "The Chosen" (six months), and Robert Crichton's "The Secret of Santa Vittoria" (fifty weeks, eighteen at No. 1). John le Carré, another Gottlieb author, is in that company. These books are not middlebrow; that is, they are not earnest pretenders to art and edification. They are what they appear to be: entertainment, but for educated people.

You did not have to buy John le Carré in a brown wrapper. But the writers of superior fiction were writing more freely, and their publishers were profiting from the results, because people like Rosset were putting pressure on obscenity laws. Looking back, it's possible to feel that the people who campaigned against those laws were pushing on an open door. It's hard to imagine that the government would have persisted very long in trying to send people to jail for selling books like "Howl" and "Lady Chatterley's Lover." The liberalization of obscenity laws followed naturally from the Warren Court's increasing protections for political speech. Still, someone had to get the courts on the record. It was Rosset who, more than anyone else, did it.

Rosset heard about "Tropic of Cancer" in his first year at Swarthmore, and he took the train in to New York City, where he bought a copy under the counter at the Gotham Book Mart—a store, incongruously located on West Forty-seventh Street, in the diamond district, that was legendary as an outlet for modernist writing. Rosset's copy was stamped "Printed in Mexico," possibly an effort at misdirecting the authorities, but also an illustration of one of the problems with publishing banned books, which is that they were not copyrighted. Once a banned book became hot, anyone with a printing press could get into the game.

Like Kahane, Rosset was knocked out. He found the book "truly and beautifully non-conformist," and he wrote a paper about it, called "Henry Miller Versus 'Our Way of Life,'" for his English class. His professor, Robert Spiller, later on a not unimportant figure in the field of American literature, gave it a B-minus. Rosset left Swarthmore after his freshman year, but he hung on to the paper. Many years later, in a courtroom, he pulled it out and read from it to show that he was not just trying to make money from smut.

Rosset bought Grove Press, a Greenwich Village startup with three titles to its name, for three thousand dollars, in 1951, and he did something with it that is fairly uncommon for American publishing houses, which tend to invest in a diversified portfolio: he made Grove into a brand. The formula was a better-capitalized version of the Obelisk formula: a combination of avant-garde literature, radical politics, and erotica. Grove published Samuel Beckett and Jack Kerouac; it published "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" and Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth"; and it published a lot of Victorian-era pornography with titles like "A Man with a Maid" and "Lashed Into Lust." Grove mainstreamed what used to be called "the underground."

Grove had some popular best-sellers, like the psychiatrist Eric Berne's "Games People Play," which sold more than five million copies, a lucky strike that helped keep the company afloat in the nineteen-sixties. But Rosset wasn't looking to acquire best-sellers. He published what he liked, and because he liked it. That included the erotica.

He did it because he could afford to. Rosset was born in Chicago in 1922. His father was Jewish and his mother was Irish, and he identified with the Irish side. He saw himself as a scrappy underdog fighting the establishment. In fact, the family was fairly wealthy. Rosset's father owned a bank, the Metropolitan Trust Company, and, after he died, in 1954, Rosset (an only child) and his mother inherited the bank and merged it with Grove. Until Grove went public, in 1967, they were the owners of the company. This enabled Rosset to place long-term bets on writers. He had no investors to answer to.

A new memoir, "Rosset: My Life in Publishing and How I Fought Censorship" (OR Books), is the work of several hands. Rosset had planned an autobiography, and he enlisted many helpers, but he was never satisfied, and, when he died, in 2012, the book was unfinished. The editors have managed to pull together a memoir using material in Rosset's papers, and have produced a book that has the charm and some of the truculence of the man himself.

Rosset's first great accomplishment after acquiring Grove was to become Beckett's American publisher. Beckett was an elusive and problematic prize. He lived in Paris; he wrote in French; and he was fanatical about the integrity

"We are now boarding priority travellers. Please be ready to present an air of entitlement."

of his art. There are differing accounts of how Rosset heard about Beckett, but it's undisputed that when they met, in Paris, they hit it off. Maybe it was the Irish ancestry. But it was sound business sense. Rosset recognized Beckett's potential at a time when he was barely a coterie author. He must also have realized that he had a melodramatically self-abnegating prima donna on his hands, and he patiently walked Beckett through the steps necessary for his books to be published in the United States, starting with persuading him to translate them into English himself, which Beckett did only after making a tremendous fuss.

Rosset kept tabs on the American production of "Waiting for Godot," to make sure that it met Beckett's standards. The play was not a hit right away, either in Paris, where it opened, in 1953, or in the United States, where it bombed in Miami in 1956, and then had a Broadway run of just fifty-nine performances. But Rosset stuck with Beckett, and eventually "Waiting for Godot" became an international sensation, and Grove had its Joyce.

"Dear Mr. Beckett" (Opus) is a collection of Beckett and Rosset's correspondence, but, for reasons presumably involving permissions, none of Beckett's letters from the first decade of their association are included. Sad, because Beckett was a droll correspondent; fortunately, the letters can be found in the terrific four-volume edition, recently completed, of "The Letters of Samuel Beckett" (Cambridge). In the beginning, Rosset's letters to Beckett are warm and solicitous, but they are almost all business. There is not much suggesting intimacy. That came later.

In 1954, Rosset received a letter from a Berkeley professor named Mark Schorer (Joan Didion was his student) suggesting that Grove publish "Lady Chatterley's Lover," then probably the most famous banned work of literature in the world. Lawrence had published it privately, in Florence, in 1928. He tried to get Beach interested, but she called the book a "kind of sermon-on-the-Mount—of Venus," and turned him down. Lawrence died in 1930. The novel was never copyrighted, and this made it instant carrion for off-shore English-language publishers to feed on. Obelisk's edition, which came out in 1936, was the third "Lady Chatterley" published in Paris. In the United States, Knopf, with the authorization of Lawrence's widow, Frieda, put out an expurgated edition.

Rosset actually disliked "Lady Chatterley." The novel's class politics about a British aristocrat's affair with her gamekeeper didn't interest him, and he found the fact that the hero talks to his penis, and calls it "John Thomas," silly. Lawrence hated pornography; his views on sex were far too high-minded for Rosset. But none of that mattered, because Rosset realized that "Lady Chatterley" could be the key to the liberation of "Tropic of Cancer"—"a Trojan horse for Grove," as he puts it in the memoir.

In Grove's case, the lack of copyright was a problem. The unexpurgated "Lady Chatterley" had always been banned in the United States and Britain. In order to publish it, Rosset needed a court to declare the book not obscene, and that was going to be expensive. If he won his case and the book was not under copyright, any publishers could print it and Grove could do nothing to stop them. So Rosset began an exhausting round of negotiations with Frieda, and with Alfred Knopf, an irascible publishing titan who considered Rosset a peon and who pretended, on no legal grounds whatever, that his company owned the rights to any edition that the courts might allow.

Frieda died; Knopf blustered; and Lawrence's British agent refused to cooperate. So Rosset decided to go it alone. In 1959, Grove published an unexpurgated "Lady Chatterley," with a preface by Archibald MacLeish, a former Librarian of Congress, and an introduction by Schorer, plus blurbs from eminent persons of letters, and waited for the government to seize the book, which it did. A trial ensued, the ban was upheld, and Grove appealed.

Rosset had retained Ephraim London, a prominent First Amendment attorney who, in 1952, had won the so-called Miracle case, Burstyn v. Wilson, in which for the first time the Supreme Court gave motion pictures First Amendment protection. (The movie at issue was "The Miracle," directed by Roberto Rossellini, and deemed sacrilegious by the State of New York.) London made the mistake of dismissing a suggestion from Rosset about how to handle the case, and was fired on the spot. (That was characteristic, as it was that Rosset eventually rehired him.) Rosset knew two lawyers by acquaintance. He called one, and, by an incredible piece of luck, the man was not at home. The second lawyer, whom Rosset knew only from tennis matches in the Hamptons, did pick up. He was Charles Rembar.

Rembar had never tried a case before, and he was not an expert on the First Amendment (although he was Norman Mailer's cousin and later claimed that he had helped Mailer come up with the nonword "fug" to use as a perfectly legal substitute for "fuck" in Mailer's war novel, "The Naked and the Dead"). But he agreed to represent Grove in the legal battle over "Lady Chatterley." Rembar turned out to be a brilliant lawyer, a quick-witted courtroom tactician with a long-term legal strategy. The strategy was to rewrite the definition of obscenity using concepts that the courts had already committed themselves to.

There was a major obstacle facing Grove in its appeal of the Post Office ban of "Lady Chatterley": a recent Supreme Court decision, Roth v. United States. Samuel Roth was an American Kahane who had the disadvantage of operating in a country in which censorship laws were enforced. He was, at heart, if not technically, a pirate, a bookaneer. He published and distributed unauthorized versions of modernist classics banned in the United States—one was "Lady Chatterley's Lover"—and he also sold pornography. One of the classics that Roth printed excerpts from was "Ulysses." Joyce found out about it, and there was an international outcry.

Roth was frequently in trouble with the law and had even done jail time. In 1957, his conviction for mailing obscene circulars and advertising an obscene book came to the Supreme Court. Roth's lawyer placed his bets on one argument: that the federal obscenity statute was unconstitutional. The majority held otherwise, and Roth went to prison again, for four years. The Court's opinion was written by William Brennan, Jr., an

observant Catholic who had been appointed a year earlier by President Dwight Eisenhower, and who became one of the most liberal Justices on the Warren Court.

Brennan explained that courts had always carved out exceptions to the First Amendment protection of speech—for instance, libel—and that history showed obscenity to have been one of those exceptions. Brennan was not prepared to challenge that tradition, but he did offer what amounted to a new definition of obscenity, thus unintentionally initiating the almost total unravelling of obscenity jurisprudence.

The term "obscene" is a conundrum. Is an expression obscene because it's arousing or because it's gross? Is the relevant affect lust (a pleasurable feeling) or disgust (an unpleasant one)? Brennan tried to split the difference with a new term. "Obscene material is material which deals with sex in a manner appealing to prurient interest," he wrote.

The Supreme Court had used "prurient" only once before in its history. That was in Mutual v. Ohio, decided in 1915, when the Court held that motion pictures are not protected by the First Amendment—the decision overturned in the Miracle case. In Mutual, the Court noted that "a prurient interest may be excited and appealed to" by movies, but made no more of it. Brennan cited Mutual, but he saw fit to add definitions of "prurient" from other sources as well: a "tendency to excite lustful thoughts," a "shameful or morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretion," and an expression "substantially beyond customary limits of candor."

Possibly sensing that the scattershot nature of his definitions simply provided prosecutors with more weapons, Brennan tackled the problem from another direction. He defined what would *not* count as obscenity. "All ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance—unorthodox ideas, controversial ideas, even ideas hateful to the prevailing climate of opinion—have the full protection of the guaranties," he wrote. "Implicit in the history of the First Amendment is the rejection of obscenity as utterly without redeeming social importance."

Looked at one way, Brennan's opinion in Roth was a setback for anti-censorship forces. After all, it was the lead opinion in a decision that confirmed the conviction of a notorious pornographer. But, looked at another way, Brennan gave Grove a lot of language to work with. Rembar saw that the path to changing obscenity law was not to get Roth overruled but to get Brennan's opinion restated as an anti-censorship decision. The task took Rembar and the rest of the legal team at Grove seven years to accomplish.

The first move was easy. In Grove's case against the Post Office, Rembar got the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York to agree that "Lady Chatterley" was a serious work of literature, since it was published by a reputable press and had impressive scholarly accoutrements (and thus was not "pandering," the basis for the crime for which most pornographers were convicted). "Chatterley" easily met the "social importance" test in Roth. The charge that the book offended contemporary standards—which is what the "customary limits of candor" test amounted to—was met by the fact that the Grove edition had been well received by the literary establishment.

By the time the opinion overturning the ban was released, in July, 1959, the Grove "Lady Chatterley" had already sold over a hundred thousand copies; by fall, it was No. 2 on the *Times* best-seller list. It was still uncopyrighted. In the end, Knopf declined to enter the lists, but other publishers were not so punctilious. By the end of the year, there were five paperback editions on the market. Only one, published by Dell, paid royalties to Grove. Ultimately, six million copies of Lawrence's novel were sold.

As Rembar could see, the "Chatterley" decision was not exactly a ringing call to end censorship. The court basically said, If it's good enough for Archibald MacLeish, it's good enough for the United States Constitution. Lawrence may have opened the gate, but it was not obvious that Miller was going to squeeze through it. "Tropic of Cancer" was a much harder case. There were several problems. The first was that Lawrence was a moralist and Miller was an anarchist. Miller didn't give a damn. "Social importance" was just the kind of cant he deplored.

A second problem was that "Tropic of Cancer" and "Tropic of Capricorn" had been republished in Paris after the war by Maurice Girodias, Kahane's son, who had taken his mother's Gentile name during the Occupation, and, afterward, launched a press, Olympia, designed to reproduce Obelisk as a publisher of avant-garde writing and pornography. (Olympia was the first publisher of "Lolita.") Someone tried to bring copies of the Paris edition of "Tropic of Cancer" into the United States, and the books were seized by Customs. In 1953, a federal court upheld the seizure. "Practically everything that the world loosely regards as sin is detailed in the vivid, lurid, salacious language of smut, prostitution, and dirt," the judge observed of Miller's novel. "And all of it is related without the slightest expressed idea of its abandon." It was "Well of Loneliness" again: it wasn't that the acts were sinful; it was that the author so clearly didn't mind.

The worst problem was that the Department of Justice advised Customs and the Post Office not to interfere with the distribution of "Tropic of Cancer." Rosset had already published the book (it could not be banned in advance of publication, because of the rule against prior restraint) and had agreed to indemnify bookstores for their costs if they faced charges. This meant that the book was subject to any number of local prosecutions. In the end, there were nearly sixty "Cancer" cases across the country. The word went out that all the police had to do was go into a store, pick up a copy, and turn to page 5, where the "ream out every wrinkle" sentences appear, and they could seize all copies. Meanwhile, a Supreme Court decision was looking remote. Rosset had to keep appealing losses in state courts and hope for a grant of certiorari to stop the bleeding. As "Catch-22" was beginning its delayed but spectacular liftoff, Rosset was trying to plug a dike with sixty holes in it, and keep Grove solvent.

In 1962, Grove had a breakthrough, when the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, on a four-to-three vote, reversed a trial-court judgment against

the book. It was a big win for Grove, but, to Rembar's dismay, the state did not appeal, so he could not get a Supreme Court decision out of the result. The litigation slogged on.

Finally, and unexpectedly, in 1964, the Supreme Court reversed, without opinion, a Florida conviction against Grove, and issued, on the same day, an opinion in a case called Jacobellis v. Ohio, reversing the conviction of a movie-theatre manager for showing a French film called "Les Amants." In his lead opinion, Brennan essentially restated what he had said in Roth, except, this time, to reach an anti-censorship verdict.

Roth, he explained, held that "a work cannot be proscribed unless it is 'utterly' without redeeming social importance." "Les Amants," and, by implication, Miller's novel, clearly had some social importance. As for "customary limits of candor," which could be interpreted as a community-standards test, Brennan said that he could not have meant the standards of local communities, such that each jurisdiction would be free to impose its own bans. The Constitution is a national Constitution, and the First Amendment applies everywhere, so the standard must be a "national standard." By the time of the Jacobellis decision, "Tropic of Cancer" had already sold more than two million copies. The Justices must have sensed that the market had established that the national-standard test had been met.

Jacobellis retained obscenity as a category of unprotected speech, but it made it virtually impossible to censor serious books for their language or their subject matter. There were two more major tests of obscenity laws: William Burroughs's "Naked Lunch," published in Paris by Olympia and in New York by Grove, and "Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure," otherwise known as "Fanny Hill," which is the first book known to have been convicted of obscenity in the United States, back in 1821. Rembar argued "Fanny Hill" before the Supreme Court. You can say what you like about Henry Miller, but "Fanny Hill" just is pornography. Rembar persuaded the Justices that, since various scholars and critics had already testified to its "social importance," they didn't even need to read it. It passed the test in Roth.

"Is this taken?"

• •

Victories in those cases sealed the deal. By the end of the decade, major American writers were publishing novels—Norman Mailer's "An American Dream"; John Updike's "Couples"; Philip Roth's "Portnoy's Complaint"—that contained words and depicted acts that just ten years earlier would have meant prosecution for their publishers. Rosset liberated the industry. He also picked up the check.

But now that formerly taboo books could be sold without legal worries, the Obelisks, the Olympias, and the Groves were no longer needed. The major houses, with their big advances, got into the act. Rosset's legal successes helped do him in. In 1969, Grove had a revenue of some fourteen million dollars; after that, things went rapidly downhill. Rosset had bought rights to more than four hundred art films, like the sexually explicit Swedish film "I Am Curious (Yellow)," but, with the relaxation of obscenity laws, the nation's art houses switched to X-rated pornography, and Rosset had no outlet for his movies.

In 1970, Grove's offices were occupied by feminists who accused Rosset of sexism. That incident was accompanied by an effort at unionization. Rosset found it all incredible—that a left-wing champion of underground writing should be a target for feminists and leftists. He was not the only nonconformist from the nineteen-fifties and sixties who found himself on the wrong side of things in the seventies. Grove was on the edge of bankruptcy.

In 1985, after struggling for a decade to pay off its debts, Rosset sold the company. The new owners, Ann Getty and George Weidenfeld, turned out to be no more financially prudent than Rosset, and, in 1986, they pushed him out. After meeting the new publisher, Beckett, now a Nobel laureate, let it be known that he would never give another book to Grove. Although Rosset persevered with various small-scale publishing enterprises, he lacked the capital to compete for major books, and he died penniless, or close to it. He never got back on the stage. But he had had a great run.

Gottlieb lasted five years at *The New Yorker.* Far down on his list of accomplishments is that he brought me into the magazine—a huge break for me, anyway. It may be that Gottlieb was not, really, a magazine person. He was a book person. A book is an egg that takes many years to hatch; a magazine is a piece of candy that has to be reconfected every week. To the extent that *The New Yorker's* financial problems at the end of the Shawn era were caused by a lack of timeliness in its coverage of culture and events, Gottlieb was not the person to solve them. But he expresses no regrets in his book. After he was fired, he picked up right where he left off, editing books. He is still at it. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

PYRAMIDS AND WIKILEAKS

Modern opera thrives in Los Angeles.

BY ALEX ROSS

L.A. Opera's production of Philip Glass's "Akhnaten" had a spooky grandeur.

For most of the twentieth century, Los Angeles was the only American metropolis without a full-fledged opera house. This turned out to be no bad thing for the city's spirited, unpredictable modern scene. In bygone days, the moneyed classes of L.A. showed little interest in parading their finery in opera boxes, as the Morgans and the Vanderbilts had done at the Met, in New York. The all-powerful Chandler family, which owned the Los Angeles *Times* and controlled vast tracts of real estate, threw its weight behind the L.A. Philharmonic, which now has an annual budget of a hundred and twenty-three million dollars and remains, by far, the wealthiest classical-music organization in Southern California. On the other hand, when opera finally took root, with the founding of L.A. Opera, in 1986, it was relatively free of the entrenched conservatism that has hemmed in older houses. No American company of L.A. Opera's size—the budget is forty-one million dollars—is more committed to new and unusual work. Its fall repertory included "Akhnaten," Philip Glass's saga of ancient Egypt, and "The Source," Ted Hearne's meditation on Chelsea Manning and WikiLeaks.

This is not to say that L.A. Opera, which is housed primarily in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, disdains the past. Since 2003, its general director has been the ageless Plácido Domingo, who also sings in tried-and-true repertory once or twice a season. The split between Domingo's fare and the contemporary offerings—which reflect the tastes of the organization's C.E.O., Christopher Koelsch—can be disconcerting. It's as if two distinct opera companies shared the same name. The first show of the fall season was Darko Tresnjak's staging of Verdi's "Macbeth," with Domingo in the title role, continuing his effortful late-career transition to baritone parts. He lacked low-end menace, and Tresnjak overdid the witchy kitsch. What kept the production alive was the fluid, vital conducting of James Conlon, the company's longtime music director. L.A. Opera has shown more nerve in presenting Barrie Kosky's creatively jarring takes on "The Magic Flute," "Dido and Aeneas," and "Bluebeard's Castle." One can understand the caution: L.A. Opera is still smarting from the setback of Achim Freyer's thirty-one-million-dollar "Ring," which struggled at the box office in 2009 and 2010.

In "Akhnaten," the disparate identities of L.A. Opera happily merged. Glass's opera, a portrait of the heretical Pharaoh who tried to convert Egypt to monotheism, was first seen in 1984, and marks an evolution from the stripped-down radicalism of "Einstein on the Beach" to a more conventional orchestral language. "Akhnaten" attains an austere majesty that won't sound entirely alien to ears accustomed to "Aida." At the same time, its static, hieratic text, derived largely from ancient Egyptian and Akkadian sources, lies far outside the operatic norm, and makes most American librettos of recent decades look bland. To put it crudely, this work can hold the attention of blue-hairs and hipsters alike; at the première, both were out in force.

The production was by Phelim McDermott, whose paper-puppet staging of Glass's "Satyagraha" entranced audiences at the Met in 2008 and 2011. McDermott, in collaboration with the set designer Tom Pye and the costume designer Kevin Pollard, achieved another wonder here: many tableaux played like cinematic reënactments of Egyptian friezes in motion, with surreal anachronisms intermingled. A squad of jugglers—inspired by a practice seen in Pharaonic art—enlivened Glass's more loquacious ostinatos.

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID DORAN

Whenever the show threatened to get twee, it veered toward spooky grandeur: an assault on Akhnaten's temple is headed by a Grand Guignol general wearing a top hat capped by a skull.

The superstar countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo took total possession of the title role. Inevitably, there was much chatter about the fact that, in Act I, he appeared stark naked, facing forward. (A patron was heard to explain, "Otherwise, we wouldn't know it's a man singing.") Anatomical revelations aside, Costanzo embodied an otherworldly ruler poised between idealism and madness, his voice a prism of brilliant colors. J'Nai Bridges was no less glowing as Nefertiti, Akhnaten's wife. The gifted young composer-conductor Matthew Aucoin, in the pit, emphasized Glass's pearly instrumental solos; Ryan Darke, L.A. Opera's principal trumpet, played gorgeously all night.

"The Source," which L.A. Opera presented at the REDCAT space, underneath Disney Hall, is the undoubted winner of this year's award for Acutely Uncomfortable Relevance. I arrived at REDCAT immediately after watching the final Presidential debate, at which Hillary Clinton mentioned apparent links between WikiLeaks and Russian intelligence. Within a few minutes, we were listening to Auto-Tuned vocalizations of classified military documents that Chelsea Manning gave to WikiLeaks in 2010. Such are the vagaries of news-driven art: when "The Source" had its première, at BAM, in 2014, WikiLeaks still seemed heroic to many leftists, but it has lost its lustre in the wake of the 2016 election. Still, Hearne's piece holds up as a complex mirror image of an information-saturated, mass-surveillance world, and remains staggering in its impact.

Hearne, a thirty-four-year-old Chicagoan who now teaches composition at U.S.C., is acutely attuned to the intricate clash of pop, technology, and politics. "The Source," based on a libretto by Mark Doten, is a mesmerizing and disquieting collage of vocal, instrumental, and recorded sounds. Four vocalists are heard singing excerpts from Afghanistan and Iraq war logs, some of them chillingly poetic in isolation: "We called for illumination"; "A young boy released pigeons." Passages from Manning's Internet chats unfold against a channel-surfing montage of Clay Aiken singing "Mack the Knife" ("Oh, the shark bites"), the N.B.A. finals, "The Bachelorette," Stephen Hawking talking to Diane Sawyer, and so on—the noisy veil of pop-culture distraction. Manning's transgender identity comes into play: "I behave and look like a male, / but it's not me."

All this is arresting in itself, but the production—which is by Daniel Fish and Jim Findlay, in conjunction with Beth Morrison Projects—is something else again. (It travels to the San Francisco Opera in February.) Hearne's soundscape is accompanied by closeup video images of a diverse group of people, who react to unseen events with dismay. A greenish reflection in one woman's glasses gives an inkling of what is happening. At the end of the work, the music falls silent, and we see what they were watching: eleven minutes of WikiLeaks' "Collateral Murder" video, documenting a 2007 strike on a Baghdad suburb. That footage became instantly notorious because of its casual cruelty: "One small child wounded. Over"; "Roger. Ah, damn. Oh, well." WikiLeaks was later accused of tendentious editing, but the clip would be shocking in any guise. I have never seen an audience more dumbfounded than the one at REDCAT: for at least a minute, no one moved or made a sound.

OPERA HAS GAINED traction elsewhere in the Los Angeles area. Long Beach Opera, which was formed in 1979, has presented everything from John Cage's "Europeras" to John Adams's "The Death of Klinghoffer." The Industry, a company established by the visionary young director Yuval Sharon, has abandoned conventional venues and staged work in warehouses, in L.A.'s Union Station, and, in the case of last year's "Hopscotch," in limousines roaming the city. Sharon has also launched a multi-year collaboration with the L.A. Phil, and is preparing a production of Lou Harrison's "Young Caesar," for June. Early signs of Sharon's infiltration of the orchestra were evident this fall, when patrons ascending from the Disney parking garage saw cloudlike sculptures over their heads and heard a sound installation by Rand Steiger—a piece called "Nimbus," evoking rain, wind, and other weather phenomena.

The L.A. Phil has itself long moonlighted as an opera presenter, usually offering several concert or semi-staged performances each season. In 2004, it introduced one of the most celebrated productions of the new century, Peter Sellars and Bill Viola's engulfing "Tristan und Isolde." In 2016, it has offered Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande," in a luminous performance under Esa-Pekka Salonen; the world première of Louis Andriessen's apocalyptic drama "Theatre of the World"; "Tosca," at the Hollywood Bowl, under Gustavo Dudamel; and, just before Thanksgiving, the first performance of Gerald Barry's "Alice's Adventures Under Ground."

In "Alice," composer and subject are uncommonly well matched. Barry is an exuberant anarchist who traffics in polystylistic delirium. His latest score begins with strident arpeggios in and around C major, as the fearless soprano Barbara Hannigan, in the title role, tries frantically to keep pace: "D-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-d-down!" It goes on, in helter-skelter fashion, for just under an hour, incorporating music-hall songs, Victorian hymns, the "Ode to Joy," and settings of "Jabberwocky" in French, German, and Russian. A similar frenzy propels Barry's adaptation of "The Importance of Being Earnest," which had its première at the L.A. Phil in 2011, and appeared at the New York Philharmonic's Biennial last spring. That opera seems almost at war with the debonair wit of its source. "Alice," by contrast, channels the topsy-turvy spirit of Lewis Carroll to an uncanny degree. Thomas Adès, a part-time Los Angeles resident, led a host of singers and L.A. Phil players in a shrill, chaotic, relentless, and altogether wonderful performance.

Such activity does not come about by accident. For decades, L.A. has had an unusually strong culture of new-music patronage: locals take pride in supporting the L.A. Phil's new-music initiatives, longtime series like the Monday Evening Concerts and newer projects like the Industry, wasteLAnd, and wild Up. The modest titans of the scene are the philanthropists Lenore and Bernard Greenberg, who helped to fund both "Akhnaten" and "Alice," and who, decades ago, had important roles in founding L.A. Opera. You see them at events large and small, where they are inevitably waylaid by grateful composers. They and others have done far more than emblazon their names on buildings: they have fostered an atmosphere in which new work can germinate and thrive. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

DANCING WITH THE STARS

"La La Land."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Boy meets girl, stuck in a traffic jam, and honks at her. Girl gives boy the finger. Boy drives on. Boy meets girl again, in a bar, and brushes past. Girl thinks boy is a jerk. Boy meets girl *again*, at a party, and something clicks. Boy loves girl, at last. But what if girl and boy want different things from love? And why make such a song and dance about it?

Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone sing and dance in Damien Chazelle's movie.

The boy is Sebastian (Ryan Gosling), the girl is Mia (Emma Stone), and their story is told in "La La Land," a new musical, written and directed by Damien Chazelle. Not an adaptation of a Broadway show, or a coda to "Glee," with a jukebox of preëxisting tunes, but an original creation, with music by Justin Hurwitz and lyrics, for five of the six big numbers, by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul. To call the film "original," however, is to raise a bunch of questions, since part of its purpose is to summon up remembrance of things past. It is rare, nowadays, to see a hero break into song onscreen—and rarer still to see him slip into song as if into something comfortable. When Sebastian wanders along a pier, whistling, and then emits a low and chesty croon ("City of stars, / Are you shining just for me?"), we have to take a moment to acclimatize. This is 2016, not 1956, and he could send a text, with a starry emoji tacked on. Yet he prefers to sing.

So, if they really don't make 'em like this anymore, why make 'em now? Partly for the most pressing of reasons: to cheer us up. We kick off in Los Angeles, on a freeway, though freedom is in short supply. Cars and trucks are snarled up, going nowhere, and you're expecting tempers to snap. That's what happened to Michael Douglas, in the same fix, in the same city, in "Falling Down" (1993), and remember how he reacted. But Chazelle's folk don't run riot with guns and baseball bats. Instead, they rampage into dance, climbing onto the hoods and the roofs of their vehicles, making holiday in the heat, and chanting, "Another Day of Sun." The camera swings and curvets in accord, then rises to survey the scene—half a mile of merriment where none should be. If you want to open the gridlock, "La La Land" declares, then music is the key.

This spectacle gets a lot done. First, it serves notice that song, as much as chatter, will be the means of expression. Get used to it, guys. Second, we are introduced to Mia and Sebastian. Third, the sequence revives the old-fashioned view of L.A. as a breeding ground of reverie and hope—a view that began to fade with "In a Lonely Place" (1950), where Bogart's mug was as glad as a whiskey sour, and died a rainy death in "Magnolia" (1999), as the cast, scattered around town, growled and groaned along to Aimee Mann's "Wise Up." There is a storm of singin' in "La La Land," but no rain; the clemency of the weather is a God-given joke, and, even at Christmas, when Mia walks home after dark, she is clad as if for June.

She is an actress, who—if this is not a tautology—spends her time going to auditions, toiling in a café, and writing a play of her own. Pausing outside a bar, she hears the sound of a piano, and enters. Hitherto, the film has been all about her, but Chazelle now switches tack and follows Sebastian. He is a musician, whose proudest boast is that he owns a piano stool once sat on by Hoagy Carmichael, and whose dearest wish is to open a jazz joint in what is currently, to his great indignation, a samba and tapas place. Notice how the hero and the heroine of the movie, in line with its title, subsist on fantasies instead of careers, conforming to a chase-your-dream credo that is not so much traditional as antique. Would the film have taken wing if she had been a chef, say, and he had worked in I.T., quietly revering the golden age of Atari and Donkey Kong?

Gosling is at once hangdog and enthused, with a shrug of self-deprecation. At one point, making ends meet by playing for an eighties retro band, he has to wear baggy pants and a blouson with the sleeves rolled up—a noble sacrifice. But he is also a spokesman for Chazelle's entire approach: "Why do you say 'romantic' like it's a dirty word?" Sebastian asks, and, as for being poor, and pummelled by modernity, "I *want* to be on the ropes." He knows what people think about jazz: "They always say, 'Let it die.' Not on my watch," he

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS GASH

announces, like Ed Harris refusing to abandon the astronauts in "Apollo 13." This idea—that nostalgia can be gutsy and purposeful rather than moony and limp—is what powers "La La Land" and inspires Sebastian to invite Mia to a screening of "Rebel Without a Cause," at the Rialto, in South Pasadena. (In truth, that movie theatre closed in 2007.) She's late, but marches in and stands onstage, bathed in the projector's beam, gazing outward in search of her date. It's a blissful image of love and cinema, interfused, and the passion persists as Sebastian, continuing his guided tour, drives her to the Griffith Observatory, as featured in "Rebel," and waltzes her into the air. Planets and galaxies roll by. She's over the moon.

The problems presented by "La La Land" are twofold. First, it looks so delicious that I genuinely couldn't decide whether to watch it or lick it. The cinematographer, Linus Sandgren, shot it on film, and the colors, rather than merge into the landscape, seem to burst in your face. Mia and her roommates, on a night out, sashay down the street in dresses of red, yellow, green, and blue—hot primary hues to match the mood. Think of Vincente Minnelli, and of Technicolor in its pomp; think of the fluorescence of "The Trolley Song," in "Meet Me in St. Louis"—clang, clang, clang went the tones of skin, lips, and fabric, not to mention Judy Garland's hair. At the opposite end of the spectrum, as Mia and Sebastian dawdle and dance beside a bench, high above the city, the light glows violet and rose—a soft spell conjured by the magic hour.

And here's the second hitch. If you believe in musicals, then your mind will turn helplessly to another bench, and another couple, at the close of day: Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, in Central Park, in "The Band Wagon" (1953). Their every step, and every touch of his hand upon hers, was done without flaw, and the synchronicity spoke not only of twin souls but of a heavenly ideal. This was Platonic film—Hollywood hinting at a formal perfection denied to the rest of us, in our stumbles and trips. (If I were exiled or marooned, and could take only a four-minute clip of any movie to keep me company, that would be my choice.) By contrast, when Gosling and Stone noodle around in the dusk, and don their tap shoes for a quick hoof, they do so with eagerness and charm. Yet their efforts are down to earth.

All of which, weirdly enough, suggests that "La La Land," despite its setting and its language, is at least half French. The freeway sequence is indebted to Jacques Demy's "The Young Girls of Rochefort" (1967), which also started with people climbing out of their stationary vehicles to dance. The film that ensued was a rough-edged fairy tale, and it was a shock when Gene Kelly, no less, appeared in a pink shirt and whipped the whole procedure into shape. To him, as to Astaire, the musical was an immaculate conception, whereas to Demy, and now to Chazelle, it is born of mortal frailties and thoughts. If the choreography, performed with more zest than unworldly expertise, lacks the chill of the nonpareil, that's the point. It's no surprise that Emma Stone, whose manner is grounded in pathos and comedy alike, should carry the film with ease. She has a long solo ("Here's to the hearts that ache, / Here's to the mess we make"), and the husky catch in her breath, which would have had Minnelli and his masters at M-G-M calling for the overdub, is precisely what lends the melody its kick—the striving in Mia's unmighty voice is a measure of her desires.

That may be why, in the second half, the tale runs a little out of puff. Though the plans of the characters come to fruition, there remains a wistful sense of roads not taken, and the final act of the drama, set five years later, is both climactic and indecisive, swaying back and forth between the imagined and the real, unwilling to give up the chase. You may gripe at that, but let's be honest: it's a kind of miracle that "La La Land" even exists, and my advice would be to ignore the backward-glancing, fault-hunting addicts of the genre, like me. Catch the film on the largest screen you can find, with a sound system to match, even if that means journeying all day. Have a drink beforehand. And, whatever you do, don't wait for a DVD or a download. The mission of this movie will be fulfilled only if it is seen by those—especially kids—who have never met a grownup musical, at the cinema, and who may not know what busy thrills can bloom, without recourse to violence, from the simplest things. The sun ignites. The song explodes. Boy meets girl. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, December 11th. The finalists in the November 28th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 2nd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

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THE FINALISTS

"I'm thinking about quitting the band."
Sarah E. Metzler, Marion Center, Pa.

"Like the pomp. Not crazy about the circumstances."
Scott Tredwell, Advance, N.C.

"This is my first mirage à trois, too."
Toney Palumbo, Brooklyn, N.Y.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"It's amazing to think he started out in the lobby."
Barbara Farrell, San Marino, Calif.

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