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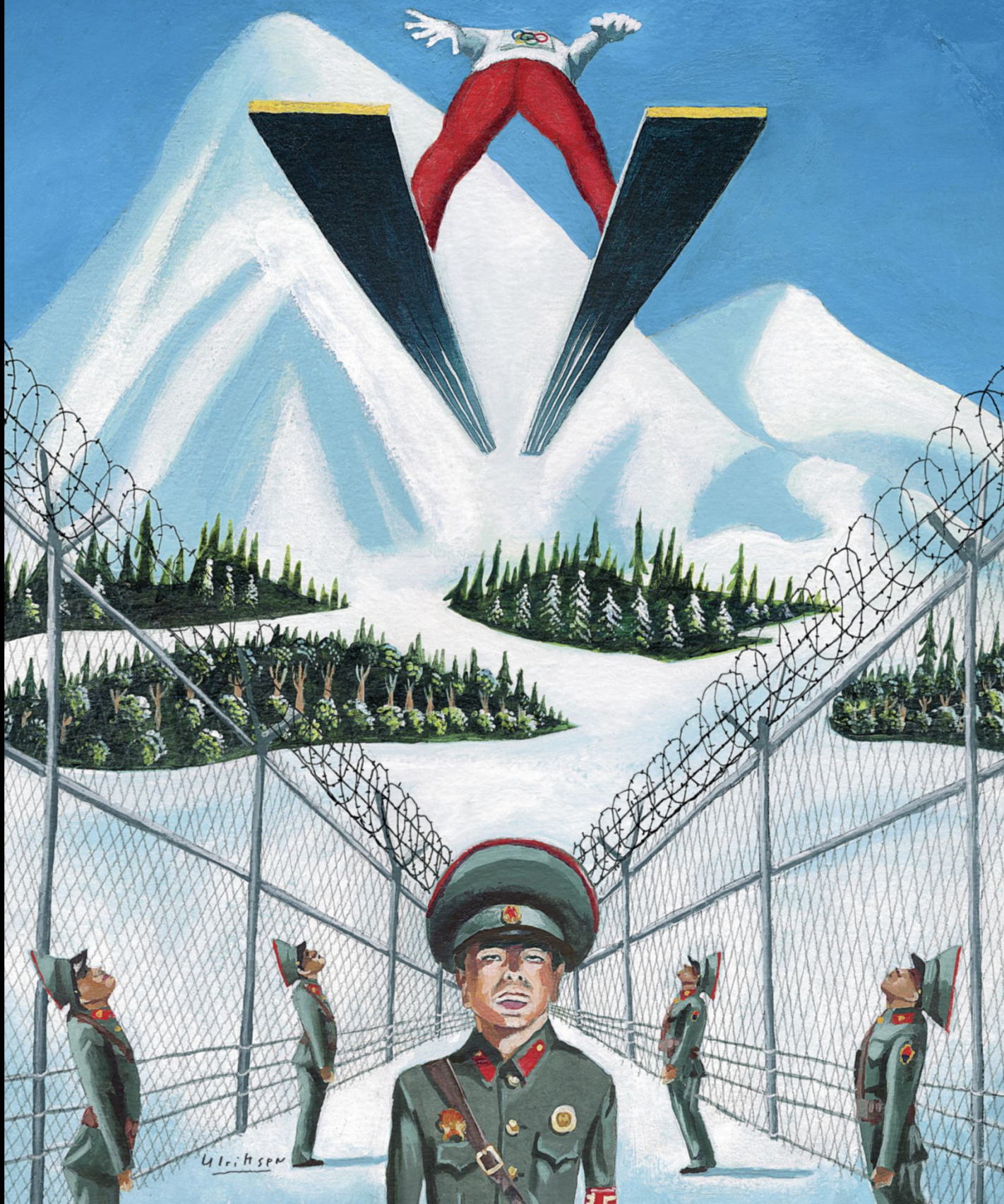

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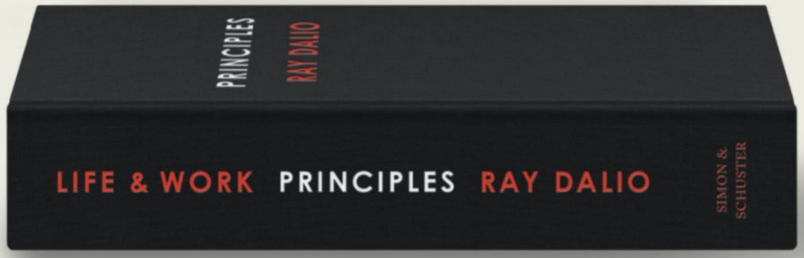

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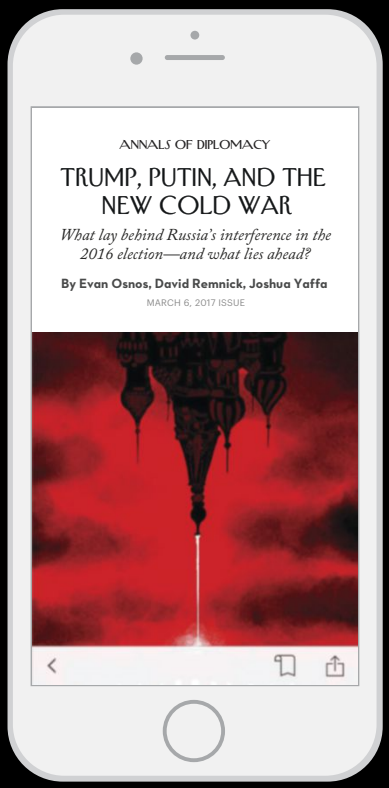

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Ian Parker (*"Stairmaster," p. 42*) contributed his first piece to the magazine in 1994 and became a staff writer in 2000.

Joyce Carol Oates (*Books, p. 70*), the 2017 recipient of the International Festival of Literature and Art with Humor Award, most recently published the story collection "Beautiful Days."

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William Trevor (*Fiction, p. 54*), who died in 2016, published dozens of novels and short-story collections. In 2008, he won the Irish Book Awards' Bob Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award.

Mary Hawthorne (*The Talk of the Town, p. 18*) is a member of *The New Yorker's* editorial staff.

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Louis Menand (*A Critic at Large, p. 63*), a staff writer since 2001, was awarded the 2016 National Humanities Medal.

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VIDEO
The hectic launch of a world-class French restaurant, in which most of the staff are just out of prison.

PODCAST
Evan Osnos discusses the escalating conflicts between the White House and the nation's intelligence agencies.

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LEFT: LARA TALEVSKI

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THE MAIL

ALL JAMMED UP

Joshua Rothman's article on paper jams resurrected my memories of three decades of altercations with printers in computer shops all over Baltimore ("Jambusters," February 12th & 19th). I was a business-forms designer and salesman in the era of continuous, pin-fed paper forms. (Remember paper with holes down each side?) My day would often begin trying to coax interleaved and fanfolded sets of crimped-and-perforated carbon through an I.B.M. 1403 printer at twelve hundred lines a minute, which is like trying to shove a quilt through a mail slot very quickly. If that worked, it was on to the decollator, a Coupe de Ville-length machine that transformed the sets into a neat stack of forms and multiple rolls of carbon paper. Next was the burster, a vicious paper-eating device that ripped the forms into individual sheets (or to shreds) with the speed and the racket of a tommy gun. My proudest invention was an unpatented static-elimination device, a yard-long piece of aluminum Christmas tinsel tied to a length of fourteen-gauge lamp wire that I wrapped around something grounded. It stretched across the back of the printer, so that the paper passed over it. When manufacturers started making tinsel out of plastic, I haunted Goodwills in search of old packs of the metal stuff. Thanks for the reminder of years spent extracting mangled payroll checks from printers with a straightened coat hanger.
Ronald W. Pilling
Bishopville, Md.

Erwin Ruiz, the youthful leader of Xerox's paper-jam team, was onto something when he invoked Bernoulli's principle of fluid dynamics: "Fast-moving air exerts less air pressure than slow-moving air." However, as I learned in flight school, it is not the bottom of the wing that is curved, as Rothman says, but the top of the wing, over which the air moves fastest. The bottom side is flat, so that slower-moving air creates lift. Sailboats use the same effect when they tack into the wind.
Jim Stoffer
Astoria, Ore.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ASSAULT

Jia Tolentino ends her article on Columbia University's attempt to decrease instances of sexual assault on campus with a hypothetical scenario described as a drunken "blur" ("Safer Spaces," February 12th & 19th). I have worked with sexual-assault survivors on campuses for two decades. What I have seen, time and time again, are male perpetrators who premeditate their crimes, choosing victims based on who they think is least likely to report them. This reality is missing from the persistent argument that if students drink less and have comfortable seating aside from their beds then their fumbling behaviors will change. Tolentino acknowledges that "there will always be people, mostly men, who experience a power differential as license to do what they want," but it bears repeating that sexual assault is not primarily about sex but, rather, about the power inherent in gendered violence.
Roseanne Giannini Quinn
Cupertino, Calif.

AIR-TRAFFIC CONTROL

In Ian Frazier's account of how drone racing could take screen-lovers "back into the actual world," he says that he is an "admirer of reality," and gives the last word to a young superstar drone pilot who is "seeing things no one has ever seen" ("Airborne," February 5th). What about the rest of us, who also admire reality, and yet would prefer to experience it without drones buzzing above our heads? I'm fine with drone racing providing screen-viewable thrills on predesigned racecourses in dedicated stadiums. But, outside those arenas, unregulated drone use will defile the public airspace.
Eric Keeling
New Paltz, N.Y.

•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Tyler, the Creator, a rapper-songwriter, clothing designer, and director, who plays Madison Square Garden on Feb. 23-24, has grown from a foulmouthed seedling into something more refined. In 2011, he emerged as the central member of Odd Future, a rap collective whose charged music videos and edgy interviews reshaped artist image-making for a new decade. His latest album, "Flower Boy," traces a mind in transition and a body in constant motion, with confessional stories and baroque production that draw from the best of aughts-era outsider pop.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DURIMEL

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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.

ALA.NI
If you've sat out the past five decades or so of popular music, and believe that the singing tradition began and ended with the theatrical stylings of Julie Andrews and Judy Garland, a breath of fresh air is hiding in plain sight. ALA.NI is a singer in the purest sense, a master of grand cabaret standards who has moved on from her past as a background singer for acts as disparate as Blur, Mary J. Blige, and Andrea Bocelli. Born in London to Grenadian parents, she studied at the distinguished Sylvia Young Theatre School, and broke out with a showstopping set on the BBC live-music series "Later . . . with Jools Holland." Last year, ALA.NI released an album of stripped-down ballads called "You & I," recorded entirely with a vintage nineteen-thirties-era RCA ribbon microphone. Now based in Paris, the singer has performed in the U.S. only a handful of times; her upcoming appearance at Le Poisson Rouge is a rare treat for her budding Stateside audience. *(158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. Feb. 27.)*

Phoebe Bridgers
This Los Angeles singer-songwriter released her début album, "Stranger in the Alps," last year. Raised in Pasadena, she studied vocal jazz and played bass for punk bands while nursing her solo repertoire. Her album title may spawn images of a place cold and remote, but Bridgers delivers stories about people both near and far with a warm conversational tone that recalls influences like Mark Kozelek and Conor Oberst. She has the detailed writing style of the late Lemmy Kilmister, casting street lights under starlight and burning trash on the beach in the same song. She performs with **Soccer Mommy** for two nights at Music Hall of Williamsburg. *(66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. Feb. 22-23.)*

Carla dal Forno
This Australian singer and multi-instrumentalist got her start in her native Melbourne, playing with lo-fi bands while pursuing a degree in fine arts. In 2014, dal Forno began to record her own melancholy, atmospheric electro-pop. Her 2016 début solo album, "You Know What It's Like," was a sleeper hit; she returned last year with four more songs on an EP called "The Garden." The music is dark and gloomy; recently, in an inspired bit of promotion, dal Forno created a playlist for her own funeral, including songs by Brian Eno, Anna Domino, and the Fates. *(Good Room, 98 Meserole Ave., Brooklyn. goodroombk.com. Feb. 26.)*

Emily Reo
The Orlando-born artist and synthesizer specialist Reo declares "Time cast a spell on me" in her twinkling song "Spell," which she recorded for the label Orchid Tapes in the vocoder-harmony style of Imogen Heap's "Hide and Seek." It's a fitting description of the sensation that her music conjures: being outside of time, and yet somehow fully immersed in it. Her 2013 album, "Olive Juice," was entrancing, unfurling with bewitching harmonies and curious percussive patterns. At Silent Barn, she joins the dark pop group **Corey Flood** as they celebrate their EP release, along with **Anna Altman** and **Privacy Issues.** *(603 Bushwick Ave., Brooklyn. silentbarn.org. Feb. 25.)*

Show Me the Body
Julian Cashwan Pratt, the lead singer of this Queens hardcore outfit, steps on photographers—but only the ones who come between the band and the fans. At Show Me the Body's ripping gigs, they reserve the pit for kids without cameras, with Pratt giving deadpan directions to the crowd between shrieks. He and his bandmates put an original spin on the hardcore sound (banjos and rap verses haven't always had a place in the genre) and share a refreshing dedication to the punk tenets of inclusivity and bullheaded productivity. "I'm in the city and I'm ready to fight / K-9, ready to bite," Pratt snarls, staring down a police dog, in "K-9," the band's latest video. Show Me the Body opens for **Lightning Bolt** this week. *(Elsewhere, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebk.com. Feb. 21.)*

DJ Taye
DJ Taye's 2017 single "Burnin Ya Boa" exemplifies the Chicago footwork subgenre of electronic music, mainly through its percussion. Metronomic throbs of bass and handclaps race forward at high speed like gag noisemakers tossed at toes, designed for feet to quick-step around them. Taye and his collaborator DJ Manny handle snatches of piano and saxophone from a recorded sample, tapping out an entirely new melody that bends and sways across three minutes. Taye is one of the youngest members of Chicago's Teklife crew, founded by the late local icon DJ Rashad. The twenty-four-year-old d.j. and producer showcases his city's frantic dance sound at the first installment of a residency curated by the vinyl archivist and producer Quantic. Stay on the dance floor until last call and you'll be able to skip the gym this week. *(Good Room, 98 Meserole Ave., Brooklyn. goodroombk.com. Feb. 22.)*

The Zombies
In the spring of 1967, these British Invasion rockers walked into Abbey Road Studios, where the Beatles had just finished recording "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," and started tracking their own masterpiece, "Odessey and Oracle." The Zombies had a No. 1 U.S. hit ("She's Not There") just three years earlier, but, after failing to replicate that success with subsequent releases, they began plotting their split. Before bowing out, the group wanted to make one last record, and, freed from commercial expectations and outside producers, they created twelve brilliant compositions marked by complex vocal harmonies, lush orchestration, and daring key modulations that rivalled (and in some ways surpassed) the sounds on "Sgt. Pepper's." Initially, "Odessey and Oracle" bombed, and the Zombies followed through on their breakup. Two years later, they scored an unlikely hit with the album's closer, "Time of the Season," which reached No. 3 on the American charts. The Zombies began touring again in 2004; they play three nights at City Winery. *(155 Varick St. 212-608-0555. Feb. 27-28 and March 1.)*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Peter Bernstein
There are plenty of jazz guitarists currently pushing the envelope of the art form, but sometimes expertly performed mainstream picking is the only thing that will do the trick, and Bernstein is the man for the job. A smooth-toned bebopper with an outsized technique (one that the position demands), Bernstein leads a quartet that includes the pianist **Sullivan Fortner,** the bassist **Doug Weiss,** and the drummer **Leon Parker.** *(Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Feb. 20-25.)*

Dave Douglas: Dizzy Atmosphere
The brilliant trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie would have turned a hundred in 2017, but it's never too late to honor one of the principal architects of modern jazz. Douglas, long a spearhead of new jazz, reminds us of his own roots as a trumpeter here, supported by such forward-thinking stalwarts as the guitarist **Bill Frisell,** the trumpeter **Ambrose Akinmusire,** and the pianist **Gerald Clayton.** A reverent take on beloved classics is not to be expected. *(Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 23-24.)*

Carmen Lundy
Considerable critical buzz in the late eighties just wasn't enough to catapult Lundy into the major leagues of jazz vocalists, but perseverance and fierce talent have kept her in the game. Drawing from her well-received 2017 release, "Code Noir," this socially informed singer is joined by the fusion legend **Patrice Rushen** on piano. *(Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Feb. 22-25.)*

Jaleel Shaw and Steve Wilson
There will be plenty of mutual respect—and maybe some spilled blood—as two rangy alto saxophonists, Shaw and Wilson, mix it up. A leathery rhythm section, including the pianist **Bruce Barth** and the bassist **Dezron Douglas,** will be on hand to stimulate the action. *(Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Feb. 20-21.)*

Tierney Sutton
A stylish and canny singer determined to usher the pop and rock auteurs of past decades into the jazz-vocal repertoire, Sutton has delved into the Joni Mitchell songbook, and on her 2016 album, "The Sting Variations," she put her own spin on the work of Gordon Sumner. "Roxanne" didn't make the cut, but such soundtrack-of-a-generation fodder as "Message in a Bottle" and "Fields of Gold" were given new life. *(Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Feb. 20-24.)*

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera
With its mythological take on Christian themes, Richard Wagner's magisterial final opera, **"Parsifal,"** can have a liturgical air, but the conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin suffuses the work with youthful vigor, giving it a warm, affirming glow. His approach creates meaningful tension juxtaposed with François Girard's bleak, postapocalyptic production, in which the anguished Amfortas—sung, in an astonishing performance, by Peter Mattei—is styled as the Fisher King of medieval legend, whose failing health renders the landscape dry, cracked, and desolate. As the young hero Parsifal, the tenor Klaus Florian Vogt sings with a voice as clear as a cornet, bright and unencumbered, to redeem Amfortas and the long-suffering knights of the Holy Grail. René Pape, Evgeny Nikitin, and Evelyn Herlitzius complete the topnotch cast. (John Keenan replaces Nézet-Séguin in the first performance.) *Feb. 23 and Feb. 27 at 6.* • **Also playing:** Met audiences never have to wait long for Franco Zeffirelli's crowd-pleasing production of **"La Bohème"** to reappear on the company's schedule. The latest revival has an excellent cast headed by Sonya Yoncheva (late of the Met's new "Tosca"), Michael Fabiano, Susanna Phillips, and Lucas Meacham; Marco Armiliato, the Met's trusted Italian hand, is on the podium. *Feb. 21 at 7:30 and Feb. 24 at 12:30.* • An early high point of Peter Gelb's tenure, Anthony Minghella's vividly cinematic staging of **"Madama Butterfly"** still feels clean, fresh, and vital more than a decade later. The revival stars Ermonela Jaho, Roberto Aronica, Maria Zifchak, and Roberto Frontali; Armiliato. *Feb. 22 and Feb. 26 at 7:30.* • Rossini's deft and propulsive musical style is so closely identified with his comedies that his serious operas don't get taken all that seriously. Occasionally, however, the Met dusts one of them off as a vehicle for a remarkable talent, and in this season's revival of **"Semiramide"** that singer is the soprano Angela Meade. Taking the titular role of the warrior queen, she leads a first-rate bel-canto cast that includes Elizabeth DeShong, Javier Camarena, Ildar Abdrazakov, and Ryan Speedo Green; Maurizio Benini. *Feb. 24 at 8. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)*

"Oyster"
Alan Lomax was an ethnomusicologist, archivist, and American original who attempted to catalogue and code folk songs using Cantometrics, a numerical system he created. Now, in an ironic twist of fate, the composer Joe Diebes makes music out of Lomax's analysis in this new, experimental opera. Phil Soltanoff stages the work, in which Lomax (played by John Rose) gives a lecture on his findings. *Feb. 20-21 at 8. (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org.)*

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic
In a welcome but stunningly predictable program, Joshua Gessen, the orchestra's talented assistant conductor, earns his stripes with three ultra-canonical works of classical Americana: Barber's melting Adagio for Strings, Bernstein's vibrant Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story," and Copland's magisterial Third Symphony. *Feb. 22 at 7:30 and Feb. 23-24 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

Paul Jacobs at St. Paul's Chapel
The commanding young organist, on the Juilliard faculty, comes to the chapel of Trinity Church Wall Street to play the new Organ Concerto by a distinguished colleague, Christopher Rouse, known for his burly but deeply expressive scores. It's part of a week of concerts inaugurating the chapel's new Noack three-manual pipe organ; works by Julian Wachner and Poulenc (the Organ Concerto) are also on the program, with Wachner conducting the excellent orchestral forces of NOVUS NY. *Feb. 22 at 1. (Broadway at Fulton St. No tickets required.)*

Ekmeles
Jeffrey Gavett's intrepid (and highly skilled) chamber choir brings the subtle, wild, and carefully modulated sounds of microtonal music (in new and recent works by Marc Sabat, Erin Gee, Rebecca Saunders, and Cat Lamb) to what should be an evocative venue in Hamilton Heights—the crypt of the Church of the Intercession, which in recent years has become one of uptown's most distinctive concert spaces. *Feb. 22 at 7:30. (Broadway at 155th St. ekmeles.com. Tickets at the door.)*

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra
The conductor Gustavo Dudamel, renowned for his exciting style, gets a chance to plumb the depths of German music by leading one of that repertory's most august interpreters in a trio of concerts—without concerto soloists—at Carnegie Hall. The first program is all Brahms (including the Symphony No. 1 in C Minor), the second delivers showstoppers by Mahler (the Adagio from the Symphony No. 10) and Berlioz (the "Symphonie Fantastique"), and the third offers a very unexpected work by Charles Ives (the rambunctious Second Symphony) along with a Tchaikovsky staple (the Symphony No. 4 in F Minor). *Feb. 23-24 at 8 and Feb. 25 at 2. (212-247-7800.)*

Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra
Once in a while, a fine American orchestra of regional rank makes an appearance at Carnegie Hall, usually to advance a novel musical cause. The Louisiana Philharmonic, in its Carnegie début, hitches its star to the great wagon of Philip Glass, who is the hall's composer-in-residence this season. The able Carlos Miguel Prieto conducts Glass's "Days and Nights in Rocinha" and Concerto Fantasy for Two Timpanists and Orchestra, as well as another work of irresistible percussive power, Revueltas's "Night of the Mayas." *Feb. 27 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

RECITALS

Emanuel Ax, Leonidas Kavakos, and Yo-Yo Ma
Three of the paramount musicians of our time—on piano, violin, and cello, respectively, and each with an indelible style—make some celebrity chamber music together, climbing three of the big mountains of the repertory: the piano trios of Johannes Brahms. *Feb. 22 at 8. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

Dante Boon
Boon, a young Dutch pianist and composer, shows an uncommon affinity for music that demands patience, steady hands, and a subtle touch, qualities found in abundance on his transfixing 2017 recording of "La Présence, les Silences," a major forty-one-minute work by the Swiss composer Jürg Frey. That piece will anchor Boon's Brooklyn recital, which also includes première performances of works by Tom Johnson, Dean Rosenthal, and Michael Vincent Waller. *Feb. 23 at 8:30. (Spectrum, 70 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn. spectrumnyc.com.)*

New York Polyphony
Performances of early-music repertoire can sometimes sound anemic, but the four men in this Grammy-nominated vocal ensemble sing with warmth and richness. The tenor Andrew Fuchs and the bass-baritone Jonathan Woody join the quartet in a program, presented by Miller Theatre, that includes works by Tallis (the exquisite Lamentations I and II and the powerful "Suscipe quaeso"), as well as works by Byrd and by Andrew Smith, a contemporary composer of sacred music. *Feb. 24 at 8. (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799.)*

Ensemble Dal Niente
On "Assemblage," a CD issued on New World Records last year, this Chicago-based new-music group poured its exuberant vitality and expressiveness into chamber works by the celebrated composer, trombonist, and Columbia University professor George Lewis. The ensemble now brings the same program to life at the Metropolitan Museum, with Lewis on hand for a post-concert discussion. (Lewis will also chat with the scholar Robert O'Meally about the current exhibition "Birds of a Feather: Joseph Cornell's Homage to Juan Gris," on the morning of the concert.) *Feb. 25 at 2. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)*

Danish String Quartet
The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center proudly presents this outstanding group, which has made a true niche for itself with its unvarnished but elegant sound and its astute programming of modern, classic, and folk-derived music. Works by Haydn and Brahms, along with the "Hunt" Quartets of Mozart (1784) and Jörg Widmann (2003), are featured. *Feb. 25 at 5. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)*

Mitsuko Uchida
The pianist, an artist of luminosity and unforced power, takes to her favorite New York haunt—Carnegie Hall—to essay three of the great sonatas of Schubert, with the gentle Sonata in A Major (D. 664) bookended by the more imposing sonatas in C Minor (D. 958) and G Major (D. 894). *Feb. 26 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

Ars Longa
The vanguard group of the Cuban early-music scene returns to Gotham after a sold-out début in 2017. This time, its program centers on *villancicos* by the eighteenth-century Cuban maestro Esteban Salas, as well as additional Baroque works from Bolivia, Mexico, and Peru. *Feb. 27 at 6. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets required.)*

Garrick Ohlsson
Ohlsson, a veteran pianist of both muscularity and keen insight, returns to Lincoln Center to offer an all-Beethoven program that features four of the composer's most popular sonatas: the "Pathétique," the "Appassionata," the "Waldstein," and the "Moonlight." *Feb. 27 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500.)*

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Tarsila do Amaral's 1928 painting "Abaporu" was so radical in its day that it inspired a manifesto.

COURTESY TARSILA DO AMARAL LICENCIAMENTOS

Tropiclia

MOMA introduces New York to Brazil's original modernist.

Some artists are so iconic, they're known by only one name: Brancusi, Léger, Tarsila. Wait, who? The painter Tarsila do Amaral is so famous in her native Brazil that forty-three years after her death she helped close out the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, when a projected pattern of red-orange-yellow arcs graced the stadium floor, an homage to her 1929 painting "Setting Sun." That chimerical landscape—stylized sunset above tubular cacti and a herd of capybaras that shape-shift into boulders—hangs now at MOMA, in the artist's first-ever museum exhibition in the U.S., "Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil." (It's on view until June 3.)

New Yorkers have had a crash course in Brazilian art in recent months, between Lygia Pape's subversive geometries, at the Met Breuer, and the sand-in-your-toes installations of Hélio Oiticica, at the Whitney. Neither would have been conceivable without the pathbreaking work of Tarsila, who synthesized the volumetric treatment of the human form, which she encountered in the studios of Léger and others in Paris, and the vibrant visual culture of her home country, in an art that still feels open-ended. She was born on a coffee plantation outside of São Paulo, in 1886, and seemed destined for the conventional life of a daughter of privilege—marrying a doctor, having a child—until her marriage unravelled, in her late twenties, and art became her full-time passion. From 1920, when she enrolled in Paris's famed Académie Julian, until the stock market crash of 1929, which reversed her fortunes, she lived between Europe and Brazil.

The show doesn't stint on process-revealing black-and-white drawings or biographical ephemera (look for a photo of Tarsila in Paris, with a group that includes a wild-looking Brancusi, hanging out in a boat). But the paintings are the main event. These include cartoon-bright scenes set in a railway station, a hilltop favela, and a carnival, all intentionally flirting with folkloric kitsch. More significant are the perversely proportioned nudes. The earliest is "A Negra," from 1923, a monumentalized cross-legged woman, situated against horizontal bands of brown, green, and blue; she could be the Afro-Brazilian cousin of a Cézanne bather. (For a deep dive into this idea, read the invaluable catalogue essay by Stephanie D'Alessandro, who co-curated the show with Luis Pérez-Oramas.) That figure morphed, in 1928, into what is arguably Tarsila's most important picture, "Abaporu." Seated in a stripped-down landscape—green ground, a greener saguaro, blue sky, and a lemon-yellow disk that splits the difference between flower and sun—the subject is portrayed in the pose of a thinker, with a tiny head resting on a spindly arm and a monstrously swollen foot, as if the intellect were dwarfed by the body's sensations.

"Abaporu" was made as a gift to Tarsila's second husband, the poet Oswaldo de Andrade, who was galvanized by its brazenly tropical modernism to write the "Manifesto of Anthropophagy," a call to cannibalize foreign influences; it resounded in Brazilian culture for decades. This sublimely weird show is an eye-opening corrective to an art history that has treated key chapters—those that aren't Eurocentric—as if they were written in invisible ink. As Andrade wrote in his manifesto, "Joy is the decisive test."

—*Andrea K. Scott*

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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Frick Collection
"Zurbarán's Jacob and His Twelve Sons: Paintings from Auckland Castle"
Francisco de Zurbarán was the second-best painter in seventeenth-century Spain—no disgrace when the champion, his Seville-born near-exact contemporary, happened to be Diego Velázquez, who arguably remains better than anybody, ever. In this room-filling show, thirteen life-size imagined portraits, painted by Zurbarán circa 1640-45, constitute a terrific feat of Baroque storytelling: the movies of their day. Each character has a distinct personality, uniquely posed, costumed, and accessorized, and towering against a bright, clouded sky. All appear in the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis, in which the dying Jacob prophesies the fates of the founders-to-be of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. After nearly four centuries, the canvases sorely need cleaning. The brilliance of their colors has dimmed, notably in passages of brocade and other sumptuous fabrics—a forte of Zurbarán, whose father was a haberdasher. But most of the pictures retain power aplenty. Spend time with them, half an hour minimum. Their glories bloom slowly, as you register the formal decisions that practically spring the figures from their surfaces into the room with you, and as you ponder, if you will, the stories that they plumb. *Through April 22.*

New Museum
"Anna Craycroft: Motion Into Being"
Step off the elevator on the museum's fifth floor and enter a mysterious, grayscale diorama—the set for Craycroft's stop-motion animation. Craycroft has created an enlarged version of the vintage technology known as a "setback" camera, a twentieth-century innovation that films animation cells on a horizontal plane, allowing drawn shapes and characters to appear to move in three-dimensional space. In one area, a long table lined with geometric forms is theatrically lit, evoking Bauhaus stage scenery; in another, viewers can sit down and watch a flickering, text-based video work that elucidates the surprising raison d'être for the project, in which the artist confronts such thorny legal and ethical issues as whether "personhood" should be granted to corporations. And, if so, why not extend that right to ecosystems? Through animation, we imagine talking animals and singing trees; Craycroft uses the medium to ponder the idea that we might consider such organisms people. *Through May 13.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Amy Sillman
The New York painter, who is also known for her forays into sculpture, animation, and zine-making (her latest issue is available by the door for a dollar), seems to confine herself enthusiastically to a single medium here, but pay attention: she's still blurring lines. More than two dozen works on paper are installed single file around the town-house rooms, their frames almost touching. (A larger unframed work is wryly pinned above the fireplace mantel.) The dense abstractions have both speed and spontaneity, with grand swipes of the brush and squirrelly black lines, but also a seductive trickery, with transparent screen-printed layers functioning as scratchy backgrounds, jagged veils, or both. It's difficult to discern which gestures are painted and which are printed—until a downcast cartoon face or a sneakered foot appears again in a neighboring drawing, the charming glimmers of figuration that are Sillman's calling card. *Through March 3. (Gladstone 64, 130 E. 64th St. 212-753-2200.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

"Of Earth and Heaven: Art from the Middle Ages"
In a refreshing deviation from standard gallery fare, this exhibition features European works from the twelfth through the sixteenth century—gory and ornate renderings of Biblical themes, with all the visual hyperbole and perspectival weirdness one could hope for. Organized with the British art dealer Sam Fogg, the show brings together a range of privately held treasures, including a life-size wood sculpture of the crucified Christ from thirteenth-century Spain, with a supernaturally long rib cage and maroon paint drizzling from his wounds. Nicolás Falcó's lush painting, made circa 1510-20, is just as breathtaking: the sage Christ child perches on the shoulder of a gilt-haloed Saint Christopher, who stands shin-deep in dark water. Majestic limestone sections from Canterbury Cathedral may be touted as the centerpiece, but it's a stained-glass triptych, glowing in the darkened back room, that steals the show. *Through March 10. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Jesse Darling
Hidden behind a torn shower curtain, the show's unnerving standout is "Comfort Station," a folding commode that Darling, who divides his time between London and Berlin, has outfitted with uneven legs—it looks as if it's trying to crawl away. A pair of smaller aluminum works, both titled "Collapsed Cane," feature similarly surreal distortions. These modified medical aids land first as slapstick. Then they instill some sense of dismay: after all, our bodies are designed to break down. *Through March 11. (Chapter, 249 E. Houston St. 347-528-4397.)*

"Mature Themes"
The infantile carnality of cartoons unites this entertaining seven-artist show, curated by John Garcia. Some works have an understated creepiness, including Kiki Kogelnik's 1970 sculpture "Untitled (Hanging)," a human silhouette cut out of white vinyl and folded over a clothes hanger, and Brian Kokoska's "Love Triangle (Goofy Cage Slave)," in which a powder-blue cartoon dog appears to twerk inside a cage, for the benefit of two Teddy bears. "Judith DreamWeapon," a painted-polyurethane sculpture by Erika Vogt, dangling from the ceiling and onto the floor, suggests a Brobdingnagian charm bracelet. The show's sleeper highlight is the scattering of delightfully grotesque ceramic figurines by Chelsey Pettyjohn. *Through Feb. 25. (Foxy Production, 2 E. Broadway. 212-239-2758.)*

MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

Born in Flames
Lizzie Borden's fierce and trenchant political fantasy, from 1983, is set in New York ten years after a second American revolution, peaceful yet drastic, which has brought about democratic socialism and sparked new conflicts centered on race and gender. Two underground feminist radio stations are in competition—one led by Honey (played by the actress of the same name), a black woman who considers the revolution unfulfilled, and another by the white lesbian musician Isabelle (Adele Bertei), whose activism is cultural. Meanwhile, the vigilante Women's Army patrols the city by bicycle, a government employment program leads to riots, and three female journalists (one of whom is played by Kathryn Bigelow) report on divisions within the socialist movement. After an activist (Jean Satterfield) dies in police custody, the feminist theoretician Zella Wylie (played by the activist and writer Flo Kennedy) calls for direct action to get the message out in the only way that matters—on television. Borden's exhilarating collage-like story stages news reports, documentary sequences, and surveillance footage alongside tough action scenes and musical numbers; her violent vision is both ideologically complex and chilling.—*Richard Brody (MOMA, Feb. 25 and Feb. 27, and streaming.)*

Double Lover
If François Ozon had set out to infuriate the psychiatric profession, he couldn't have done a more efficient job. Chloé (Marine Vacth), suffering from inexplicable stomach pains, consults a shrink named Paul (Jérémie Renier), who not only cures her but, in a triumph for transference, moves in with her. One day, she sees him in the street; in fact, it's not him but his twin brother, Louis (Renier again), also a shrink, of whom she was unaware. She consults him, too, whereupon he abuses her, verbally and physically; her decision to return for more may be the point at which some viewers, now more than ever, will have had enough. With leading performances that verge on the robotic, and a steady accumulation of mirror images and split screens, the movie feels so calculated that Ozon often seems to be working out an equation rather than tracking any credible relationships. The macabre comedy that David Cronenberg extracted from a similar setup, in "Dead Ringers" (1988), is largely absent here, though there is a freakish beauty to Ozon's carnal inventions, not least in the foursome involving both brothers and a double helping of Chloé. With Jacqueline Bisset. Based on a novel by Joyce Carol Oates. In French.—*Anthony Lane (In limited release.)*

The 15:17 to Paris
With wide-eyed wonder, Clint Eastwood tells the real-life story of three young American men who, in 2015, thwarted a terrorist attack aboard a train bound for Paris. His admiration and astonishment are embodied in his gonzo casting of the three men—Spencer Stone, Anthony Sadler, and Alek Skarlatos—as themselves. (All first-time actors, they perform with lively earnestness.) The attack takes only about ten minutes of screen time; most of the film traces their friendship, starting in middle school, in Sacramento, in 2005, when the three boys, disdained and angry, bond—and become obsessed with playing war. After some floundering, Spencer and Alek enter military service; Anthony goes to college. The three young men take a jaunty

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summer trip through Europe and, as if they've been training for it, they make history. Eastwood's film (written by Dorothy Blyskal) only masquerades as a drama; it's a thesis about the traits that forge the men's heroism. There's also a bit of politics—a view of social trends that foster or frustrate the men's best qualities—but it hardly figures in Eastwood's briskly ecstatic vision of the lives of secular saints.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Loveless
The new movie from Andrei Zvyagintsev, who made "The Return" (2003) and "Leviathan" (2014), is no less bleak than its precursors. Alyosha (Matvey Novikov), age twelve, is the only child of Zhenya (Maryana Spivak) and Boris (Aleksey Rozin), whose marriage is inches away from collapse. They all still live together, just about, in a Moscow apartment block, but each adult has a lover (Boris's girlfriend is pregnant), leaving no one around to love the boy. When he vanishes, it takes his parents a while to notice, and longer still to panic. The police are unable to help; as so often in Zvyagintsev's films, the state is at best incompetent and at worst oppressively corrupt. Instead, it is volunteers who start a search, and the camera prowls with them through empty woodlands and the husks of ruined buildings—a dank rebuke to the new existence, adorned with cell phones and exercise machines, that Zhenya covets. As in Antonioni's "L'Avventura" (1960), the plot feels at once gripping and open-ended, but that film's mood of cool mystery is supplanted here by an atmosphere of hopelessness and spite. In Russian.—*A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/12 & 19/18.) (In limited release.)*

The Party
The British writer and director Sally Potter's cinematic playlet gathers a remarkable cast for a frenzied but narrow one-set comedic drama. Janet (Kristin Scott Thomas), a veteran politician, has just won a long-desired appointment as her party's shadow Health Minister. She hosts a gathering to celebrate, but her husband, Bill (Timothy Spall), sits in stone-faced silence while playing d.j. with his sophisticated collection of LPs. Then, friends arrive: the cynical April (Patricia Clarkson) and her New Age-y husband, Gottfried (Bruno Ganz); the scholarly Martha (Cherry Jones) and her much younger wife, Jinny (Emily Mortimer); and the banker Tom (Cillian Murphy), who shows up without his wife but with a pistol. The revelations start flying, at a bewildering pace: a terminal illness, a pregnancy, an affair or two, a long-ago romance. Filming in black-and-white, keeping the pace brisk and the tone stage-loud as if angling for the balcony, Potter presses plenty of action into the seventy-minute span, but none of the life-changing confessions or outsized gestures seem substantial or deep-rooted; the movie's ideas and impulses are a grab bag of bourgeois-bohemian emblems.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Permission
Will, played by Dan Stevens, and Anna, played by Rebecca Hall, are a couple. Will loves Anna. Anna, um, loves Will. Will and Anna live in Brooklyn, played by Brooklyn. Will and Anna have good but not shattering sex, somewhere around a 5.6 on the Richter scale. Anna can't help imagining what it would be like to sleep around and, you know, maybe hit an 8.8. Will is unconvinced, but he goes along with her because he's a nice guy. Or an idiot. Such is the premise of Brian Crano's romantic comedy, which is fitfully comic, and from which the romance—of the conventional kind, at least—soon leaks away. Paired with Will and Anna are her brother Hale (David Joseph Craig) and his partner, Reece (Morgan Spector), who have issues of their own, including Hale's fervid wish to adopt a child. The film, despite the agonizing of its central figures, melts like a lemon drop the moment you've seen it, and the most fun seems to be had by Lydia, an adventuress who takes her pleasures neat, snapping up Will along the way, and who gives Gina Gershon her most succulent role in quite a while.—*A.L. (2/12 & 19/18) (In limited release.)*

Phantom Thread
The role taken by Daniel Day-Lewis in Paul Thomas Anderson's strange and sumptuous film—the actor's final screen appearance, he has claimed—is, in every sense, tailor-made. He plays Reynolds Woodcock, a fashion designer of the nineteen-fifties, who, in the London house that he shares with his sister Cyril (Lesley Manville), creates immaculate dresses for a selection of wealthy women. As devout as a priest in his calling, he seems to resent any intrusion upon his professional peace, yet he invites a waitress named Alma (Vicky Krieps) into his life as a model, and, eventually, as far more. The result is a pact as perilous and as claustrophobic as that between the guru and his disciple in Anderson's "The Master" (2012), with the camera closing in remorselessly on stricken or adoring faces, and a strong tincture of sickness in the romantic atmosphere. All three leading players respond with rigor to this Hitchcockian intensity, and Reynolds—fussy, cold, and agonized—is a worthy addition to Day-Lewis's gallery of obsessives. The costumes, every bit as alluring as you would expect, are by Mark Bridges, and Jonny Greenwood contributes a swooning score.—*A.L. (1/8/18) (In wide release.)*

The Silence
This 1963 drama by Ingmar Bergman begins with one of the director's signature sequences: a boy (Jörgen Lindström) riding with two women in a compartment of a train breaks free and beholds, with frozen wonder, an ominous transport of tanks on the opposite track. One of the women, Anna (Gunnel Lindblom), is his mother; the other, Ester (Ingrid Thulin), is her sister, whose coughing jags force the group to leave the train in a strange city and stay in a desolate, palatial hotel while she tries to recuperate. In a country where they don't speak the language (one invented by Bergman), the women endure their monotonous isolation by contriving hothouse passions, playing erotic games, and unleashing pent-up resentments, all in the presence of the blankly bewildered boy. Bergman unfolds grand themes—childhood and its mute sensibility, adulthood and its unhealed emotional wounds—in highly inflected images, which have an anguished intensity unseen since the age of silent films. In Swedish.—*R.B. (Film Forum, Feb. 23, and streaming.)*

The Young Karl Marx
This biographical drama melts five crucial years in the life of a revolutionary into the buttery batter of a romantic bio-pic. The action runs from 1843 to 1848 and follows the twentysomething journalist Karl (August Diehl) and his wife, Jenny (Vicky Krieps), from Prussia to Paris, where he encounters Friedrich Engels (Stefan Konarske), the wealthy son of a textile manufacturer, whose study of English laborers is abetted by his romance with Mary Burns (Hannah Steele), an Irish factory worker. Exiled to Brussels by the French government for his political agitation, Karl tries to turn his ideas into a movement. As Karl struggles with poverty and Friedrich struggles with his family, they both head to London and plot to take over a secret international society of workers. The director, Raoul Peck, who wrote the script with Pascal Bonitzer, looks admiringly on Karl's principled revolutionary ardor while highlighting the alluring folly of his theoretical ideals. Marx comes off, above all, as a supreme tactician whose empathy remains abstract; the movie's hidden hero is the radical humanist Wilhelm Weitling (Alexander Scheer), who foresees destructive violence arising from Marx's ideological purity. The movie's plush, cozy aesthetic and unintentionally funny melodrama are at odds with its subjects: revolt, theory, originality, and observation.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

SNAP STILLS/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Technicolor palette is nearly a co-star of the 1953 film noir "Niagara," alongside Marilyn Monroe, who plays a scheming woman married to a mentally ill war veteran. It screens Feb. 21 at MOMA.

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THE THEATRE

In "The Low Road," the author of "Clybourne Park" melds Henry Fielding and Monty Python.

The Misanthrope

The playwright Bruce Norris turns his jaundiced eye on free-market capitalism.

"I screwed up my back yesterday, so if I'm grimacing that's why," the playwright Bruce Norris said recently. Norris has a reputation as a grimacer, at least in the way he expresses his acidic world view onstage. Best known for his Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning "Clybourne Park" (2010), a disenchanted gloss on "A Raisin in the Sun," he is often said to make his liberal audiences squirm. His 2006 comedy, "The Pain and the Itch," so effectively satirized an NPR-loving, Bush-hating bourgeois family that friends of friends started calling him "that Republican playwright."

In fact, he said, "I'm a big economic lefty," which should become clear from his new play, "The Low Road," in previews at the Public Theatre. Commissioned by London's Royal Court Theatre, where it ran in 2013, the play is a historical parable that lampoons the eighteenth-century roots of free-market capitalism, with a cast of eighteen playing characters including Adam Smith. Norris described it as a parody of a Henry Fielding novel, charting a young man's progress in life, but it draws on everything from Monty Python to the "Capitalism for Beginners" book he owned as a child. (He grew up in blue-blooded Houston, where his family attended the same church as the Bushes.)

The real inspiration, though, was the ascendance of Paul Ryan during the 2012 Presidential race. "I just kept having this nausea during that election," he said, "because that man with those cold, soulless blue eyes was articulating this horrifying vision—and there were people who were persuaded by it." Not that he expects theatre to solve our societal ills. "I would never say that my impact on the world has been a positive one, because I'm so horrified at the naked hypocrisy. Look at where we're sitting!" (We were at the Time Warner Center, near where "The Low Road" was in rehearsal.) "Everything about what we do is just world-destroying."

Norris, who is fifty-seven, became a playwright to escape being an actor. In 1987, he starred in a short-lived sitcom called "The Popcorn Kid," as a concessions boy at a movie theatre. He recalled a photographer chastising him during a promotional shoot: "I was not making enough of an ecstatic, toothy smile, and he kept yelling at me, 'Wipe that irony off your face!'" Staring down a future of being typecast as the "awkward juvenile, stupid dad, or nasty bureaucrat," he wrote a play called "The Actor Retires," first staged in Chicago in 1991. He began working with Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre Company and dated the director Mary Zimmerman, an ensemble member, until they broke up and he moved to New York, in the mid-nineties. Soon after, he received a commission from Steppenwolf, which has premièred six of his plays.

As for winning the Pulitzer, he recalled having an eight-hour window of satisfaction before thinking, "That was the apex of my life, and clearly everything is downhill from here." A committed pessimist, Norris feels alienated from his political kin. "I wouldn't call myself a progressive," he said, "because progress is an illusion." Cue that grimace.

—*Michael Schulman*

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMIE COE

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Amateurs
Jordan Harrison's comedy, directed by Oliver Butler, follows a theatre troupe trying to stay ahead of the Black Death in fourteenth-century Europe. With Quincy Tyler Bernstine, Michael Cyril Creighton, and Thomas Jay Ryan. *(Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. In previews. Opens Feb. 27.)*

Angels in America
Andrew Garfield, Nathan Lane, and Lee Pace star in the National Theatre's revival of Tony Kushner's epic two-part drama about New Yorkers living through the nineteen-eighties AIDS epidemic. Directed by Marianne Elliott. *(Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929. Previews begin Feb. 23.)*

Edward Albee's At Home at the Zoo: Homelife & The Zoo Story
Lila Neugebauer directs Albee's diptych of one-act plays: his 1959 classic "The Zoo Story" and its 2004 companion piece, "Homelife." *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Opens Feb. 21.)*

Frozen
Disney brings its hit film to the stage, with songs by Robert Lopez and Kristen Anderson-Lopez. Caissie Levy and Patti Murin play the sisters Elsa and Anna in Michael Grandage's production. *(St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 866-870-2717. Previews begin Feb. 22.)*

Hello, from the Children of Planet Earth
The Playwrights Realm stages Don Nguyen's comedy, in which a lesbian couple trying to have a baby ask a friend who works at NASA to be their sperm donor. *(The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Previews begin Feb. 24.)*

Jerry Springer—The Opera
Richard Thomas ("Anna Nicole") and Stewart Lee wrote this musical ode to the talk-show host, staged at London's National Theatre in 2003. John Rando directs the New Group's production, featuring Terrence Mann and Will Swenson. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews. Opens Feb. 22.)*

Later Life
Keen Company revives A. R. Gurney's 1993 romantic comedy, directed by Jonathan Silverstein, about two middle-aged guests at a cocktail party who consider rekindling a flame from thirty years earlier. *(Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Feb. 27.)*

An Ordinary Muslim
In Hammaad Chaudry's play, directed by Jo Bonney, a Pakistani-British couple navigate religious doctrine, their families' expectations, and Western secular culture. *(New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. In previews. Opens Feb. 26.)*

They, Themself and Schmerm
The transgender actor Becca Blackwell performs this solo comic confessional dealing with gender, molestation, and a self-produced video by the child star Corey Haim. *(Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Feb. 22.)*

Three Tall Women
Glenda Jackson, Laurie Metcalf, and Alison Pill play the same woman at different ages in Edward Albee's play, which won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Joe Mantello directs. *(Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Feb. 27.)*

NOW PLAYING

America Is Hard to See
Life Jacket Theatre Company ("Gorey: The Secret Lives of Edward Gorey") introduces us to a strange community that could only be American. The writer-director Travis Russ put together this lovely show, drawing on interviews that his New York-based company conducted in Miracle Village, Florida, a small settlement populated with convicted sex offenders. Dodging prurience and judgment, the piece, dotted with brief songs by Priscilla Holbrook, is a deceptively gentle look at redemption, faith (a local pastor emerges as a charismatic character), and what makes a community. Discomfort slowly seeps in as you find yourself sympathizing with some of the men, just as you remember that these seemingly nice guys were described as proficient liars. Under its plain exterior—the stage is nearly bare, the tone willfully low-key—the play is a heartbreaking, complicated portrait of people adrift. *(HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 866-811-4111. Through Feb. 24.)*

Fill Fill Fill Fill Fill Fill Fill
After her rock-star boyfriend dumps her onstage in the middle of a concert, Joni throws herself into the single life. She conjures an entire relationship with a waiter in the span of five minutes, finds herself in a threesome with a swinging couple, and somehow ends up on a game show produced by her roommate's boyfriend. You might say that Joni, played as a sweet, goofy dork by Sarah Chalfie, is trying to fill fill fill the hole in her life. As its title indicates, Steph Del Rosso's new comedy of millennial manners is in constant overdrive, and the director, Marina McClure, doubles down with a madcap staging that's difficult to sustain. Del Rosso doesn't seem to know how to wrap up Joni's story, either, and she abruptly ends the show just as it's finding its groove. *(Flea, 20 Thomas St. 212-226-0051.)*

Flight
Created by the Scottish company Vox Motus and based on a novel by Caroline Brothers, this unclassifiable experience narrates the attempt of two young brothers to escape from Kabul to London. The presentation is profoundly imaginative: each audience member sits in a private booth around a black carrousel that conveys a succession of hundreds of gorgeously designed miniature dioramas, which in sequence tell the story of the boys' two-year journey. Each vignette is a still-life, but an immersive soundtrack of dialogue, narration, music, and effects, delivered by headphones, fully animates the scenes. You could call it theatre, or art installation, or some mad hybrid of comic book, peepshow, and radio play; one audience member was overheard describing it as "analog virtual reality." No matter the name, it's unforgettable in both content and form, a devastating concatenation of dreams and nightmares on the run. *(The Heath at the McKittrick Hotel, 542 W. 27th St. 212-564-1662.)*

In the Body of the World
Eve Ensler ("The Vagina Monologues") has built a career on body positivity. But what happens when the body turns against you? Ten years ago, as she was working with a doctor helping Congolese women who had been raped, Ensler was diagnosed with uterine cancer. Tests, chemotherapy, and a reckoning with mortality ensued. Now Ensler recalls that experience in a solo outing that's been given a beautiful Manhattan Theatre Club production by the director Diane Paulus ("Waitress") and the set designer Myung Hee Cho. Ensler isn't a great actor—she mostly sticks to an unflaggingly chipper tone—but she is a canny raconteur who toggles between blunt descriptions and fuzzy-wuzzy feels, the personal and the political, the micro and the macro. Spontaneous applause greets Ensler's arias of self-empowerment, but ultimately this superficial, feel-good show makes as much of a lasting impression as a warm bath. *(City Center Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)*

[Porto]
Kate Benson's play is a deconstructed rom-com and a stealth heartbreaker. It's set in a "boushy" bar, with characters named after drinks or occupations. ("Boushy," an unseen narrator explains, is a portmanteau of bourgeois and douchey.) After a gruesome monologue on sausage-making, Porto (played by Julia Sirna-Frest, with a tremulous mixture of hope and resignation) perches on a stool, anticipating another Malbec-fuelled night. She sees Hennepin (Jorge Cordova), a cute guy forking up his first taste of foie gras. Hennepin spots Dry Sac (Leah Karpel), Porto's flighty, blotto best friend. And Porto has to decide if it's even worth wanting him. "I don't know how to do that," she says, "make something with someone else that isn't going to kill me." The play is messy, but it should be. Work, booze, books, chat, doubt, faith, desire: this is how the sausage of adult life gets made. *(McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 866-811-4111.)*

Returning to Reims
The French philosopher Didier Eribon's memoir about growing up working-class and gay in the French provinces doesn't sound like promising terrain for the stage. But this import from Berlin's Schaubühne doesn't so much adapt as complement the text. In this conceit, the quietly magnetic Nina Hoss ("Homeland") portrays an actress recording the voice-over for a documentary based on Eribon's book. Halfway through, the play, directed by Thomas Ostermeier, changes tack, and the character intervenes in the story by bringing up Hoss's own real-life father, a Communist welder turned parliamentarian. The seemingly dry subject matter relies heavily on political and sociological theories—Marxist historical materialism comes up, and there is a Noam Chomsky joke—and the evolution of European leftist politics. But the questioning production, which deftly incorporates new and archival footage, never feels less than compassionately human. *(St. Ann's Warehouse, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Feb. 25.)*

ALSO NOTABLE

Balls 59E59. *Through Feb. 25.* • **The Band's Visit** Ethel Barrymore. • **Bright Colors and Bold Patterns** SoHo Playhouse. • **Cardinal** Second Stage. *Through Feb. 25.* • **Disco Pigs** Irish Repertory. • **Farinelli and the King** Belasco. • **Fire and Air** Classic Stage Company. • **Hangmen** Atlantic Theatre Company. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **John Lithgow: Stories by Heart** American Airlines Theatre. • **Latin History for Morons** Studio 54. *Through Feb. 25.* • **Miles for Mary** Playwrights Horizons. *Through Feb. 25.* • **Once on This Island** Circle in the Square. • **The Parisian Woman** Hudson. • **SpongeBob SquarePants** Palace. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr. • **X: Or, Betty Shabazz v. the Nation** Theatre at St. Clement's. *Through Feb. 25.*

РЕЛИЗ ГРУППЫ "What's News" VK.COM/WSNWS

DANCE

New York City Ballet
The company returns to fertile ground with a program of Balanchine works set to the music of Igor Stravinsky. Balanchine first tackled "Le Baiser de la Fée" in 1937, though the more or less abstract version presented here dates from the 1972 Stravinsky Festival, as do "Duo Concertant" and "Symphony in Three Movements." "Agon" is a pathbreaking example of ballet modernism, from 1957. • Feb. 20-22 at 7:30 and Feb. 23 at 8: "Romeo + Juliet." • Feb. 24 at 2 and Feb. 27 at 7:30: "Divertimento from 'Le Baiser de la Fée,' " "Agon," "Duo Concertant," and "Symphony in Three Movements." • Feb. 24 at 8 and Feb. 25 at 3: "Neverwhere," "Mothership," "The Decalogue," and "Namouna, a Grand Divertissement." *(David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through March 4.)*

Jennifer Monson
Monson is an exceptional improviser, unprepossessing yet shamanic. Doing almost nothing, she can maintain the suspenseful aura of someone who might do anything. "Bend the Even," her latest project, is concerned with shifts of sound, light, and motion that are barely perceptible, like the exact moment when dawn becomes day. The performance's gratifications are likely to be subtle, intangible, evanescent. *(The Chocolate Factory, 5-49 49th Ave., Long Island City. 866-811-4111. Feb. 20-24.)*

Bebe Miller Company & Susan Rethorst
"The Making Room," which premières at New York Live Arts, is just one part of an ongoing project that brings together two veterans of the downtown dance scene. Both of them are known for enigmatic works that combine everyday movement with imagery that alludes to hidden stories and private experiences. The evening includes pieces by each choreographer, as well as a conversation about their collaboration. *(219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 21-24.)*

Tatyana Tenenbaum
A singing voice produces vibrations that are both sound and motion. This is the relationship that Tenenbaum examines and exaggerates in her formally playful works. Her drive toward abstraction, in tension with the emotional tug of conventional musical theatre, produces an intriguing energy. In her newest effort, "Untitled Work for Voice," that tension acquires a political cast, in a kind of backstage musical that grapples with white guilt. *(Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Feb. 22-24.)*

Panta Rei Dansteater / "Lullaby"
This intimate work—a meditation on masculinity—brings Norway's Panta Rei Dansteater to the U.S. for the first time. Three men, dressed in work trousers and button-down shirts, engage in a series of visceral interactions, ranging from tender to conversational to combative. The partnering is fluid, unspooling like a succession of run-on sentences. A pianist and a cellist, also male, accompany the action with music by the composer Sverre Indris Joner; many of the melodies are drawn from lullabies that originated in countries President George W. Bush called the "axis of evil." *(Schimmel Center, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 212-346-1715. Feb. 23-24.)*

Abby Z and the New Utility
Abby Zbikowski's "Abandoned Playground" is a hard-core workout, a team effort in endurance. Nine dancers in gym shorts and knee pads go all out—jerking, jabbing, hurling, spinning, launching, crashing. For an hour, they breathe hard and grunt and urge one another to never give up. When the work débuted, last April, its sweaty intensity caused a stir. This reprise run, opening the 2018 Harkness Dance Festival, at the 92nd Street Y, offers another chance to see what won the young choreographer a Bessie Award. *(Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 23-24.)*

"Works & Process" / Washington Ballet
Before becoming the artistic director of Washington Ballet, in 2016, Julie Kent had a long and illustrious career with American Ballet Theatre. Now she has commissioned a work from an A.B.T. colleague, the rising choreographer Gemma Bond. This preview event combines excerpts from the new ballet, which will début in March, with a discussion between Kent and Bond moderated by the dance critic (and *New Yorker* contributor) Marina Harss. *(Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Feb. 25-26.)*

ABOVE & BEYOND

Entrepreneurs Festival
For the seventh year running, New York University invites business-owning alumni to share advice and anecdotes at the largest student-run entrepreneurial event in the country. The conference includes panels and discussions exploring the nuances and unforeseen challenges of starting and managing a company, and culminates with the Pitch, where attendees present their ideas to an audience of experts. This year's participants include Di-Ann Eisnor, the director of growth for the popular navigation app Waze; Dr. Nedal Shami, the co-founder and chief strategy officer of CityMD Urgent Care; and Tony Shure, a co-founder of the salad chain Chopt. *(N.Y.U. Tisch Hall, 40 W. 4th St. nyuef.org. Feb. 23-24.)*

New York International Children's Film Festival
This annual festival, founded in 1997, hosts shorts, features, Q. & A.s with directors, and national premières. (The winning films are eligible for Academy Award consideration.) Among the highlights this year are a preview of Season 2 of the Netflix adaptation of Lemony Snicket's "A Series of Unfortunate Events" and the New York première of the Japanese musical anime "Lu Over the Wall," about an aspiring musician who joins a band in search of the perfect lead singer—who happens to be a mermaid. *(Various locations. nyicff.org. Feb. 23-March 18.)*

Midnight Moment
Since 2012, Times Square has taken a few short minutes each night for art, when its mammoth, world-famous video displays are wiped of advertisements in favor of short films and other experimental visual works, curated by Times Square Arts. This February, if you find yourself strolling through the world's intersection between 11:57 and midnight, you'll catch the final week of "Save the Presidents," a short documentary by Tali Keren and Alex Strada. The lens stalks a field of forty-three deteriorating Presidential busts, which were excavated from a Virginia sculpture park in 2010 and left to languish in a rural field not far away. As the film screens, giant images of George Washington's stone likeness loom over Broadway, in a somber comment on political representation and impermanence. *(Times Square. arts.timessquarenyc.org. Through Feb. 28.)*

READINGS AND TALKS

92nd Street Y
Mary Norris, a copy editor for this magazine from 1978 to 2017, gathered her musings on the many intricacies of the English language in "Between You & Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen." Raised in Cleveland and educated at Rutgers University, Norris carried the *New Yorker* style into the modern world with warmth and humor, finding whimsy in rigidity and simplifying the tiny grammar dilemmas that trip up even the most bookish. She'll read from her memoir at this talk, and discuss life after editing. *(1395 Lexington Ave. 92y.org. Feb. 22 at 7.)*

Just a Show
Though he works by day as a staff writer for "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert," Harris Mayersohn also hosts a regular comic variety show at Sunnyvale, a remote Bushwick bar that takes its name from the wacky mockumentary television series "Trailer Park Boys." On the last Sunday of each month, Mayersohn gathers fellow standup performers and yuckster writers from the city's bustling comedy community for an unpredictable night of sketch antics and pranks. This special two-year-anniversary edition features the comedians Dan Chamberlain, Peter Smith, Sandy Honig, Lucy Cottrell, Jay Weingarten, and Matthew Goldin. *(1031 Grand St., Brooklyn. sunnyvalebk.com. Feb. 25 at 6.)*

ILLUSTRATION BY PABLO AMARGO

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FOOD & DRINK

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES POMERANTZ FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

TABLES FOR TWO

Tetsu

78 Leonard St. (212-207-2370)

It may seem that Masa Takayama, the chef and owner of the sushi mecca Masa, earned mythical status owing solely to the sheer audacity of his prices—at $595 per person, before drinks and tax, dinner at Masa must be the most expensive prix fixe in the city—but it's worth remembering that he got there because of the ethos he has built around his skills with fish. Takayama apprenticed for years at Ginza Sushi-ko, in Tokyo, before setting out on his own in Los Angeles, in the late eighties. By the time he débuted Masa, in the Time Warner Center in 2004, he was operating at the pinnacle of fine dining. Where do you go from the top?

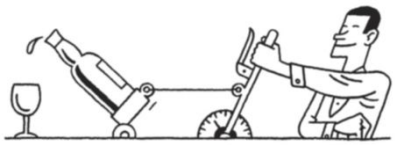
Last November, Takayama opened the much more casual Tetsu, an izakaya in banker-haven Tribeca. The heavily designed space, with a vast open kitchen, moody steel-panelled walls, and glaring overhead spotlighting, feels a little like a Las Vegas-styled modern-day dungeon. (The name means "iron.") There's an extensive sake menu, but the food is the focus, and it's remarkably hit or miss.

To start one evening, the duck with cabbage slaw was bland, sweet, and underseasoned, oddly studded with raisins and drenched in a dressing that could have been mayo. Fried pork-belly skewers were eerily similar to corn dogs. Tamarind baby-back ribs were slick with grease but not sauce, and octopus with cilantro was far from tender. But robata-grilled yellowtail was fresh and juicy, and fried duck tongues were as cute as you'd want, crunchy and cheerful and dusted with chili powder. The squid-ink "pasta" noodles were made from fish—slippery and firm, they took well to bottarga. A rather luscious burger, available only before 6 P.M., was prodigiously fatty, seared to a crust, on a pretzel bun that disintegrated after not too long. It came with excellent crispy fries strewn with fried herbs and bacon.

There's one exception to the spottiness: the sushi, which is impeccable. Here is where Takayama's influence is deeply felt, in perfect little pieces of nigiri or delicate temaki on crisp nori. The rice is pillowy, with just enough vinegar to provide counterpoint to the soft, silky slabs of mackerel, scallop, salmon, amberjack, even maitake mushroom. Perhaps a bit of cynicism can be detected in the uni-toro nigiri: it sounds good, but these two worshipped ingredients really don't belong together; the metallic taste of the tuna belly overpowers the delicate sweetness of the sea urchin, plus, one piece costs sixteen dollars. But there's nothing cynical about opening the best sushi restaurant in Tribeca, which is exactly what Takayama has done, whether he meant to or not. *(Dishes $6–$26.)*

—Shauna Lyon

BAR TAB



29B Teahouse
29 Avenue B (646-864-0093)

The city can be tough on extroverts who have made it into February with their healthful resolutions more or less intact: if you're still attempting to cut back on booze, going out with friends is risky—one drink inevitably leads to another. Luckily, Stefen Ramirez, an owner of Tea Dealers, a longtime purveyor of high-end teas, is intent on cultivating, at this elegant new Alphabet City establishment, what he calls "an air of sobriety." "Now more than ever, people need that," he said, on a recent Saturday, as patrons chatted quietly over pots of tea and glasses of wine, in an airy ceramic-lined space flooded with pristine afternoon light. The drinks are inventive and tasty (try one of the Korean-tea-infused sojus or the Moon Over Hadong, with yuzu and pepper). But the pièce de résistance is the exquisite matcha beer, for which friendly attendants, expert in the art of making tea, whisk ceremonial-grade matcha into Koshihikari beer. Poured into a delicate glass, the emerald concoction resolves into an inch of pale-green foam. The earthiness of the tea offsets the sweetness of the rice-based lager, and the flavor expands as the drinker continues topping off her glass with the remaining beer in the can. Patrons concerned with sobriety will be delighted with the nonalcoholic terrain—there is an impressive array of oolong, pu-erh, matcha, and other teas. But for something unexpected, order from 29B's rotating selection of house-made sparkling teas. With eyes closed, one might mistake a flute of the honey-hued jasmine variety for a very dry prosecco, save for the intense floral perfume that lingers after each sip. "A few people I've given it to have started crying," Ramirez said. "It reminded them of their family, or something from their past."—*Wei Tchou*

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

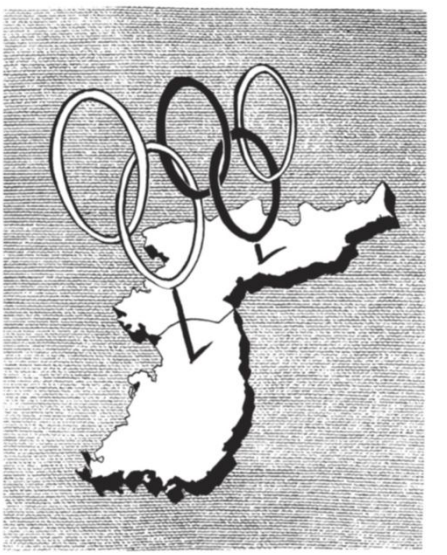
COMMENT
PEACE GAMES

An enduring bromide about the Olympic Games holds that they provide a respite from politics. That has been a fiction since at least 424 B.C., when Sparta, fighting Athens in the Peloponnesian War, was barred from the Olympiad. In the modern age, it has remained thus. As Seoul prepared to host the 1988 Summer Games, Pyongyang tried to scare the world away by detonating a time bomb on a South Korean passenger jet, killing all hundred and fifteen people onboard. Two spies who planted the bomb were caught, and swallowed cyanide, but one survived. She revealed that the attack had been ordered, in a handwritten directive, by Kim Jong Il, the heir apparent to the nation's founder.

The Games have returned to South Korea at another moment of acute anxiety, with the potential for hostilities between the two nations at a level rarely seen since the Korean War ended, in 1953. The North Korean regime, now led by Kim's son, the thirty-four-year-old Kim Jong Un, is still violent, unpredictable, and isolated, but, this time, it did not try to stop the Games. Instead, it adopted a more sophisticated strategy: a diplomatic play, with a fragile potential to defuse the confrontation.

For months, experts on North Korea have suspected that Kim might switch course, from confronting the United States and South Korea to playing on tensions between them. In a New Year's Day speech, after months of flouting international condemnation of his development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, Kim surprised his adversaries by proposing talks about sending a North Korean delegation to the Games. The two nations restored a military hotline and agreed to field a joint women's ice-hockey team. Kim's gambit was calculated to appeal to South Korea's President, Moon Jae-in, an ardent proponent of engagement. Moon hailed the deal as a breakthrough, saying, "Many considered it an impossible dream to have an Olympics of peace, in which North Korea would participate and the two Koreas would form a joint team."

The South Korean people, however, are less sanguine. Many older citizens, whose families were riven by the war, long for reunification, but younger people, with no memory of an undivided Korea, tend to regard the North as a bizarre embarrassment. Having grown up under Pyongyang's threats to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire," they worry that, even under the best of circumstances, reuniting with an impoverished dictatorship could hobble South Korea's economy. According to the Korea Institute for National Unification, a think tank based in Seoul, sixty per cent of South Koreans in their twenties oppose reunification.



In the first encounter of the new diplomacy, Kim deployed an unexpected tactic: he sent his powerful and reclusive younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, to the Games, where she caught the United States off balance. She posed with Moon for photographs, and invited him to a summit "at his earliest convenience" in Pyongyang. He did not formally accept, but he came close, saying, "Let's create the environment for that to be able to happen."

Vice-President Mike Pence, representing the United States, was a step behind. He ignored Kim, and refused to stand when the North and South Korean athletes entered the stadium together at the opening ceremony. Daniel Drezner, a professor of international politics at Tufts University, considered that approach "wrong-footed." Pence's allies complained that the media was swooning over Kim—CNN tweeted that she was "stealing the show." But, Drezner wrote in the Washington *Post*, "it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that Mike Pence had a bad weekend."

Then, as Pence headed back to the United States, last Monday, the Trump Administration, too, abruptly changed course. With the inter-Korean overtures gaining strength, and Washington risking a breach of its alliance with Seoul,

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the White House said that it was now willing to join preliminary talks with North Korea. That's encouraging: they would present the first possibility of substantive progress since a failed round of "exploratory" talks between Washington and Pyongyang in February, 2012.

But the Olympic rapprochement does not likely herald an imminent end to the crisis. John Delury, a North Korea expert at Yonsei University, in Seoul, who has advocated for talks, said, "Moon succeeded in making the Olympics safe and positive, but he has always been clear that the goal was to change the atmosphere and start a dialogue. They have to sustain this momentum and bridge the gap between inter-Korean détente and the United States. It's a big test, and, if it fails, it makes it easier for others to say, 'We tried talks and they didn't work.'" Last Tuesday, the chiefs of the U.S. security agencies told the Senate Intelligence Committee that the Olympics had not changed their assessment. Dan Coats, the director of National Intelligence, said, "The decision time is becoming ever closer in terms of how we respond" to North Korea's weapons development.

If Moon does accept Kim's invitation, the talks could take place as soon as this summer. (A poll published last Thursday, by the Yonhap news agency, found that sixty per cent of South Koreans support a summit.) American and South Korean experts believe that North Korea remains unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons, but could, in time, be persuaded to limit further production and allow inspectors to return. The most plausible early deal could involve a suspension of joint military exercises between the United States and South Korea, which Pyongyang considers a rehearsal for invasion, in exchange for a halt to weapons tests. But, in the months ahead, the chances of derailment are significant. Washington and Seoul have agreed to postpone any exercises until after the Paralympic Games end, in March; if they resume, Kim Jong Un could respond with more missile launches. If he moves to follow through on threats to test a nuclear device over the Pacific, the White House could try to prevent it with a limited strike, a strategy that carries extraordinary risks of escalation. President Trump, for his part, also could end the rapprochement with a tweet.

Nevertheless, for all the doubts surrounding the Olympic thaw, history suggests that it would be wrong to dismiss this moment. In the nineteen-seventies, Ping-Pong diplomacy helped rebuild ties between the United States and China; in recent years, wrestling competitions have afforded the United States and Iran a basis for communication. "Sport," George Orwell wrote in 1945, "is war minus the shooting." In South Korea this week, that, at least, is something to cheer.

—*Evan Osnos*

WHISTLE-BLOWING DEPT.
INCOGNITO

After Grigory Rodchenkov left his position as the director of a Russian anti-doping lab, in November of 2015, some burly guards showed up in his front yard. Ostensibly, they were sent to protect Rodchenkov from prying reporters. But he knew enough about Vladimir Putin's Russia to fear the worst. "One day, he is security," Rodchenkov said last week. "Next day, he is killer."

Rodchenkov promptly fled. He is an asthmatic, and he told his wife, Veronika, that he couldn't handle another Moscow winter, so he planned to wait it out in sunny Los Angeles. He packed light, to avoid arousing suspicion. He recalled, of bidding Veronika goodbye, "It was not long kiss. I don't want make her scared."

Bryan Fogel, a competitive cyclist and a filmmaker, was waiting for him in L.A. Fogel and Rodchenkov had been collaborating on a gonzo documentary about doping. When Rodchenkov unzipped his suitcase and showed Fogel what he had spirited out of Russia—evidence of Russia's state-sponsored doping program, stored on a laptop and two hard drives—the project took a more serious turn. At one point in the movie, Rodchenkov tells Veronika, over Skype, "I'm going under witness protection." The film, titled "Icarus," and released by Netflix, has been nominated for an Oscar.

All the hubbub surrounding Rodchenkov's whistle-blowing ("RUSSIAN INSIDER SAYS STATE-RUN DOPING FUELED OLYMPIC GOLD," a *Times* headline read) has not played well in Moscow: the former head of Russia's Olympic committee said that Rodchenkov "should be shot for lying, like Stalin would have done"; Putin called him "an imbecile." In December, the International Olympic Committee banned Russia from the Winter Games, in Pyeongchang. Shortly afterward, Rodchenkov's lawyer, Jim Walden, got a tip that a team of Russians was in the U.S., hunting for Rodchenkov. Since then, Walden said, an armed security detail has kept Rodchenkov on the move, and sometimes in disguise, so that his pursuers "can't pick up his scent."

Last week, Rodchenkov was holed up in a hotel conference room in the tri-state area. He had on jeans and a button-down shirt, and his face was covered by sunburst sunglasses and a black Lycra balaclava. He had to pinch the balaclava and hold the fabric away from his lips ("It's coming into my mouth!"), so that it looked like a duck's bill when he talked. His voice was recognizable from "Icarus." He would neither confirm nor deny having undergone cosmetic surgery.

By this point, the Games in Pyeongchang were in full swing, and Rodchenkov had reverted from whistle-blower to sports nut. "I adjust my routine to watch live transmission," he said. He'd been setting an alarm to catch particular events. That morning, he had risen early for the women's ten-kilometre pursuit biathlon. "Ladies competition is a little more emotional than men," he said.

There was a knock on the door. Room service. Rodchenkov turned his body to face a wall as one of his guards cracked the door to take the delivery. Rodchenkov passed on lunch, in part because of the balaclava and in part because of his growing paunch. "When you are stressed, you are coming to the fridge," he said.

This reminded one of Walden's associates to fetch her purse and remove a ziplock bag of chili peppers from her garden that she'd brought for Rodchenkov to cook with. Delighted, he replied, "Yes! I love them." He went on, "Because I am chemist, I am cooking all the time." Soups are one of his specialties. "But you cannot cook soup in small cup. You need

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volume, especially for borscht." He hinted that his large-quantity cooking was responsible for his weight gain. Asked if he shopped for ingredients in Russian markets in the U.S., he replied, "It's unimaginable. If I hear a Russian voice, I just make U-turn."

Back home, he said, Veronika would watch his diet. These days, their conversations tended to be brief and perfunctory. Her phone is almost certainly being tapped. He said, "It's just 'How are you? How are children? I'm O.K. You're O.K.?'" His daughter recently married, but Rodchenkov missed the wedding.

It was getting late, and one of Rodchenkov's guards announced, "We got to wrap up." Rodchenkov fidgeted with his shades and his mask. His plans for later? "I'd like to see speed skating. Women's fifteen hundred metres." Maybe he could even get in some calisthenics during the commercials. And for dinner? He had made a pot of Chinese mushroom soup, which was waiting on the stove, but upon further thought he said, "I think I will take little bit diet. Only fruits."

—Nicholas Schmidle

ON THE RUNWAY
REAL PEOPLE

A few days before Fashion Week began, the avant-garde label Eckhaus Latta held a casting call in a Chinatown basement for its runway show. Women with pink hair, men with full-back tattoos, plus-size and transgender models, and not terribly tall civilians—all were fair game in the eyes of Rachel Chandler, the casting director who'd summoned them.

Chandler was reviewing the day's snapshots as a few stragglers showed up. A lanky woman with a short Afro and an unplaceable accent sauntered in and handed over her modelling card.

"Where are you from?" Chandler, who is thirty years old and petite, with blond hair, asked. She is a new mother, and she wore a hoodie and baggy jeans.

"Panama," the woman said.

"Cool," Chandler said. "I've never had a model from Panama before."

Two years ago, Chandler and her business partner, Walter Pearce, who is a twenty-two-year-old downtown It Boy, created an agency called Midland, which aims to cast real people (with an emphasis on the eccentric or the unpolished) in fashion shows and ad campaigns. Their clients include Adidas, Gucci, Barneys, and the C.F.D.A.-winning designer Telfar.

Pearce explained, "I'm drawn to women who seem like they're deer in the headlights, parents-as-cousins, and 'Are we uptown or downtown?'" He described the look Chandler is going for as "grown, scary women who will yell at you if you drop something in their house."

For Eckhaus Latta, Chandler hoped to cast a mix of working models and "nodels," as nonprofessionals are called. Some of these are friends of hers and of the designers, and some are people whom she stops on the street. Last year, a friend she cast walked the runway with the middle buttons of her dress undone to reveal a pregnant belly. Eckhaus Latta's line often features gender-neutral sizing, and a recent series of ads pictured models having sex. For another campaign, Chandler cast her assistant and the babysitter of a stylist friend; both were topless and wore clown makeup.

When it comes to casting models, the line between "real" and "too real" can be tricky to discern. The label's designers—Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta, thirty-year-old graduates of the Rhode Island School of Design—were worried about coming off as gimmicky this season. Some agencies had misinterpreted their aesthetic and sent over candidates with obvious shticks, or with too many tattoos.

Chandler and the designers pored over a pile of head shots, frowning. Eckhaus, who has tousled black hair and was wearing a white turtleneck and black jeans, picked up a photo of a young woman with white-blond hair and sunken eyes. "No, no," he said. "She looks like a piranha."

Chandler held up a shot of a classically beautiful woman with thick brown hair parted down the middle. "She's so pretty," she said.

"We could shave her head?" Eckhaus joked.

Chandler's phone vibrated with a news alert. "This mutant crayfish clones itself, and it's taking over Europe," she read. "She's fabulous," Chandler said, holding up the phone to show the crustacean to the others.

A panicked voice from the hallway intruded. "Oh, it's not over? Thank God!" the voice yelled, in a thick French accent.

"Well, it's technically over," Chandler told the pouty-lipped woman, when she walked in. "But we'll see you."

The woman removed her jacket and posed for a head shot, still breathless. "I don't know if you know my story," she said.

"What's your story?" Eckhaus asked.

"I'm transgender," she said.

"O.K.," Chandler said.

"I was going to miss the casting, but I love your brand so much," the model said, as she scurried out.

Rachel Chandler

"I liked her, but she's too sexy in the face," Eckhaus said.

Latta, who is tall and blond, with rosy cheeks, stood in front of a wall of head shots and scrunched her mouth. "It's feeling very white right now," she said.

Chandler leaned in and began counting. Toward the bottom of the wall were three young black men, all shirtless. "It's actually not *that* white," she said.

"It's unbalanced to me," Eckhaus said.

"It feels too model-y," Latta added. "It's not as strong on the nodels."

"That's because we don't have any friends anymore, because all we do is sit in the studio," Eckhaus said.

They mulled the idea of casting Thea Westreich, an art adviser in her seventies, who'd modelled for them before.

Latta looked at the board. "These

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girls are so *pretty*," she said with disgust.

"Maybe that's good," Chandler said.

"I'm thinking we need more of a vibe of a masc woman," Latta said.

Eckhaus pointed to a photo of a woman. "She's butch," he said. They thumbed through the pile, stopping at a model they'd liked earlier.

"She was great," Chandler said. "She's trans!"

"Cool," Latta said. "And she didn't say, 'So do you know my story?'"

—*Carrie Battan*

PARIS POSTCARD
CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

Last month, just before "Saturday Night Live" parodied Catherine Deneuve and Brigitte Bardot as wine-swilling reactionaries, Marlène Schiappa, a Frenchwoman with significantly greater authority on gender issues, made a quick visit to New York. Schiappa is the gender-equality minister in President Emmanuel Macron's government. A former blogger (her Web site, Maman Travaille, was among the country's first online resources for working mothers) and author (she edited an anthology called "Letters to My Uterus"), she is, according to a recent poll, the fourth most popular member of the Macron cabinet, and among the most outspoken. Since her appointment, last May, she has campaigned against *les violences obstétricales*—painful or traumatizing procedures that women undergo during childbirth, including unnecessary episiotomies. The day after the publication of the Deneuve letter, which Schiappa deemed "dangerous," she exchanged friendly tweets with Asia Argento, one of Harvey Weinstein's accusers.

"The French feminist movement has never been a single bloc, it's never been monolithic," Schiappa said upon her return to Paris, receiving a visitor in her office. Among other jabs the Deneuve letter made at American-style feminism, it denounced the "puritanism" of the #MeToo movement. Schiappa went on, "In France, when one wants to say that we mustn't go too far, the expression is 'We must not Americanize society.' As if people in the United States don't seduce each other, don't have relationships. I was in New York for two days. I took elevators with men. They didn't make me sign a contract beforehand saying that I wasn't going to sue them. It's even possible that some of them might have flirted."

Schiappa, who is thirty-five, had gone to New York to attend a conference on women in corporate leadership. Her itinerary left no time for extracurriculars. "I ate a club sandwich," she said. Her impressions owed as much to Tocqueville as they did to Lena Dunham and to Jezebel, both of whom she cited as influences. "I always notice the energy and the volunteerism that exist in America," she said. "Regarding the place of women, the reflex in France is to say, 'What's the state going to do for me?'" In New York, Schiappa had announced that the French government was creating, in partnership with the World Economic Forum, a task force, in order, she said, "to take the best of public engagement from France, and the best of private engagement from the States."

Macron has designated gender equality the *grande cause* of his five-year term. In the legislative elections last June, half of his party's slate of candidates were women. (Gender parity has been the law in France since 2000, but parties often choose to pay fines rather than heed it.) Two hundred and twenty-three women were elected to the French parliament, making it thirty-eight per cent female, nearly fifty per cent more than the previous record. Still, some feminists feel let down by Macron, who had strongly hinted that he might pick a female to be Prime Minister, only to select Édouard Philippe, an establishmentarian whose sole contribution to diversity is his beard. And this month a woman accused Gérald Darmanin, Macron's young budget minister, of having raped her in 2009. (Darmanin has said that he will sue her for defamation. In 2004, she was convicted of blackmail.)

The situation has put Schiappa in a tricky position. "I couldn't be in a government with someone who was charged with rape," she said. "But there is a presumption of innocence, and he hasn't been charged." (Last week, another minister, Nicolas Hulot, was accused of sexual assault. He denies any wrongdoing.) She continued, cleverly, "Just because there was a complaint against this woman for defamation doesn't mean we have to consider her guilty of defamation."

In a recent profile titled "How Far Will Marlène Schiappa Go?," the newsweekly *Le Point* characterized her as "the blundering, too talkative young cousin" of the administration. Annoyed with such coverage, she has begun wearing her hair in a businesslike updo, but she is determined,

"It's more expensive, but I raised it myself."

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Marlène Schiappa

whatever controversy may come, to enact a law that would make street harassment punishable by an on-the-spot fine. "There's a study that just came out that says that eight women in ten in France are afraid when they go out by themselves at night," she said. "*Importuner des femmes*"—bothering women—she went on, using Deneuve's formulation. "It's not like they're offering women a rose in the street."

That weekend, she said, she had heard her eleven-year-old exchanging tips with a friend: "My daughter said, 'Watch out if there's a group of guys coming—you need to look straight in front of you.' And her friend said, 'That's not my technique. I pretend to be on the phone or listening to music.'" Schiappa continued, "That says that we're steeped in this, that it's an inevitability—that when it rains we take an umbrella, that when we're hungry we eat, that when we enter a shop we say '*Bonjour*,' and that when someone harasses us in the street we do *this*. I find that terrible."

—*Lauren Collins*

HERE TODAY DEPT.
FLOWER BOMBS

By day, the floral designer Lewis Miller creates arrangements of abundance and originality for understated events at such venues as the Maidstone Club, the Stone Barns Center, and the New York Public Library. By night, his Banksy side kicks in. Every month or so, under cover of predawn darkness, he and his team take a van to a different location in the city and swiftly unload treasure: buckets and buckets of flowers. Then, as quickly as they can, they shove the blooms into corner trash cans, or tuck them into the nooks and crannies of construction sites, or drape their garlanded stems around statuary. Miller calls these guerrilla installations Flower Flashes: he puts them together in less than twenty minutes; they vanish within a matter of hours. Instagram saves them for posterity.

"So here's what I want to do," Miller said last week, at his East Village studio. He was sitting at a worktable, next to a pair of potted orange trees in full fruit, talking to his special-projects director, Irini Arakas. "I want to get a bunch of cardboard boxes of various sizes and just prime them white, then roll on blue stripes—very graphic—and paint some huge red hearts on top of that. Then just have these hedges of carnations in the boxes." The designer Tory Burch had donated seventeen thousand pink carnations, left over from her Fashion Week show, for the project.

"They're a perfect color," Arakas observed, the clovish scent of carnations enveloping the studio. "A cross between Pepto-Bismol and Sweet'N Low."

"It's the ultimate free gift," Miller said. "I mean, who was lucky enough to see Tory Burch's show? Only a handful of special people. So now we can take these and do something cheeky, for the everyday New Yorker."

Miller is tallish and trim, with wavy chestnut hair, peony-pink skin, and eyes the color of forget-me-nots. He was wearing a pressed navy chambray shirt over a striped T-shirt with khakis and blue suède sneakers. Arakas was dressed in a long skirt and dangling earrings.

After scissoring around the periphery of a design he'd sketched with colored Sharpies, Miller laid the cutout over a photograph of the shuttered HSBC bank at Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue, finessing it so that the sketch fit perfectly against the bank's glass doors, which were scrawled with graffiti and featured a sign warning of rat poison. He continued, "So, super-fresh and optimistic and preppy, but it's Valentine's Day—so not *too* sweet."

"And, Toots, are you thinking of adding writing?" Arakas asked, pointing at the bottom of the sketch, where the word "love" was penned in.

"Yeah, that's the message," Miller said. "It's not about stupid Valentine's Day love but 'I love New York.'"

"And if people take these carnations they'd better give them to their moms or their sweethearts," Arakas said.

Miller had planned a second Valentine's installation: a six-foot-tall heart-shaped wreath made of dried grapevines threaded with ivy. The wreath's armature was premade, but the following day he would fill it out in the studio with fuchsia Mamy Blue and David Austin English roses, chrysanthemums, blue delphinium, and, of course, red roses.

At 5:35 A.M., the van brought the half-done wreath to its flash site, at the West Fourth Street subway station, in front of the basketball and handball courts.

"That is *beautiful!*" a man in a long overcoat and a wool cap exclaimed, emerging from the shadows. Miller and his helpers were poking the final flowers into the wreath—red anemones, blue and pink sweet peas, pink-and-green ornamental-cabbage stems, Queen Anne's lace.

"Can I have some to give to my mother?" the man asked. "She's eighty-two and housebound." Arakas grabbed a bunch of roses from a bucket and dropped them into the man's outstretched hand. "This will mean so much to her," he said. "I want to sing a song right now, if you don't mind." He began, in a croaky voice, "Lean on me, when you're not strong, and I'll be your friend, I'll help you *ca-a-ar-ry* on . . ."

The team worked feverishly as he sang, then cheered him when he finished.

"Oh, I love it," the man said of the wreath. "Artist effect. That's what the world needs right now." He shuffled off, dragging a suitcase on wheels.

The wreath completed, the sidewalk swept, Miller's tag (LMDXNYC) stencilled in chalk on a railing, the team piled into a taxi and sped up to Fourteenth Street to meet the van with the carnations. They quickly set up the striped boxes with hearts on the front, then added the carnation hedges. Bleary-eyed people on their way to work stopped to take photos with their iPhones. Miller took one, too, then bolted, just as the sun came up.

—*Mary Hawthorne*

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ANNALS OF WAR

ESCAPING ISIS

How a small group of immigrants helped save their people back home.

BY JENNA KRAJESKI

Growing up in northwestern Iraq, Hadi Pir often went to Mt. Sinjar for solace. As a Yazidi, a member of an ancient religious minority, he believed that the narrow mountain was sacred, central to the Yazidi creation myth. Aside from the mountain, the region where the country's six hundred thousand Yazidis live, also called Sinjar, is flat and desert-like. To Yazidis, it seems clear that God created the mountain because He knew that they would need a place to hide.

Yazidis have suffered centuries of religious persecution, based largely on the false idea that they revere the sun as God and worship a fallen angel. Though Yazidis pray toward the sun, and worship seven angels, they are monotheistic, and there is little to distinguish their God from the Muslim or the Christian one. Under the Ottomans, Yazidi villages were raided so often that the word *firman*, which means "decree" in Ottoman Turkish, came to mean "genocide" among Yazidis. When Saddam Hussein was President of Iraq, Yazidi villages were razed, and their inhabitants were resettled in planned communities and compelled to identify as Arabs. By the time that Pir was in college, in the early two-thousands, the Yazidis counted seventy-two genocides in their history.

Pir's family were caretakers of a shrine in a northern valley, and if he read something disparaging about Yazidis in an Iraqi newspaper he would cool off in its stone rooms. If a neighbor returned from Mosul to Khanasour, Pir's home town, saying that he had been mocked by Arabs or Kurds for wearing traditional Yazidi robes, Pir might sit in one of the mountain's orchards and read Western philosophy—Hegel's "The Philosophy of History" was a favorite—before walking home.

Pir planned to write a novel about Yazidi persecution with his friend Murad Ismael, an engineering student who loved poetry as much as Pir loved philosophy. In their book, whose events would take place in the nineteenth century, Yazidis are chased from their homes by Ottoman soldiers. The slowest among them are killed, but the lucky ones hide on the mountain until it is safe to descend.

After 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq, Pir and Ismael, like many

ISIS intended to wipe out the Yazidi religion in Iraq. Yazidis in America had a plan, so they started driving to Washington.

MOISES SAMAN/MAGNUM

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Yazidi men, took jobs as interpreters for the U.S. military. Because they were a targeted religious minority, there was little opportunity outside the Army, and they were unlikely to join the Iraqi insurgency. In the military, they befriended another Yazidi, named Haider Elias, who, in spite of his poor background, spoke nearly perfect English, with a TV-made American accent.

The three men worked with the U.S. for years, often with the Special Forces. Being an interpreter was dangerous—Pir carried two guns, an automatic rifle to kill insurgents and a pistol to kill himself if he faced being kidnapped. On one mission, Pir, working undercover to collect locations of insurgents, met with a Sunni fighter who later became a high-ranking ISIS militant. On another, his best friend was killed. "We were soldiers, basically, more than interpreters," Pir told me. After their service, they received special visas to come to the U.S. Elias and Ismael went to Houston, along with a dozen Yazidi families. In 2012, Pir and his wife, Adula, and their daughter, Ayana, ended up in Lincoln, Nebraska, whose Yazidi community, with about a thousand members, is the largest in the U.S.

Pir started working for a nonprofit that assisted refugees—the group had helped resettle his family—and he and Adula had another daughter, Yara. Iraq was consumed by sectarian violence, but their lives in America were stable. They studied English, and on warm weekend evenings they joined other Yazidis in a park near their home. Even the source of the despair that sometimes overtook them could be identified at a clinic in Lincoln. Adula's listlessness was postpartum depression; Pir received a diagnosis of P.T.S.D. He enrolled in a creative-writing class, where he wrote an essay about Mt. Sinjar. He wanted his classmates, who talked about the U.S. as if all of it belonged to them, to understand that all Yazidis had in Iraq was the mountain.

On the evening of August 2, 2014, Adula's brother called from Khanasour. "We've heard villages south of Mt. Sinjar have been attacked by ISIS," he told her.

"Is he sure?" Pir asked. The Islamic State had recently been taking territory in Iraq, which its leaders vowed to make part of their caliphate. In June, ISIS had driven the Iraqi Army out of Mosul, but Sinjar, which was about eighty miles west, was guarded by soldiers from Iraqi Kurdistan.

"No," Adula said. Yara had a fever and Adula was depressed again. "I have to go," she told her brother. "Be careful."

When Adula's brother phoned again, at midnight, they were taking Yara to the hospital, so they ignored the call. At three in the morning, when they pulled into the parking lot of their apartment complex, dozens of their Yazidi neighbors were outside on the lawn, talking on their cell phones and crying.

"ISIS has taken over Sinjar," a neighbor said. "Everyone is running to the mountain."

ISIS came into Sinjar at dawn, with the intention of wiping out Yazidism in Iraq. The group's Research and Fatwa Department had declared that, unlike Christians or Shia Muslims, Yazidis were a "pagan minority." The Kurdish soldiers retreated without warning, after determining that their position was untenable. Yazidis ran from their homes and scrambled up the rocky slopes of Mt. Sinjar. Trucks jammed with people overturned on narrow roads. Homes north of the mountain quickly emptied; with the roads controlled by ISIS, thousands of Yazidis were trapped in the southern villages.

In Lincoln, Adula stayed on the phone with her family as they packed a change of clothes, some photographs and papers, and cookies that they had baked for an upcoming holiday. As they walked along the dirt road leading to the mountain, their voices were drowned out by the sound of car engines. Adula worried most about her mother, who had arthritis and high blood pressure, and her sister-in-law, who was seven months pregnant.

Pir couldn't bear to take the phone from his wife, or to talk to Ismael or Elias when they called. He was sure that all the Yazidis in Sinjar were going to die. If they made it to the mountain, they would die of thirst. If they didn't make it, they would be killed by ISIS. Elias, who was studying biology at Houston Community College, spent the night calling his family but was unable to reach his youngest brother, Faleh. In the morning, he found out that Faleh had been executed, along with dozens of other men from their village. When Elias closed his eyes, he imagined his brother's phone ringing the moment the gun was fired.

Early the next morning, Yazidis across America began to organize. In Houston, they protested in front of the Galleria mall; in Lincoln, they marched to the governor's mansion. But it was a Sunday, and the mansion was dark. After two young Yazidi men were restrained by the police for banging on the gate, everyone went home.

On the morning of August 4th, Pir was going to work when a neighbor from Khanasour called from the mountain.

"Hadi, we're still alive," he said. "Me and my brothers have a few AKs and we're guarding a shrine."

Pir began to cry.

"Don't cry," the neighbor said. "You have to do something. No one cares about us." Pir thought, If we are his only hope, then there's no hope. "Be strong," his neighbor said. "There are a lot of families following behind us."

Elias, Ismael, and Pir hadn't always agreed with how the U.S. military operated in Iraq. Pir would listen to soldiers propose ransacking villages in search of a single insurgent. "I know it's not going to work," he said. "But they will not take my opinion." Still, without other allies, Yazidis clung to the belief, long after it evaporated for most Iraqis, that the Americans would help them. "A lot of people would call us and say, 'No one can rescue us but the U.S.,'" Ismael said.

Pir wrote on Facebook, "We are planning to go to Washington," and implored Yazidis to join them. Then he reserved a fifteen-passenger van. A few hours later, seeing the responses to his post, he reserved four more.

The next day, Yazidis wearing shirts that read "Save the Yazidis" boarded airplanes in Houston. Others came from Arizona, Virginia, West Virginia, and Canada. In Lincoln, Pir sat behind the wheel of a van at the head of a convoy

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of cars. He entered "The White House" into his G.P.S. and started out on a twelve-hundred-mile drive.

The Yazidi group called itself the Sinjar Crisis Management Team. "We, a group of more than one-hundred interpreters, worked for the U.S. military in Iraq and our people are under attack by terrorists," Ismael wrote to every lawmaker and journalist he could reach. He also e-mailed photographs of Yazidi children, weakened by thirst, and a video of a mountaintop burial.

On August 7th, about a hundred Yazidis gathered in front of the White House. Their permit allowed them three hours, after which they had to make way for a protest for Palestinian rights. The story had begun to dominate the U.S. media, and a group of Yazidis from Virginia and Canada had arranged for a meeting at the Office of International Religious Freedom, a division of the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (D.R.L.).

With a dozen other Yazidis, Pir waited to be escorted to the meeting. He hadn't thought to bring a tie; he wore sandals and a powder-blue polo shirt, damp with sweat. An elderly Yazidi dressed in a traditional white robe cinched with a red cummerbund was so overcome that he could barely walk. They were led to a conference room, packed with State employees. Doug Padgett and Leanne Cannon, two early-career officials who had been fielding calls from the Yazidis, stood by the windows, and Thomas O. Melia, their boss at the D.R.L., sat at a table. The Yazidis told stories of families killed by ISIS, homes destroyed, and the unbearable conditions on the mountain. Ismael noticed that Padgett, a six-foot-five-inch former Navy officer, was crying. "I didn't think that the U.S. will care that much about us," Ismael told me. "To be honest, we are a small minority in the middle of nowhere."

The Yazidis had a three-point plan. The U.S. must drop food and water on the mountain, then help a Yazidi militia that had been formed in Sinjar. Finally, the Americans had to persuade the Iraqi government to track the growing number of Yazidis held captive by ISIS. They were convinced that, without pressure from the U.S., nothing would happen. "When the big guy is in, everybody's in," Pir said.

The Yazidis asked to see the State Department's maps of northern Iraq; they found them to be hopelessly unspecific, marking only major towns and roads. Though President Obama had decided to intervene in Sinjar, the limited U.S. assets in northern Iraq were focussed on protecting the U.S. consulate and the U.S. oil companies in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. The State Department was struggling to track the fleeing Yazidis and the militants.

In Sinjar, everything had a name: family homes; a fig tree and the well used to water it; a crevasse that might, on satellite imagery, look like a hairline fracture but was big enough to hide a family. In some cases, there were three names for one spot—an Arabic one, a Kurdish one, and a Yazidi one. Ismael, who had received a master's degree in geophysics from the University of Houston, had begun aggregating information from Sinjar onto maps, marking fleeing Yazidis with stick figures in wheelchairs and ISIS positions with red octagons.

"Can I use your whiteboard?" Pir asked at the meeting, and began to draw Mt. Sinjar. "Like, O.K., this is Iraq, this is Syria, this is the K.R.G.," Ismael recalls, using the acronym for Iraqi Kurdistan. "The south is basically impassable," Pir told the group. ISIS occupied the roads out and the area's Sunni villages. "Those people need to be able to make it to the north if they have any chance of surviving." He tried to avoid politics: although Kurdish soldiers had abandoned Sinjar, Iraqi Kurdistan was a U.S. ally. "Our message was, These people could die and you can do something about it," Pir said.

The Yazidis were "the antithesis of Washington advocates," Melia told me. "They also—and this is what may have helped them make the case—knew way more about the U.S. military than any of us did."

Later that day, Melia attended an interagency meeting, where an official said that no one knew if anyone was left on Mt. Sinjar. "She was explaining that all the cell phones were dead," he told me. "I said, 'No, the phones work. We just got information in the last hour.'" Melia found Padgett. "Call Haider or Murad," he said. "Ask them if their cell phones are still working."

Padgett contacted Elias, who said that he had just spoken with his family. "We are in D.C., trying to do something," Elias told his relatives, urging them to give his number to anyone who wanted it.

The Yazidis checked into a nearby hotel, where they stayed five or six to a room. That night, Obama announced that he had authorized aid drops and air strikes in Sinjar, calling what was happening to Yazidis there a "potential act of genocide." In celebration, the Sinjar crisis team ordered pizza, their first real meal in days.

When the first pallet of supplies was dropped, Adula's cousin called Pir from the mountain. "We can hear the airplanes, but where is the food?" he asked. Adula's family had made it to a large northern valley, where they joined hundreds of others, exhausted and terrified. Pir and Ismael knew the valley; there were two small temples and a deep well. In the spring, Yazidis went there to grill meat and drink beer. In the summer, though, the valley was scorched. The water, shared among the Yazidis, would soon become silty and putrid.

Pir realized that the Americans were dropping aid near structures where farmers stayed only during the harvest. The team bought a cheap printer and the next morning returned to the State Department offices with their maps.

"These are empty," Pir said, pointing to the buildings. It alarmed him that the U.S. knew so little about Sinjar. When he worked with the Army, officials seemed to have eyes in every corner of Iraq. Now they needed him to tell them where to drop food? He pointed to where Yazidis had gathered—places where there were wells, and far enough away from ISIS. "A lot of people are too tired now to

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walk," he said. "The closer you can drop them, the better." He was elated when, later that night, he learned that aid had reached many of the Yazidis.

In the course of a few days, the Yazidis met with organizations such as U.S.A.I.D. and the Institute for International Law and Human Rights. They went to the White House to meet with the deputy national-security adviser, Ben Rhodes, and the adviser on Iraq, Andy Kim, in the Roosevelt Room. "That was as emotional a meeting as I think I had," Rhodes told me. "Given the role we played in invading and occupying and being present in Iraq for so many years, we *had* to care about what was happening to the Yazidis."

At every meeting, people seemed to be on the Yazidis' side. Even a K.R.G. representative they met with, who tried to justify the Kurdish fighters' withdrawal, was distraught about the plight of the fleeing Yazidis. "It frankly doesn't get any more clear-cut," Rhodes said. "There are people on a mountain. You can get those people food and water and you can bomb the people who are laying siege to the mountain." But, without granular intelligence, the military couldn't respond quickly enough. Sarah Sewall, the Under-Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, told me that the Yazidis came with "what we would call in the policy world 'actionable intelligence.' That's huge."

A system developed. The Yazidis e-mailed and texted Cannon and Padgett reports that they received by phone from Mt. Sinjar. Cannon forwarded the reports to an e-mail chain that quickly grew to include some two hundred officials, including people far her senior, such as the U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad.

She included officials who disapproved, at least initially, of using the Yazidis as sources, among them career diplomats who preferred their own sources and were skeptical that members of the Office of International Religious Freedom, who are not Iraq experts, understood the consequences of focussing on Yazidis. "ISIS had already killed two thousand Shia," one official, who was working on Iraq in August, 2014, told me. "They were killing Sunni imams for speaking out against them. They were pretty awful to a lot of people."

"It slices! It dices! It drives a wedge between you and your wife, because you stored all the unsold units in her writing nook, not like she was using it anyway but whatever!"

• •

"It was incredibly unconventional," Colonel Chuck Freeman, a Department of Defense adviser at the U.S. consulate in Erbil, told me. Colleagues warned him that Cannon's job was to emphasize human-rights abuses above long-term military and political gains. "They were concerned she was emotional," he said. "Quite frankly, it was extremely emotional, once we started realizing what was going on."

Ismael, Elias, and Pir learned how to transform G.P.S. coördinates into the grid system favored by the military. An intelligence officer sent the men a high-resolution digital map, on which Ismael made layers for streets and temples, towns and villages, valleys and farms; a layer for people stranded on Mt. Sinjar and one for ISIS Humvees; layers for water towers and cell towers, houses, sheds that looked like houses, and garages where militants hid when they heard airplanes.

At night in Washington, when it was morning in Iraq, twenty-two Yazidis pooled their phones and computers in a hotel room, where they processed the information they were receiving from Sinjar. When the hotel became too expensive, they moved to a motel, in Maryland, forty minutes from Washington. It was so grimy that they checked for bedbugs. They did not know when they would return home. They felt useful, and that feeling was a salve. "It was, like, now, yes, we have a job," Ismael told me. "We are here, we can get the Yazidis' voice to the strongest country."

On August 9th, a Yazidi fighter in the northern town of Sharfadin called Ismael. He was watching the road with binoculars, and he noticed that ISIS militants on a small hill were watching *him*, and they had better binoculars. "There are four trucks and a DShK"—a mounted machine gun—"aimed at the road," he told Ismael. "If

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"O.K., coffee break's over."

• •

you are facing north, it's on the left."

"It's a very good place for them," Pir told Ismael. His iPhone was old and needed to be constantly charged, so he sat hunched by the bed, close to an outlet. "They are in control."

Ismael called Attallah Elias, a Yazidi in Virginia whose uncle was leading the fighters in Sharfadin. He reported the same thing. In Lincoln, Khalaf Smoqi, a former interpreter, whose brother had friends who were fighting in Sharfadin, provided more information. "My brother is a hundred per cent sure they are about to attack," he told Ismael. "If the DShK stays, no one will be able to escape."

Ismael e-mailed Cannon and Padgett with the information, and a few hours later the fighter in Sharfadin called Ismael to tell him that ISIS targets were being hit in air strikes. Ismael e-mailed Padgett and Cannon: "Amazing, the attack took place. Love you America."

"Any more confirmation or details you get would be great!" Cannon replied.

"The attack got three of them and the fourth one escaped eastward."

"Three what—people trucks units?" Padgett asked.

"Three trucks."

"We felt like, O.K., so we're not wasting our time," Elias said.

One of Pir's friends called him from the mountain. "I don't like my wife," he joked. "Can you give the coördinates to the Americans so they can bomb her?" Pir laughed and then jumped on the bed until he could feel Ismael's disapproving stare and stopped.

Missing their families, and fearing that they would lose their jobs, many of the Yazidis left Washington after a week, vowing to send information from home. Soon, only Elias, Pir, and Ismael remained in the motel.

Their room became a wreck of papers and maps. They kept the door closed, avoiding the other guests and the cleaning staff. ISIS targets had been hit at checkpoints in the north, and an ISIS headquarters in Sinjar City had been destroyed. Aid drops were reaching many more Yazidis.

Elias, Pir, and Ismael struggled to resist the politicizing of the crisis. If they suspected a journalist of trying to use the Yazidis to support partisan talking points—"Fox News always wants to take the argument of the Yazidi genocide to be anti-Islamic," Ismael said—they pushed back. In the motel room, it was harder to resist. Their resentment toward the Kurdish soldiers simmered. They also worried that they wouldn't be able to suppress their own prejudice; Ismael couldn't bear to talk to his Muslim friends. One afternoon, they ordered sandwiches and opened the door to find a deliveryman with a dark beard. Though they knew they were being silly, even offensive, the sight of the deliveryman scared them, and they asked to change rooms.

"We were basically blind," Ismael recalled. "You get to the edge of your emotions, to the edge of everything."

Pir couldn't shake the feeling that everyone in Sinjar was going to die. One night, he had watched an ISIS video in which Yazidi men were forced to convert; later, he heard that they were killed anyway. Pir, Elias, and Ismael felt guilty that they were safe in America. More than once, they offered to go to Iraq. "We the former interpreters present in DC today are ready to conduct these operations with the US Special Forces, or to go to Sinjar on our own to rescue what can be rescued from our people," they wrote to Padgett and Cannon.

Pir and Elias were also increasingly concerned about their remaining family members in Sinjar. Yazidis had begun leaving the mountain through a safe corridor guarded by a Syrian Kurdish paramilitary group, the Y.P.G. The corridor began in Karse, a town on the north side of the mountain, followed a paved road for seven miles to Sinoni, which was guarded by Yazidi militia and Y.P.G., and then eight miles north to the Syrian border. Once Yazidis were inside Y.P.G.-controlled Syria, they could either stay in a refugee camp or continue north and eventually cross the border into Iraqi Kurdistan.

Adula's family were still in the valley, charging their cell phone on car batteries and eating small rations of mutton. Pir told his in-laws that they had to go over the top of the mountain, a journey of more than ten hours for a healthy person. He worried that they would be shot, that Adula's mother would collapse, that her sister-in-law would give birth prematurely. They left on the morning of August 10th, stopping often, drinking a little water and watching for danger; twenty-four hours later, they reached Karse. Pir tried not to show his relief; he didn't want anyone to think that he cared more about Adula's family than about the other Yazidis.

Elias's family had reached Karse and

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were making their way to the Tigris River, which marks the border between Syria and Iraq. He gave them instructions culled from his military experience. "Fall on the ground when you hear shots," he said. "Run when you don't."

Elias slept on the floor, not wanting to be comfortable. He quickly lost ten pounds. One day, he went to the airport to exchange rental cars; on the way back, his phone died. He got lost on the highway, which was full of signs to places he had never heard of. Overwhelmed, he pulled over and wept.

After Elias's family crossed the Tigris, they no longer had cell-phone service, so he distracted himself with other calls: two villages in the south, Hatamiya and Kocho, where Elias had spent part of his childhood, were under siege, and he felt sure that all the inhabitants would be killed or kidnapped unless the U.S. intervened. But, to the military, the south was a mystery. "We had no idea what was going on in Kocho," the intelligence officer told me.

A day later, after his family started walking, Elias got a call from a friend. The family had stopped just beyond the checkpoint into Iraqi Kurdistan. Relieved, Elias and the others went to a McDonald's. "Let's relax," Pir said when they sat down. "Just for an hour."

A moment later, Ismael's phone rang. "We have to go back," he said. "DAESH"—the Arabic acronym for ISIS—"have given an ultimatum in Kocho."

On August 3rd, during ISIS's initial advance on Mt. Sinjar, the militants had laid siege to Kocho and Hatamiya, blocking the roads and killing anyone who tried to escape. Once Yazidis began leaving through the safe corridor, ISIS turned back to the villages. The Sinjar crisis team warned Padgett and Cannon about the impending tragedy on August 8th, the day after they arrived in D.C., writing, "Women are fearful of rape and forced sexual slavery."

That night, they reported that villagers were threatening mass suicide. "We are trying to reach them," they wrote. They suggested that the U.S. conduct air strikes on ISIS positions, and then land a small force to protect the civilians.

"Murad, unfortunately, I don't believe any U.S. planes would be allowed to land there so this is probably not a feasible option," Cannon wrote back. "I'm sorry."

"OMG," Ismael replied.

"Murad we are sending every bit of information you give us to very high ranking officials at State and DoD," Padgett e-mailed. "Write to Ben Rhodes," he continued. "In some ways your voice is more powerful than ours."

"Here is the plan we are thinking about," Ismael wrote. ISIS was not yet inside Kocho; its forces were guarding the paved road to the mountain. If the U.S. provided air cover, villagers could escape on foot or in cars. They had kept some guns hidden from ISIS, and were ready to use them. The Americans didn't even have to drop bombs; just flying over the area would scare the militants away. "We are looking at the map now," they wrote. "There is no ISIS present in the northwest side of the towns all the way to the mountain."

As the days went by without U.S. action, the e-mails became more urgent. On August 9th, the men suggested air cover so that Yazidi fighters in Syria could go into Kocho. Ismael wrote, "I think this is a wonderful plan and we can undertake it tonight as ISIS is under the shock of our air strikes (Murad Opinion)."

On August 10th, the villagers of Hatamiya escaped on foot. Villagers from Kocho wanted to follow, but they were still waiting for the U.S. to intervene. "The people of this village would like to get this following question addressed and time is running out: what should we do?" the Sinjar crisis team wrote.

By August 14th, the men hadn't slept in days. They had reported more than ten ISIS locations between Kocho and the mountain, but the locations hadn't been hit. They suggested, again, that they go themselves, and asked for air cover. Ismael threatened to light himself on fire in front of the White House.

Cannon and Padgett read every message, but not even the Yazidis' intelligence could compel the military to take action. "Helping an individual village amidst a conflict is a more complicated endeavor than dealing with an isolated area like a mountain," Rhodes said. Kocho was more like Syria, where Obama had resisted intervening in part because of the difficulty in distinguishing between militants and civilians. Then, on the morning of August 15th, the team sent Cannon and Padgett an e-mail with the subject line "KOCHO MASSACRE TAKING PLACE."

"Help Help Help," the message read. "ISIL KILLING MEN IN MASS AND TAKING WOMEN IN KOCHO. HAVE AIRPLANES GO THERE."

ISIS marched Kocho's fifteen hundred people to the village school and separated them by age and gender. The men were lined up and shot. The women were taken to a nearby town, where the younger ones were separated from the older ones.

A military contact of Cannon's watched the massacre unfold on satellite imagery. "We saw guys getting shot in the back of the head and pushed into the ditches," he told me. "Couldn't do a damned thing about it." U.S. forces didn't have airplanes at the ready, he explained, and even if they had it was too difficult to save the villagers while killing the militants. "What happens if we go whack a bunch of guys who are gonna get shot in the head, but they don't have to get shot in the head because we killed them?" he asked. "What does ISIS say? 'Americans killing innocents.'"

Ismael called Padgett, screaming. "They are saying just to bomb the whole village," Ismael said of the people of Kocho. "They would rather they all die." Padgett was silent. Ismael didn't seem to understand that he and Cannon worked for the human-rights department. The real power of the U.S. government was far above them.

After the women were taken from Kocho, Padgett wrote to Pir and the others, "Have you lost all cell connection with them?"

"We lost everything," they replied.

The disillusionment was severe, both for the Yazidis and for many of the State

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Department employees. "I think when we did Sinjar their hopes were very high," the intelligence officer told me. "I don't think we followed through on those hopes."

A few days later, Pir and Elias decided to go home. Abid Shamdeen and Ziyad Smoqi, two Lincoln-based former interpreters, would relieve them. Before they left, Padgett and Cannon asked to meet. At a café in Alexandria, Virginia, the Americans and the Yazidis talked about their personal lives for the first time. Padgett and his wife were choosing a school for their eldest daughter. Cannon told them about her nieces and nephews. Elias and Pir made fun of Ismael for living with his mother. "We called our wives every day," they said. "We had to remind Murad to call his mom!"

Padgett asked if they thought that the U.S. occupation had precipitated the attack against the Yazidis. Pir didn't want to assign blame, so he said that to Yazidis, who were poor and always under threat, it didn't really matter.

Not long afterward, Ismael left as well. "I am in the airport now," he wrote to the officials. "Thanks for everything, Doug and Leanne, you're both Yazidi angels in the time of their genocide. If we have a museum someday, your names will be honored."

Back home in Lincoln and Houston, the three men tried to resume their daily routines. They went to work and to school and participated in social events that had once been emblems of their American lives but that now felt irrelevant and guilt-inducing.

On September 10th, in a televised speech addressing the outcome in northern Iraq, Obama quoted a Yazidi survivor. "We owe our American friends our lives," the quote read. "Our children will always remember that there was someone who felt our struggle and made the long journey to protect innocent people." Elias and Ismael had helped solicit the quote, sending options to Cannon and Padgett, and although the sentiment was genuine, it felt premature. Most Yazidis from Sinjar were now refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan; thousands more were ISIS captives. Every day brought another story of a woman's desperate attempt to avoid being sold into sex slavery, and every detail was e-mailed to Padgett and Cannon, along with maps, transcripts of phone calls, and plans.

Predicting the Kocho massacre had confirmed the men's worth as sources, and they were visited by Army intelligence officials, who proposed setting up lines of communication that bypassed the State Department. They agreed, but saving the Yazidis now had none of the simplicity of early August. Captives had been taken far from home, many of them to Syria, and their confused descriptions were difficult to convert into precise coördinates. Laila Khoudeida, a Lincoln-based activist, had little to offer the women when they called. "I want you to be hopeful," she said. "I want you to make sure your phone is always charged."

At the State Department, officials tried to learn from the example of Sinjar, by cultivating sources at the D.R.L. and using them to undertake military operations that prioritized saving lives. "Once you put civilian protection into the equation of a military mission, you have to think differently," Sarah Sewall, the State Department under-secretary, told me. But attempts to replicate the system in Syrian villages failed; in the chaos of the conflict, villagers couldn't accurately relay information quickly enough. As the battle against ISIS escalated, so did the number of civilian casualties.

Many Yazidis lost faith in the U.S. government, which they felt had intervened in Sinjar mainly to justify reëntering Iraq. It wasn't America that saved the Yazidis, a Yazidi militia commander told me; it was the Syrian Kurdish fighters, and even they had acted in self-interest, as a challenge to Iraqi Kurdish leadership in the region. "The Yazidis have no friends," the commander said.

Pir, Elias, and Ismael acknowledged that the intervention had been imperfect, but they didn't share the animus. They poured their optimism into working as activists. The Sinjar crisis team became Yazda, a Yazidi-rights organization. Dozens of Yazidis and non-Yazidis started working for Yazda, lobbying governments to take in displaced Yazidis; monitoring conditions in refugee camps in Iraqi Kurdistan; and using their new contacts within the U.S. government to locate kidnapped women and to support them after they are freed. The activists were determined that this genocide, unlike those which preceded it, would leave Yazidis with the ability to defend themselves.

In early October, 2014, ISIS repopulated Kocho with captives. Seeing a second chance to save the village, Pir, Elias, and Ismael returned to Washington. This time, the Yazidis were granted a meeting at the Pentagon. Elias was amazed by how big it was. Pir wasn't sure why Pentagon officials wanted to meet with them, except out of curiosity. "I think they were more interested how three broken guys, refugees in the U.S., how they got information," he told me.

Ismael did most of the talking. As before, he brought maps with ISIS locations. "Yazidi fighters are ready to help," he said. "If you provide air cover, you will scare ISIS. Just bomb the checkpoints." He grew more and more animated, until, eventually, he was shouting and banging on the table. "We can do this," he kept saying. "We can do this together! We can save them."

Pir felt sorry for his friend. He turned to Elias, a tight smile on his face, and whispered, in Kurdish, "Who is this *we*?"

The Pentagon officials were sympathetic, but they told the Yazidis that it still wasn't possible to intervene in Kocho. A few days later, Pir, Elias, and Ismael were home again. Pir met with his Army intelligence contact at a Lincoln café for the last time. He would still work for Yazda, and continue to send information to Cannon and Padgett, but he wanted to be a teacher, and to raise his children. "I want to be a normal American," he said. "I want to have a family, a job. I can't save the Middle East."

"Before, I believed in destiny," Ismael told me. "After the genocide, I think the world moves on very practical things. For a community to be able to defend itself, you should not rely on humanity, you should not rely on goodness. For a community to protect itself, it should have weapons, economic strength, media."

"At the same time," he continued, "if you believe the sun is sacred, go and say it." ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

A TYPICAL DAY

BY ZACK BORNSTEIN

Midnight-8 A.M.: Vividly hallucinate while paralyzed atop a cushion-topped box of metal springs.

8-8:05 A.M.: A small plastic box generates fast-moving vibrations strong enough for my eardrums to register them and communicate to my brain that it is time to switch from a hallucinating state to a state of gathering food and information. I smack the box.

8:05-8:15 A.M.: Spin a dial to release water that has travelled from the top of a mountain through a maze of lead pipes onto my outermost epidermal layer in order to rinse away the salty liquid that my body secreted through thousands of holes while I was hallucinating.

8:15-8:17 A.M.: Agitate a brush created by children halfway around the world to remove minuscule invisible creatures from the bones in my mouth that I use to turn all my food into soup before swallowing it. Spit out excess soap that is chemically designed to taste like food, but isn't. "Forget" to floss.

8:17-8:20 A.M.: Tunnel my body into shapes made from interwoven threads of dyed plant refuse which have been pieced together by poor people a third of the way around the world to match the shapes of my limbs and my trunk.

8:20-8:23 A.M.: Tunnel my body into a different set of interwoven threads because the first one didn't satisfactorily create the illusion that my body is desirably healthy for copulation as judged by a theoretical stranger whom I may encounter during the day.

8:23-8:25 A.M.: Look for my wallet.

8:25-9 A.M.: Strap myself into a small rocket-room that is powered by the burnt remains of prehistoric kelp, in which I avoid dying by spinning a plastic circle wrapped in optional cow skin.

9-9:15 A.M.: Arrive at a cement cube that I don't own and consume a bitter, addictive toxin that tricks my brain into thinking it's more awake than it is.

9:15-11:30 A.M.: Wiggle ten bony protrusions coming off the ends of my arms over a grid of plastic-covered springs to make numbers and letters appear on a light panel aimed at my eyes.

11:30-11:31 A.M.: Hear the intricate pattern of vibrations that others use to address me, and triangulate its source to a little man who decides whether or not I provide value to the people who own the cement cube.

11:31 A.M.-Noon: Use my mouth and my throat to send vibrations back at the little man to persuade him that the numbers and letters on my light panel are "marketable to millennials."

Noon-1 P.M.: Repeatedly slam my aforementioned soup-making bones together to more easily swallow the flesh of a bird and turn it into parts of myself.

1-3:29 P.M.: Continue wiggling my ten bony protrusions over the grid of plastic-covered springs. Certain chemicals squirting through my brain tag this experience as unpleasant, while other chemicals, from a different part of my brain, override this unpleasantness, because past experience has taught me that wiggling my bony protrusions will lead to acquiring paper that I can use to obtain more bird flesh, which I require for life.

3:29-3:29.5 P.M.: Consider violating ingrained social norms and walking out of cement cube because it's not enough paper.

3:29.5-3:30 P.M.: Remember that it's better than no paper at all.

3:30-3:38 P.M.: Sit on a fixture of hardened white clay and expel any bird flesh that my body was not able to turn into itself.

3:38-4 P.M.: Play Free Chess App Lite atop the white clay fixture, even though I finished expelling a while ago.

4-6 P.M.: Continue wiggling my ten bony protrusions. Chemicals squirting through my brain ramp up the associated feelings of unpleasantness, while other chemicals compensate by inducing hallucinations of desirable activities, such as vibrations I might emit to Jessica to make her like me.

6-6:38 P.M.: Re-strap myself into my rocket-room and push a button that prompts the generation of vibrations that were recorded from the mouths of four attractive teen-agers who live more than three thousand miles away. Harry Styles ain't bad.

6:38-7:50 P.M.: Press buttons on a plastic box to pulse electromagnetic waves at a Styrofoam cup full of elbow-shaped wheat and edible chemicals that resemble cheese enough to trick my brain into thinking that they are cheese. Use a piece of rounded metal mined from under the crust of the Earth by people I don't know to stir together the wheat and the chemicals, carry them toward my chin, and burn a flap of exposed muscle in my mouth which is the only body part of mine that allows me to taste.

7:50-11:28 P.M.: Watch reruns of "Frasier."

11:28-11:35 P.M.: Use aforementioned Chinese-child-made brush to scrub away any scraps of bird flesh or elbow-shaped wheat that my exposed muscle flap was unable to relocate into the tube that leads to the bag of acid in my midsection.

11:35-11:59 P.M.: Climb onto my cushion-topped box of metal springs. Leak salty liquid from the inside corners of my eyes while chemicals in my brain recreate the images and the sounds of all of my past failures.

11:59 P.M.-Midnight: Smile thinking about how I am unique and in control of my destiny, until my brain restarts its vivid hallucinations. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

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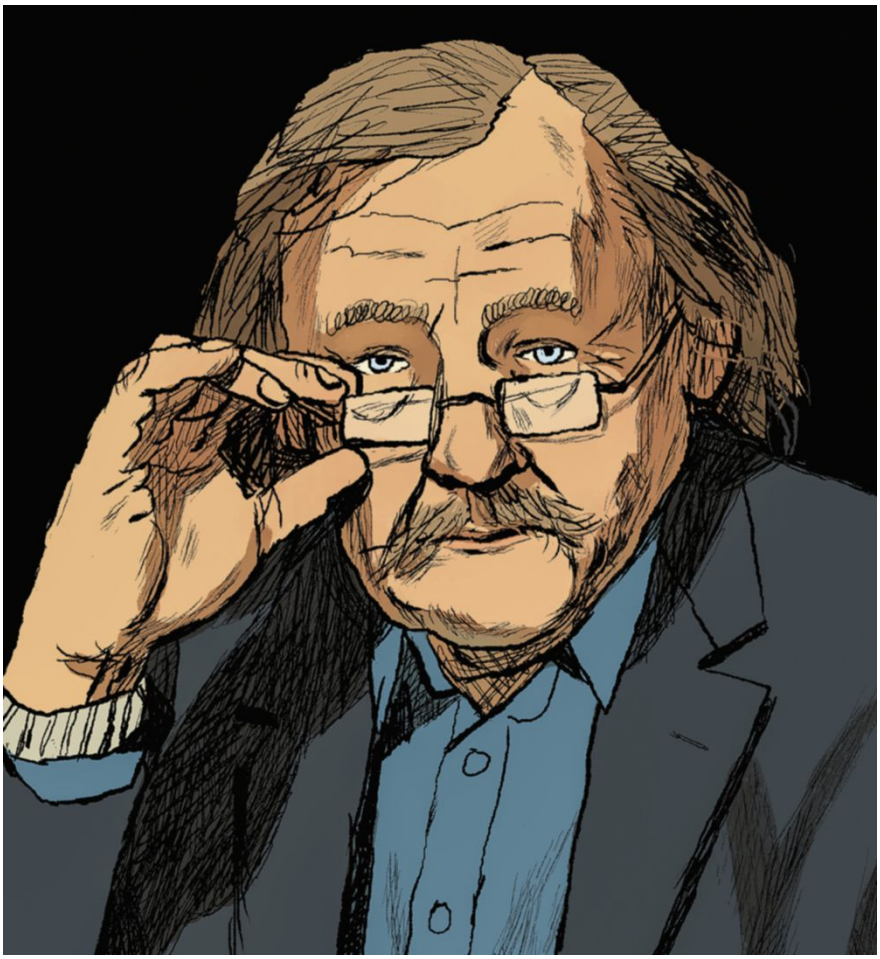
LIFE AND LETTERS

DOKTOR ZEITGEIST

Germany's celebrity philosopher explains the age of rage.

BY THOMAS MEANEY



Peter Sloterdijk has emerged as his country's most controversial public intellectual.

One weekend last June, in an auditorium in the German city of Karlsruhe, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk celebrated his seventieth birthday by listening to twenty lectures about himself. A cluster of Europe's leading intellectuals, academics, and artists, along with a smattering of billionaires, were paying tribute to Germany's most controversial thinker, in the town where he was born and where he recently concluded a two-decade tenure as the rector of the State Academy for Design. There were lectures on Sloterdijk's thoughts on Europe, democracy, religion, love, war, anger, the family, and space. There were lectures on his commentaries on Shakespeare and Clausewitz, and on his witty diaries, and slides of buildings inspired by his insights. Between sessions, Sloterdijk, who has long, straw-colored hair and a straggly mustache, prowled among luminaries of the various disciplines he has strayed into, like a Frankish king greeting lords of recently subdued fiefdoms. The academy bookstore was selling most of his books—sixty-odd titles produced over the past forty years. The latest, "After God," was displayed on a pedestal in a glass cube.

At a dinner in his honor, Sloterdijk surveyed the scene with a Dutch friend, Babs van den Bergh. "Do you think I should read out the letter?" he asked. In his hand was a note from Chancellor Angela Merkel praising his contributions to German culture.

"You really shouldn't read it," van den Bergh said.

"It's not even a good letter, is it?" Sloterdijk said. "It's so short. She probably didn't even write it."

"Of course she didn't write it," van den Bergh said. "But you would never get a letter like that in the Netherlands or anywhere else. *Someone* in her office worked very hard on it."

Reverence for intellectual culture is waning in much of the world, but it remains strong in Germany. Sloterdijk's books vie with soccer-star memoirs on the German best-seller lists. A late-night TV talk show that he co-hosted, "The Philosophical Quartet," ran for a decade. He has written an opera libretto, published a bawdy epistolary novel lampooning the foundation that funds the country's scientific research, and advised some of Europe's leading politicians.

Sloterdijk's colleagues offered encomiums. The architect Daniel Libeskind said that his books have inspired a rethinking of European public space. Bruno Latour, the sociologist and historian of science, apologized for not knowing German, and recited in French a long, droll poem he had written, describing Sloterdijk as a scribe of God. There was a video montage of Sloterdijk's television appearances across the decades, in which a young blond mystic with arctic-blue eyes and torn sweaters gradually morphed into the burgherly figure before us.

On the second night of the symposium, Sloterdijk and his partner, the journalist Beatrice Schmidt, invited some friends to their apartment, on a stately street next door to a Buddhist meditation center. A picture by Anselm Kiefer of a bomber plane hung in the hallway to the kitchen. In the building's untamed back garden, Sloterdijk began pouring bottles of white Rhône wine for his guests. There were whispers about the wonders of his cellar. On a small wooden porch, Sloterdijk spoke to two young women about his recent travails while getting his driver's license renewed. "It's a complete horror," he said. "It takes nine hours in Germany. Only your most maniacally loyal friends are willing to go with you." When Sloterdijk goes into one of his conversational riffs, there is a feeling of

ILLUSTRATION BY MIKKEL SOMMER

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liftoff. A rhythmic nasal hum develops momentum and eventually breaks into more ethereal climes, creating the sense that you have cleared the quotidian. "The car is like a uterus on wheels," he says. "It has the advantage over its biological model for being linked to independent movement and a feeling of autonomy. The car also has phallic and anal components—the primitive-aggressive competitive behavior, and the revving up and overtaking which turns the other, slower person into an expelled turd."

In Germany, where academic philosophers still equate dryness with seriousness, Sloterdijk has a near-monopoly on irreverence. This is an important element of his wide appeal, as is his eagerness to offer an opinion on absolutely anything—from psychoanalysis to finance, Islam to Soviet modernism, the ozone layer to Neanderthal sexuality. An essay on anger can suddenly plunge into a history of smiling; a meditation on America may veer into a history of frivolity. His magnum opus, the "Spheres" trilogy, nearly three thousand pages long, includes a rhapsodic excursus on rituals of human-placenta disposal. He is almost farcically productive. As his editor told me, "The problem with Sloterdijk is that you are always eight thousand pages behind."

This profligacy makes Sloterdijk hard to pin down. He is known not for a single grand thesis but for a shrapnel-burst of impressionistic coinages—"anthropotechnics," "negative gynecology," "coimmunism"—that occasionally suggest the lurking presence of some larger system. Yet his prominence as a public intellectual comes from a career-long rebellion against the pieties of liberal democracy, which, now that liberal democracy is in crisis worldwide, seems prophetic. A signature theme of his work is the persistence of ancient urges in supposedly advanced societies. In 2006, he published a book arguing that the contemporary revolt against globalization can be seen as a misguided expression of "noble" sentiments, which, rather than being curbed, should be redirected in ways that left-liberals cannot imagine. He has described the Presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump as a choice "between two helplessly gesticulating models of normality, one of which appeared to be delegitimatized, the other unproven," and is unsurprised that so many people preferred the latter. Few philosophers are as fixated on the current moment or as gleefully ready to explain it.

Sloterdijk's comfort with social rupture has made him a contentious figure in Germany, where stability, prosperity, and a robust welfare state are seen as central to the country's postwar achievement. Many Germans define themselves by their moral rectitude, as exhibited by their reckoning with the Nazi past and, more recently, by the government's decision to accept more refugees from the Syrian civil war than any other Western country. Sloterdijk is determined to disabuse his countrymen of their polite illusions. He calls Germany a "lethargocracy" and the welfare state a "fiscal kleptocracy." He has decried Merkel's attitude toward refugees, drawn on right-wing thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Arnold Gehlen, and even speculated about genetic enhancement of the human race. As a result, some progressives refuse to utter his name in public. In 2016, the head of one centrist party denounced him as a stooge for the AfD, a new far-right party that won thirteen per cent of the vote in last year's federal elections.

The rise of the German right has made life more complicated for Sloterdijk. Positions that, at another time, might have been forgiven as attempts to stir debate now appear dangerous. A decade ago, Sloterdijk predicted a nativist resurgence in Europe, a time when "we will look back nostalgically to the days when we considered a dashing populist showman like Jörg Haider"—the late Austrian far-right leader—"a menace." Now Sloterdijk has found himself in the predicament of a thinker whose reality has caught up with his pronouncements.

The rest of Germany thinks of Karlsruhe, when it thinks of it at all, as a placid city where the Supreme Court is situated. Nestled in the far southwest, where Germany begins to blend into France, Karlsruhe was one of the first planned cities of Europe and an oasis of the Enlightenment. When Thomas Jefferson passed through, in 1788, he sent a sketch of the street plan back home, as a possible template for the layout of Washington, D.C.

The town is also the birthplace of the inventor of the bicycle, an entrepreneurial baron named Karl von Drais—a fact that Sloterdijk, who loves cycling, cherishes. When I met him a few weeks after his birthday celebrations, he suggested riding into town to try a new steak restaurant. He talked about advances in bicycle design, which got him onto one of his favorite topics: inventors. "There are people who are all around us who have invented something essential," he said. "There's a man in Germany who invented the retractable dog leash. Can you imagine? Millions of people have them now. Of course, these leashes present an existential threat to me, since I'm an avid cyclist. Sometimes I'm riding fast and there's an owner over there, and the dog over there, and in between—!"

We embarked. On his bike, Sloterdijk seemed massive. In the light wind, his plaid short-sleeved shirt became a billowing tube. The fusion of man and machine looked top-heavy and precarious, but his pedalling was strikingly efficient, unstrenuous yet powerful. From the chest up, he appeared no different from the way he does in a seminar room.

At the restaurant, Sloterdijk ordered a glass of rosé. I asked him about the German federal elections, which were a few months away. Sloterdijk spoke disparagingly of all the major parties, except for the F.D.P., Germany's closest equivalent to libertarians. "The most appealing scenario would be for the F.D.P. to share a coalition with Merkel's Christian Democrats," he said. "They could inject some sense into them."

Most Germans think of health care, education, and other basic services as rights, not privileges, but the F.D.P. has argued that the country's welfare state has become hypertrophied, a view close to Sloterdijk's own. "It creates a double current of resentment," he said. "You have the people making money who feel no gratitude in return for all they give in taxes. Then you have the people who receive the money. They also feel resentment. They would like to trade places with the rich who give to them. So both sides feel bitterly betrayed and angry." Sloterdijk argues that taxation should be replaced with a system in which the richest members voluntarily fund great civic and artistic

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works. He believes that this kind of social web of happy givers and receivers existed until around the end of the Renaissance but was then obliterated by the rise of the European state. He gets excited about the profusion of philanthropic schemes emanating from Silicon Valley and sees in them an attractive model for the future.

Compared with many other countries in the West, Germany still has a relatively high level of social equality. The Second World War decimated the German aristocracy, and anti-élitist sentiment surged during the protests of 1968, as a generation of German students began to question the bourgeois priorities of their parents. There is a widespread skepticism of unbridled American-style capitalism and consumer culture. German bankers earn a fraction of what their American counterparts do, and avoid ostentation. It is not uncommon for C.E.O.s and C.F.O.s to painstakingly sort through their household recycling on the weekends. People are wary of credit—nearly eighty per cent of German transactions are made in cash—and customers in hardware shops and bakeries pay, with unfathomable diligence, in exact change.

But even in Germany inequality is growing. Sharp hikes in apartment-rental prices in major cities have dissolved neighborhoods and pushed ordinary workers into long commutes. Last year, the government put forward a plan to privatize the Autobahn. Deutsche Bank, once a stolid provincial lender, has transformed itself in the past two decades into a steroidal, Wall Street-style multinational, a leader in the collateralization of debt, and a major creditor of Donald Trump. Hippie beach enclaves on the Baltic Sea have become resorts for trust-funders.

Germany's embrace of luxury delights Sloterdijk. He believes that it was a historic mistake of the international left to "declare war on the beautiful people," and welcomes signs that Germans are allowing themselves to take pleasure in extravagance. The proliferation of sleek steak restaurants, such as the one we were in, is but one promising sign among many.

The waiter stopped by our table, and Sloterdijk handed him back his second glass of wine. "Was it not cold?" the waiter asked. "Yes, but I want it colder," Sloterdijk said. Later, as we got up to leave, the waiter tentatively approached him and asked, "Are you Herr Sloterdijk?" For a second, it seemed as if he was going to kiss his hand.

As we rode our bikes through Karlsruhe, I asked Sloterdijk what he remembered of his childhood. "We lived in another part of town," he said over his shoulder. "I've gone back to visit it, looking for traces, but nothing came back: there was no *temps retrouvé!*" Sloterdijk was born in 1947, part of the generation that Germans call "rubble children"; he remembers playing in the ruins left behind by the Allied bombing campaigns. His mother worked at a radar center during the war, and met his father, a Dutch sailor, after the German collapse. The marriage did not last long, and Sloterdijk lost contact with his father in early youth. "I had to find my own father and mentors, which meant that I had to look in the world around me," he has said. "Somehow I managed to divide myself into teacher and student."

Part of the "somehow" involved his mother, who taught him ancient Greek sayings and harbored no doubts about her son's genius. When Sloterdijk was a teen-ager, they moved to Munich, where, outside school, he started consuming large amounts of expressionist poetry. In the late nineteen-sixties, he studied literature and philosophy as an undergraduate at the University of Munich, where his friend Rachel Salamander, now an editor and the owner of a Jewish-literature bookshop in the city, remembers him as a dazzling presence. "He spoke faster than everyone thought, and wrote faster than they spoke," she told me. "I was not surprised at all by what he became."

Sloterdijk pursued a doctorate at the University of Hamburg but received only a middling grade on his dissertation, and, for a while, his academic prospects were uncertain. In 1979, he moved to India, where he studied with the guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, near Pune. He says that the greatest discussions of Adorno he ever heard were on the fringes of an ashram there. His time in India led him to challenge many of his intellectual assumptions. "In the German philosophical tradition, we were told that we humans were poor devils," he said to me. "But in India the message was: we weren't poor devils, we contained hidden gods!"

In 1983, a few years after his return, Sloterdijk published a thousand-page book that has sold more copies than any other postwar book of German philosophy. The title, "The Critique of Cynical Reason," seemed to promise a cheeky update of Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason," but the book instead delivered a wildly personal polemic about the deterioration of the utopian spirit of 1968 and called for Sloterdijk's generation to take stock of itself. His peers, as they reached middle age, were pragmatically adjusting to global capitalism and to the nuclear stalemate of the Cold War. He issued a challenge to readers to scour history and art for ways of overcoming social atomization. Punning on Kant's concept of the thing-in-itself, he asked, "Have we not become the isolated thing-for-yourself in the middle of similar beings?"

The antidote to cynicism, he suggested, was a re-immersion in the heritage of the Cynics of ancient Greece. He looked to the philosopher Diogenes, who rejected the social conventions that governed human behavior and said that people should live instinctively, like dogs. The word "cynic" comes from the Greek *kynikos*, meaning "doglike," and Sloterdijk coined the term "kynicism" to differentiate Diogenes' active assault on prevailing norms from the passive disengagement of the late twentieth century. He celebrated the direct way that Diogenes made his points—masturbating in the marketplace, defecating in the theatre—and suggested that the answer to his generation's malaise was to repurpose the spontaneous currents of sixties counterculture.

The book caught a moment and made philosophy seem both relevant and fun, beguiling readers with arguments about the philosophical import of breasts and farts. But although it made Sloterdijk's name, he remained an academic outsider, drifting from post to post for almost a decade. His response was to dismiss those who dismissed him—"Their codes and rituals are reliably antithetical to thought," he told me—and to forge his reputation instead with articles in magazines and newspapers. He received

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job offers from America, but it was becoming clear that he was by nature a gadfly—that he and Germany needed each other because they agitated each other so much.

Sloterdijk began picking fights with some of the most renowned members of the German academic establishment, in particular the leftist theorists of the Frankfurt School. "It's not advisable to go up against Sloterdijk in a public setting," Axel Honneth, a leading figure of the school, told me. "He wins on points of rhetoric that are in inverse proportion to the irresponsibility of his ideas." A French-Canadian academic recently produced a diagram of Sloterdijk's feuds with other German intellectuals; it looks like a trick play in football.

The most notorious episode occurred in 1999, after Sloterdijk published "Rules for the Human Zoo," an essay about the fate of humanism. Since Roman times, he argued, humanism's latent message had been that "reading the right books calms the inner beast" and its function was to select a "secret élite" of the literate. Now, in the age of media-saturated mass culture, reading great books had lost its selective function. "What can tame man, when the role of humanism as the school for humanity has collapsed?" he wrote. Channelling Heidegger and Nietzsche, Sloterdijk imagined an "Über-humanist" who might use "genetic reform" to insure "that an élite is reared with certain characteristics."

In Germany, where the very word "selection" is enough to set off alarms, Sloterdijk's essay invited antagonism. Was he making a plea for eugenics? Jürgen Habermas, the country's most revered philosopher, declared that Sloterdijk's work had "fascist implications," and encouraged other writers to attack him. Sloterdijk responded by proclaiming the death of the Frankfurt School, to which Habermas belongs, writing that "the days of hyper-moral sons of national-socialist fathers are coming to an end." German intellectuals mostly sided with Habermas, but Sloterdijk emerged from the scuffle with his status considerably enhanced. He was now a national figure who stood for everything that Habermas did not.

Sloterdijk's professional uncertainties

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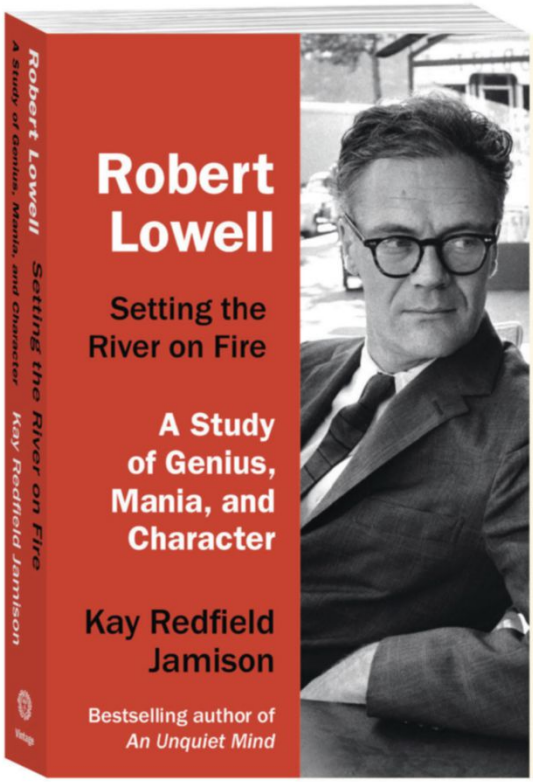

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resolved themselves in the early nineties, when his appointment to a prime post at the academy in Karlsruhe gave him the freedom to do whatever he liked. Since then, his newspaper articles and TV appearances have gradually established him as a media celebrity. Over the summer, ordinary Germans who spotted his books in my hands engaged me in conversation on trains, in coffee shops, at universities, and in bookshops. "Sloterdijk creates for his readers the feeling that they are suddenly in possession of the solutions to the greatest problems in philosophy," the German literary critic Gustav Seibt told me. He also has a strong following among wealthy élites, who value the intellectual patina he provides for their world views. Nicolas Berggruen, a billionaire investor who recently established an annual million-dollar philosophy prize, told me, "Sloterdijk takes on the biggest issues, but in the least conventional ways."

In the academy, he is still regarded with suspicion. The English philosopher John Gray argued, in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books*, that, sentence by sentence, much of his output is simply incomprehensible. It's a common reaction among Anglophone readers, who are often baffled by the scale of his reputation. This is in part because his metaphorical, image-addicted style of philosophy has been in short supply in English since Coleridge. But in Europe it finds a ready audience. His writings, abstruse yet popularizing, have made him an uplifting guru for some and a convenient devil for others—the crucial fact being that he is never ignored. "The most interesting thing about Sloterdijk may not be anything particular he has written," the Berkeley intellectual historian Martin Jay told me, "but simply the fact that he exists."

Shortly after the German federal elections in September, I met Sloterdijk for lunch, at a small Italian restaurant in the west of Berlin. "This is a restaurant where Gerhard Schröder used to come," Sloterdijk told me with satisfaction. The former German Chancellor began inviting Sloterdijk to gatherings of intellectuals in the nineties, when his broadsides against left-leaning public moralists were first winning him a following among conservative and centrist politicians. After our lunch, Sloterdijk was going to see the country's current President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. I asked if he ever saw Angela Merkel, and he laughed, saying, "She's got to this point where she exudes the persona of a woman who no longer needs anyone's advice."

Since I had last seen Sloterdijk, Merkel and her party, the C.D.U., had pulled off a narrow victory in the federal elections, but major gains achieved by previously marginal parties were making it hard for Merkel to assemble a governing coalition. The leftist party Die Linke had made inroads into the youth vote, recalling the successes of Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn. The libertarian F.D.P., which Sloterdijk had praised months before, had done well, too, but eventually turned down the opportunity to join Merkel in a coalition government. Overshadowing everything else in the headlines were the advances made by the nationalist AfD.

When I brought up the AfD, Sloterdijk sank his head in his hands, and his expansive manner gave way to something more cautious. For years, the German media have been making connections between Sloterdijk's thought and new right-wing groups, and he's become used to rebutting the charge of harboring far-right sympathies. In my conversations with him, his political preoccupations seemed closer to libertarianism than to anything more blood and soil, but he has a habit of saying things that, depending on your view, seem either like dog whistles to the far right or like the bomb-throwing reflexes of a born controversialist. When Sloterdijk said, of Merkel's refugee policy, that "no society has the moral obligation to self-destruct," his words called to mind Thilo Sarrazin, a former board member of the Bundesbank, who, in 2010, published an anti-Muslim tract with the title "Germany Abolishes Itself," which became a huge best-seller and made racial purity a respectable concern of national discussion.

I asked Sloterdijk about Marc Jongen, a former doctoral student of his who became the AfD's "party philosopher" and recently took up a seat in the Bundestag. "In a perfect world, you are not responsible for your students," he said. "But we live in a half-perfect world, and so now people try to pin Jongen to me." I asked if there was any common ground between him and Jongen, and he replied with an emphatic no, calling Jongen "a complete impostor." He went on, "He came to the university to study Sanskrit classics like the Upanishads, but then he gave it all up. A political career is the way out for him." The response was unequivocal, but couched less in terms of moral abhorrence than of professional disdain.

Sloterdijk deplored the rise of the right, but he couldn't resist seeing something salutary in the spectacle. "It's been coming for a long time," he said. "It's also a sign that Germans are more like the rest of humanity than they like to believe." He started talking about "rage banks," his term for the way that disparate grievances can be organized into larger reserves of political capital.

He described this concept in his 2006 book "Rage and Time," an examination of the loathing of liberal democracy by nativist, populist, anarchic, and terrorist movements. The book follows his usual detour-giddy historical method, comparing political uses of anger, and of related emotions such as pride and resentment, from Homer to the present. In premodern societies, he argues, vengeance and blood feuds provided ample outlet for these impulses. Later, loyalty to the nation-state performed a similar function, and international Communism managed to direct class rage into utopian projects. But modern capitalism presents a particular problem. "Ever more irritated and isolated individuals find themselves surrounded by impossible offers," he writes, and, out of this frustrated desire, "an impulse to hate everything emerges." It was this kind of rage, Sloterdijk believes, that was on display in the riots in the *banlieues* of Paris in 2005.

In "Rage and Time," Sloterdijk writes that the discontents of capitalism leave societies susceptible to "rage entrepreneurs"—a phrase that uncannily foreshadows the advent of Donald Trump. When we spoke about Trump, Sloterdijk explained him as part of a shift in Western history. "This is a moment that won't come again," he told me. "Both

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of the old Anglophone empires have within a short period withdrawn from the universal perspective." Sloterdijk went so far as to claim that Trump uses fears of ecological devastation in his favor. "The moment for me was when I first heard him say 'America First,'" he said. "That means: America to the front of the line! But it's not the line for globalization anymore, but the line for resources. Trump channels this global feeling of ecological doom."

I asked Sloterdijk if there was something specifically American about Trumpism. "You can't go looking for Trump in Europe," he told me. "You know, Hegel in his time was convinced that the state in the form of the rule of law had not yet arrived in the new world. He thought that the individual—private, virtuous—had to anticipate the state. You see this in American Westerns, where the good sheriff has to imagine the not-yet-existent state in his own private morality. But Trump is a degenerate sheriff. He acts as if he doesn't care if the state comes into being or not, and mocks the upright townsfolk. What makes Trump dangerous is that he exposes parts of liberal democracies that were only shadowily visible up until now. In democracies, there is always an oligarchic element, but Trump makes it extremely, comically visible." For Sloterdijk, Trump's true significance lies in the way that he instinctively subverts the norms of modern governance. "He's an innovator when it comes to fear," Sloterdijk told me. "Instead of waiting for the crisis to impose his decree, his decrees get him the emergencies he needs. The playground for madness is vast."

"He's somewhat risk-averse, so you might have a hard time getting him onto a pier."

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The day after our lunch was the five-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. The city of Wittenberg, half an hour outside Berlin, where Luther had—allegedly—nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church, had suddenly been transformed into something like an American Christian-college campus. Midwesterners and Californians mixed with fellow-pilgrims in squares and outside churches, discussing the doings of St. Paul and debating whether Luther was a monk or a friar. Faux-medieval stalls were selling Reformation souvenirs, including T-shirts that said "Viva la Reformation!" and Luther socks that read "Here I stand, I can do no other."

Sloterdijk had come to speak at a local Protestant academy about the meaning of the Reformation. "Luther had the great fortune to be followed by Bach," Sloterdijk told his audience. "His form of individualism was illuminated by the most beautiful music."

"But he was also followed by Hitler!" a young man in the audience said.

"Hitler was a degraded Papist," Sloterdijk shot back.

Little by little, the discussion gravitated to assaults on Sloterdijk's positions. "You sound like the right-wingers when you speak of the refugees," an elderly doctor stood up and declared. "We cared about refugees after the war and we can do it again."

Sloterdijk replied impatiently. "The Americans gave us this idea of multiculturalism that suited their society fine, but which, as software, is not compatible with our German hardware of the welfare state," he said. "There's this family metaphor spreading everywhere: the idea that all of humanity is our family. That idea helped destroy the Roman Empire. Now we're in danger of letting that metaphor get out of control all over again. People are not ready to feel the full pressure of coexistence with billions of their contemporaries." He went on, "In the past, geography created discretionary boundaries between nations and cultures. Distances that were difficult to overcome allowed for mental and political space." Space and distance, he argued, had allowed for a kind of liberality and generosity that was now under siege—by refugees, by social media, by everything.

At the end of the talk, the faithful of all ages lined up to buy copies of "After God." The polite chatter momentarily gave way to the brisk ritual of book-signing. Sloterdijk scrawled on the open books offered to him. Bearing a freshly signed copy, a pastor visiting from the Rhineland sympathized with Sloterdijk's predicament as a salesman. "We become more like America every day," he told him. "Isn't it a pity?" ♦

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LETTER FROM MOSCOW

THE MISS UNIVERSE CONNECTION

Beauty pageants long helped Trump's businesses. One of them may also have helped his Presidential bid.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

The first-round results of the 2013 Miss Universe pageant seem to have come as a surprise to some of the competition's judges, who thought that they would declare the finalists. The seven judges of the pageant's preliminary round were charged with winnowing eighty-six contestants to fifteen finalists. Divided into two groups, they had brief conversations with each of the contestants, who then paraded onstage, first in bathing suits, then in evening gowns. The judges—including public-relations professionals, a modelling entrepreneur, and a fashion reporter—rated each woman on such qualities as "appearance" and "personality," after which the ballots were whisked away. "They told us not to share how we voted with each other, but we did anyway," one of the preliminary judges told me. When the finalists were announced, he said, the winners included several who hadn't been selected. "I was shocked," the judge told me. "I didn't know what had happened. I felt ridiculous." The contestants were not so naïve—they understood who was in charge.

From 1996 to 2015, Donald Trump co-owned the Miss Universe Organization, which also included the Miss U.S.A. and Miss Teen U.S.A. pageants. A day or two before a pageant began, Trump would casually visit the contestants while they conducted their final rehearsals. Former contestants told me that Trump would circulate among the young women, shaking hands and chatting with each of them, periodically turning to speak with Paula Shugart, the president of the Miss Universe Organization, who followed him at a discreet distance. (Paula Shugart declined to comment.) Adwoa Yamoah, who competed as Miss Canada in 2012, told me, "He made comments about every girl: 'I've been to that country.' 'We're building a Trump Tower there.' It was clear the countries that he liked did well. He'd whisper to Paula about the girls, and she'd write it down. He basically told us he picked nine of the top fifteen." Kerrie Baylis, who was Miss Jamaica in 2013, described a similar scene and added that, when the finalists were announced, "the list looked like the countries that Donald Trump did business with, or wanted to do business with." Shi Lim, who competed that year as Miss Singapore, told me, "The finalists were picked by Trump. He was really in charge. We called it the Trump card." (A Miss Universe spokeswoman said that the pageant rules allowed the company's staff, including Trump, to participate in naming the finalists.)

Trump has long viewed his businesses as mutually reinforcing, with all the products—from hotels to steak, vodka to golf resorts—complementing one another. As he said in the introduction to the first episode of "The Apprentice," the reality-television show that made him a global celebrity, "I've mastered the art of the deal and have turned the name Trump into the highest-quality brand." Trump often staged the Miss Universe pageant in cities where he had other business interests, and finalists usually came from countries where Miss Universe had strong television ratings. Under Trump, the pageant was held twice in Las Vegas, twice in Florida, and twice in Puerto Rico. In the other years, Trump kept the pageant true to its origins as a swimsuit competition by setting the ceremony in warm-weather locations like Panama City, São Paulo, Quito, and Mexico City. (Although interest in beauty pageants has faded in the United States, it remains high in Latin America.) Only once did Trump steer the pageant away from temperate environments—in November, 2013, when Miss Universe took place in Russia.

Today, the Miss Universe pageant in Moscow looks like a harbinger of the Trump campaign and Presidency, featuring some of the same themes and characters. Miss Universe represents a paradigmatic example of Trump's business style in action—the exaggerations that teeter into lies, the willingness to embrace dubious partners, the hunger for glamour and recognition. Trump got away with this kind of behavior for decades, and he played by the same rules during his run for the Presidency.

Last Friday, Robert Mueller, the special counsel, unveiled the indictment of thirteen Russian nationals, and three Russian organizations, on charges that they conspired to throw the 2016 election to Trump. Their main method, the indictment contends, was the manipulation of social media through posts by Russians operating under stolen identities. The Russians' diction was sometimes imperfect—one Instagram post said a "particular hype and hatred for Trump is misleading the people and forcing Blacks to vote Killary"—but their goal was apparent. In the words of the indictment, the conspirators sought to provide information to the American public "supporting the presidential campaign of then-candidate Donald J. Trump and disparaging Hillary Clinton."

The indictment does not explicitly assert that Trump or his campaign knowingly participated in the Russian conspiracy. On Friday afternoon, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, said that the President took this omission as vindication, noting that Trump "is glad to see the Special Counsel's investigation further indicates—that there was NO COLLUSION between the Trump campaign and Russia and that the outcome of the election was not changed or affected." In fact, Mueller's charges suggest the opposite. The undertaking had more than eighty employees and a budget of more than a million dollars a month.

The indictment does not address

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In Moscow, Trump partnered with the property tycoon Aras Agalarov, describing him, wrongly, as Russia's richest man.

ILLUSTRATION BY BARRY BLITT

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several other efforts that American intelligence agencies have tied to Russia, such as the hacking of e-mail accounts linked to prominent Democrats. And Mueller has not yet made public his findings on the clearest link between the Trump campaign and Russian interests: the link that emerged from the Miss Universe pageant in Moscow. The ever-more-pressing question is whether Trump and the Russians used the relationships cemented at the pageant to advance Trump's goal of becoming President of the United States.

Shortly after Yolande Betbeze was named Miss America 1951, she precipitated a crisis. An aspiring opera singer, Betbeze announced that she would not pose in a bathing suit when she went on tour. Executives at Catalina swimwear, a sponsor of the pageant, were offended, and the company decided to create competing events, which came to be called Miss Universe and Miss U.S.A. (Miss U.S.A., not Miss America, advances to the Miss Universe competition.) That rift still defines the differences between the pageants. Miss America, with its earnest talent competitions and its scholarships for winners, purports to reward a multidimensional female ideal. Not so Miss Universe. As Candace Savage put it, in "Beauty Queens," her amusing history of the pageants, "The new competitions were to emphasize 'beauty,' pure and simple, with none of the ridiculous folderol about talent."

By the late nineteen-sixties, ownership of the Miss Universe Organization had passed to a lingerie company called Kayser-Roth. Cindy Adams, who was an assistant at the company, and her husband, the comedian Joey Adams, were friends of Roy Cohn, the New York lawyer and fixer who had been a close aide to Senator Joseph McCarthy. "Roy used to invite us everywhere, and once we went to a party on Long Island, where I happened to be seated at a small table with this tall young guy with blond hair," Adams told me recently. "Roy told me at that dinner that one day Donald would own New York. I said, 'Yeah, pass the gravy.'"

In 1971, Adams arranged for the Miss Universe contestants to walk down Seventh Avenue as a publicity stunt for the pageant, which was to take place in Miami that year. "Cops studded the route. Nobody was allowed near the contestants in the line of march," Adams wrote later, in the New York *Post*, where she is a columnist. "I look over. Who's alongside some nifty beauty from some Who-Knows-Where-Country? My brand-new Best Friend. He wasn't The Donald then." Adams concluded, "I also knew then that he loved beauty, loved blondes, and loved the Miss Universe Pageant."

In 1996, Trump attended the Miss Universe pageant, which was being co-hosted in Paradise, Nevada, by the second of his three wives, Marla Maples. Trump heard that the owner of the organization was putting the business up for sale. "How could I pass up the opportunity to own the world's premiere beauty pageant?" he later wrote. As with so much regarding Trump's finances, the price he paid for it is something of a mystery. In "The Art of the Comeback," he wrote that he beat out several competitors with a bid of ten million dollars; in subsequent interviews, he said that he had paid only two million.

From the beginning, Trump did little to conceal his attitude toward women. As he told Howard Stern in an interview, when he bought the pageant he found that it had strayed from its roots as a beauty contest. "They had a person who was extremely proud that a number of the women had become doctors," Trump said. "And I wasn't interested." In 1997, during his first year as owner, Trump became embroiled in a conflict involving Alicia Machado, of Venezuela, who was the reigning Miss Universe at the time and had gained weight during her tenure. Trump went on a public crusade to shame her. Wearing a suit and tie, and trailed by cameras, he followed Machado into a gym to watch her work out. "This is somebody that likes to eat," Trump told the reporters. The controversy resurfaced during the 2016 campaign, when Hillary Clinton, in the first Presidential debate, said, "He called this woman 'Miss Piggy.' Then he called her 'Miss Housekeeping,' because she was Latina." After a pause, Clinton said, "Donald, she has a name: Her name is Alicia Machado." (Trump was unrepentant, telling Fox News, "She gained a massive amount of weight, and it was a real problem.")

Trump also boasted about ogling Miss Universe contestants during the events. "I'll go backstage before a show and everyone's getting dressed, and everything else, and you know, no men are anywhere, and I'm allowed to go in because I'm the owner of the pageant and therefore I'm inspecting it," he told Stern. "You know, they're standing there with no clothes." Over the years, when asked about his management of the pageants, he has often replied with some version of the quip "The bathing suits got smaller and the heels got higher and the ratings went up." The part about ratings isn't true. As the book "Trump Revealed," by Michael Kranish and Marc Fisher, noted, when Trump bought Miss Universe the viewership in the United States had declined from around thirty-five million in 1984 to twelve million in 1997. The numbers kept falling during Trump's ownership, and the American audience for the 2013 pageant consisted of fewer than four million. Still, Trump recognized that the pageant was a useful vehicle for expanding his reach overseas, and no country so consistently kindled his ambitions as Russia.

Trump's interest in the country goes back to the days of the Soviet Union. His first book, "The Art of the Deal," published in 1987, begins with an account of a typical day in his life, including a phone call with an acquaintance who conducted a lot of business with the Soviet Union. "I'm talking about building a large luxury hotel, across the street from the Kremlin, in partnership with the Soviet government," Trump wrote. "They have asked me to go to Moscow in July." Later that year, he did go to Moscow and what was then Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), but his plans to build there never came to fruition.

Trump returned to Moscow in each of the following decades, hoping to add one of his eponymous towers to the city's skyline. His regular visits have

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led some to speculate that Trump had a kind of obsession with the country, but he looked for deals all over the world, and he returned to Russia because that's where the money was. A longtime adviser to Trump told me, "It's a major metropolitan city, and around the years of 2000, give or take, with the privatization, there was a lot of money in Moscow."

The atmosphere of post-Soviet Russia also seemed to suit Trump. He travelled to the city again in November, 1996, during the raucous "Wild East" days following the collapse of Communism and the Soviet system. His arrival in Moscow came after a plunge in his financial fortunes. (His 1995 tax return, published in part by the *Times* in 2016, showed losses of nine hundred and sixteen million dollars.) He had lost the trust of American banks and was forced to search for credit and business opportunities abroad. In a news conference shortly after his arrival in Moscow, he said that he planned to invest two hundred and fifty million dollars to build a pair of luxury apartment towers in the city, one to be called Trump International and the other Trump Tower. In addition, he said that he was looking into renovating and running two famous hotels from the Soviet era. As Trump said in a Mark Singer profile in *The New Yorker*, published a few months later, "We're looking at the Moskva Hotel. We're also looking at the Rossiya. That's a very big project; I think it's the largest hotel in the world. And we're working with the local government, the mayor of Moscow and the mayor's people."

The Moskva, steps from Red Square and the Kremlin, was the subject of a bizarre legend. The story goes that during the early thirties, in the midst of Stalin's purges, the architect submitted a set of plans to Stalin for the dictator's approval. Stalin didn't notice that the architect had provided two versions of the front façade. Rather than risk Stalin's wrath by pointing this out, the architect used both designs, one on the left side of the building, the other on the right. The architect survived the ordeal, but, by 1996, the building was falling apart, and city authorities were looking for investors to renovate it.

During this trip, Trump was accompanied by a prominent American businessman—Bennett LeBow, the chairman of the Vector Group, a holding company with investments in tobacco and real estate. LeBow and Trump arranged to meet with representatives of Boris Yeltsin's government in a conference room at the Moskva to discuss taking over the hotel.

An expatriate businessman who attended the event that day told me, "I was just a kid, and I was supposed to help out at the meeting. LeBow was upstairs, in a room called 'the library,' but Trump was late. So they sent me downstairs to wait for him." When Trump arrived, he was accompanied by two young Russian women. The businessman said, "I had never met Trump before, and I was nervous as hell. So I started panicking. I mean, this was a serious meeting. So I suggested to Trump that I wait downstairs at the bar with them. I'd keep them company until he was finished. He said no way. He thought it was hilarious. He wanted to go upstairs with them. So what could I do? The three of them went up to the meeting together."

As with Trump's previous visit, nothing came of this mission to Moscow. (LeBow declined to comment. A White House spokesperson indicated that the President has "absolutely no memory of any women attending a meeting with him while there and disputes any suggestion to the contrary.") Later, the Rossiya was torn down and replaced with a park. The Moskva was eventually renovated and converted into a Four Seasons Hotel.

By the turn of the century, Trump had moved away from the capital demands of developing real estate and begun leveraging his celebrity into franchise deals. He had experienced repeated bankruptcies in Atlantic City, and was cut off from traditional sources of funding. As a result, he began to welcome less reputable partners, as long as they had access to cash.

His ambition of putting his name on a building in Russia persisted. A source in Moscow told me that "Trump was always trying to get in touch with Russian money," adding that in 2007 the source brought a Russian real-estate developer to meet with Trump at Trump Tower, in New York, to discuss a franchise project in Moscow. "The deals

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were always the same," the source said. "Trump would lend his name, and the local guy would put up the money, build, and manage. Nothing came of it."

Trump made his first foray into the Russian market when he lent his name to Trump vodka. "By the summer of '06," Trump said in a news release, "I fully expect the most called-for cocktail in America to be the 'T&T,' or the 'Trump and tonic.'" The product was launched at a series of parties in New York, Miami Beach, and Hollywood. Among the guests, according to news reports, were Stormy Daniels, the porn actress, and the former Playmate Karen McDougal, both of whom were reportedly later paid to conceal their relationships with Trump. In 2007, with similar fanfare, Trump announced that his vodka would expand its distribution into Russia, with a $1.5 million deal for ten thousand cases. The vodka flopped, in Russia and elsewhere. A longtime vodka executive in Russia told me, "Trump vodka never even showed up on our sales reports—that's how little it sold." Production ceased in 2011.

The 2008 recession shattered the real-estate market, but Trump's position was cushioned by the success of "The Apprentice," which was being syndicated around the world. Trump SoHo, a hotel and condominium in New York, had already begun selling space. His partners in the project included Felix Sater and Tevfik Arif, two real-estate operators who were born in the Soviet Union and maintained strong ties to Russia. Sater, the son of a Russian mobster, had immigrated to the United States as a child. In 1993, he went to prison for fifteen months after stabbing a man in the face with the stem of a broken margarita glass during a barroom confrontation; and in 1998 he pleaded guilty for his role in a forty-million-dollar stock-fraud scheme carried out with mobsters. In 2010, Arif, who had worked at the Soviet Ministry of Trade, was arrested in Turkey with ten others aboard a luxury yacht and accused of being part of a prostitution ring. (He was later acquitted.) Sater and Arif were principals in the Bayrock Group, which invested in Trump real-estate ventures from its offices on the twenty-fourth floor of Trump Tower.

The extent of Trump's financial ties to Russia remains unclear, but he appears to have had a number of investors and business partners from the former Soviet Union. In 2008, Donald Trump, Jr., told the audience at a real-estate conference, "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets. . . . We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia." He also said that he had made six trips to Russia during the previous eighteen months. In 2013, Trump's son Eric told the sportswriter James Dodson, "We don't rely on American banks. We have all the funding we need out of Russia." (On Twitter, Eric Trump denied having made the remark.)

In 2013, Trump's prospects in Russia began to look more sanguine, thanks to a music video featuring a pop star named Emin Agalarov. Emin's father, Aras, had made a fortune as a real-estate developer in Moscow, and Emin had put the family fortune to work for the benefit of his singing career. The Moscow music scene favors hard-edged rap, but Emin found a degree of success as a crooner in the mold of Enrique Iglesias. In 2013, he had high expectations for a danceable tune called "Amor," and he wanted an especially beautiful woman to star in the accompanying music video. Emin and his publicist, Rob Goldstone, a former tabloid journalist from Great Britain who was hired to promote Emin's singing career outside Russia, approached the Miss Universe Organization and asked if the men could cast the reigning champion, Olivia Culpo, the former Miss U.S.A. Emin and Goldstone also suggested that the Agalarovs host Miss Universe in Moscow in 2013, so that Emin could perform for the pageant's global audience. That June, Emin and Aras travelled to Las Vegas to close the deal with Trump.

In some ways, the alliance between the Agalarovs and Trump seems preordained. The Russian family's mingled interests in real estate and show business led some to call them the Trumps of Russia. Unlike Trump, Aras came from a family of modest means, but he had roots in Azerbaijan, where work was under way on a Trump hotel and residence tower in Baku, the capital. Emin was married to the daughter of Ilham Aliyev, the longtime Azerbaijani President. (They have since divorced.) Christopher Steele, the former British spy who examined Trump's ties to Russia, may have hinted at a darker explanation for the Agalarovs' interest in Miss Universe. Retained by the research firm Fusion GPS, which was paid by Hillary Clinton's campaign, Steele asserted that the "Russian regime has been cultivating, supporting and assisting TRUMP for at least 5 years." Even if Steele is wrong and Russia was not cultivating Trump as an asset, it seems clear that by this point Trump would do business with just about anyone. No licensing deal was too demeaning; he would attach his name to steak, water bottles, neckties, mattresses, lamps, and vodka.

On the trip to Las Vegas, Aras and Emin Agalarov were accompanied by Goldstone and came to an agreement with Trump that the Agalarovs would host the Miss Universe pageant in Moscow that year. With his characteristic salesman's bravado, Trump later said that there had been eighteen other bidders vying for the pageant; in fact, it's not clear that there were any others. According to various reports, the Agalarovs invested twenty million dollars to bring the event to Moscow. "Twenty million dollars is not even close," Scott Balber, a lawyer for Emin and Aras Agalarov who has also represented Trump, told me. "The site fee to Miss Universe was a couple of million dollars at most."

In 2002, Trump had sold half of the Miss Universe Organization to NBC, which broadcast the pageant, and the network had representatives on the organization's board. "Trump didn't decide alone that the pageant would take place in Russia," Michael Cohen, a former executive vice-president of the Trump Organization and a personal attorney to the President who also served on the Miss Universe board of directors, told me. "The board unanimously agreed that the package the Agalarovs put forward was best for the company and best for the contestants, so we approved it. I suspect that one of the Agalarovs' motivations was to advance Emin's career."

Trump, though eager to take his pageant to Moscow, likely had an exaggerated idea of the Agalarovs' place in Rus-

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MOZART'S FINAL HOUR

1
My father is playing the B-Flat Sonata.
Hidden under the rented baby grand
I press one pedal or another,
"damper," "sustain"—

Mozart grows pompous, prissy,
or strangely tongue-tied.

You can watch the shadows come—
the elm in the French window
impenetrable as a score.
Rain is a diminished chord.

I press those huge slippers
that smell of fart and wax,
gently, and my father
adjusts his timing delicately.

It's late.

Mozart bloated with sepsis says:
Fetch me my quill. I have an idea
that will make me famous.

Now the room is entirely dark.
My father is playing by heart.
That stupid grief—he memorized it.

Our love is like nightfall
or a trill: you can see through it
but not *it*.

2
Then time shall be no more.

—*D. Nurkse*

sian society. "I remember when we first came to him for a meeting, he was sitting in the lobby of his own hotel, which, of course, is called 'Trump,' " Aras Agalarov told the Russian magazine *Snob*. Trump, Aras continued, "began to shout, 'Look who came to me! This is the richest person in Russia!' " According to *Forbes's* ranking of the wealthiest people in Russia, Agalarov placed fifty-first, with a net worth of about $1.7 billion. Anders Aslund, an expert on the Russian economy at the Atlantic Council, in Washington, told me, "Most of the great Russian fortunes come from natural resources, like oil, and the real-estate developers are distinctly second-class in the pecking order. And Agalarov's stuff is mostly on the outskirts, in what's called the Moscow region, on the way to the airport." Nor does Agalarov wield outsized clout with Putin. "Real-estate developers like Agalarov are under the thumb of the government, and they are expected to do as they are told," Aslund said. "Agalarov is building two stadiums for the World Cup this summer, not because he'll make much money doing it but because it's what the government expects of him. Agalarov surely had met Putin, but in 2013 neither he nor Trump would have mattered much to Putin."

Trump's mistaken impression of Agalarov seems to have given him an exaggerated expectation of meeting Putin, which was one of his goals in taking Miss Universe to Moscow. On June 18, 2013, just after Trump announced that the Miss Universe pageant would take place in Russia, he tweeted, with a kind of desperate giddiness, "Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Moscow—if so, will he become my new best friend?" That fall, before the pageant, David Letterman asked Trump, on "Late Night," if he had ever met Putin. "I met him once," Trump replied, falsely.

On Friday, November 8, 2013, Trump travelled to Moscow with Phil Ruffin, his business partner in Las Vegas. Ruffin is married to Oleksandra Nikolayenko, a former Miss Universe from Ukraine, who is forty-six years Ruffin's junior. After they arrived, Trump attended a morning meeting about the pageant at his hotel, the Ritz-Carlton. Keith Schiller, a former New York City police officer who had long served as Trump's bodyguard, sat on one side of the room. At some point during the session, Schiller testified to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, someone offered to send five women to Trump's hotel room. Schiller said that he took the offer as a joke, rejected it, and told Trump of the invitation, which he said the two men laughed about.

Later that day, the Agalarovs hosted a reception for Trump at a Moscow outpost of the Nobu restaurant chain. Emin Agalarov owns several restaurants run by the Los Angeles-based chef Nobu Matsuhisa, who was also in Moscow to serve as a judge in the final round of Miss Universe the next day. About a dozen people attended, including Herman Gref, the former Minister of Economic Development and Trade under Putin and the president of Sberbank, the largest bank in Russia. From there, the Agalarovs took Trump to Crocus City, their shopping mall, west of the city, where the pageant would take place. Aras Agalarov hosted a fifty-eighth-birthday party for himself at which the contestants gathered to sing "Happy Birthday." The event may have been

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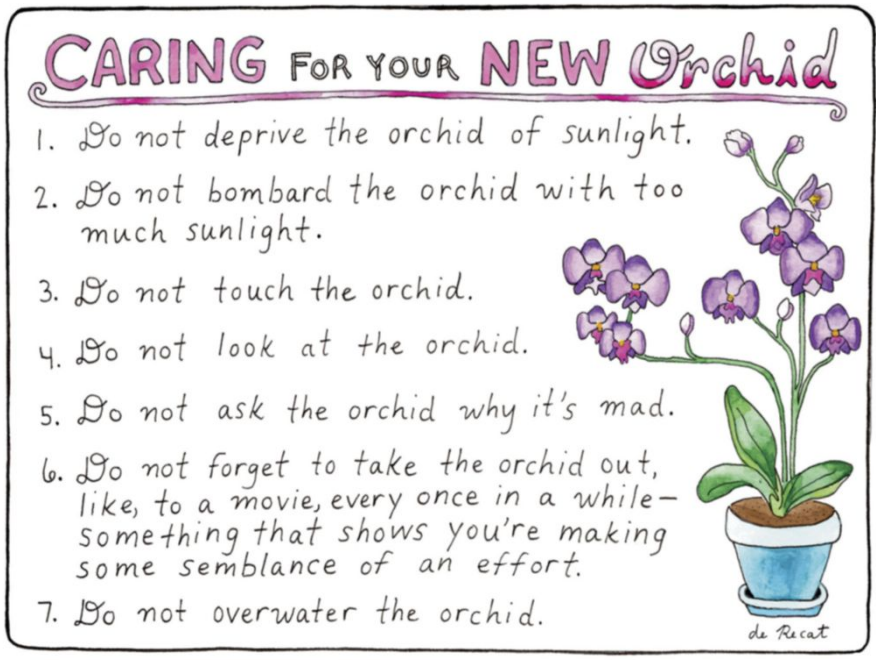

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Trump's chance to inspect the women and render his judgments about who should advance to the finals.

The following morning, Emin, who had asked Trump to shoot a scene for his music video, brought a camera crew to the Ritz-Carlton. In a conference room, Trump recited his famous line—"You're fired"—in one take. He also held a news conference and sat for an interview with Thomas Roberts, an MSNBC anchorman who would serve as the television host of the finals, along with Mel B., the British singer better known as Scary Spice. (Andy Cohen, the television personality, had co-hosted the previous year's pageant but withdrew from the 2013 contest because Russia had passed an anti-gay law that year. Roberts—who, like Cohen, is gay—agreed to take his place.) Asked by Roberts about his relationship with Putin, Trump again dissembled, saying, "I do have a relationship, and I can tell you that he's very interested in what we're doing here today." Trump went on, "He's probably very interested in what you and I are saying today, and I'm sure he's going to be seeing it in some form, but I do have a relationship with him." He told Roberts that Putin had "done an amazing job. . . . A lot of people would say he's put himself at the forefront of the world as a leader." Maria Abakumova, a Moscow-based journalist who worked for the Russian edition of *Forbes* at the time and covered Aras Agalarov, told me that people thought Putin would attend the pageant, but he never showed up. Later, Aras told the Washington *Post* that Putin had sent Trump a sort of consolation prize—a note along with a decorative box.

The faux triumphal arch that greets visitors to Crocus City establishes the grandiosity of the Agalarovs' commercial complex. It is three separate but connected malls. One, dubbed "Vegas," features moderately priced retailers. A second consists of dozens of luxury shops, and a third offers home-improvement products. There is also an aquarium, a hotel, a heliport, and Crocus City Hall, the six-thousand-seat theatre where the Miss Universe pageant would be staged.

To accommodate the international television audience, the live broadcast in Moscow began late on the night of Saturday, November 9th. Trump and Aras Agalarov sat next to each other in the front row. One judge, an Italian wristwatch designer named Italo Fontana, told me, by e-mail, that Trump "greeted me like we were friends since ages and with a smile and a pat on my shoulder he told me: 'I recommend you, vote the most beautiful one!'"

The judges included Steven Tyler, of Aerosmith; the supermodel Carol Alt, who had been a contestant on "Celebrity Apprentice"; and the ice-skater Tara Lipinski. An announcer provided a few facts about each finalist—"She never wears flats because she feels she is made to be a beauty queen"—until only Miss Venezuela and Miss Spain remained. (The contestants were referred to by their countries, not by name.) At the end of the show, Olivia Culpo handed her crown to Gabriela Isler, of Venezuela, who became the seventh winner from that country since 1979.

Trump later boasted about how many important people he met during the weekend, telling *Real Estate Weekly*, a trade publication, "Almost all of the oligarchs were in the room." This was far from true—very few attended—but photographs and news reports show that Trump did cross paths with some wealthy Muscovites and a variety of prospective business partners. Perhaps the most notorious guest was Alimzhan Tokhtakhounov, a Russian businessman widely suspected of fixing an ice-dancing competition at the 2002 Winter Olympics. At the time of the pageant, he was a fugitive from justice in the United States, where he had been charged with running an organized-crime money-laundering operation from an apartment at Trump Tower, three floors below Trump's penthouse. (He denies the allegations.)

The after-party for several hundred guests took place in a large meeting room on the Crocus City campus. Trump and the Agalarovs presided in one of the V.I.P. boxes, receiving guests and taking photographs. Timati, a leading Russian rapper, came to pay his respects. "It was a pretty sedate affair in their box," one guest recalled, adding that, in the next box, Roustam Tariko, the founder of the business empire Russian Standard, which was an official partner of the pageant, held a livelier celebration, with about a dozen young women, including numerous Miss Russia contestants. (Russian Standard also sponsors the Miss Russia pageant, a feeder event for Miss Universe.) The parties wound down at around four in the morning.

Trump stayed at the Ritz-Carlton

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for only two nights, but his presence there has given rise to the most sensational accusation about his time in Moscow. The Steele dossier claims that Russian authorities had exploited Trump's "personal obsessions and sexual perversion in order to obtain suitable 'kompromat' (compromising material) on him." A source allegedly present at the scene said that Trump had rented the Presidential Suite at the hotel, where Barack and Michelle Obama had stayed, and that he had employed "a number of prostitutes to perform a 'golden showers' (urination) show in front of him," as a way of defiling the bed in which the former First Couple had slept. The accusation seems unlikely, though not impossible, and Trump has denied the validity of the dossier. In any case, he seems to have been in high spirits when he left Moscow. Shortly after his departure, he tweeted to Aras Agalarov's account, "I had a great weekend with you and your family. You have done a FANTASTIC job. TRUMP TOWER-MOSCOW is next. EMIN was WOW!"

If Trump had simply gone back to his career in business, the Miss Universe pageant in Moscow would today rank as little more than a footnote in the colorful saga of a flamboyant New York real-estate developer. But a year and a half later, in June, 2015, Trump declared his candidacy for President in a notorious speech at Trump Tower, in which he accused Mexico of exporting criminals and rapists and called for the building of a border wall. Outrage followed, especially in the Spanish-speaking world, and Trump quickly made a deal to sell his ownership of the Miss Universe Organization, to the WME-IMG talent agency. Neither the sale price nor Trump's profit on the deal, if any, has been disclosed.

In the Presidential campaign, Trump continued his embrace of Moscow with a roundelay of ingratiation and deference to Putin. He had also kept in touch with the Agalarovs. A year after the pageant, he appeared in another of Emin's videos, to celebrate his thirty-fifth birthday. ("Emin, I can't believe you're turning thirty-five," Trump said. "You're a winner, you're a champ!") In April of 2016, Emin told the Washington *Post,* "I consider him a friend. We exchange correspondence. We see each other a few times a year."

As a Presidential candidate, Trump continued working on a plan to build in Russia. In October, 2015, based on a proposal by Felix Sater, Trump signed a non-binding letter of intent to license the Trump name to a potential office tower in Moscow. In an e-mail sent at the time to Michael Cohen, Sater wrote, "I will get Putin on this program and we will get Donald elected. . . . Buddy our boy can become President of the USA and we can engineer it. I will get all of Putins team to buy in on this." Cohen, who negotiated on Trump's behalf, recalled, "The licensee was intent on developing the tallest building in the world, a hundred and twenty stories or so, with commercial space, a hotel, and residential. But the most important requirement we had was that Felix find the right piece of real estate for it, because the Trump brand is all about location, location, location. By January, 2016, I saw that he couldn't come up with any location, so I told him the deal was dead."

The scope of Russian meddling in the election remains unknown, but it appears to have included hacking e-mail accounts affiliated with prominent Democrats, seeding social media with pro-Trump and anti-Clinton items, and, perhaps, directing financial assistance to pro-Trump organizations. According to six U.S. intelligence chiefs, Russia is building on its 2016 efforts by launching a new round of attacks aimed at undermining the 2018 elections. On February 13th, Dan Coats, the director of National Intelligence, warned the Senate Intelligence Committee, "We expect Russia to continue using propaganda, social media, false-flag personas, sympathetic spokesmen, and other means of influence to try to build on its wide range of operations and exacerbate social and political fissures in the United States." In the same hearing, Christopher Wray, the director of the F.B.I., acknowledged that the President had not asked his intelligence officials to take specific measures to address Russian interference. "We need to inform the American public that this is real," Coats said, in what sounded as much like an appeal to the President as to the public. "We are not going to allow some Russian to tell us how to vote and how to run our country. I think there needs to be a national cry for that."

Trump, it seems, has never asked his top intelligence officials for an accounting of Russian activities during the campaign or for a plan to stop such efforts from continuing in the future. As a result, the quest for accountability rests largely with the Mueller investigation, which is trying to determine whether Trump and his campaign staff knew about, encouraged, or sponsored the Russian efforts. To date, the most direct evidence that they did is a result of connections forged in the lead-up to the 2013 Miss Universe contest. On June 3, 2016, Rob Goldstone, Emin Agalarov's publicist, e-mailed Donald Trump, Jr., offering damaging information about Hillary Clinton as "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump." Donald, Jr., replied, "If it's what you say I love it." Six days later, Trump, Jr., Jared Kushner, the candidate's son-in-law, and Paul Manafort, then the chairman of the campaign, welcomed a group of visitors to Trump Tower led by a Russian attorney named Natalia Veselnitskaya. In July, 2017, the *Times* informed the White House that it was working on a story about that meeting. The President and his advisers, who were returning from a trip to Europe aboard Air Force One, prepared a misleading statement about the purpose of the meeting, asserting that it had been a harmless discussion of adoption policy.

Mueller's prosecutors have taken a close look at the meeting, and at the President's public response to its exposure. It is illegal for foreign nationals to contribute to American campaigns, including through in-kind contributions, such as opposition research. The misleading statement may become evidence of obstruction of justice. And the indictments of the Russians on Friday showed Mueller's determination to reveal the extent of foreign influence in the election and to hold accountable those who facilitated it. For decades, in Trump's business dealings, he never paid a price for his salesman's hype, which repeatedly edged into falsehood. The Mueller investigation may now bring an unprecedented and overdue moment of reckoning. ♦

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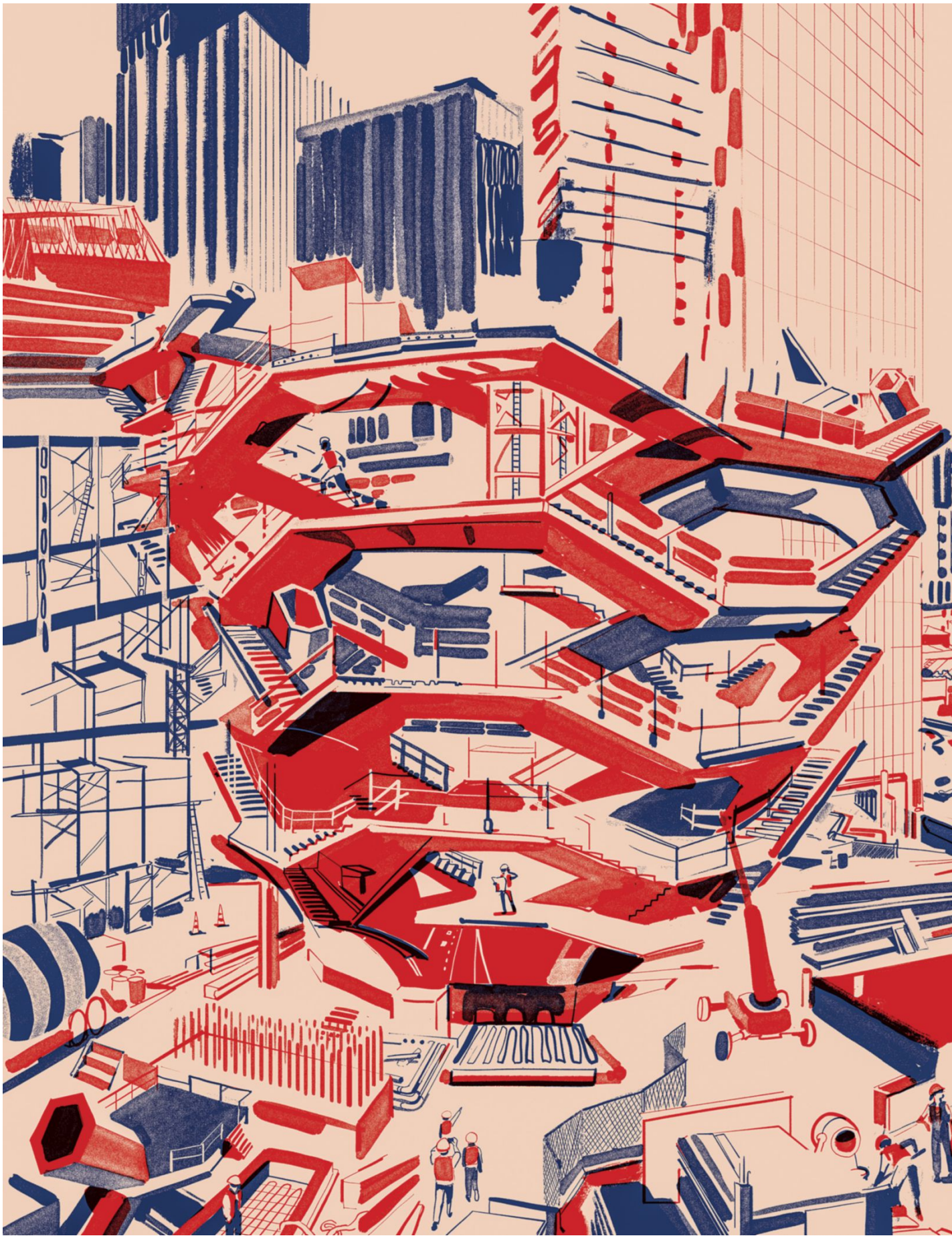

The Vessel, in Hudson Yards, has a hundred and fifty-four staircases and eighty landings. Heatherwick has said that, at a site

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PROFILES

STAIRMASTER

Has Thomas Heatherwick created a rival to the Statue of Liberty, or a hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar folly?

BY IAN PARKER

where there is nothing else to commemorate, the Vessel can be a "monument to us."

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

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Stephen Ross, the seventy-seven-year-old billionaire property developer and the owner of the Miami Dolphins, has a winningly informal, old-school conversational style. On a recent morning in Manhattan, he spoke of the moment, several years ago, when he decided that the plaza of one of his projects, Hudson Yards—a Doha-like cluster of towers on Manhattan's West Side—needed a magnificent object at its center. He recalled telling himself, "It has to be big. It has to be monumental." He went on, "Then I said, 'O.K. Who are the great sculptors?'" (Ross pronounced the word "sculptures.") Before long, he met with Thomas Heatherwick, the acclaimed British designer of ingenious, if sometimes unworkable, things. Ross told me that there was a presentation, and that he was very impressed by Heatherwick's "what do you call it—Television? Internet?" An adviser softly said, "PowerPoint?"

Ross was in a meeting room at the Time Warner Center, which his company, Related, built and partly owns, and where he lives and works. We had a view of Columbus Circle and Central Park. The room was filled with models of Hudson Yards, which is a mile and a half southwest, between Thirtieth and Thirty-third Streets, and between Tenth Avenue and the West Side Highway. There, Related and its partner, Oxford Properties Group, are partway through erecting the complex, which includes residential space, office space, and a mall—with such stores as Neiman Marcus, Cartier, and Urban Decay, and a Thomas Keller restaurant designed to evoke "Mad Men"—most of it on a platform built over active rail lines. Ross refers to the project, which will yield eighteen million square feet in sixteen buildings on twenty-eight acres, and cost about twenty-five billion dollars, as the largest private-sector real-estate development in American history.

Ross looked down on a model of the plaza, which featured a miniature version of the structure commissioned from Heatherwick: a copper-colored, urn-shaped lattice of a hundred and fifty-four staircases and eighty landings. It looked like scaffolding that had been readied for the construction of a hundred-and-fifty-foot head of Ozymandias. Ross called it "my baby." For the moment, it's known as the Vessel—or, officially, as Vessel. (Ross longs for the public to give it an affectionate nickname.) One can think of it as a compressed extension of the High Line, or as the site of a perpetual evacuation drill; it's a proposed future venue for downhill mountain-bike races. Starting sometime next year, it will be open to the public, via free, timed-entry tickets. Ross's evident delight in the piece—even as some of his associates wonder about its size and purpose, and its cost, which exceeds a hundred and fifty million dollars—derives partly from his confidence that, in time, it will become "*the* icon for New York," just as the Eiffel Tower is for Paris. The Vessel is about as wide as it is tall, and will fit nicely into an Instagram photograph.

Ross recalled a work of art that, in the late nineteen-nineties, was incorporated into the façade of a Related development on the south side of Union Square. To his regret, his company took the advice of the Public Art Fund and the Municipal Art Society. "It was a disaster," he said. "That thing where the smoke comes out? Whatever the hell it is." He was talking about Kristin Jones and Andrew Ginzel's "The Metronome," an unloved combination of elements: a string of L.E.D. numbers displaying both the time of day and the amount of time left in the day; puffs of steam emitted from a large hole; a protruding human hand. Ross said, sadly, "I wanted to put a Frank Stella there. He wanted to do a great thing." (Ross regularly attends Art Basel Miami Beach, and his collection of modern painting and sculpture includes works by Fernando Botero, Jim Dine, and Niki de Saint Phalle.)

For Hudson Yards, Ross told himself, "I'm not giving this to anyone else." He made the plaza's centerpiece a personal project, and started with the wise observation that "every visitor, and every New Yorker, wants to go to Rockefeller Center during Christmas season, to see the tree." He continued, "So I said, 'I need a three-hundred-and-sixty-five-day tree, O.K.?'" He began to ask artists for proposals.

In the fall of 2012, on a bye week for the Dolphins, when his wife was away in Paris, Ross visited Storm King, the upstate museum of large outdoor art works. He was joined by Jay Cross, the Related executive in charge of Hudson Yards. Cross brought along a monograph that had been published in advance of a Heatherwick retrospective, "Designing the Extraordinary," at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London. Ross leafed through the book as they drove up the Hudson Valley. He saw a bench, made from extruded aluminum, with an alluringly rippled surface; a motorized pedestrian bridge that can curl up into a ball, like a wood louse, on one side of a waterway in London. And Cross reminded Ross of the work that Heatherwick had revealed a few months earlier, at the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in London. Two hundred and four copper cones attached to long stalks—one for each nation—came together, in a mechanical flourish, to create a cauldron.

Ross said, "Bring him in."

Joanna Lumley, the British actress who starred in "Absolutely Fabulous," is a friend of Heatherwick's, and often refers to him, fondly, as a child. She has said that, after his early successes, Londoners began asking, "What can this brilliant boy do next?" Speaking on a panel in 2014, she called him an "extraordinary and brilliant boy." Heatherwick is forty-eight, employs nearly two hundred people, and has two children. (He is separated from their mother.) But he projects an air of otherworldliness and innocence. His hair is worn tousled—with a curl or two dangling over his forehead—and his wardrobe is oriented toward very loose pants, baggy white shirts, and vests. He gives the impression of a child apprentice in Tolkien's Middle-earth.

His firm, Heatherwick Studio, is on a busy street in King's Cross, in a red brick Edwardian building that the company shares with a two-star chain hotel. The studio, reached through a courtyard, first presents a visitor with a view of shelves holding dozens of design oddities, such as might be displayed in a Victorian museum or a Paul Smith menswear store. These include a Japanese mechanical lucky cat, spoons with unusually long handles, an engine part, and perfume bottles designed by

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the studio for Christian Louboutin.

Heatherwick has an earnest, expressive way of talking: wide eyes, little shakes of the head. He seems to be forever making the discovery that he has said something delightfully apt. After the Olympics, there was a brief period of optimism in British civic life—a wave of national amazement that the event hadn't ended in disaster and humiliation. Heatherwick helped to create that moment, and then came to represent it. In 2013, he became a Commander of the British Empire. Boris Johnson, the mayor of London between 2008 and 2016, and now the British Foreign Secretary, compared him to Michelangelo and invited him to join a trade delegation to China. British *GQ* included him on its annual list of the country's best-dressed men.

He was praised for his inventiveness, across a range of scales, using a range of materials. Heatherwick has a gift for discovering, in a commission for an object, the opportunity for an event: movement, spectacle, play. Bjarke Ingels, the Danish architect, who has collaborated with him, recently said that, unlike many designers, "Thomas is focussed on the jaw-dropping centerpiece—the 'wow' moment." Heatherwick tends to achieve effect more through texture than through form—by, say, stitching or layering a multitude of near-identical parts to make a highly conspicuous whole. His sculpture for an atrium at the Wellcome Trust, in London, is made of a hundred and forty thousand suspended glass spheres, each the size of a plum, arranged into cloud-like forms. He has proposed building a footbridge entirely from a welded cluster of stainless-steel disks. His U.K. Pavilion for Expo 2010, in Shanghai, was a rounded cube formed from sixty thousand translucent acrylic rods that waved in the wind like bullrushes. The design was widely considered a triumph. Rowan Moore, the architecture critic of the London *Observer*, called it "outstandingly memorable," noting that "we expect buildings neither to be hairy nor in motion."

Heatherwick Studio employs architects, but Heatherwick is not an architect. His work could be described as a celebration of never having absorbed, in a formal architectural education, dogma about designing things to be flush and taut. "There's a Harry Potter-esque, Victorian quirkiness in the work," Ingels said. "An element of steampunk, almost."

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Heatherwick largely avoids self-deprecation. Last year, he wrote in the *Evening Standard* that his scheme for a tree-covered "Garden Bridge" over the Thames, in central London, was "extraordinary." He has been known to sign his name with an exclamation point, and puts effort into couching even a passing thought as a design insight. Not long ago, he told me, with raised eyebrows and a confiding chuckle, that a fireplace "creates a heart to a room," and that rooms lacking fireplaces "can be a bit focusless."

His keenness never to be considered unexceptional or businesslike is surely a spur to his creativity, but it can lead to confusion in conversation. When we first met, at a Manhattan café, a little more than a year ago, Heatherwick said that cultural institutions were a "clichéd format" for a designer, and did not particularly interest him. "If everyone's doing museums, how much differentiation are you going to be able to make if you do one, too?" He was just then completing a major art museum, with an attached luxury hotel, in Cape Town, South Africa.

Heatherwick also suggested that it would make little sense for him to design a chair, because "someone else could do just as good a job." He added, "The most satisfying thing is to make a *difference*." In 2004, Heatherwick designed a limited-edition glass chair. He has also made molded-polypropylene chairs that can be spun like a top. They sell for seven hundred dollars each. Last year, the studio designed a table. For years, Heatherwick has said that he'd like to design prisons and hospitals, but he has not done so.

When we first talked, Heatherwick was working on three major projects in New York: the Vessel; a renovation of David Geffen Hall, at Lincoln Center, which was expected to cost half a billion dollars; and a two-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar pier, on the West Side, to be paid for largely by Barry Diller and Diane von Fürstenberg. Among projects elsewhere, Heatherwick was co-designing, with the Bjarke Ingels Group, headquarters buildings for Google in Mountain View, California, and in London.

Such success depends, in part, on gaining the confidence of people with

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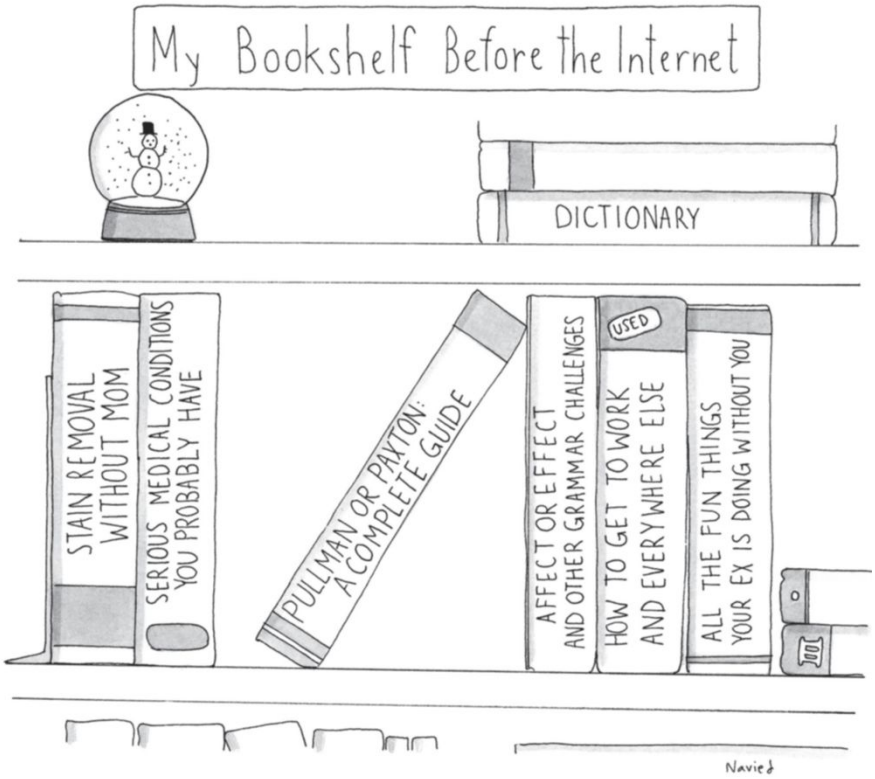

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means. In an interview a few years ago, Heatherwick described himself as shy in meetings, but Ingels told me, "I've seen him in action—he is almost a hypnotist." Heatherwick could be thought of as a tycoon's idea of a creative spirit. Jay Cross, Stephen Ross's colleague at Related, said that "Thomas sees Stephen as the ultimate patron, and I think Stephen sees Thomas as the ultimate genius." If Heatherwick is indeed introverted, this hasn't cut him off from the world: he once sat in the front row at a Burberry fashion show in London. Ross told me that he'd taken Heatherwick to Dolphins games, and that his guest had begun to appreciate the sport. (Asked about the relationship between Ross and Heatherwick, Cross said, "Don't take this word out of context, but I would say it's loving.") Will Hurst, an editor and writer at *The Architects' Journal*, in London, recently suggested that Heatherwick, more than any other British designer, knows "how to pull the levers of power."

Heatherwick would prefer to be seen as an outsider. At our initial meeting, I asked him about the Garden Bridge. It was said that the bridge, sponsored by an unscrupulous Conservative mayor and paid for partly with public funds, was a folly for the few and a venue for corporate celebrations. It was expected to cost two hundred and sixty million dollars. Joanna Lumley, in the role of celebrity civic booster, has for years lobbied for a bridge of this sort, and has promoted Heatherwick's design, referring to it as "a tiara on the head of our fabulous city." James Corner, the landscape architect who co-designed the High Line with Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the architectural firm, is among those who have described it as a vanity project.

I asked Heatherwick about the way the planned bridge had become known, fairly or not, as a symbol of privilege. He answered by saying, "I never went to school with Boris, or anyone from power." That is, he underlined the class distance between himself and Johnson, the former mayor, whose style—honed at Eton and Oxford—is that of amused, ruling-class insouciance. Heatherwick continued, "I went to a primary school in Wood Green"—an unglamorous North London neighborhood. "My grandmother was a servant at Windsor Castle. My other grandmother was a German Jewish refugee who fled for her life."

Heatherwick's background didn't drop him at the door of the British establishment, but he was left within reach of it. He has the sensitivities of someone given not every advantage. His maternal grandfather, a Marxist poet and a virtuoso recorder player who fought in the Spanish Civil War, was the son of the owner of Jaeger, a leading London fashion firm. His uncle Nicholas Tomalin was a well-known journalist. Thomas's mother was a jewelry designer who became an expert on beads; his father was a musician, and ran an East London charity, before coming to work part time in his son's studio. Heatherwick grew up in a house that was big, even if it was in bohemian disarray. (He has said that he was self-conscious about packed-lunch sandwiches that weren't as neatly made as those of his classmates.) After leaving primary school, Heatherwick attended two well-known private schools: Sevenoaks, in Kent, which was founded in the fifteenth century, and the Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley, in Hertfordshire, which puts an emphasis on gardening, handiwork, and a bespoke form of performance art called eurythmy.

Heatherwick attended college in Manchester, and then pursued a graduate degree in furniture design at the Royal College of Art, in London. In the fall of 1993, at the start of his final year, Terence Conran, who founded Habitat, the British furniture chain that popularized a modernist look, and who later founded London's Design Museum, came to speak to students. Heatherwick introduced himself. (Whenever Heatherwick describes this encounter, he emphasizes grievance over good fortune; at an event at the Parsons School of Design, he said, "My evil professor wouldn't let me meet him. . . . I had to run down the stairs—the fire stairs—to speak to him.") Conran, impressed by Heatherwick, invited him to build his graduate-thesis design in a workshop at his seventeenth-century manor house in Berkshire. That spring, Heatherwick lived in Conran's home and made an eighteen-foot-high gazebo out of hundreds of strips of laminated birch. They became friends, and with Conran's encouragement Heatherwick quickly set up a commercial studio. Conran has called Heatherwick "the Leonardo da Vinci of our times"; he introduced Heatherwick to Lumley. The birch gazebo now stands in Conran's garden. A few years ago, James Dyson, the vacuum-cleaner

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entrepreneur, dislodged the top of it while landing a helicopter on the lawn; it has since been repaired.

On a morning in September, before dawn, a tugboat was pushing a loaded barge from Newark Bay to Manhattan, at the pace of a kayak. In the galley, a crew member fried onions. On the bridge, the captain, Stephen Cluett, dryly referred to the morning's work as "a Carnival cruise without Kathie Lee and the cocktails." As the boat went under the Bayonne Bridge, Cluett had a view of the Tribute in Light searchlights, commemorating the 9/11 attacks; as the searchlights faded into first light, the boat passed the Statue of Liberty.

On the barge lay two sculptural pieces of steel, each about the size of a school bus. Painted gray, they were held in place by their weight. Both were future Vessel landings that, at each end, had stairs going up and stairs going down. The people who had been fabricating and transporting these objects referred to them as "dog bones."

The tugboat reached Hudson Yards. From the river, the half-built Vessel seemed a little lost—a shiny brown espresso cup—amid the clutter of cranes and unfinished high-rises. A clearer river view will emerge, but will then disappear in a few years, after a second growth of towers appears on the western half of the Yards. If the Vessel becomes a rival to the Statue of Liberty, it will be unusual, in the landmark category, for being corralled by skyscrapers. Approached from most directions, it will fully reveal itself only when it's almost overhead, like a Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon of SpongeBob SquarePants.

Heatherwick has said that, at a site where there is nothing to commemorate, the Vessel can be a monument "to us"—an opportunity to reflect on something "timeless about humans and our physicality." On the tugboat, Cluett spoke of a "hundred-and-fifty-five-million-dollar head-scratcher." When he was told that the cost estimate had risen to two hundred million dollars, including landscaping, he said, "I forgot the landscaping part," adding, "That's a lot of goddam mulch."

The development of the West Side rail yards was initially connected to New York's bid, thirteen years ago, to host the 2012 Summer Olympics. The city proposed building a stadium atop a platform spanning the wide trench, between Thirtieth and Thirty-third Streets, where the M.T.A. parks L.I.R.R. trains, on two dozen parallel tracks. After the Games, the stadium was to become the home of the New York Jets. In support of the bid, the city created the Special Hudson Yards District, stretching from Thirtieth to Forty-first Streets, to encourage high-density development, with the compensation of new public space and a likely extension of the 7 train.

The stadium plan fell apart, and New York subsequently lost the Olympics to London. But the rezoning and the promised public spending drew developers. As Stephen Ross recently told me, "I learned, during Watergate, 'Follow the money.'" In 2008, Related, then in partnership with Goldman Sachs, made a deal with the M.T.A. to develop the space above the tracks.

Related was obliged to leave half of the platform open to the sky. A strip of new parkland, running onto the site from the north, would flow into a public space about the size of Union Square Park. To the east, there would be a shopping mall; to the south, Related was expected to accommodate, but not operate, an arts institution known as the Culture Shed. (It is now the Shed.) This building was initially oriented on a north-south axis. In 2010, a remarkable design, by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, was made public: a six-floor box with two nesting translucent canopies, which could be rolled out onto an adjoining area, creating an additional covered exhibition or performance space. (These two canopies later became one.) Ross was unhappy when he realized that the canopies—expected to be deployed for at least half the year—would claim space that he considered his. "I thought, There's no way in the world!" he told me. "I said, 'It's going to block my retail.'"

Related successfully pressed city planners. The Shed was turned ninety degrees, to become parallel with Thirtieth Street. In this orientation, it was squeezed for space, so it was partly integrated into the base of a planned seventy-floor luxury residential tower. Diller Scofidio + Renfro, a firm that had never worked on a high-rise, was asked to co-design that tower. A Related spokesperson told me that there was no connection between the Shed's repositioning and the architectural contract. Nobody at Diller Scofidio + Renfro agreed to be interviewed for this article, but last year Liz Diller, one of the firm's partners, told a journalist that the eventual arrangement was a "deal with the Devil," adding, "We never imagined in a million years that we would be doing a commercial tower. But we like to do everything once." A penthouse in the tower is currently listed at thirty-two million dollars.

Related's initial model for its plaza was Bryant Park, in midtown. The company commissioned a report from Dan Biederman, who, in the eighties and nineties, led the resuscitation of that space, which had become a derelict spot for drug dealing. He is now the president of the Bryant Park Corporation and runs a consultancy. His advice, he recently said, was to "first program the space and *then* design the space." (He also calculated that, although Bryant Park can expect a hundred and ten days a year of nice sitting-outside weather, the far West Side can expect only eighty, because of wind.) Biederman told me, without complaint, that a public space dominated by one very expensive object—the Vessel will cost more than the highest price ever paid for a sculpture at auction—could be considered "the opposite of our philosophy" at Bryant Park, where the total capital spending since the eighties has been about twenty-five million dollars. "This will be a real test," he said. "I'm absolutely undecided whether Hudson Yards will be the greatest success or a failure."

By early 2012, the footprints of the structures on the platform's eastern side were fixed: four towers, the Shed, shops, restaurants. Related asked for proposals from three landscape-architecture firms. The platform, only a few feet thick and heated up by idling trains below, presented a horticultural challenge. Related executives did not ask for a sculptural landmark, although they did explain the need for a few concrete vents, which could perhaps double as kiosks or cafés.

One proposal, from the firm Nelson Byrd Woltz, included a lawn, a man-made stream, and a reflecting quarter-inch skim of water that could be drained whenever the Shed's canopy was rolled out over it. The firm also included a six-story lookout tower. This was sketched as a shaft around which two ramps spiralled in a double helix—all of it wrapped in a

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perforated screen of weathered steel, the rust-covered material of a Richard Serra sculpture. In its pitch, the firm referred to two rail tunnels that run beneath the site. The tunnels, dug in the early twentieth century, still transport all trains between Penn Station and New Jersey. The tower, vaguely suggesting a drill bit, would have been erected close to the point where tunnelling machinery was once lowered down a shaft.

I asked Ross about his reaction to seeing N.B.W.'s tower.

"Ugh," he said.

Related hired the firm, but at a meeting with Thomas Woltz, the owner of N.B.W., Ross asked for a new landscape. "I said, 'Throw those plans out!'" he recalled. He described Woltz's face falling, and added, "Nice young kid."

If Ross had ever supported the idea of another Bryant Park, he no longer did. He took Woltz to a window at the Time Warner Center, saying, "Look at Columbus Circle, how *hard* it is." There would be no grass on his plaza. "I said, 'Forget about it.' I mean, people with their dogs?"

The final landscape will include no lawn, no stream, no skim of water. But Ross had clearly absorbed the idea of an ornament. Jay Cross acknowledged that such a structure "wasn't a part of our thinking until Woltz brought it up." He added, "Once the lawn was gone, Stephen was, like, 'We've got to have a piece of art.'" It had to be a destination, Cross said. "It had to be 'I'll meet you at the Whatever.'"

Before the 2012 Summer Olympics, Heatherwick was known in Britain for three striking but impermanent designs. His Shanghai Expo pavilion had a scheduled life of only six months. In 2002, for a site in Manchester, Heatherwick Studio had created B of the Bang, a two-hundred-foot-tall cluster of metal spikes emanating from the top of a column, to suggest a midair explosion. It was finished late and was over budget. The tip of a spike fell off just before it was unveiled. Other spikes later threatened to fall and had to be removed. The Manchester City Council sued Heatherwick and his contractors, and settled out of court. In 2009, the sculpture was dismantled.

The New Routemaster, a handsome double-decker bus designed for London's transportation authority, went into service in February, 2012; it had an open platform at the back, echoing a classic, defunct design. It seems to have been commissioned, at the insistence of Boris Johnson, as much to symbolize the city as to serve it: a double-decker pavilion. It had advantages over off-the-shelf alternatives but cost nearly twice as much, was cramped and hot, and was more polluting than promised. The bus was discontinued.

Heatherwick Studio had submitted designs for two Olympic structures—a velodrome and an observation tower—but had failed to win the commissions. A participant in the tower competition has said that Boris Johnson asked for a design that would "match the Eiffel Tower." The winning entry was co-designed by Anish Kapoor, the British artist best known for Cloud Gate, a seductive, seamless blob of polished stainless steel in Chicago's Millennium Park. Nicknamed the Bean, it is now partway to achieving Eiffel-like status. Kapoor's London Olympics tower, the ArcelorMittal Orbit, is not. A three-hundred-and-eighty-foot lattice of red steel loops around a red steel trunk, it has been likened to the site of a major roller-coaster accident.

The design for Heatherwick's losing entry, which has never been published, was a staircase that split and split again—"like a growing plant," he told me. In the course of his twenty-five-year career, Heatherwick has generated ideas that he has been loath to abandon; one was to adorn a design with large planters, each holding a single tree. One of Heatherwick's former colleagues told me that, in brainstorming sessions, "tree bowls always came up." Another favored conception was a connected set of staircases. His Olympic design echoed an unbuilt 2006 commission for a structure on a hilltop in Baku, Azerbaijan. This monument—an ascending curlicue—was "a heroic staircase," Heatherwick wrote in 2012. "It would give people stories to tell, such as the first time their child had walked up by herself or the time that, having made it to the top, a young man went down on one knee and made a proposal of marriage." (This is not the Azerbaijani way, but perhaps it would have become so. Related executives expect marriage proposals on the Vessel.)

Heatherwick did secure a more modest Olympic commission, the cauldron, and he made a sensation out of it. Discounting a recommendation from officials that it should have no moving parts, he provided the opening ceremony with a moment of high emotion. The cauldron looked like something that should malfunction, yet it worked. Today, the Museum of London has a permanent exhibition celebrating the design. "Each stem carried a fragment of the Olympic flame in a uniquely shaped copper piece, only burning as one when they finally and perfectly nestled together," one caption reads.

"I grew up in a city where nothing happened," Heatherwick told me, referring to his sense of London's creative stagnation, at least in terms of civic space, in the seventies and eighties. But, after the Olympics, he said, "there was a window of opportunity to maybe *not* be cynical, and to maybe make something unprecedented." A few weeks after the closing ceremony, Heatherwick and Joanna Lumley had their first meeting with Boris Johnson about the Garden Bridge. Earlier that year, Lumley—who had previously proposed such a bridge as a memorial to Princess Diana—had written to Johnson, saying that the project would bring "great loveliness" to the Thames. She had added, "Please say yes." Covered with hundreds of trees, it would link an area of diplomatic missions and barristers' chambers, on the north side, to a riverside walk, popular with tourists, on the south. Heatherwick says that he and Lumley first discussed the idea some fifteen years ago. She has always deferred to him on its design, except for a few suggestions: it should have a Christmas tree during the holidays; it should not provide a straight line of sight, encouraging pedestrians to meander; and, although the bridge's platform would widen at two points, above thick supporting pillars, from the air its outline should not evoke a pair of sunglasses or a bra.

Bjarke Ingels, describing his collaborations with Heatherwick, recently said, half joking, "Whenever I wanted Heatherwick to like something, I would start by talking about nooks and crannies—he says 'nooks and crannies' *constantly*." Heatherwick has described the Garden Bridge as "a series of intimate spaces in which to stop and linger." Richard Rogers, the architect, has praised it as a likely "oasis of calm and beauty." Lumley has imagined a place "where the only sounds

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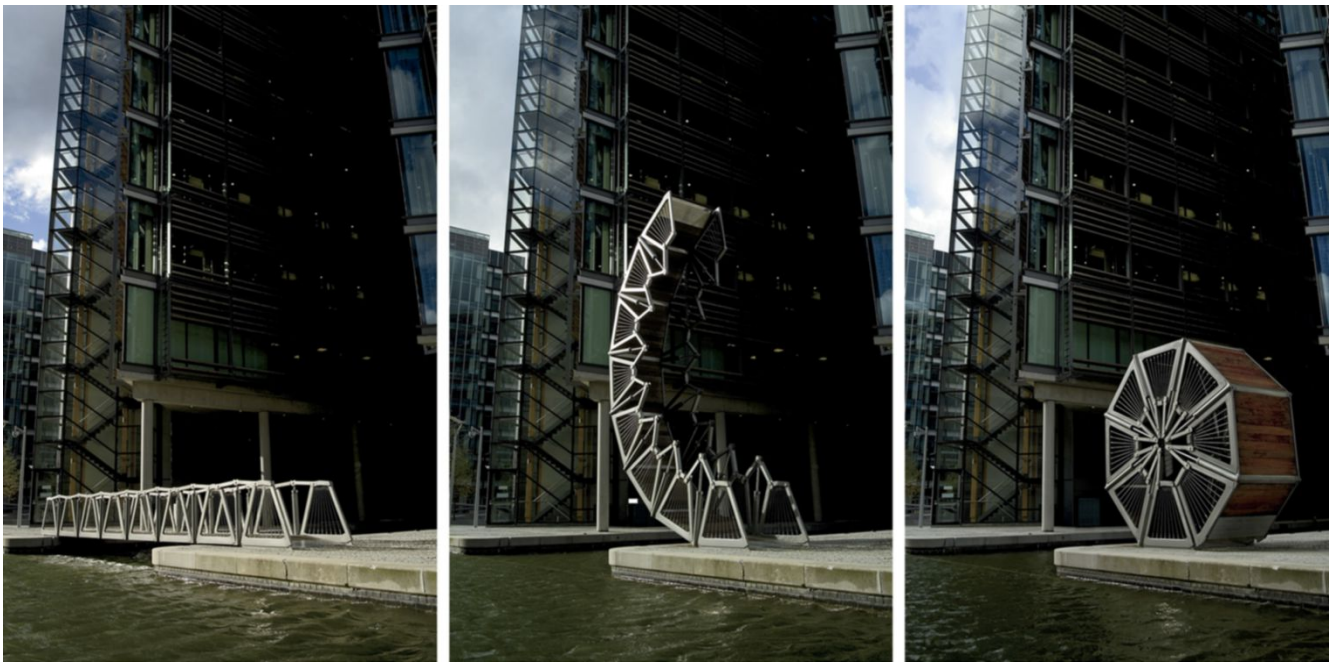

Heatherwick Studio's Rolling Bridge. The curling, thirty-nine-foot bridge was installed in central London in 2004.

COURTESY STEVE SPELLER

will be birdsong and bees buzzing and the wind in the trees, and, below, the steady rush of water." One can admire this optimism, after repressing thoughts of driving rain and dense crowds. But Heatherwick and the bridge's supporters also have asked that it be valued as transportation infrastructure, and this is harder to accept. Heatherwick told me that the Garden Bridge would be built in "the biggest gap" that exists between any two bridges in central London, which wasn't true. It would be closed at night, and cycling would be banned. According to projections, its entrances would be congested. Indeed, Heatherwick has said, approvingly, that the bridge "has the potential to be the slowest way to cross the river."

A month after Heatherwick met with Johnson about the bridge, he was at the Carlyle Hotel, in Manhattan, showing a proposal to Barry Diller. Pier 54, at the end of West Thirteenth Street, was set to be demolished. Diller had offered to fund a replacement, and this had been sketched out by Michael Van Valkenburgh, the landscape architect. Three firms, including Heatherwick Studio, were asked to design a performance space for it. Heatherwick's proposal went beyond this brief. He designed a new pier, in a form that suggested a half-built wooden boat, with curved ribs rising more than two hundred feet. With this, the firm secured a commission for a new pier. The ribs were later lost; Diller recently praised Heatherwick's work but said that the initial design was "impractical" and "couldn't be built." The pier evolved into an undulating park standing on flared pilings—a cauldron half submerged in the Hudson.

Before the 2012 Olympics, Jay Cross, the Related executive, asked Heatherwick to "think about those vent shafts" which needed to be constructed at Hudson Yards, and propose designs that incorporated them into cafés or kiosks. Heatherwick, remembering the assignment more sweepingly, told me that "Jay commissioned us to work on the design of the square—to collaborate with Nelson Byrd Woltz." In Woltz's recollection, Related "asked Thomas to look at pavilions, and he came back with multiple concepts for the whole site." One design, Woltz said, involved "giant rectangles at different elevations," adding, "They were really—what can I say?—extraordinarily *inventive* for public space where you have to have disability access." Cross described it as "the whole plaza popping up and down," and said, "We were, like, 'That's complicated.'" Related didn't pursue these ideas.

After Stephen Ross decided to commission a monument for Hudson Yards, he consulted with curators and art dealers—including Glenn Lowry, the director of MOMA—and began to gauge the interest of such artists as Kapoor, Jaume Plensa, Jeff Koons, Maya Lin, and Richard Serra. Serra was invited to outline a proposal, for a fee, but said no. According to Cross, Serra told Ross, "You know what I do—you know that it's going to be structural steel, you know it's going to be monumental. What do I need to show you?" He added, "Hire me and I'll go to work." (Serra, through a representative, confirmed that he declined to participate but denied that he used these words.) Ross, recalling the encounter, described Serra's work as poorly suited for the site, because it was "very subtle" and "not iconic."

In late 2012, Heatherwick had a preliminary meeting with Ross. Heatherwick told me that he conceived of his task to be "to play back to him what he must be thinking." Ross was bound to have considered "the success of Chicago's Millennium Park, and a couple of the main pieces there"—namely, Kapoor's Cloud Gate and Plensa's Crown Fountain, in which water spouts from two walls displaying videos of people opening their mouths. Heatherwick assumed that Ross would be tempted to commission something similar but bigger—"because you're a billionaire," he said. At the meeting, Heatherwick acknowledged his likely rivals by suggesting the limitations of "what I think people refer to as the 'turd-in-the-plaza syndrome.'" (The phrase was coined by the architect James Wines.) That is, Heatherwick told me, too many developers remain attached to a shopworn contrast between "cool, cold architecture"

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and "an expressive object unconnected to the normal functional requirements of humans." He went on, "There's an obviousness to the format, however amazing the art work is. It felt to me that something should have a *use*. It might be a different kind of use—but something that people touch and engage with."

After this meeting, Related had a shortlist of three—Heatherwick, Kapoor, and Plensa—each of whom was asked to produce a proposal. ("I paid one sculptor five hundred thousand dollars," Ross recalled. "I paid another two hundred and fifty thousand.") I recently spoke to Plensa on the phone. "Cities are not only buildings but people," he told me, in a soft voice. He said that, when contemplating Hudson Yards, he "felt it was important, in this huge geometry, to try to offer something more organic, to create a space to breathe." His design took the form of giant iron leaves—"to remind us of nature"—that visitors could walk beneath, after passing through a fine curtain of water. He told me, "It was a very poetical project."

At eight-thirty on a recent morning, Heatherwick sat with Stuart Wood, a senior colleague, at a round table in the King's Cross studio. Heatherwick said, "What I like about stairs—as soon as you start using your body, it breaks down potential artistic bullshit, because there's just an immediacy to straining your leg." His work consistently embraces the public appetite for near-art experiences: visual and experiential novelty, ideally in a noncommercial setting, delivered without the distractions of ambiguities or subtext. Other artists and designers harness the same desire: the German artist Carsten Höller recently attached a helter-skelter slide to Kapoor's ArcelorMittal Orbit tower. But Heatherwick is unusual, and perhaps canny, for making work that's widely understood to be sculptural, and that sells at auction as sculpture, even as he relieves those who experience his products from the burden of paying heightened attention. The Olympic cauldron was given an award as the best British work of visual art of 2012, but, Heatherwick told me, "I'm not an artist." And he suggested that it would have been a mistake, at Hudson Yards, to cause anyone to "wonder what the artist had meant." (Jonathan Jones, the *Guardian's* art critic, has written, of Heatherwick, "If he were an artist, he would be a really bad one." The Olympic cauldron, he said, did its symbolic work well—separate nations, together—but "it did not have any deep poetic secret." And B of the Bang was a "monstrous and clunking expression of a slight idea.")

In Heatherwick's studio, Stuart Wood said that when he and his colleagues started thinking about Hudson Yards they "were looking at amphitheatres, theatre spaces, performance spaces." He continued, "Quite pragmatically, our thinking about leading people upward, as a way to create more three-dimensional public space, led to the idea of stairs."

But an amphitheatre "could seem to exclude," Heatherwick explained. "If you have people all sitting facing inward, there's a back that's pushing people away. So—how could you be porous but also centrally focussed?"

"We started to delete the non-necessary geometry," Wood went on. "And what remained were stairs and landings." He added, "We wanted it to be small at the bottom, to not jam up the space, but not so small that you can't get *in* it. So we found that sweet spot"—a base with a fifty-foot diameter. Each floor, or ring of landings, would be wider than the one below it. The studio at first assumed that each level would include as many landings as possible: five on the bottom floor, increasing to nine at the top. But this made symmetry difficult. The designers decided to preserve a pattern of gradually inflating hexagons, with five landings on every floor.

When I met Ross, he showed me a printed copy of Heatherwick's PowerPoint presentation, entitled "Vessel." There were renderings of people facing one another on bleachers. Ross, remembering Heatherwick's commentary, which had been accompanied by music from the opening ceremony of the London Olympics, said, "What if you lifted people up, up, up, up, up?" There were images of people on floating platforms. Ross turned to an all-black page—a PowerPoint fade to black—and then to a rendering of the Vessel. Ross flicked through the remaining pages, saying, "I never got this far."

"I fell in love instantly," he told me. "My guys around here thought I was out of my goddam mind. It was too big, too this, too that. 'How are we going to build it?' 'What's it going to cost?' I said, 'I don't care.' The cost, I figured, would be seventy-five million." (The ArcelorMittal Orbit cost thirty-six million.)

Before making a final decision, Ross weighed the Vessel against Plensa's proposal, which Jay Cross described to me as "surprising and beautiful," and one by Kapoor. Ross told me, without naming Kapoor, that a prominent artist had shown him something "bigger and better" than

"You never think it's going to happen to you."

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his best-known works. He then said, "Who says it's better? But it's bigger." He laughed. "You know, I wasn't happy." (Kapoor declined to comment.)

In October, 2013, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Heatherwick had been given the commission. The design was not made public for another three years, and Related took efforts to keep it secret. Cimolai, the Italian company contracted to fabricate the Vessel's parts, was asked to build a twenty-foot fence around its steelworks, near Venice. After a visiting welding inspector, not knowing what he was seeing, took a photo of a Vessel part and posted it online, Related protested to Cimolai. "Being good Italians, we killed him," Claudia Pavan, Cimolai's project manager for the Vessel, said recently.

Heatherwick told me that his structure was commissioned "with no obvious commercial outcome" in mind, but Ross did show the design to some would-be Hudson Yards tenants. Ross Love, a managing director of the Boston Consulting Group, recalled a meeting in which Stephen Ross brought out a model of the Vessel. "It was great theatre," Love said. "It was 'I really shouldn't be showing you this.' He was like a proud father." Love regarded the object as "a folly," but an optimistic one. "You have this thing that is pointless—and that is the point," he said. The company took floors forty-two to forty-seven at 10 Hudson Yards.

According to Cross, Liz Diller was "aghast" when she first saw Heatherwick's design, finding it "too big, and too close" to the Shed. (Diller denies this.) The Vessel was twenty-five feet taller than the Shed; it was as if the Statue of Liberty stood in front of the Metropolitan Opera. "She lobbied against it," Cross said. "I think she'll forever be somewhat bothered by it." Cross was sympathetic to this concern. He recalled, "I would have conversations with Thomas: 'Are you sure you got the scale right?'" Cross asked Heatherwick to consider the difference between "a beautiful ocean liner" of the mid-twentieth century and the behemoth cruise ships of today. He told Heatherwick, "In my view, it's a wine goblet. Are you sure you don't want it to look like a champagne flute?"

Asked about these discussions with Cross, Heatherwick told me that they were about budget, not scale. "There are people whose job it is to save money," he said. The Vessel was the right size. "We had a sense of how many people you needed for it to be alive and thriving," he added. "And I felt that you either properly do the project or you don't do the project. You don't negotiate."

Cross spoke to Ross. "I said, 'Stephen, I think we should build a big model, and put in the Vessel as he's designed it, and we should put in a slightly smaller one, and let's all sit down and look at it and whatever you decide is fine. But I think we owe it to ourselves—it's a big decision.'" They set up a model of Hudson Yards in an empty storefront on Thirtieth Street. Guests included Heatherwick and the architect David Childs, who often advises Ross and is largely responsible for the designs of the Time Warner Center and One World Trade Center. Seated, they had a street-level view of the site. Cross put in one Vessel, then the other. "I couldn't get Thomas to redesign it as smaller," he recalled. "So, for the alternate version, I just took a ring off the top—or two rings, I can't remember which." He laughed. "Stephen goes, 'O.K., so I've looked at them both, are we done?'"

"You don't want to discuss it?" Cross asked.

"Nope," Ross said.

As Cross recalled, Ross then asked Heatherwick, "You good?"

"Yep, bigger is better, for sure," Heatherwick replied.

Cross told me, laughing, "That was the end of that."

Later, on a visit to Cimolai, in Italy, Ross celebrated his seventy-sixth birthday. A pastry chef, who had signed an N.D.A., made a Vessel-shaped cake. Ross tore off the top ring and teasingly offered it to Cross, saying, "Are you happy now?"

In 2014, Google asked several architectural firms to submit eighteen-minute video proposals for the design of a new headquarters in Mountain View. Ingels and Heatherwick were then invited to separate lunches with Larry Page, Google's co-founder. Google decided to pick both. The two firms began working on a Mountain View master plan; later, they collaborated on the design of a long, low building in King's Cross. Both projects are under way.

Ingels recently applied to Heatherwick's work a Danish idiom: "Crossing the river to fetch water." Sometimes "things are done for the sake of showing that you're putting more effort into it," Ingels said. "That's where we've had most of our clashes. What inspires me, or elevates me, is when things feel effortless." His instinct, he said, is to say, "Let's get rid of the fat."

But, when Ingels has lost arguments of this sort, he has come to appreciate the result. "This obsession with making the effort evident sometimes makes him stumble onto things that are really quite brilliant," Ingels said. Heatherwick's curling pedestrian bridge, he noted, "is the most complicated way to make a drawbridge, and by far the most slow and expensive, but it's also really cool."

Ingels recently visited Heatherwick's Cape Town project, the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa. Its central space, carved out of an array of hundred-year-old concrete grain silos, is "jaw-droppingly beautiful," Ingels said, but "insane" at a practical level. To afford it, "you almost have to starve the rest of the building." To Ingels, this other space felt neglected: fire doors with push bars. "But it is also what makes it possible. It's not a schmear of effort on everything. It's 'We're going to pile up intention in this spot *here*.'" (Heatherwick's Shanghai Expo pavilion took up a fifth of the available site; the rest was artificial turf.) Ingels added, with respect, "He is capable of putting forward bold ideas that most people would self-censor, because they want to come up with something that could actually happen." Referring to the Vessel, he said, "It's really wild to get away with that. That project could have died a billion times."

One morning in late September, I walked onto the Vessel with Heatherwick. He wore a hard hat, and a reflective vest over a wool vest. The Vessel was then two-thirds built. Like the vandalized cake, it petered out in stumps of staircase. Around the base lay several of the "dog bone" landings, soon to be lifted into place by a crane that stood in the Vessel's center. For New York steelworkers,

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The atrium and the exterior of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa, designed by Heatherwick Studio.

COURTESY IWAN BAAN

this was an unusual project. It was closer than most to a kit assembly—all the welding had been done in Italy—and the parts required delicate handling. Pool noodles had been taped to the platforms of the boom cranes, to prevent dents. Kaniehtakeron Martin, a crane foreman, told me, "It took a little getting used to, treating this thing with kid gloves." On another visit to the Vessel, I lowered myself into the hollow center of a landing, through a manhole, and then crawled inside the structure, uphill, to where three steelworkers were bolting on a new section. They joked about not looking sweaty enough.

Visitors will reach the new plaza from the subway, from the High Line, or through the shopping mall. Above, at the top of the tallest tower, a cantilevered observation deck will face southeast. One wonders if the plaza will feel less like a park and more like a box packed with a Vessel. When I visited with Heatherwick, we stood for a moment in what could be thought of as the Vessel's lobby, from which four staircases lead up to the first set of landings. Above us, polished copper-colored cladding, on the undersides of staircases and landings, offered distorted reflections of people and machines out of our direct view, as in a Hyatt atrium. The lobby is twenty feet across, and the Vessel's capacity will likely be seven hundred; one can imagine a crush of people pausing here to take upward photographs, and others in line for an elevator that will rise on a snaking track, using a rack-and-pinion mechanism, as on a funicular. "It's definitely intimate," Heatherwick said. But he was sanguine about congestion. "As long as no one gets hurt," he said. In a bold invitation to New Yorkers, he added, "I would love there to be more disorder in the world. I think it would be a real shame if everyone was polite."

He went on, "All you can try to do is design something that will be an unusual experience. I do feel that this is a different category of social device. There's no goal of relevance, no goal of making order."

A year earlier, I'd seen Heatherwick at an outdoor event where the Vessel's design was made public. Mayor Bill de Blasio, Stephen Ross, and dancers from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre appeared onstage. De Blasio told Heatherwick not to be discouraged if New Yorkers shared blunt opinions of his design. Although Heatherwick is in near-constant contact with American clients, and with America, his speech that day included a cascade of Britishisms, as if to mark his distinctiveness: "trainers" for sneakers, "skip" for dumpster, "climbing frame" for jungle gym, "Tube" for subway. He said that when he first came to New York, in the eighties, he visited his "German Jewish grandmother." (This grandmother, who designed textiles for Marks & Spencer, did not live in New York, although a great-aunt did.)

The Vessel, he told the audience, was no more than "a platform." But the promise of stairs, he said, is that you can "jump on them, dance on them, get tired on them, and then plonk yourself down on them." At an event a few weeks later, he added, "Maybe it's the best place to go and smoke."

I subsequently saw a list of recommended rules for the Vessel—drawn up by consultants, hired by Related, who compared the attraction to the Washington Monument. "Visitors must be in good health and free from any physical limitations," the draft dictated. "Children must meet a minimum height requirement of forty-two inches." There was a ban on food, gum, drinks other than water, strollers, backpacks, animals, running, jumping, and throwing balls. Also: "No sitting on the stairs." Heatherwick, shown the list for the first time, said, "What I'm sure they want is for it to be used and loved and enjoyed."

When we climbed the Vessel, Heatherwick made a point of bounding up the first staircase, two steps at a time. "Am I *running*?" he asked, as if dismissing all debate about restrictions in a privately held, semi-public space. "Who's going to stop you going up stairs fast?" The Vessel was a "brave commission," he said. Only "a very cynical person" would disagree.

As we ascended, Heatherwick admired what he described as handwelds. (Claudia Pavan, of Cimolai, had explained that

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the Vessel includes both handwelds and automated welds that, at extra expense, were made to resemble handwelds.) "We wanted the structure to be skeletal, and the spine to be raw," he said. "The world seems, to me, to have become too shiny, too polished." I later attended a Related meeting at which managers, with a mixture of exasperation and amused indulgence, discussed trying to make signage for the landings that would look distressed enough for Heatherwick but legible enough to meet the city's fire code.

But the primary view of the Vessel, for people not on it, is of polish. Heatherwick's design looks like an industrial relic reborn as a motivational object—and a mirror. According to directions that Heatherwick Studio provided to Michael Loughran, the Related executive who managed the Vessel's construction, the copper-colored soffits, or undersurfaces, should be "jewel-like." Loughran told me, "Their first ambition was 'We want it to be real copper.'" He pointed out that, thanks to "oxidization and everything else," such a surface would soon look "like the Statue of Liberty." Instead, Related applied a very fine copper-colored finish to aluminum, in a process that has also been used to apply color to iPhones. (Everyone I asked at Related, including Ross, recalled the studio proposing copper, but Heatherwick—perhaps protective of his reputation as a designer "immersed in materials and making," as his Web site puts it—told me that "there wasn't a deep love for copper particularly.")

As we climbed the Vessel, its geometry opened up; the tread plates of the steps became longer, making it slightly easier to climb, as if delivering a lesson about the pleasantness of success. Heatherwick, however, was in a period of professional disappointment. Around this time, it was reported that the proposed renovation of David Geffen Hall had been scrapped. And Barry Diller had withdrawn financial support for a new pier, after having tired of legal objections to it. (Later, the project sputtered back to life.)

Perhaps most distressingly for Heatherwick, the Garden Bridge had been scuttled. Sadiq Khan, who succeeded Johnson as mayor of London, in 2016, had requested a review of the bridge's procurement. The judgment, confirming reporting by *The Architects' Journal* and others, had been scathing: Johnson's administration had run a rigged competition, to deliver a commission to its preferred designer. For months before other firms were asked to make proposals, Heatherwick had been discussing his design with Johnson and his advisers, and with London's public-transportation authority; he had even joined Johnson at a meeting at Apple, in Cupertino, California, to pitch, unsuccessfully, for corporate sponsorship. When the competition entries were scored, Heatherwick Studio was given more points in the category of "relevant design experience" than two firms that had each worked on more than a dozen bridges. Without criticizing Heatherwick, the review described the process as "not open, fair, or competitive." Khan withdrew the city's financial support. Fifty million dollars of public money had already been spent.

"It's such a shame," Heatherwick said. "I got an e-mail saying, 'This is a vanity project blocking a view of St. Paul's Cathedral'! And you go, 'I wonder what the biggest vanity project in the city ever was? Probably St. Paul's!'" He had previously observed that "there was a huge resistance to St. Paul's being built." This point—a striking one to add to a conversation about vanity—has been echoed by Joanna Lumley, who has said, "When St. Paul's was built, London went mad with rage, and said, 'Take this filthy building down.'" Adrian Tinniswood, the author of "His Invention So Fertile: A Life of Christopher Wren," told me that this isn't true; the most one could say is that, amid joyful appreciation of the new cathedral, some Londoners offered "quibbles."

I asked Heatherwick if he agreed that the bridge had been poorly procured. He said that he hadn't yet read the report, which had been published five months earlier, because it was too long. I said that it was fifty pages. He replied, "Oh," before adding, "I still think it's the right idea, and I'm not rushing off to build it somewhere else. I think it's the right place. It may not have been the right time."

In New York, Heatherwick had found a billionaire client who had seen "an opportunity to leave a legacy behind," as Jay Cross put it, and who answered to no one. "Stephen had total control," Cross said. "There was no real veto power anywhere else."

Heatherwick and I stopped on the Vessel's seventh level, by temporary signs that warned "Caution: Tripping Hazard." Heatherwick said, "Walking up sixteen stories is a daunting thing, but I think you'll be distracted by your experience, and not notice your legs." A part of the Vessel's appeal may be the work of avoiding other visitors: it may set a challenge similar to that of exiting a subway station efficiently, but lasting an hour.

To the west, over open tracks that will soon be covered by a second platform, and then by more buildings, there was a clear view of the river. Heatherwick said that he wasn't saddened by thoughts of the eventual loss of this view. "I'm not campaigning for no buildings there," he said. Soon afterward, I was told that Related's residential towers on the western Yards will include work by Santiago Calatrava, Frank Gehry, Robert A. M. Stern, and Heatherwick Studio.

The Vessel topped out in December. The last of eighty landings twisted in high winds and then dropped into place. "Three years," Claudia Pavan, of Cimolai, said. "So much work."

I asked Jay Cross how he thought the Vessel looked. He smiled, and said, "It's forbidding." He added, "That's a little too strong a term. It really depends on where you stand."

It had become Cross's responsibility to program the Vessel. Stephen Ross, he noted, laughing, had "never been *overly* focussed on that, which surprises me." Cross was consulting with David Saltz, the producer of Super Bowl halftime shows, about a grand opening. "Saltz and I are the only ones thinking, How are we going to use it? How are we going to ticket-time it, and have rules?" Cross talked of Easter-egg hunts. "And maybe you have Kenneth Branagh do 'Hamlet' down here—it's a bit like a Shakespearean theatre." Related also seemed likely to schedule musical events. Heatherwick had pointed out to me what he considered a happy coincidence: just as the Vessel has eighty landings, the New York Philharmonic has eighty members. (In fact, the orchestra has a hundred and six members.) "Thursday-night concerts at the Vessel?" Cross said. "If you're looking down, on top of their heads, I don't know how it's going to work."

I walked back inside with Stephen Ross. "Thomas is probably the most creative person in the world," he said. ♦

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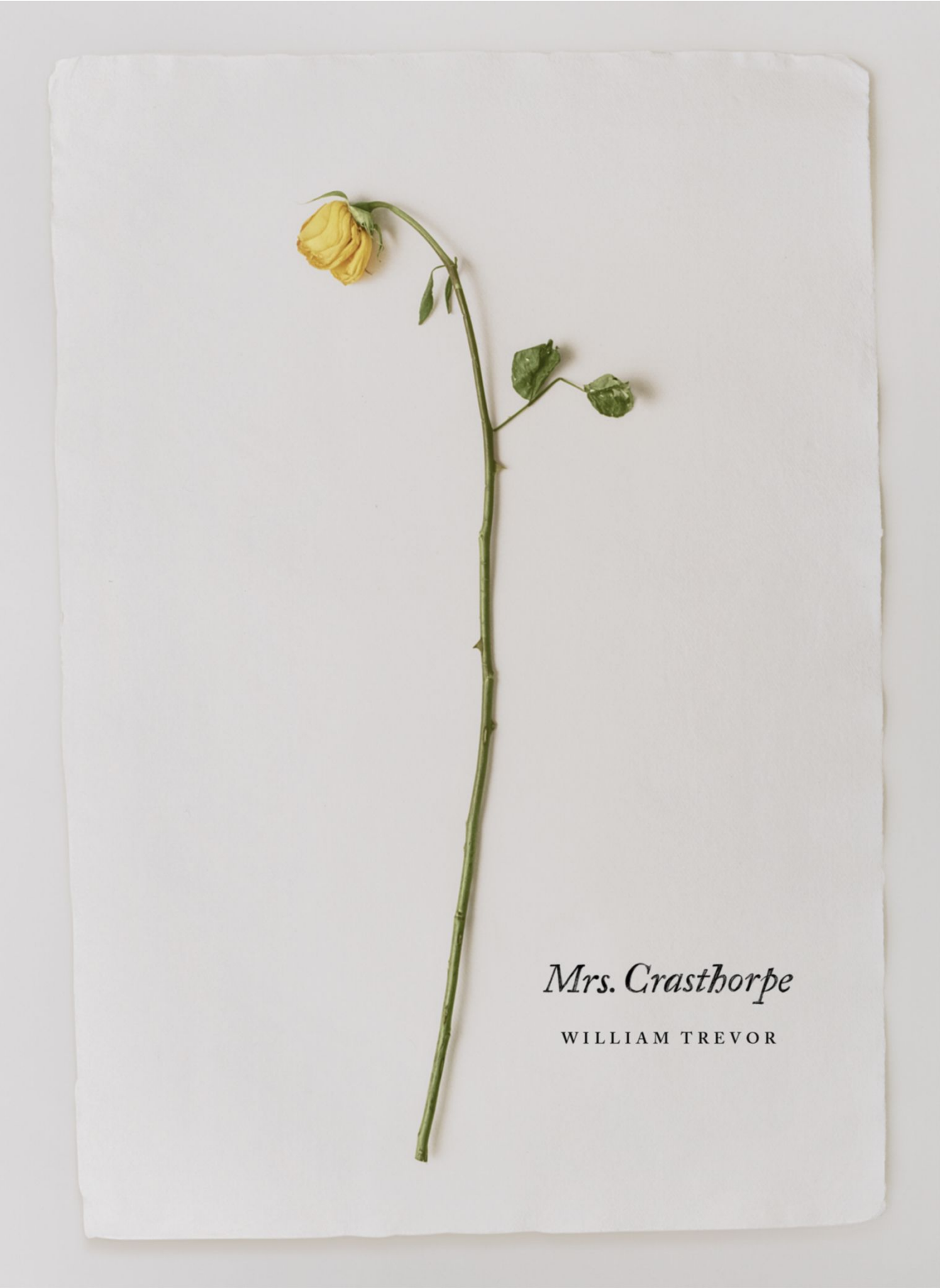

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PECKMEZIAN

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On the short walk from the churchyard to her car, Mrs. Crasthorpe was aware of a profound humiliation. A lone mourner at her husband's funeral, she had sensed it first in the modest country church he had insisted upon for what he had called his obsequies. A woman cleric unknown to Mrs. Crasthorpe had conducted a bleak service, had said the necessary words in an accent that appalled Mrs. Crasthorpe, and then had scuttled off without so much as a glance in Mrs. Crasthorpe's direction. Two men were waiting, leaning on their shovels in the nearby graveyard, and within minutes had returned the clay to where they had dug it from, making a little mound, the coffin gone forever and with it Arthur, all of it a mockery. She was wrong, Mrs. Crasthorpe knew, to blame Arthur for the arrangements he'd put in hand before he went, but she'd become used to blaming him in his lifetime and couldn't help doing so still.

She was a woman of fifty-nine who declared herself to be forty-five because forty-five was what she felt. She had married a considerably older man, who had died in his seventy-second year. She had married him for his money, but, in spite of the comfort and convenience this had brought, Mrs. Crasthorpe believed that in marriage she had failed to blossom. Always a rosebud was how, privately, she thought of herself; and there was, in Mrs. Crasthorpe, a lot of privacy, there always had been. She knew she would tell no one, not ever, that Arthur had been buried without a decent sendoff, just as she'd told no one that she was the mother of a son or that there had been, in the late years of her marriage, Tommy Kildare and Donald.

"I shall relish my widowhood," she asserted, aloud and firmly, in her car. "I shall make something of it."

A light rain became heavier as she drove, the windscreen wipers slushing it away, a sound she particularly disliked. In the driving mirror, which she glanced at now and then, her blonded hair, her gray-blue eyes, the curve of her generously full lips pleased Mrs. Crasthorpe. She liked the look of herself, and always had.

She turned on the radio to suppress the windscreen-wiper noise, wondering as she did so why Arthur had chosen to be buried in such an obscure place, wondering what it was she hadn't listened to when she'd been told. Faintly, on some foreign station, popular music passed from tune to tune, each one known to Mrs. Crasthorpe, since they were of her time.

Etheridge let himself in quietly, not releasing the catch of the lock until he'd pulled it to and could open the door soundlessly. With luck, Janet would have slept and would be sleeping still. Sleep was everything to her now, the kindest friend, the tenderest lover. She didn't allow it to be induced, the drugs she was offered invariably declined.

He looked down at the sleeping face that illness was taking from him, a little more each day. For a moment he saw in the wan, tired features the shadows of Juliet, the wisdom of Portia, Estella's thoughtless pride. "I'll go," the carer whispered from the doorway.

"Dear Janet," he whispered himself, wondering how her day had been.

When he had made tea, Etheridge carried the tray back to the bedside and the rattle of the cup and saucer woke his wife, as every day it did. It was what Janet wanted, what she liked: that she should always be awake when he was here.

"Hello again," she said.

He bent to embrace her, and held her for a moment in his arms, then plumped her pillows up and straightened the turndown of her top sheet. She said, when he asked, that she was feeling better. But she didn't eat any of the cake he had brought, or the biscuits, and didn't look as well as she had that morning.

"Oh, nothing to write home about," he responded to a query as to how the day had been for him. She'd finished "A Fine Balance," she said. She'd heard a program about silverware on the radio. "Well, no," she said. "Not interesting at all."

"Some soup later, darling? Cream cracker?"

"Soup would be lovely. No cream cracker."

"We landed the contract. I thought we wouldn't."

"I knew you would."

She was an actress. He had been settled for years in the offices of Forrester and Bright, a firm of specialist printers that had made a corner for itself by taking on complicated assignments that other printers couldn't be bothered with. In their early forties now, they'd been married since they were both twenty-three.

"It's awful for you," Janet said, gloomy as she sometimes was when she'd just woken up.

"Of course it isn't." Without an effort, the familiar reassurance came.

They smiled at each other. They knew it was awful.

" 'University Challenge' tonight," Janet said.

"You'll behave yourself," the warder said.

"I always do."

"She's here. You see you do."

Derek wished she wouldn't come. It was silly from both their points of view. She knew it was, it wasn't as if she didn't, but still she came. She'd tell him the latest about the old boy and he'd try not to hear. She'd tell him because there was nothing else to tell him. She'd sit there in her finery, ashamed of him and ashamed of being ashamed. She had called it "naughty" once, the way he was. She didn't call it anything now.

He heard the click of her heels, a sprightly sound, different from the thump of boots. The warder respected her, knowing her from her visits; he was a nice man, she said. She liked people being nice.

"Now, you behave, lad." The warder again rebuked Derek in advance, a white splotch on the shiny peak of his cap his only untidiness.

"You see that?" Derek said when she came. "A bird done its business on Mr. Fane."

He teased her with bad grammar and she winced when he did, although she pretended she didn't mind. She was on about something new: the old boy had died and no one had come to the funeral. Derek hadn't known him, there had never been a reason that they should have known each other, but even so she talked about him.

"You all right?" she asked.

"Oh, great," he said.

And that was all; Mrs. Crasthorpe accepted without protest that their brief exchanges were over. "You're good, the way you come," the warder said when she began to go. She left a pot

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of damson jam, which was a favorite.

She hailed a taxi and asked to be taken to Pasmore's. She had phoned, as she always did, to make sure there'd be a table for her, and there it was, in the corner she had come to regard as hers. They didn't gush in Pasmore's; you could feel the dignity of their being above it. They spoke almost in whispers, but you could hear every word, because they wanted you to. She always had tea in Pasmore's after visiting Derek.

As she ordered from the waitress, who had come at once to her, her thoughts picked up from where she'd left them, no different from the thoughts she always had in Pasmore's. He couldn't help himself; he didn't try. He wasn't the kind to try, he had explained: he liked being a persistent offender. Yet even so it couldn't be less than horrid for him. That it must be horrid had many times haunted Mrs. Crasthorpe at this same table, and she pressed it away from her now, glancing about for a face she recognized among the teatime people. But, as always, there wasn't one.

"How nice!" She smiled away her dejection when her sultana scones came and her tea was poured for her, which they always did for one at Pasmore's.

When Janet died, painlessly in her sleep, Etheridge moved from the flat in Barnes to a smaller one in Weymouth Street. No practicality or economic necessity inspired the change. It was just that Barnes, shadowed now by death, was not as once it had been. Its spaciousness, its quiet streets, stared back at Etheridge morosely, the jazz pub that had been theirs seeming ordinary, the river unappealing. The same flowers blooming again in the window boxes should have been a memory and a solace, but were not. Moving in at Weymouth Street, Etheridge thought of leaving Forrester and Bright, of leaving London, too, but when a few weeks had gone by Weymouth Street seemed far enough. It had no past; it tugged at nothing. He settled there.

Mrs. Crasthorpe set about making something special of her widowhood with a will. She spent a week in Eastbourne, clarifying her thoughts, for the town's modest opulence, its unhurried peace and sense of other times had had a calming effect before. Nothing had changed: the Parades, the Grand Hotel, the well-dressed people on the streets, the unfearful sea all drew once more from Mrs. Crasthorpe an admiration that went back to her girlhood. It was in Eastbourne that she first had felt the better for being alive. She could think more productively in the briny air; she got things right. Funeral weeds had had their day, solemn rites were dead and gone: in the dining room of the Grand Hotel, she sensed that she was forgiven for her unshed tears, the grief she could not manage. Shambling through his days, Arthur hadn't wanted to know about Tommy Kildare or Donald. "We're chalk and cheese," he'd said vaguely. He'd left her everything.

She walked about in Eastbourne, going nowhere, wondering if she would meet a chum, and when she didn't it seemed better that she shouldn't, that privately and on her own she should dwell on how life should be now. In this, she did not banish fantasy: Her chums would give her a party, for they were party people. In twos and threes, they would stand about and see in her another woman, and Derek would come with presents, as he never had before, and Tommy Kildare would be as once he'd been. So young she seemed, he'd say, she could be seventeen. And Donald would kiss her fingers and call himself a Regency buck.

When he'd first moved to Weymouth Street, Etheridge hadn't hung up the print of Seurat's "Sunday Afternoon," but then he did, because it was a shame not to. Framed and wrapped, it had been waiting for him one September 12th, probably his fortieth, he thought. The sum of the accumulated I.O.U.s, each one dated April 4th, hadn't become enough for Janet's earrings; it would have if there'd been one more year. Sometimes, even in Weymouth Street, such lesser shadows flitted about, but Etheridge dismissed this interference as a trick of the light or of his own imagination. Work was a help, and when he had been in Weymouth Street for almost six months he ceased to lie sleepless in the lonely early hours. Recollections were less distinct; bits of remembered conversation were somehow lost; the last of the clothes were given away. At a cookery class, he learned to make risotto and eggs Benedict. He played the piano more skillfully than before, had a drink every evening in the Cock and Lion, read Mauriac in French, and was promoted at Forrester and Bright.

Mrs. Crasthorpe had earlier noticed somewhere the man who was coming toward her in Beaumont Street. His tie bore the colors of a regiment or a public school. His hands were delicate: gentle hands, Mrs. Crasthorpe surmised, the fingernails well kept. He had looks and, she imagined, charm; she liked the way he dressed. She liked his serious expression as he walked, how he seemed to dwell on serious matters, unravelling confusion, clever. He wasn't in a hurry. She liked that, too.

"Enford Crescent," she said to herself, wondering how long it had been since Enford Crescent was plucked out of nowhere by Tups or Primmie, she couldn't remember which. You asked the way to Enford Crescent when a boy you liked the look of came along. He wouldn't know, he couldn't know: there was no Enford Crescent. For an hour once, Primmie and a nameless boy had trailed about, searching for what they would never find, falling in love, so Primmie had said. And Tups, another time, searching also, was taken to the Palm Grove and was bought a Peach Surprise.

"I think it's probably quite near," Etheridge said when he was asked for directions to somewhere he thought he'd once noticed on a street sign. "Excuse me," he called out to a couple with a dog on a lead. "This lady's looking for Enford Crescent."

The couple had been engaged in an argumentative conversation, which had abruptly ceased. They were middle-aged and tired-looking, a note of impatience in both their voices. The dog was a black-and-white smooth-haired fox terrier, snappish because it disliked its lead.

"Enford?" the man who restrained it repeated. "Not round here, I shouldn't think." His companion nodded her agreement.

The woman who'd asked for directions was smiling rather helplessly now, Etheridge thought. "Never mind," she said.

The couple and the dog went on.

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WILD TURKEY

Two remnant-dinosaur wild turkeys
walk between silence and silence. Not to themselves a meal of meat.
I, who am to myself also not meat, feed mosquitoes nightly,
though day and night I wait for hunger
to find me its dark wood violin, inside its dark wood case.

—*Jane Hirshfield*

"You've been most kind," the woman in search of Enford Crescent said.

"Well, hardly that."

"Oh, yes. Indeed."

"I'm sorry I misled you."

"No, no."

"Someone will know when you ask again."

"Of course."

Mrs. Crasthorpe watched the man she had spoken to walking away from her, and when he passed out of sight she missed him as if she knew him. He had a cultivated voice and was polite without being like an icicle. She'd always been attracted by fair-haired men.

Still gazing into the empty distance, she felt the weight of her age. She'd been impulsive once upon a time, hasty and not caring that she was. Tups had called her a spur-of-the-moment girl. Primmie had, too. They'd liked the impulsiveness in her; she'd liked it herself. He would have done, the fair-haired man, she'd known he would. She would have told him. He would have listened and understood. She knew that, too, and yet she'd let him go.

For no particular reason, when Janet was ill, Etheridge had begun to fill the remaining pages of a half-used ledger book with autobiographical jottings. He did not intend this to be a diary, simply a record of early childhood, his own and Janet's, some later memories collected, too. It established time and place, what had been shared and what had not, the marriage, and people known and houses lived in. While he was homesick at a Gloucestershire boarding school, Janet was being taught at home by a Miss Francis, school being considered a risk for a delicate child. Her first theatrical appearance, unnamed, unnoticed, was in the pantomime chorus of "Jack and the Beanstalk." Short-skirted, glamorous, she was seventeen, while Etheridge, not then known to her, was waiting for a vocation to offer itself. They met when Janet came to London.

Alone thirty years later, Etheridge could not forgive her death and imagined he never would. He sensed that his feelings were unreasonable and he struggled to dismiss them, disliking himself for what seemed to be a selfishness. But, still, resentment hung about. Why should she not have what mostly people did have? Why was she now mere dust?

The autumn that came was an Indian summer, and every weekend, on either Saturday or Sunday, Etheridge walked in Regent's Park. He learned from a book the names of flowers he didn't know; he fed the birds. But mainly, while time passed more slowly than on weekdays, he watched from a pavement table of a café the people who came and went. He envied them, and he envied himself as he had been.

When, years ago and halfway through her marriage, Mrs. Crasthorpe had discovered this same part of London, she had liked it at once. She had visited it to inspect, and take her pick of, an elderly woman's jewelry, the woman once well-to-do but no longer. Mrs. Crasthorpe had bought three rings and a bracelet, and when, a month or so later, the same advertisement appeared again she made a second journey and on her return persuaded her husband to sell their house and buy one she had seen in Coppice Mews. She liked the mews, she liked the streets, and so did he; he hadn't at first but with time she'd persuaded him that he did. He died in Coppice Mews, apologizing for having to leave her on her own and for wanting to be buried in a small country churchyard she considered unsuitable for the urban man he'd been. She honored his wishes nonetheless, and was already on familiar terms with the people of the shops, had the mews house painted in the colors she had previously wanted. All of which, for Mrs. Crasthorpe, increased the pleasure of widowhood.

A faintly familiar face was what Etheridge was aware of, without knowing where or when he'd seen it before. Then he remembered and nodded at the woman who was turning the pages of a newspaper at the next table.

She stared at him when he did so, as if her thoughts had been similar to his. "Good Lord!" a moment later she exclaimed. Her scent was as pungent as it had been when she had asked for directions. Her clothes were different. She held out a hand that was just within Etheridge's reach. "I rather think we've met before," she said.

"Well, yes, we have."

"What weather!"

"It's lovely."

"A day for the races!"

She used to go racing often, she said. The Oaks, the Derby, Cheltenham. Wimbledon for the tennis, Henley. "Oh, such a lot," she said, but things were quieter now. Inevitable, of course, as the years pile up.

She was handsome in her fleshy way, Etheridge supposed. Careful, experienced. You couldn't call her gross, and there was something in her lavish, well-used smile that was almost delicate. Her teeth were very white. Her breasts were firm, her knees trim. She fiddled with a brooch she wore, a loop of tiny stones, chips of sapphire and washed-out ruby they might have been, the only decoration on a pale-cream dress. Sometimes a languid look came into her features and, for a moment, then they were tranquil.

"What a troublesome country Cambodia is!" she chattily remarked, folding away her newspaper as she spoke. "You'd think they'd have more sense."

She was the worst in the world about names, she confided, seeming to imply

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that Etheridge had told her his on their previous encounter, which he hadn't. His coffee came, too hot to be drunk in a couple of gulps, allowing him to go away.

It was extraordinary, Mrs. Crasthorpe marvelled, that he should again be here, this attractive stranger who had continued to float about in her consciousness and whom she'd made herself love a little. What lengths she went to, she reflected, how determinedly she guarded herself from the cruelty that was more than Tommy Kildare's treachery or Donald deciding that he was homosexual, more than the haunting years of Arthur's dreary world, more than tediousness and boredom. How good the everyday was, the ordinary, with its lesser tribulations and simple pleasures. "What are you thinking?" she asked.

Unable to find the white lies that were always there for him, Etheridge muttered incomprehensibly. He wondered if this talkative woman was drunk, but the flow of information about herself had come in an orderly manner, suggesting that she was not.

"How attractive your name is," she said. "Crasthorpe is appalling, don't you think?"

She had been Georgina Gilmour once, she said, the same Gilmours who had carried their name all over the English-speaking world. The Crasthorpes had never been much and were, of course, unrelated to her.

"How much I enjoy conversation with strangers," in passing she revealed.

She spoke about the Gilmours at some length, their place in Scotland for the shooting, the child among them in the past who'd been a musical genius, and Nanny Fortescue, to whom three generations had been devoted, and old Wyse Gilmour, who'd raced at Silverstone and lived to be a hundred and two.

"Well, there you are," she said, without finality. She scribbled on the edge of her newspaper and handed him the scrap of paper she tore off: she'd written down her address.

"We clearly are not birds of a feather," pensively she concluded. "But if you should ever think we might know one another better I'm nearly always at home in the afternoon."

He nodded vaguely. Abrupt and dogmatic, her manner might have seemed rude, but she managed to make it an unawareness, as probably it was.

"Your wife," she said. "You mentioned your wife."

He shook his head.

"I thought you said your wife . . ."

"No."

"I thought . . ."

"My wife died."

Afterward, Etheridge avoided having coffee at that particular café, but several times he caught a glimpse of Mrs. Crasthorpe, once coming out of the Cock and Lion. It had surprised him when she'd said that they weren't birds of a feather: he had imagined that that was what she'd thought they were. He avoided the Cock and Lion, too, and frequented instead the Admiral's Rest, which was farther away and rougher. Once, he heard his name called out in Vincent Street and walked more quickly on. Mrs. Crasthorpe did not interest or concern him, and it was hard to believe that this pushy, over-lively woman might possess qualities more appealing than her manner. Crowded out by his continuing anger at the careless greed of death, her attentions were hardly noticed. Mrs. Crasthorpe would fade away to nothing, which was what she had been before she asked him for directions.

But, having lunch at Le Paon one day with the two men from the office he regularly had lunch with, he thought he saw Mrs. Crasthorpe on the street. The plate-glass terrace doors of the restaurant had not been folded back, as in high summer they invariably were: Le Paon in early autumn echoed only with its own murmur of voices, enlivened with occasional laughter. All three men had ordered chops; a glass of house wine had been brought to each. Their conversation while they waited was devoted to the difficulties that had arisen because a typeface was neither available nor obtainable. "I'll try Thompson's this afternoon," one of Etheridge's colleagues said, and the other mentioned J. Sinclair's in Edinburgh. Etheridge said nothing.

Mrs. Crasthorpe wasn't wearing her pale-cream dress but, instead, a flowery one he had also become familiar with. She was standing still, in conversation with a figure in a long black overcoat that looked, at least from a distance, to be much too heavy for the time of year. Its wearer—his back to the restaurant's façade and to Etheridge—gestured repeatedly, as if in persuasion. Mrs. Crasthorpe did not seem happy. From time to time, she attempted to move away, only to be drawn back by her companion's insistence that their encounter should continue.

"Your chops, sir," a waiter said, and there were roast potatoes and parsnips mashed and rich brown gravy.

"Or possibly Langford's." Etheridge at last contributed something to what was being discussed, feeling that he should.

When the meal ended, he noticed that while he hadn't been looking the conversation on the street appeared to have become a fracas. Mrs. Crasthorpe

"Want to step outside for a reminiscence of when we smoked?"

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and the man in the black coat were now at the center of a small crowd, the man still gesturing, Mrs. Crasthorpe more agitated than before. Etheridge could hear the voices of several bystanders raised in angry abuse that was clearly directed at the blackly clad figure. Two elderly women pushed to get closer to him; a bearded man was restrained from striking him; a younger woman was shouting into a mobile telephone. Then the gesticulating ceased, and the man in the black coat shrugged, his arms raised in despair, his comic stance suggesting that something he considered to be a source of humor had been misunderstood. Etheridge didn't feel the incident was worth drawing to his colleagues' attention, and by the time he reached the street himself the crowd had disappeared and Mrs. Crasthorpe had, too. The man in the black coat was laughing, his wrists held out to the two policemen who had taken charge of him.

Unnatural little bastard, the warder's unspoken thought was when he heard that this arrest had taken place. His own mother, the thought went on, who brought him jam and did her best. His own mother, and in broad daylight.

"Only teasing," Derek said the next time she came. "I thought you'd be amused."

She wept where no one could see her. She never had where anyone could, not ever in all the days and nights, all the waking up to another incident and Arthur knowing nothing. She hadn't wept when Tommy Kildare had had enough of her or when Donald needed something different. But she wept her private tears whenever she imagined the coat unbuttoned, the sudden twitch as it opened wide, the torch's flash. She wept because she loved him as she did no other human being. She always had. She always would.

In time, Etheridge married again, a relationship that strengthened as the years passed, his contentment in it similar to the contentment he had discovered in marriage before. It seemed natural in the circumstances to move away from Weymouth Street and he did so; natural, too, to buy a house in quiet Petersham, rescuing it from years of neglect and subsequent decay. A child was born there, and then another.

To his second wife, Etheridge talked about his first, which caused neither offense nor irritation, and even the bitter chagrin of his mourning was understood. He considered himself fortunate in almost every aspect of his life as it now was, in his wife and his children, in the position he held at Forrester and Bright, in the open sward of Petersham, its city buses plying daily, its city sounds a whisper in a quieter London.

Another winter passed, another spring, and most of summer. August became September, and it was then, as the days were shortening, that the name Crasthorpe occurred again. The name was unusual, and it caught Etheridge's eye in a newspaper item concerning a woman who in the night had fallen down in the street and had lain there until she was discovered by refuse collectors when the dusk of another early morning came. She had died while being conveyed to hospital in the refuse men's enormous vehicle, a reek of whiskey emanating from her sodden clothes. Cold print reported a scene that moved him: a shrunken body gently placed on a bed of waste, the refuse men standing awkwardly then, saying nothing. The woman was thought to be a vagrant, but Etheridge saw blonded hair bedraggled and stockinged knees, an easy smile and clothes he remembered. Chatter he'd been unable to escape from he remembered, too: childhood friends recalled, and going to the races, and conversations with strangers. He'd thrown away the scrap of paper that had been pressed upon him, its sprawl of handwriting unread. In Vincent Street, he had hurried on.

But the curiosity that Mrs. Crasthorpe had failed to inspire in her lifetime came now. Why had she lain all night where she had fallen? Why were her clothes saturated with whiskey, she who had been so conventional and respectable? What did her wordless epitaph say?

Lost somewhere in the crowded tangle bound by Mare Street, Morning Lane, and Urswick Road is unmarked Falter Way, the sign that once identified it claimed by vandals long ago. It is a narrow passage, not greatly used because it terminates abruptly and leads nowhere. No street lights burn at night in Falter Way, no brass plate or printed notice proclaims the practice of commerce or a profession. There are no shops in Falter Way, no bars, no breakfast cafés. No enterprising business girls hang about in doorways.

"Crasthorpe." A uniformed policeman repeated the name and shrugged away his dismay.

"Poor bloody woman," his colleague said, and closed his notebook.

There was nothing untoward to report, nothing to add or alter. What had happened here was evident and apparent, without a trace of anything that needed to be looked at more carefully.

In turn, the two men telephoned, then went away.

Derek wondered why his mother didn't come and hoped it was because at last she'd realized that all of it was ridiculous. When the old boy died she'd said, "Come to the house," and he hadn't understood that she meant to live there. She could pass him off as a houseboy, her idea was; she couldn't see the snags. Once, she would have said that snags didn't matter. Once, she'd liked being teased. Funny how she was.

Etheridge found it hard to forget Mrs. Crasthorpe, although he wanted to. It shamed him that he had thought so little of her, a woman not really known to him, and then only because she'd been embarrassing and even a nuisance. He had read about Falter Way in the newspaper report of her death and had wondered why she had gone there. On an impulse, when months afterward he was near it himself, he asked about Mrs. Crasthorpe, and although she was remembered, no one had known her name. In nearby Dring Street and the shoddy bars of Breck Hill, he imagined her, a different woman, drinking heavily. She went with men, a barman said, she liked a man.

Etheridge guessed his way through the mystery of Mrs. Crasthorpe, but too much was missing and he resisted further speculation. He sensed his own pity, not knowing why it was there. He honored a tiresome woman's secret and saw it kept. ♦

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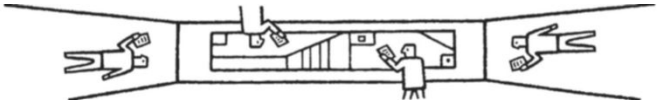
THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

IMAGINARY KINGDOMS

"Black Panther" and "Early Man."

BY ANTHONY LANE

If you start in the center of Africa and head southeast, you arrive at Wakanda. According to one map, it lies somewhere near Uganda—below South Sudan, above Rwanda, and abutting the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Unlike those nations, however, which have been scalded by strife, Wakanda is a model of serenity. It is a kingdom, wisely ruled, and rich in a precious natural resource, vibranium, which is used for hyper-technology. Foreign marauders have never pillaged that wealth, because they know nothing about it. In short, Wakanda is blessed among nations, and there's only one thing wrong with the place. It doesn't exist.

The map appears in "Black Panther," most of which is set in present-day Wakanda, at a pivotal point. The old king is dead; long live the new king, T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), a princely sort who comes with many advantages. His mother is played by Angela Bassett, who rocks a ruff better than any queen since Elizabeth I. His most trusted combatant, should trouble loom, is the shaven-headed Okoye (Danai Gurira), who can fell an aircraft with the toss of a spear. He has a thing going with the wondrous Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o). Oh, and I almost forgot: he's a superhero. Unlike Peter Parker, whose teasing, could-it-be-me act has worn thin, T'Challa is super and proud, turning at will into Black Panther. His suit, at once bulletproof and clingy, makes Tony Stark's outfit look like a deep-sea diver's. Sure, Bruce Wayne has the Batmobile, but T'Challa has a whole country to drive. The king is the man.

We have already met him, in "Captain America: Civil War" (2016), but there he was merely a part of the Avengers gang, and he made no more impact, to be honest, than the one with the bow and arrow whose name I can never remember. Hence the pressing need for this new film. There have been black superheroes before, and Will Smith's character in "Hancock" (2008) was an unusual blend of potency and dysfunction, but none have been given dominion over a blockbuster. (The one who merits it best is Frozone, from "The Incredibles," who has to miss dinner to save the world. "We are talking about the greater good!" he cries. Back comes the reply: "Greater good? I am your *wife*. I'm the greatest good you are *ever* going to get.") Nor has the genre, until now, allowed black identity to be the ground bass of a single tale. There are white actors in "Black Panther," including Andy Serkis and Martin Freeman, but their roles are minor ones—the types of role, that is, to which black performers, in this patch of the movie business, have grown wearily accustomed.

The director is Ryan Coogler, and those of us who admire his work will be stirred to find that "Black Panther" is bracketed by short scenes in Oakland, California. That is where his début feature, "Fruitvale Station" (2013), began, with genuine cell-phone footage from an incident in 2009, when an unarmed African-American, Oscar Grant, was shot and killed by police. The rest of the movie traced the arc of Oscar's final day, and what struck you was how normal and how plotless it felt—a mild domestic tiff, a trip to the store to buy shrimp, phone calls to his mom. The only special thing about that day was how it ended, and the tension in "Black Panther" springs from Coogler's instinctive urge to relay the rough textures of non-heroic experience while also striving to meet the demands of Marvel, by offering a gadget-packed dogfight in the skies, say, or a ride on an armored rhino.

The fact that he mainly succeeds is no surprise, since his previous movie, "Creed" (2015), a late but meaty addition to the "Rocky" saga, with Sylvester Stallone as a coach, proved that Coogler could hold his nerve in a franchise. On the one hand, "Creed," like "Black Panther," keeps reminding us that a major studio has money in the game; the musical score, in both cases, is grimly insistent, as if to insure that the emotional content of each scene is packaged and delivered on cue. On the other hand, every Coogler movie features Michael B. Jordan, who is hardly someone to be hemmed in. He ought to have won an Oscar for his Oscar, in "Fruitvale Station"; he was the bullish young boxer in "Creed"; and now, in the latest film, he shows up as T'Challa's nemesis, Killmonger, who believes that he has a claim to the Wakandan throne. While Boseman does what he can with the ever-noble hero, Jordan is so relaxed and so unstiff that, if you're anything like me, you'll wind up rooting for the baddie when the two of them battle it out. Jordan has swagger to spare, with those rolling shoulders, but there's a breath of charm, too, all the more seductive in the overblown atmosphere of Marvel. He's twice as pantherish as the Panther.

Few recent movies have been more keenly anticipated than this one, in

ABOVE: LEWIS SCOTT

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Ryan Coogler's blockbuster stars Chadwick Boseman as an African king who morphs at will into a bulletproof superhero.

ILLUSTRATION BY KRISTIAN HAMMERSTAD

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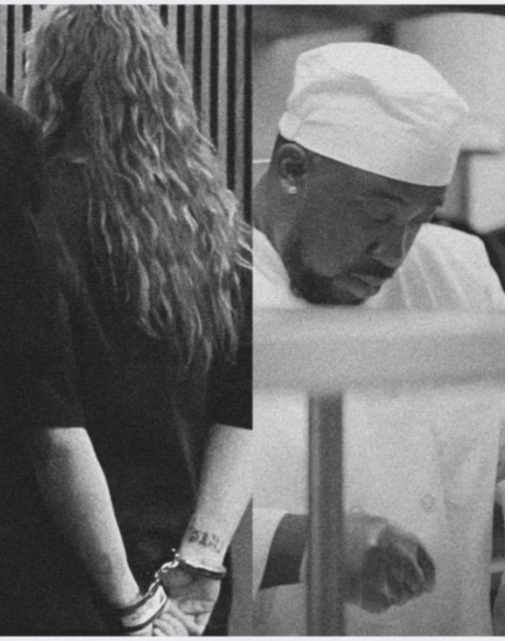

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regard both to its box-office potential and to the force of its mythmaking. With its vision of an unplundered homeland, blooming from liberty rather than from bondage, "Black Panther" is, in the fullest sense, an African-American work, and Carvell Wallace was rightly moved to ask, in a *Times* essay, "Can films like these significantly change things for black people in America?" We shall see. My only qualm concerns not so much the mission of Coogler's movie as its form; I wonder what weight of political responsibility can, or should, be laid upon anything that is accompanied by buttered popcorn. Vibranium is no more real than the philosopher's stone. More Americans will presumably watch "Black Panther" than have ever read "Black Boy" or "Invisible Man," but do numbers alone make the difference? Are 3-D spectacles any more reliable than rose-tinted ones, when we seek to imagine an ideal society?

The opportunity to see a warthog playing the harp doesn't come along nearly as often as it should. All the more reason, then, to welcome "Early Man," although whether the harpist in question is technically a warthog is open to dispute. He's piggy enough in snout and trotter, and lavishly tusked, and he answers to the name of Hognob, yet he barks and bays like a wolf. Hognob is the sidekick of Dug (voiced by Eddie Redmayne), and Dug, being in possession of a bucktoothed grin and oodles of true grit, is the hero.

"Early Man" is the latest film from Aardman Animations, and the director is Nick Park, the sultan of stop-motion, to whom we are eternally indebted for Wallace, Gromit, and other gems of superpliability. As the title suggests, the setting is prehistory. (No date is given, although we are helpfully told that the opening sequence occurs "around lunchtime.") Dug belongs to a minor tribe, dwelling peaceably in the lush glades of an extinct volcano. This demi-paradise is invaded by a more advanced people, brought there by a lust for metal ore, and led—or bossed around—by the vainglorious Lord Nooth (Tom Hiddleston). "The age of stone is over," he declares, speaking in a heavy but unexplained French accent. "Long live the age of bronze."

Dug, as dauntless as ever, travels to the stronghold of his foes. The entrance is shielded by one gate after another, each shunting into position with a mighty clang, and finally, in the movie's best gag, by a little sliding bolt, such as you might find on a garden shed. Such attention not just to detail but to the unforeseen and deliciously unnecessary detail is an Aardman hallmark; in "The Curse of the Were-Rabbit" (2005), the climactic chase had to pause while the villain, a beefy mutt, produced a tiny flowered purse, took out a coin, and fed it into the slot of a fairground ride. As a rule, Aardman scripts are unabashed by puns—"You haven't eaten your primordial soup!" somebody exclaims in "Early Man"—but it's the visual treats, too homely for surrealism but too wacky to be cute, that anchor the films and transfigure the whole world, ancient and modern, into a potential joke shop. Why *not* use mini-crocodiles as clothespins, when you need to clip your washing to the line?

If "Early Man" slips below the studio's highest standards, that may be due to its length. In "A Grand Day Out" (1989), Park managed to rocket Wallace and Gromit—one man and his dog—to the moon and back in twenty-three minutes, whereas the new movie takes more than an hour longer to tell a plainer tale, topped with a lighter scattering of laughs. Dug and company confront the enemy in a soccer match; should they win, they will return to their beloved woods. The whole thing feels challengingly British, right down to the sports commentators and the munificent arrival of a queen (Miriam Margolyes), and it's also too Gromit-less for comfort. Aardman is a haven for the humanish: for creatures that hail from other species but match us or even, in Gromit's case, outstrip us in proficiency and grace. The stage of "Early Man," though, is stuffed with men and women—on the Neanderthal spectrum, it's true, but propelled by needs and greeds much like our own—whereas the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air are reduced to the role of extras. It pains me to say so, but Hognob is not enough. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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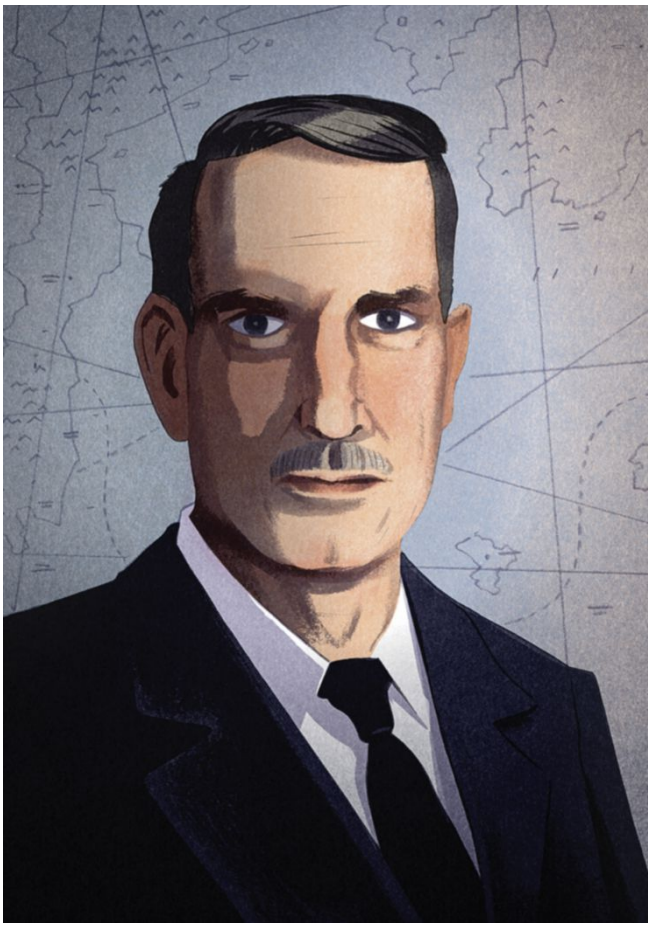
A CRITIC AT LARGE

MADE IN VIETNAM

Edward Lansdale and the war over the war.

BY LOUIS MENAND



In Lansdale's counter-insurgency approach, soldiers were fighters but also salesmen.

ILLUSTRATION BY BILL BRAGG

For almost thirty years, by means financial, military, and diplomatic, the United States tried to prevent Vietnam from becoming a Communist state. Millions died in that struggle. By the time active American military engagement ended, the United States had dropped more than three times as many tons of bombs on Vietnam, a country the size of New Mexico, as the Allies dropped in all of the Second World War. At the height of the bombing, it was costing us ten dollars for every dollar of damage we inflicted. We got nothing for it.

We got nothing for pretty much everything we tried in Vietnam, and it's hard to pick out a moment in those thirty years when anti-Communist forces were on a sustainable track to prevailing. Political and military leaders misunderstood the enemy's motives; they misread conditions on the ground; they tried to beat unconventional fighters with conventional tactics; they massacred civilians. They pursued strategies that seemed designed to produce neither a victory nor a settlement, only what Daniel Ellsberg, the leaker of the Pentagon Papers but once a passionate supporter of American intervention, called "the stalemate machine."

Could the United States have found a strategic through line to the outcome we wanted? Could we have adopted a different strategy that would have yielded a secure non-Communist South Vietnam? Max Boot's "The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam" (Liveright) is an argument that there was a winning strategy—or, at least, a strategy with better odds than the one we followed.

There were two major wars against the Communists in Vietnam. The first was an anticolonial war between Communist nationalists and France, which, except for a period during the Second World War, when the Japanese took over, had ruled the country since the eighteen-eighties. That war lasted from 1946 to 1954, when the French lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu and negotiated a settlement, the Geneva Accords, that partitioned the country at the seventeenth parallel. The United States had funded France's military failure to the tune of about $2.5 billion.

The second war was a civil war between the two zones created at Geneva: North Vietnam, governed by Vietnamese Communists, and South Vietnam, backed by American aid and, eventually, by American troops. That war lasted from 1954 (or 1955 or 1959, depending on your definition of an "act of war") to 1975, when Communist forces entered Saigon and unified the country. The second war is the Vietnam War, "our" war.

The more we look at American decision-making in Vietnam, the less sense it makes. Geopolitics helps explain our concerns about the fate of Vietnam in the nineteen-forties and fifties. Relations with the Soviet Union and China were hostile, and Southeast Asia and the Korean peninsula were in political turmoil. Still, paying for France to reclaim its colony just as the world was about to experience a wave of decolonization was a dubious undertaking.

By 1963, however, "peaceful coexistence" was the policy of the American and Soviet governments, Korea had effectively been partitioned, and the Sino-Soviet split made the threat of a global Communist movement seem no longer a pressing concern. And yet that was when the United States embarked on a policy of military escalation. There were sixteen thousand American advisers in South Vietnam in 1963; during the next ten years, some three million

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American soldiers would serve there.

Historians argue about whether a given battle was a success or a failure, but, over-all, the military mission was catastrophic on many levels. The average age of American G.I.s in Vietnam was about twenty-two. By 1971, thousands of them were on opium or heroin, and more than three hundred incidents of fragging—officers wounded or killed by their own troops—were reported. Half a million Vietnam veterans would suffer from P.T.S.D., a higher proportion than for the Second World War.

People sometimes assume that Western opinion leaders turned against the war only after U.S. marines waded ashore at Da Nang, in 1965, and the body counts began to rise. That's not the case. As Fredrik Logevall points out in his study of American decision-making, "Choosing War" (1999), the United States was warned repeatedly about the folly of involvement.

Intervention in Southeast Asia would be "an entanglement without end," France's President, Charles de Gaulle, speaking from his own nation's long experience in Indochina, told President Kennedy. The United States, he said, would find itself in a "bottomless military and political swamp." Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, told Kennedy that sending in American troops would be a disastrous decision. Walter Lippmann, the dean of American political commentators back when political commentary had such titles, warned, in 1963, "The price of a military victory in the Vietnamese war is higher than American vital interests can justify."

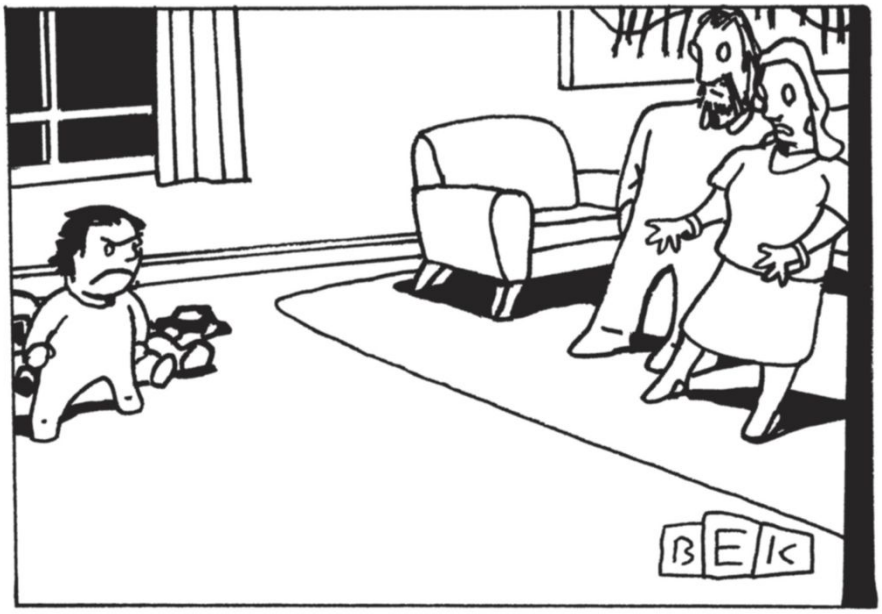
De Gaulle and Nehru had reasons of their own for wanting the United States to keep out of Southeast Asia. But Kennedy himself was keenly aware of the risks of entrapment, and so was his successor. "There ain't no daylight in Vietnam, there's not a bit," Lyndon Johnson said in 1965. "The more bombs you drop, the more nations you scare, the more people you make mad." Three years later, he was forced to withdraw from his reëlection campaign, his political career destroyed by his inability to end the war. The first time someone claimed to see a "light at the end of the tunnel" in Vietnam was in 1953. People were still using that expression in 1967. By then, American public opinion and much of the media were antiwar. Yet we continued to send men to fight there for six more years.

Our international standing was never dependent on our commitment to South Vietnam. We might have been accused of inconstancy for abandoning an ally, but everyone would have understood. In fact, the longer the war went on the more our image suffered. The United States engaged in a number of high-handed and extralegal interventions in the affairs of other nations during the Cold War, but nothing damaged our reputation like Vietnam. It not only shattered our image of invincibility. It meant that a whole generation grew up looking upon the United States as an imperialist, militarist, and racist power. The political capital we accumulated after leading the alliance against Fascism in the Second World War and then helping rebuild Japan and Western Europe we burned through in Southeast Asia.

American Presidents were not imperialists. They genuinely wanted a free and independent South Vietnam, yet the gap between that aspiration and the reality of the military and political situation in-country was unbridgeable. They could see the problem, but they could not solve it. Political terms are short, and so politics is short-term. The main consideration that seems to have presented itself to those Presidents, from Harry Truman to Richard Nixon, who insisted on staying the course was domestic politics—the fear of being blamed by voters for losing Southeast Asia to Communism. If Southeast Asia was going to be lost to Communism, they preferred that it be on another President's head. It was a costly calculation.

There were some American officials, even some diplomats and generals, who believed in the mission but saw that the strategy wasn't working and had an idea why. One of these was John Paul Vann, a lieutenant colonel in the Army who was assigned to a South Vietnamese commander in 1962, at a time when Americans restricted themselves to an advisory role. It seemed to Vann that South Vietnamese officers were trying to keep their troops out of combat. They would call in air strikes whenever they could, which raised body counts but killed civilians or drove them to the Vietcong. Vann cultivated some young American journalists—among them David Halberstam, of the New York *Times,* and Neil Sheehan, of United Press International, who had just arrived in Vietnam—to get out his story that the war was not going well.

Vann didn't want the United States to withdraw. He wanted the United States to win. He was all about killing the enemy. But his efforts to persuade his superiors in Vietnam and Washington failed, and he resigned from the Army



"Honey, all we want is what's quiet for us."

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in 1963. He returned to Vietnam as a civilian in 1965, and was killed there, in a helicopter crash, in 1972. In 1988, Sheehan published a book about him, "A Bright Shining Lie," which won a Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction and is a classic of Vietnam literature.

"The Road Not Taken" is the story of another military figure sympathetic to the mission and critical of the strategy, Major General Edward Lansdale, and Boot says that his intention is to do for Lansdale what Sheehan "so memorably accomplished for John Paul Vann." Boot's task is tougher. Sheehan was in Vietnam, and he knew Vann and the people Vann worked with. He also knew some secrets about Vann's private life. Boot did not know Lansdale, who died in 1987, but he interviewed people who did; he read formerly classified documents; and he had access to Lansdale's personal correspondence, including letters to his longtime Filipina mistress, Patrocinio (Pat) Yapcinco Kelly.

Lansdale was at various times an officer in the Army and the Air Force, but those jobs were usually covers. For much of his career, he worked for the C.I.A. He was brought up in California. He attended U.C.L.A. but failed to graduate, and then got married and went into advertising, where he had some success. In 1942, with the United States at war with the Axis powers, he joined the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.), the nation's first civilian intelligence service and the precursor of the C.I.A. During the war, Lansdale worked Stateside, but in 1945, shortly after the Japanese surrender, he was sent to the Philippines.

It was there that he had the first of his professional triumphs. He ran covert operations to help the Philippine government defeat a small-scale Communist uprising, and he supervised the candidacy of a Filipino politician named Ramon Magsaysay and got him elected President, in 1953. To assist in that effort, Lansdale created an outfit called the National Movement for Free Elections. It was funded by the C.I.A.

This was Lansdale's modus operandi. He was a fabricator of fronts, the man behind the curtain. He manipulated events—through payoffs, propaganda, and sometimes more nefarious means—to insure that indigenous politicians friendly to the United States would be "freely" elected. Internal opposition to these leaders could then be characterized as "an insurgency" (in Vietnam, it would be termed "aggression"), a situation that called for the United States to intervene in order to save democracy. Magsaysay's speeches as a Presidential candidate, for example, were written by a C.I.A. agent. (The Soviets, of course, operated in exactly the same way, through fronts and election-fixing. The Cold War was a looking-glass war.)

In 1954, fresh from his success with Magsaysay, Lansdale was sent to South Vietnam by the director of the C.I.A., Allen Dulles, with instructions to do there what he had done in the Philippines: see to the establishment of a pro-Western government and assist it in finding ways to check Communist encroachment. (The Communists in question were, of course, Vietnamese opposed to a government put in place and propped up by foreign powers.)

As Boot explains, Vietnam was a different level of the game. The Philippines was a former American colony. Almost all Filipinos were Christians. They liked Americans and had fought with them in the war against Japan. English was the language used by the government. The Vietnamese, by contrast, had had almost no experience with Americans and were proud of their two-thousand-year history of resistance to foreign invaders, from the Chinese and the Mongols to the French and the Japanese. There were more than a million Vietnamese Catholics, but, in a population of twenty-five million, eighty per cent practiced some form of Buddhism.

The South Vietnamese who welcomed the American presence after 1954 were mainly urbanites and people who had prospered under French rule. Eighty per cent of the population lived in the countryside, though, and it was the strategy of the Vietcong to convince them that the United States was just one more foreign invader, no different from the Japanese or the French, or from Kublai Khan.

In 1954, Ho Chi Minh, the President of North Vietnam, was a popular figure. He was a Communist, but he was a Communist because he was a nationalist. Twice he had appealed to American Presidents to support his independence movement—to Woodrow Wilson after the First World War, and Truman at the end of the Second—and twice he had been ignored. Only the Communists, he had concluded, were truly committed to the principle of self-determination in Asia. The Geneva Accords called for a national election to be held in Vietnam in 1956; that election was not held, but many people in the American government thought that Ho would have won.

Lansdale knew neither French nor Vietnamese. For that matter, he couldn't even speak Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines. (In the Philippines, he is said to have sometimes communicated by charades, or by drawing pictures in the sand.) Yet, as he had done in the Philippines, he managed to get close to a local political figure and become his consigliere. In the Philippines, Lansdale could choose the politician he wanted to work with; in Vietnam, he had to play the card he was dealt. The card's name was Ngo Dinh Diem.

Diem was the personification of the paradoxes of American designs in Southeast Asia. "A curious blend of heroism mixed with a narrowness of view and of egotism . . . a messiah without a message" is how one American diplomat described him. He was a devout Catholic who hated the Communists. One of his brothers had been killed in 1945 by the Vietminh—the Communist-dominated nationalist party. During the war with France, he had spent two years in the United States, where he impressed a number of American politicians, including the young John F. Kennedy. In 1954, the year of the French defeat, he was appointed Prime Minister by the Emperor, Bao Dai, a French puppet who lived luxuriously in Europe and did not speak Vietnamese well.

Diem was a workaholic who could hold forth for hours before journalists and other visitors to the Presidential Palace. A two-hour Diem monologue was considered a quickie, and he didn't like to be interrupted. But Diem did not

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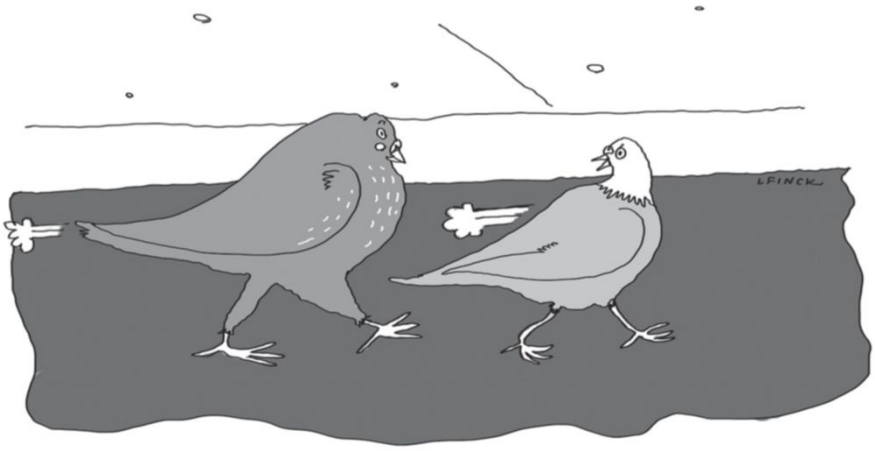

"You'll never catch me! Not without arms!"

• •

see himself as a Western puppet. He was a genuine nationalist—on paper, the plausible leader of an independent non-Communist South Vietnam.

On the other hand, Diem was no champion of representative democracy. His political philosophy was a not entirely intelligible blend of personalism (a quasi-spiritual French school of thought), Confucianism, and authoritarianism. He aspired to be a benevolent autocrat, but he had little understanding of the condition Vietnamese society was in after seventy years of colonial rule.

The French had replaced the Confucian educational system and had tried to manufacture a new national identity: Franco-Vietnamese. They were only partly successful. It was not obvious how Diem and the Americans were supposed to forge a nation from the fractured society the French left behind. Diem's idea was to create a cult of himself and the nation. "A sacred respect is due to the person of the sovereign," he claimed. "He is the mediator between the people and heaven." He had altars featuring his picture put up in the streets, and a hymn praising him was sung along with the national anthem.

This ambition may have been naïve. What made it poisonous was nepotism. Diem was deeply loyal to and dependent on his family, and his family were an unloved bunch. One of his brothers was the Catholic bishop of the coastal city of Hue. Another was the boss—the warlord, really—of central Vietnam. A third brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, lived in the Presidential Palace with his wife, Tran Le Xuan, a woman known to the press, and thus to the world, as the Dragon Lady, Madame Nhu. She operated as Diem's hostess (he was celibate) and was free with her usually inflammatory political opinions. American officials in Saigon prayed that the Nhus would somehow disappear, but they were the only people Diem trusted.

Nhu ran the underside of the Diem regime. He created a shadowy political party, the Can Lao, whose members swore loyalty to Diem, and he made membership a prerequisite for career advancement. According to Frances FitzGerald's book "Fire in the Lake" (1972), he funded the party by means of piracy, extortion, opium trading, and currency-exchange manipulation. He also created a series of secret-police and intelligence organizations. Thousands of Vietnamese suspected of disloyalty were arrested, tortured, and executed by beheading or disembowelment. Political opponents were imprisoned. For nine years, the Ngo family was the wobbling pivot on which we rested our hopes for a non-Communist South Vietnam.

The United States had declined to be a signatory to the Geneva Accords—which had, after all, effectively created a new Communist state—but Lansdale's arrival in Saigon on the eve of Diem's official appointment was a signal that we intended to supervise the outcome. And the American government was always prepared to swap out South Vietnamese leaders when one seemed to falter—a privilege we bought with enormous amounts of aid, some $1.5 billion between 1955 and 1961. It is to Lansdale's credit that Diem survived as long as he did.

After landing in Saigon and setting up a front, the Saigon Military Mission, Lansdale began sending infiltrators into North Vietnam (violating a promise that the United States had made about respecting the ceasefire agreed to at Geneva, though the North Vietnamese were violating the accord, too). The agents were instructed to carry out sabotage and other subversive activities, standard C.I.A. procedure around the world. But almost every agent the agency sent in underground somewhere was captured, tortured, and killed, usually quickly, and this is what happened to most of Lansdale's agents. People survive in totalitarian regimes by becoming informers, and those regimes were often tipped off by double agents.

The Geneva Accords provided for a three-hundred-day grace period before the partition in order to allow Vietnamese to move from North to South or vice versa, and Lansdale, using American ships and an airline secretly owned by the C.I.A., arranged for some nine hundred thousand Vietnamese, most of them Catholics and many of them people who had collaborated with the French, to emigrate below the seventeenth parallel. (A much smaller number immigrated to the North.) These émigrés provided Diem with a political base.

Lansdale's most important accomplishment was helping Diem win the so-called battle of the sects. The French defeat had left a power vacuum, and groups besides the Vietminh were jockeying for turf. In 1955, three of them united in opposition to Diem: the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao, religious sects, and the Binh Xuyen, an organized-crime society with a private army of ten thousand men.

Diem neutralized the religious sects by the expedient of having Lansdale use C.I.A. funds to buy them off. Boot says the amount may have been as high as twelve million dollars, which would be a hundred million dollars today. But the Binh Xuyen, which controlled the Saigon police, remained a threat. Worried that Diem was not strong enough to hold the country together, the U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, sent cables

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to the American embassies in Saigon and Paris authorizing officials to find a replacement. Lansdale warned Diem that U.S. support was waning, prompting him to launch an attack on the Binh Xuyen. The Binh Xuyen was routed, and Dulles countermanded his order.

To secure his winnings, Diem called for a referendum to determine whether he or Bao Dai, the former Emperor, should be head of state. Diem won, supposedly with 98.2 per cent of the vote. He carried Saigon with 605,025 votes out of 450,000 registered voters. Lansdale's main contribution to the campaign was to suggest that the ballots for Diem be printed in red (considered a lucky color) and the ballots for Bao Dai in green (a color associated with cuckolds). Boot does not mention that this simplified Nhu's instructions to his poll watchers: he told them to throw out all the green ballots.

With Diem's consolidation of authority, Boot says, Lansdale reached "the apogee of his power and influence." In 1956, he left Southeast Asia and took a position in the Pentagon helping to develop special forces like the Navy SEALS and the Green Berets. He enjoyed a brief resurgence with Kennedy's election, in 1960. Kennedy was a Cold Warrior, but he was not locked into a Cold War mentality. He liked outside-the-box types, and he liked Lansdale and even considered appointing him Ambassador to South Vietnam. But the State Department and the Pentagon did not like outside-the-box types and they certainly did not like Lansdale, who remained in the States and was assigned to head Operation Mongoose, charged with devising methods for overthrowing Fidel Castro.

Lansdale does not seem to have been directly involved in the notoriously wacko assassination plots against Castro (the poisoned cigar and so on), but Boot suggests that he knew of such plans and would not have objected to them. He did come up with a scheme for an American submarine to surface off the Cuban coast and fire explosives into the sky. Rumors, introduced inside Cuba by C.I.A. agents, that Castro was doomed would lead Cubans to interpret the lights in the sky as a sign of divine disapproval of the regime.

In the mid-seventies, in a statement to a congressional committee, Lansdale denied proposing the scheme (Boot says he lied), but it was consistent with his usual strategy, which, in the case of Cuba, was to fund an indigenous opposition movement whose suppression would give the United States an excuse to send in troops. A lot of brainpower was wasted on those anti-Castro schemes. Castro would run Cuba for another forty-five years. The country is now ruled by his brother.

Lansdale was reassigned to Vietnam in 1965, but Diem was dead. He had been deposed in 1963, in a coup d'état to which the American government had given its approval. He and Nhu were assassinated shortly after they surrendered. (Madame Nhu was in Beverly Hills, and escaped retribution.) There were celebrations in the streets of Saigon, but the event marked the beginning of a series of coups and government by generals in South Vietnam. Short of withdrawal, the United States now had no choice but to take over the war.

By 1965, therefore, when Lansdale arrived for his second tour of duty, the American military was fully in charge. It had little interest in the sort of covert operations Lansdale specialized in. The strategy now was "attrition": kill as many of the enemy as possible. "Life is cheap in the Orient," as General William Westmoreland, the commander of American forces, explained to the filmmaker Peter Davis—who, in his documentary "Hearts and Minds" (1974), juxtaposed the remark with scenes of Vietnamese mourning their dead, imagery already familiar from photographs published and broadcast around the world. Lansdale was not able to accomplish much, and he returned to the United States in 1968.

In 1972, he published a memoir, "In the Midst of Wars," in which he was obliged to recirculate a lot of cover stories—which is to say, fabrications—about his career. Reception of the book was not kind.

Lansdale's private life turns out to have been a little sad. From the letters Boot quotes, it is clear that Pat was the love of his life. "I'm just not a whole person away from you," a typical letter to Pat reads, "and cannot understand why God brought us together when I had previous obligations unless He meant us for each other." But Lansdale's wife would not give him a divorce, and he reconciled himself to trying to keep the marriage alive. He suffered for many years from longing and remorse. When Lansdale was with his wife, Pat dated other men. There appear to have been no significant dalliances on his part. Only after his wife died, in 1973, were he and Pat married.

"The Road Not Taken" is not the first book devoted to Edward Lansdale, and it is not quite of the calibre of "A Bright Shining Lie," in part because Boot can't provide the ground-level reporting that Sheehan could. But it is expansive and detailed, it is well written, and it sheds light on a good deal about U.S. covert activities in postwar Southeast Asia.

Boot is a military historian, a columnist, and a political consultant who has worked with the Presidential campaigns of John McCain, Mitt Romney, and Marco Rubio. He has been highly critical of Donald Trump, and describes his social views as liberal, but he has been a proponent of American "leadership," a term that usually connotes interventionism.

One might therefore have expected his book to adopt a revisionist line on Vietnam—to argue, for example, that the antiwar media misrepresented the military situation and made it politically impossible for us to prosecute the war to the fullest of our capabilities. He clearly wants to suggest that the war was winnable, and he believes that Lansdale's approach was the wiser one, but he is cautious in his analysis of what went wrong. It was a war with too many variables for a single strategic choice to have tipped the balance.

Interestingly, and despite some prefatory claims to the contrary, "The Road Not Taken" does not really transform the standard picture of Lansdale. Everyone knew that he was C.I.A., and that he combined an affable and artless personality with a talent for dirty tricks. Boot's Lansdale is not much different from the one FitzGerald sketched in "Fire in the Lake," back in 1972. "Lansdale was in many respects a remarkable man," she wrote:

> He had faith in his own good motives. No theorist, he was rather an enthusiast, a man who believed that Communism in Asia would crumble before men of goodwill with some

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concern for "the little guy" and the proper counterinsurgency skills. He had a great talent for practical politics and for personal involvement in what to most Americans would seem the most distinctly foreign of affairs.

If anything, Boot tries to moderate some of Lansdale's received reputation. Sheehan, in "A Bright Shining Lie," called South Vietnam "the creation of Edward Lansdale." Boot thinks this is an exaggeration, and a lot of his book is committed to restoring a sense of proportion to his subject's image as a political Svengali, or "Lawrence of Asia." So why did he write "The Road Not Taken"? And why should we read it?

In many ways, Lansdale was a throwback. He operated in the spirit of the old O.S.S. He treated all conditions as wartime conditions, and so did not scruple to use whatever means necessary—from bribes and misinformation to black ops—to achieve ends favorable to the interests of the United States. Like the man who created the O.S.S., General William (Wild Bill) Donovan, he was a backslapper who prized informality and was indifferent to such bureaucratic punctilio as "the chain of command." He was a freelancer. He made his own rules.

That is exactly what his C.I.A. masters wanted him to do. And it is why, after the American military took charge in Vietnam and bureaucratic punctilio was back in style, his influence waned and he was put on the shelf. Techno-strategists like Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense under Kennedy and Johnson, had no use for Lansdale. They did not even find him entertaining. They looked on him as a harebrained troglodyte.

Still, McNamara's strategy failed. Did Lansdale know something that McNamara and the rest of Kennedy and Johnson's "best and brightest" did not? Boot thinks he did, and one purpose of his book is to revive Lansdale as a pioneer of counter-insurgency theory.

Lansdale was a proponent of the "hearts and minds" approach. He believed in the use of subterfuge and force, but he rejected "search and destroy" tactics—invading villages and hunting out the enemy, as American forces did repeatedly in South Vietnam. It was a search-and-destroy mission that resulted in the massacre of hundreds of civilians at My Lai, in 1968.

Tactics like this, Lansdale saw, only alienated the population, and he advocated what he called "civic action," which he defined, in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1964, as "an extension of military courtesy, in which the soldier citizen becomes the brotherly protector of the civilian citizen." In other words, soldiers are fighters, but they are also salesmen. They need to sell the benefits of the regime they are fighting for, and to do so by demonstrating, concretely, their commitment to the lives of the people. This is what Lansdale believed that the Vietcong were doing, and what the Philippine rebels, who called themselves the Hukbalahap, had done. They understood the Maoist notion that the people are the water, and the soldiers must live among them as the fish.

As Boot notes, Lansdale was by no means the only person who believed that the way to beat the Vietcong was to play their game by embedding anti-Communist forces, trained by American advisers, in the villages. This happened to be the theme of "The Ugly American," by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer, which was published in 1958 and spent an astonishing seventy-eight weeks on the best-seller list. Lederer and Lansdale were friends, and Lansdale appears in the book as a character named Colonel Hillandale, who entertains locals with his harmonica (as Lansdale was known to do).

"The Ugly American" was intended—and was received by many—as a primer on counter-insurgency for battlegrounds like Vietnam. Although the title has come to refer to vulgar American tourists, that was not the intention. In the book, the "ugly American" is the hero, a man who works side by side with the locals to help improve rice production. He just happens to be ugly.

Boot, oddly, doesn't mention it, but the United States *was* engaged in civic action in South Vietnam from the beginning of the Diem regime. Through the Agency for International Development, we had been providing agricultural, educational, infrastructural, and medical assistance. There was graft, but there were also results. Rice production doubled between 1954 and 1959, and production of livestock tripled. We gave far more in military aid, but that is because our policy was to enable South Vietnam to defend itself.

In the pursuit of civic action, though, there was always the practical question of just how South Vietnamese troops and their American advisers were supposed to insinuate themselves into villages in the countryside. It was universally understood, long before the marines arrived, that in the countryside the night belonged to the Vietcong. No one wanted to be out after sunset away from a fortified position. John Paul Vann was notorious for riding his jeep at night along country roads. People didn't do that.

What was crucially missing for a counter-insurgency program to work, as Lansdale pointed out, was a government to which the population could feel loyalty. Despite all his exertions as the Wizard of Saigon, pulling Diem's strings from behind the curtain, he could not make Diem into a nationalist hero like Ho. As many historians do, Boot believes that the Diem coup was the key event in the war, that it put the United States on a path of intervention from which there was no escape and no return. "How different history might have been," he speculates, "if Lansdale or a Lansdale-like figure had remained close enough to Diem to exercise a benign influence and offset the paranoid counsel of his brother." But Boot also recognizes that events may have been beyond Lansdale's or Diem's control. "Perhaps Lansdale's achievements could not have lasted in any case," he says.

Probably not. Lansdale was writing on water. The Vietnam he imagined was a Western fantasy. Although the best and the brightest in Washington shunned and ignored him, Lansdale shared their world view, the world view that defined the Cold War. He was a liberal internationalist. He believed that if you scratched a Vietnamese or a Filipino you found a James Madison under the skin.

Some Vietnam reporters who were contemporaries of Lansdale's, like Stanley Karnow, who covered the war for a number of news organizations, and the *Times* correspondent A. J. Langguth, assumed that the artlessness and the harmonica playing were an act, that Lansdale was a deeply canny operative who hid his real nature from everyone. Boot's book suggests the opposite. His Lansdale is a very simple man. Unquestioned faith in his own motives is what allowed

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him to manipulate others for what he knew would be their own ultimate good. He was not the first American to think that way, and he will not be the last.

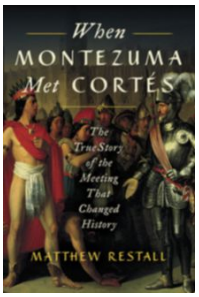
The English writer James Fenton was in Saigon, working as a journalist, when Vietcong troops arrived there in 1975. He managed, more or less by accident, to be sitting in the first tank to enter the courtyard of the Presidential Palace. Fenton described the experience in a memorable article, "The Fall of Saigon," published in *Granta* in 1985.

Like many Westerners of his education and generation, Fenton had hoped for a Vietcong victory, and he was impressed by the soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army when they marched into the city. But he stayed around long enough to see the shape that the postwar era would take. The Vietnamese Communists did what totalitarian regimes do: they took over the schools and universities, they shut down the free press, they pursued programs of enforced relocation and reëducation. Many South Vietnamese disappeared.

Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City, and Ho's body, like Lenin's, was installed in a mausoleum for public viewing. Agriculture was collectivized and a five-year plan of modernization was instituted. The results were calamitous. During the next ten years, many hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese fled the country, most of them by launching boats into the South China Sea. Two hundred thousand more are estimated to have died trying. "We had been seduced by Ho," Fenton concluded. What he and his friends had refused to realize, he wrote, was that "the victory of the Vietnamese was a victory for *Stalinism*." By 1975, though, most Americans and Europeans had stopped caring what happened in Southeast Asia.

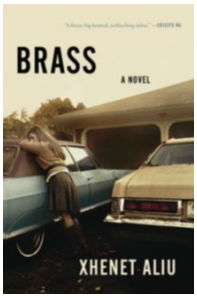
Then, around 1986, the screw of history took another turn. Like many other Communist states at the time, Vietnam introduced market reforms. The economy responded, and soon Western powers found a reason to be interested in Southeast Asia all over again: cheap labor. Vietnam is now a major exporter of finished goods. It is a safe bet that somewhere in your house you have a pair of sneakers or a piece of electronic equipment stamped with the words "Made in Vietnam." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



When Montezuma Met Cortés, *by Matthew Restall (Ecco)*. In 1519, the emperor Montezuma received the conquistador Hernán Cortés and some of his men as guests in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. Within two years, Montezuma was dead, the Aztecs routed, and the city destroyed. This revisionist history contests received views of Cortés as either swashbuckling hero or bloviating villain, of the Aztecs as cannibals, and of Montezuma as a meek, mystical king who voluntarily capitulated. Restall skillfully describes a subtler story of relationships both loving and coercive. He offers a particularly bold interpretation of Montezuma's devotion to his palace zoo, arguing that he saw Cortés and his men as exotic creatures and hoped to learn by studying them.

First Time Ever, *by Peggy Seeger (Faber & Faber)*. This whirling memoir follows the folksinger and activist through international tours, crises in her famous musical family, and a long, all-consuming relationship with the British singer Ewan MacColl. Seeger's conversational prose has a flair for capturing the common (a 1938 Chevy "had a vertical fish-mouth and a fat lady's rump") and the cataclysmic; remembering her mother's early death, she writes, "I try to see and hear things for her, to lure her spirit back from the lost body." Colorful characters flit in and out, and, remembering them, Seeger, who is now eighty-two, is often wistful. Of one friend, she writes, "He died, but he is still in my present tense."



Brass, *by Xhenet Aliu (Random House)*. Set in Waterbury, Connecticut, the working-class town of abandoned brass mills where the author grew up, this novel tells the parallel stories of a mother and a daughter struggling to improve their fates. The novel shifts between the perspectives of Elsie, a second-generation Lithuanian who begins a furtive romance, and, years later, her daughter, Luljeta, the issue of this ill-fated liaison. Luljeta, a promising student, embarks on a misguided search for her father after the shock of her rejection by N.Y.U. Both women yearn to escape Waterbury but face seemingly intractable obstacles. Aliu is witty and unsparing in her depiction of the town and its inhabitants, illustrating the granular realities of the struggle for class mobility.

Three Daughters of Eve, *by Elif Shafak (Bloomsbury)*. Peri, the protagonist of this novel, is an Istanbul housewife and mother who lives a good, stable life as "a fine modern Muslim." But a violent encounter unleashes memories of her time as a student at Oxford, which ended abruptly. We learn about her relationship with a handsome professor—who was forced to resign, amid scandal, soon after she took his controversial religion seminar—and also about her struggle with God. The child of a devout mother and a secular father, she entered college feeling spiritually conflicted, and deeply alone. Moments in the narrative are heavy-handed, but the book offers a complex portrayal of Turkey as a place that, like Peri herself, once "had great potential—and look how that had turned out."

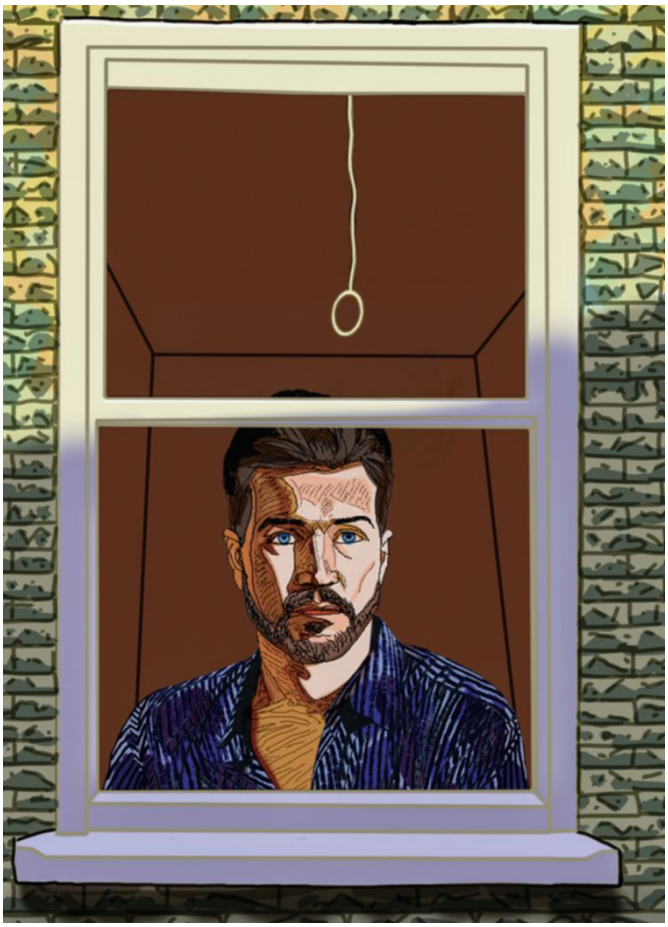
РЕЛИЗ ГРУППЫ "What's News" VK.COM/WSNWS

BOOKS

OCULAR PROOF

Seeing and believing in A. J. Finn's "The Woman in the Window."

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES



An archetype, as Mark Twain might have observed, is nothing but a stereotype with a college education. Where modernists and postmodernists boldly plunder the collective treasuries of myth, legend, fairy tales, and art for their own idiosyncratic purposes, commercially minded writers replicate formulaic situations, characters, and plots in order to appeal to a wide audience. The challenge is to invest the generic formula with just enough distinction—what dust-jacket blurbs might praise as "originality"—without leaving formula behind; to fuse the familiar and the unfamiliar while assuring the reader that the ending will be clear, decisive, and consoling in a way that "literary fiction" usually is not.

"The Woman in the Window" (Morrow), a highly successful début novel by the pseudonymous A. J. Finn (thirty-eight-year-old Daniel Mallory, a former editor at Morrow), is a superior example of a subset of recent thrillers featuring "unreliable" female protagonists who, despite their considerable handicaps—which may involve alcoholism, drug addiction, paranoia, and even psychosis—manage to persevere and solve mysteries where others have failed. Its title evokes such best-sellers as "The Girl on the Train" and "The Woman in Cabin 10," not to mention "Gone Girl" (in which the titular girl is the contriver of the mystery), while its frame of reference involves classic American noir films: "Gaslight," "Vertigo," "Strangers on a Train," "Wait Until Dark," "Sudden Fear," "Rope," and, most explicitly, "Rear Window." Indeed, although the protagonist of "The Woman in the Window," a thirty-nine-year-old child psychologist named Anna Fox, is wryly self-aware, her mode of narration resembles a film script. We get very short chapters and a preponderance of single-sentence paragraphs, in cinematic present-tense prose that seems to teeter breathlessly on stiletto heels:

> The phone rings.
>
> My head swivels, almost back to front, like an owl, and the camera drops to my lap.
>
> The sound is behind me, but my phone is by my hand.
>
> It's the landline . . .
>
> It rings again, distant, insistent.
>
> I don't move. I don't breathe.
>
> Who's calling me? No one's called the house phone in . . .
>
> I can't remember. Who would even have this number? I can barely remember it myself.
>
> Another ring.
>
> And another.
>
> I shrivel against the glass, wilt there in the cold. I imagine the rooms of my house, one by one, throbbing with that noise.
>
> Another ring.
>
> I look across the park.

Such staccato paragraphs expand "The Woman in the Window" to more than four hundred pages even as they allow those pages to be read and turned in a near-continuous forward motion.

Anna Fox, seemingly estranged from her husband and young daughter, and living alone in a five-story brownstone in a gentrified Manhattan neighborhood, is a sophisticated addition to the sisterhood of impaired and befuddled female protagonists confounded by mysteries erupting in their lives. Since a personally devastating experience some months before, Anna has become cripplingly agoraphobic:

> Many of us—the most severely afflicted, the ones grappling with post-traumatic stress disorder—are housebound, hidden from the messy, massy world outside. Some dread the heaving crowds; others, the storm of traffic. For me, it's the vast skies, the endless horizon, the sheer exposure, the crushing pressure of the outdoors. "Open spaces" the DSM-5 calls it vaguely. . . .

In many recent domestic thrillers, the credibility of the female witness is at stake.

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY SMITH

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> As a doctor, I say that the sufferer seeks an environment she can control. Such is the clinical take. As a sufferer (and that *is* the word), I say that agoraphobia hasn't ravaged my life so much as become it.

It is said that most agoraphobics are female and that there are far more of them than statistics suggest. For some, the disorder seems to begin in childhood; for others, like Anna, agoraphobia is a consequence of a traumatic episode or episodes, perhaps exacerbated by guilt and a wish to self-punish.

As in "Rear Window," the mystery begins when a housebound but sharp-eyed and inquisitive person happens to see, or imagines that she has seen, a murder committed through a neighboring window. Anna, in her quasi-paralysis, has become a shameless voyeur; she has acquired a camera with a powerful zoom lens that apparently allows her not only to spy on lovers next door but to note the very "archipelago of tiny moles trailing across the back" of a beautiful red-haired adulteress. (Her neighbors resent being spied on, but not enough to pull down the blinds.) Anna can even peer some distance into rooms, as in an Edward Hopper painting of preternatural exposure and clarity.

Indeed, "The Woman in the Window" seems set in mid-century small-town America, not in twenty-first-century Manhattan. When Anna summons the police, she is visited by Conrad Little, an affable and loquacious detective, and engages him in TV-style repartee. Following the dictates of the genre, Detective Little does not believe Anna; his cursory investigation doesn't indicate that any crime has been committed. But, in the manner of a kindly small-town sheriff, he remains indulgent of her and her suspicions.

Anna, when not addressing us in her breathless mode, is engagingly self-doubting and self-loathing, by turns warmly funny and panic-stricken; she's also an aficionada of the best of Hitchcock and the "Thin Man" movies. She's a sympathetic, professional woman who views her victimhood as more or less what she deserves (the reader will learn why, eventually), even as she is gamely trying, through therapy, to recover and return to "the light." Certainly, the novel's most compelling passages deal not with the "Rear Window"-inflected, credibility-straining mystery unfolding in a brownstone across the way but, rather, with Anna's sense of herself as a wounded individual, a highly intelligent and educated person who has virtually destroyed her life through a succession of bad decisions. Agoraphobics are inmates in a kind of self-imposed asylum, prevented from escaping by the violent panic attacks that overcome them when they try to step outside:

> What would I do if I were on that screen, a character in one of my films? I would leave the house to investigate, like Teresa Wright in *Shadow of a Doubt.* I would summon a friend, like Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window.* I wouldn't sit here, in a puddle of robe, wondering where next to turn.
>
> Locked-in syndrome. Causes include stroke, brain stem injury, MS, even poison. It's a neurological condition, in other words, not a psychological one. Yet here I am, literally locked in—doors closed, windows shut, while I shy and shrink from the light.

Like its great predecessor Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," the classic tale of the seemingly unreliable female narrator witnessing events she cannot explain or make plausible to others, "The Woman in the Window" presents two mysteries. There's the film-noir mystery, glimpsed in tantalizing fragments through the window, and there's the more engrossing, though less explicable, mystery of the witness herself. *Is* she reliable? Is she *sane*?

Though the novel provides Anna Fox with a painstakingly stitched backstory that has consequences for the present, she ultimately seems more a function of the plot than a fully realized person, not quite as interesting as her problems. Her interior voice is not especially female; it is, rather, genderless. She appears to possess no physicality, no sexuality, though we're told that she had a love affair not long ago and, in a brief scene that particularly tests credulity, she sleeps with an ex-convict who has rented her basement apartment. Most improbable, Anna consumes cases of Merlot and an incapacitating quantity of opioids. But perhaps this is why a protagonist who is preoccupied with a mystery is so slow to figure out an explanation that will long have been obvious to readers.

"The Woman in the Window"—in which our suspects are a fixed cast of neighbors in another household—is an updated variant of the locked-room mystery, that reliably entertaining standby. And the mystery, of course, plays by its own strict rules. Of all literary genres, it tends to be the most formulaic, since it presents a succession of episodes that both advance and befuddle the trajectory toward a solution, which must be postponed until the very end of the novel. (In the real world, the first forty-eight hours after a crime are generally considered crucial.) Red herrings—false clues, false leads, false suspects—must be embedded in the narrative, even as the villain hides in plain sight. To accomplish this sleight of hand, it helps to tell the story from the perspective of an individual who is intensely involved in the mystery without having the capacity to comprehend what is happening around her. The reader can thereby identify with the heroine and share in her increasing alarm and helplessness. Such straightforward genre works maintain an implicit contract between reader and author: keep turning pages, don't slow down to question improbabilities; it will all be explained in the final chapter, often by the villain to the protagonist, who is guaranteed to survive.

If the mystery genre does not abide much reality, it should be recalled that no Shakespearean tragedy or sonnet—no work of art in which the constraints of form are exacting—is likely to withstand the bracing winds of common sense. Still, there are cultural currents to which novels like "The Woman in the Window" are well suited. In the chorus of best-selling contemporary domestic thrillers, a triumphant #MeToo parable has emerged: that of the flawed, scorned, disbelieved, misjudged, and underestimated female witness whose testimony is rejected—but turns out to be correct. Vindication, cruelly belated, is nonetheless sweet. It is the voice of Detective Little, shaking his head and telling the woman in the window, "I owe you an apology." ♦

РЕЛИЗ ГРУППЫ "What's News" VK.COM/WSNWS

MUSICAL EVENTS

PALACE INTRIGUE

Christophe Rousset reinvigorates the French Baroque.

BY ALEX ROSS

When, on a recent snowy day in Paris, members of the early-music ensemble Les Talens Lyriques arrived for a rehearsal at the Collège-Lycée Jacques-Decour, a secondary school near the Gare du Nord, they had to make their way around a revolutionary barricade. That morning, students at the school had gone on strike, joining a nationwide protest against proposed changes to the *baccalauréat*, the French college-entry exam. The main entrance was blocked with garbage bins; a sign decried "*libéralisme scolaire*" and "*sélection bourgeoise*." As I walked toward a side door, I was nearly hit by a snowball, for which the perpetrators were apologetic. The protest prompted me to think about the political significance of the music being played inside. Les Talens Lyriques specialize in composers from the time of the French Baroque, when Versailles was the grandest court in Europe. Given that President Emmanuel Macron has modelled himself on none other than Louis XIV—he aspires to what he calls a "Jupiterian" style—one wonders whether the French Baroque could once again become an instrument of power.

Christophe Rousset, a harpsichordist and conductor who founded Les Talens Lyriques, in 1991, has devoted much of his life to the music of the ancien régime. His most ambitious undertaking has been to record the *tragédies lyriques*, or tragic operas, of Jean-Baptiste Lully, the Sun King's master of music. Rousset is also closely associated with Jean-Philippe Rameau, Lully's more freewheeling successor as the arbiter of French style. Yet Rousset is prone to subversive gestures. The previous evening, at the Opéra Comique, he had conducted an operatic spectacle titled "Et in Arcadio Ego," in which arias and interludes by Rameau were joined to a modern-minded libretto by the novelist Éric Reinhardt and an avant-garde staging by the transgender artist Phia Ménard and the stage designer Éric Soyer. A traditional Parisian scandal ensued, with one faction booing and another shouting "Bravo!"

"I am very happy with this show," Rousset told me at lunch the following day. "Having a new text, a new dramatic subject, makes the music speak in a different way. Lully wrote always for the glory of the king. With Rameau, a man of the eighteenth century, it is different. In that period, the freedom is much wider, the criticism of the monarchy is very clear, and Rameau is part of it in the way he is always trying new things that can be disturbing and revolutionary. Rameau says to the audience, 'You don't like it? I don't care.' There is some of that in our show. And it is funny—since the big boos on the first night and a lot of talking on the Internet about how unacceptable it is, we are selling more tickets."

Rousset is a short, slim man of fifty-six, with a faintly elfin appearance. He was dressed in a sweater, a rainbow scarf, black jeans, and hiking boots. He presents a combination of airy aestheticism and intellectual toughness. He affects no grand manner in rehearsal: that day, Les Talens Lyriques and the Chamber Choir of Namur were preparing for a performance of André Campra's Requiem, from 1722, and Rousset hopped about from one part of the ensemble to another. He does not pontificate or editorialize. Yet he is relentless in pursuit of what he wants. After spending several minutes trying to get the right shade of pianissimo, he said, "*Finalement, je suis content,*" to knowing laughter.

When Rousset presents music of the ancien régime, he adds subversive gestures.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHLOÉ POIZAT

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From an early age, Rousset was smitten with the aesthetics of Versailles—the music of Lully and Rameau, the plays of Racine and Molière, the paintings of Watteau. "I cannot say why," he told me. "My parents are not from the nobility, to say the least. I grew up in the South of France, and on occasional trips to Paris I would say, 'I want to go to Versailles! I want to go to Versailles!' I was a strange little boy." He first studied piano, then gravitated to the harpsichord, winning national notice in his teens. He became the chief continuo player for the expatriate American maestro William Christie, who, beginning in the nineteen-eighties, spearheaded a revival of interest in the French Baroque. In 1989, Christie's captivating presentation of Lully's "Atys" travelled to BAM, causing a sensation.

"I was very happy being Christie's harpsichord player," Rousset said. "I thought that would be enough. It was actually Christie who pushed me into conducting." In 1991, Rousset took charge of an entire production by Christie's ensemble, Les Arts Florissants. After parting ways with Christie, the younger man founded his own group. At first, he delved into Italian opera, not wishing to set himself up as Christie's rival. Then, when Christie moved on to a wider repertory, Rousset returned to Lully and Rameau, his early loves.

Lully wrote thirteen *tragédies lyriques;* Rousset's survey has so far encompassed "Persée," "Roland," "Armide," "Amadis," "Bellérophon," "Phaëton," and, most recently, "Alceste." These impeccably refined treatments of mythological and legendary subjects can seem interchangeable to the first-time listener. Lully was a man of formulas, as was his prized librettist, Philippe Quinault: spare melodies unfold over gravely dancing rhythms, every word made clear. Rousset's musicians animate the scores without trying to inject every moment with drama—an urge that often leads to overheated performances of Baroque fare. Rousset is restrained in his interventions, yet he can be piercingly effective. In Act II of "Alceste," at the end of a duet between the title character and King Admetus, the lovers repeat each other's names over lamenting dissonances. Rousset imposes an expansive ritardando; Judith van Wanroij and Emiliano Gonzalez Toro, the singers, become gorgeously lost in each other's sound.

Similar virtues elevate Rousset's other explorations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century repertory. He has championed the operas of Salieri—"La Grotta di Trofonio," "Les Danaïdes," and "Les Horaces"—as well as works by Cimarosa, Martín y Soler, Jommelli, and Traetta. Such offbeat choices can exasperate concert promoters, but Rousset refuses to limit himself to brand-name masters. He says, "If you go to a museum, you can see the masterpieces by Caravaggio, Vermeer, Watteau, and so on. But next to them you can see the less celebrated ones, like Leonello Spada and Tournier, who are in the Caravaggio style, or Lancret, who is of the same period as Watteau. In music, it should be the same. Let us hear the whole history."

"Et in Arcadia Ego," the Rameau spectacle, seems, by contrast, an exercise in defamiliarization. Reinhardt's libretto tells of a ninety-five-year-old woman who is reliving her life as she faces death. At the beginning, as Rameau's "Zaïs" Overture churned in the orchestra, hyper-bright lights were trained on the audience, representing the shock of birth. In an eerie tableau of hazily remembered childhood, water dripped on frozen flowers and on what appeared to be a Pokémon statue, causing petals to droop and ears to fall off. Toward the end, a "2001"-like monolith hovered over a distant, luminous portal; then an inflatable tarp of garbage-bag plastic covered the stage. None of this made immediate sense, but it had a kind of hallucinatory precision. Less compelling were the verbose literary texts projected during orchestral interludes. Having got the gist, I often closed my eyes and simply listened. Les Talens Lyriques, in the pit, offered their trademark combination of gossamer and grit: the young mezzo-soprano Lea Desandre, portraying the dying woman, sang with elegant fire.

The production seemed to go over best with younger members of the crowd. Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques have pitched themselves toward a youthful audience, resisting staid, élitist stereotypes of classical performance. They have launched various educational programs: their rehearsals at the Collège-Lycée Jacques-Decour often double as teaching sessions. One of these occurred the day I visited. Once the protest had ended—it wound down before lunchtime—the rehearsal room was invaded by a throng of middle schoolers, who received whispered lectures from a teacher and were invited to sit amidst the ensemble. One boy gazed at Rousset as if hypnotized. Perhaps he has a future in Baroque conducting.

That night, I followed the Chamber Choir of Namur out to the Chapelle Royale at Versailles, where, in league with the Millénium Orchestra and the Argentine conductor Leonardo García Alarcón, the group sang three of Lully's grand motets: the Dies Irae, the De Profundis, and the Te Deum. The journey was somewhat arduous, as the snow had wreaked havoc on the subway and trains. Speckled in white, Versailles had a ghostly, unreal air. It seemed less a relic of an imperial age than a Symbolist's dream vision.

Lully's sacred music has a distinctly flamboyant, operatic character: the Te Deum is buttressed by trumpets and timpani. One could imagine Louis XIV basking in reflected musical glory. As in the operas, though, the most potent passages are those in which ceremony falls away to reveal raw emotion. Lully's setting of the Lacrimosa in the Dies Irae takes the form of a sensuous succession of upward-leaping and downward-stepping phrases. Mathias Vidal, singing the high-tenor part, gave a startling edge to a brief melismatic line: it would have been excessive if it had not been true to the text, with its tearful cry for forgiveness.

Afterward, as I walked back to the train and Versailles disappeared behind a scrim of snow, I thought about the changing meaning of the royal Baroque. Lully served one of history's supreme autocrats, and exercised his own form of musical absolutism. Seldom has a composer been so enmeshed in worldly power. For Rousset, though, the values attached to such music have shifted over time. "Lully and Rameau are now in a state of resistance to the chaotic world around us," he told me. "Their kind of beauty is something alien, maybe even something shocking. They feel out of place, and so they are absolutely necessary." ♦

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POP MUSIC

THE "TRL" GENERATION

Dashboard Confessional and Justin Timberlake try again.

BY CARRIE BATTAN

Last summer, the emo-pop band Dashboard Confessional made an unexpected choice at the end of a live show in Central Park. All evening, it had performed its blockbuster singles, most of which are known for their pared-down, acoustic intimacy and the epic, agonized wail of the front man, Chris Carrabba. But Carrabba closed the set with an emotionally labored rendition of Justin Bieber's "Love Yourself," from 2015, a master class in acoustic pop. The cover version illuminated how much Carrabba shares with the world of mainstream pop. But it also demonstrated what separates the band from its peers—in pop, emo, indie rock, and punk alike. Like Bieber, Carrabba has a knack for vocal melody, but the tone and the intensity of his version made the song anew. Bieber's bratty lyrics were defanged, and the chorus—"If you like the way you look that much/Then, baby, you should go and love yourself"—was transformed from a kiss-off into an outpouring of pure reaction. Carrabba can mold any sentiment into totalizing torment without surrendering its sweetness.

In the past two decades, this ability has enabled Carrabba to cut a singular path. A child of punk rock who eventually found a calling as an emo-rock singer, in the late nineteen-nineties—more than a decade after emo's genesis as a small, community-oriented scene, in Washington, D.C.—Carrabba became a poster child of the genre at a time when major record labels were realizing its commercial potential. Wholesome despite his full-arm tattoos, Carrabba was, in many ways, the perfect pop star: someone who made emotional pain sound like an aspirational state. His lyrics were eminently shoutable by crowds of thousands: "My hopes are so high that your kiss might kill me/So won't you kill me/So I die happy," he sings on "Hands Down," from 2002, one of the band's biggest hits.

During the aughts, Carrabba inched away from this hyper-specific torrent of inner dialogue, toggling between an intimate acoustic sound and something more like sweeping stadium rock. On the band's new full-length album, "Crooked Shadows," its first in nearly a decade, this transition is complete. Carrabba, rather than rely on the demons of his youth, uses his lyrics as a rallying cry for younger people who suffer from evergreen types of emotional distress. He no longer speaks to an imagined audience of one but to an entire generation. He is newly fond of the pronoun "we": "We never learned to keep our voices down, no/We only learned to shout," he sings, on "We Fight."

For Carrabba, who is forty-two, despondence is now buttressed by an almost gospel-like optimism. "Ooh, we're gonna be all right!" he tells his listeners, a stark turn from the man who, on the early hit "Saints and Sailors," described himself as "a walking open wound, a trophy display of bruises." Carrabba understands that a young person's angst is as fleeting as it is potent, and he speaks as a figurehead for anguish rather than as a victim of it. Yet, even from this vantage, he remains true to the tenets of emo—that life is essentially terrible, and that every experience is rooted in a kind of emotionally stunted suffering and adversity that must be tackled. "There's still a kid somewhere that needs to hear this, who's tired of bleeding and battered and being torn up," Carrabba announces, on "We Fight."

Commitment to honoring emotional distress is one thing. Meaningful expression of those emotions is another, and Dashboard Confessional's late-career music is less powerful than its early work, precisely because it comes from a place

Chris Carrabba no longer sings to an audience of one but to an entire cohort.

ILLUSTRATION BY AMY MATSUSHITA-BEAL

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of remove. "Crooked Shadows" is as concise and earnest as Dashboard has ever been, but its sound has been flattened into a pop-rock haze, with Carrabba's voice lower in the mix than on previous releases. "Crooked Shadows" will not do much for the Dashboard Confessional fan—or for the young teen who has never heard of the band but desperately craves its strain of emotional laceration.

For younger generations, emo is less a genre that speaks to a moment than a perennial force that generates waves of searing, confessional rock music. Because emo was never exactly cool, it has been insulated from the questions of relevance that squashed other niche types of music, such as indie rock and grunge. There is near-annual chatter about emo's revival, in the form of older bands resurfacing, or of new generations of alt-rockers paying homage to the genre. Taylor Swift is a rabid Dashboard Confessional fan—and Carrabba could be cited as the inspiration for the emotional precision of her lyrics. The stigma of emo sincerity has long faded, so much so that today's most exciting hip-hop and pop stars are explicitly calling on its sound. One man's emotional turbulence may be fleeting, but emo is eternal.

Another early-aughts front man whose legacy has benefitted more from his prolonged absence than from his presence is Justin Timberlake, who returns to the spotlight this year, unwittingly alienated from today's culture. Like Carrabba, Timberlake is a prominent ambassador of the era of MTV's "TRL"; he is also one of the most successful graduates from the academy of boy bands. He launched his solo career, in 2002, with the album "Justified," for which he and the producer Timbaland teamed up to create genre-bending pop songs that, despite their ugly, low-range squelch, made you want to dance. But Timberlake was not just a sonic innovator; he was also a harbinger of the ways in which hip-hop has overtaken the pop landscape, and of the ease with which white stars have co-opted hip-hop and R. & B.

But Timberlake's new album, "Man of the Woods," his fifth, fumbles awkwardly with the present. On its surface—and there is plenty of surface on this sixteen-song slog—it's an attempt to reposition Timberlake as a soulful, salt-of-the-earth guy reconnecting with his Memphis roots. ("Act like the South ain't the shit," he taunts, on "Midnight Summer Jam," as though Atlanta has not been widely accepted for a half decade as the most important city in music.) For someone hoping to boost the reputation of the South, Timberlake demonstrates only a cursory concept of what it can represent, lyrically and musically. Drained beer cans, twangy guitar, low whistles, flannel shirts, an elemental connection with nature and God, laments about work and bills—all are jammed into this record. The effect is a pop-identity hall of mirrors, and "Man of the Woods" is both the most bizarre and the dullest major pop record of this decade.

"Man of the Woods" could have been a fascinating, if not particularly commercial, concept album about a famous, talented man's return to his birthplace. But Timberlake—who made the album with the guidance of Pharrell, another early-aughts star who has persisted into this decade—cannot seem to stick to his conceit. One moment, he's a carefree party instigator with a dirty mouth; the next, he's a downtrodden Southerner who's behind on his bills. He's a weathered sage addressing his young son, then he's a guy with no finer point to make than "Success is cool/Money is fine/But you're special."

The production is not much more focussed: Timberlake is both a one-man barbershop quartet and a neo-funk Frankenstein. Despite all of his attempts at cross-genre noodling, the best song on the album is the most straightforward attempt at country music, "Say Something," which finds Timberlake playing backup for Chris Stapleton.

It's not difficult to understand why Timberlake made a record like this. Aging pop stars must navigate the challenge of maintaining relevance while avoiding desperation. They also strain to capture the attention of listeners who are barraged with innovation. An artist like Timberlake, for better or for worse, must aspire to high art and grand gestures. These, of course, are harder to pull off than they appear. Artistic vision cannot be faked, which is an unfortunate reality that Timberlake has been able to elide until now. ♦

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THE THEATRE

THE TROUBLES

Martin McDonagh's pastiche about the patriarchy.

BY HILTON ALS

Just as playwrights' artistic development can be charted through their work, critics tell us who they are—and how they grow, or don't grow—when they're fortunate enough to be able to focus on a particular dramatist over a period of time. An engaged critic jumps at the chance to dance with an artist's vision; it teaches him so much about himself and, by extension, his job, which is and isn't subjective. Brooks Atkinson, the *Times'* lead theatre reviewer for decades, wrote many pieces about Tennessee Williams's triumphs and fascinating failures; taken together, those reviews read like a long letter from a fair and unsentimental uncle, offering encouragement and tough love in equal measure. Kenneth Tynan's pieces about Noël Coward, Terence Rattigan, and John Osborne are not only intimate dialogues with the playwrights but, collectively, a descriptive narrative about how empire is changing and must change. And Elizabeth Hardwick's New York theatre reviews are as much about her love for the city that promoted such non-natives as Sam Shepard and Peter Weiss as they are a defense of drama as a literary art.

Thinking about Martin McDonagh's work over the years hasn't led me to any definitive conclusions just yet, but his latest play, the comedic drama "Hangmen" (directed by Matthew Dunster, at the Atlantic Theatre Company's Linda Gross), his eighth to be produced in New York, illustrates, perhaps more than any other, how the slick, self-satisfied cynicism that infects his weakest scripts threatens to overtake his real gifts—which include an excellent sense of structure and, as evidenced in "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" (1996) and other early works, a genuine understanding of how loneliness can twist bodies and twist the truth. At forty-seven, the London-born writer is relatively young, and has, one hopes, many more plays and films ahead of him. (His 2017 movie, "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri," which he wrote and directed, has been nominated for seven Oscars.) Still, what one senses squatting onstage at the Linda Gross is the playwright's tattered drive; no amount of spirited dialogue and action can hide his intellectual and spiritual exhaustion.

Like many, many writers before him, McDonagh may now be trapped by his own success: it, too, sits exhausted center stage—embedded in the violence and lack of moral consequence that pit his characters' skin. Despite the contempt in his work—or because of it—McDonagh's "bad boy" image still gives audiences a racy thrill, particularly American audiences, who, for the most part, look at the world through a moral lens. But the excitement that he elicits is hollow. As the characters in "Hangmen" engage in all sorts of brutal and morally misguided hijinks, without quite realizing what they're doing (or allowing it to get to them), much is exposed beyond what McDonagh has actually written. "Hangmen" relies on McDonagh's technical skill and his jadedness: he knows what contemporary audiences want—to be dominated by "real" men who piss on the theatre's generally liberal air while conversing in unspeakable language.

"Hangmen" begins excitingly. It's 1963. A prison cell in the North of England. The space is grim, just the kind of place you'd imagine as an antechamber to the gallows, or to Hell. Plus, the lighting is terrible. James Hennessy (Gilles Geary) sits at a table, head in his hands, a guard on either side of him. He's as miserable as one of Kafka's supplicants, and just as perplexed: what has he done to end up in such a terrible

In "Hangmen," the writer's slick cynicism threatens to overtake his real gifts.

ILLUSTRATION BY GOLDEN COSMOS

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place? He's been convicted of abducting a girl in Norfolk and murdering her. Hennessy's innocent, though, and we know he's innocent: we can hear it in his voice. He says he's never been to Norfolk, and he would never do a "nasty thing" like that. But what do the facts matter here? Harry (Mark Addy), the hangman, and his shorter, thinner assistant, Syd (Reece Shearsmith), aren't buying any of it. Guilt is guilt, never to be questioned if it has been decreed so by the courts. Anyway, Harry has a job to do, and he wears his hideous responsibility like a badge he can't help shining.

But, as with any self-important professional, it doesn't take much to throw Harry off his game. Albert Pierrepoint, Harry's rival executioner, is considered the superior hangman. (Harry: "I'm just as good as bloody Pierrepoint!" Hennessy: "Hung by a rubbish hangman, oh that's so me!") And it's during this scene that McDonagh's brand of Flann O'Brien-influenced absurdity flexes itself most frighteningly and amusingly: in addition to correcting Hennessy's English, Syd, who stutters, spends the last moments of Hennessy's life telling him that if he would just relax he'd be dead by now. Lights out.

Lights up on a pub on the outskirts of Oldham. It's a couple of years after Hennessy's hanging. Harry's behind the bar, pulling pints, along with his wife, Alice (Sally Rogers). The pub is grim in a different way. You can somehow see the smoky funk of a thousand stale cigarettes oozing down the walls. Talk oozes out of the drinkers' mouths, too. There are a few regulars—latter-day patrons of Harry's Bar in Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh," except that McDonagh's guys, including Arthur (John Horton), the oldest and deafest of the lot, Charlie (Billy Carter), and Bill (Richard Hollis, turning in a very smart characterization of a self-pitying alcoholic), aren't nearly as deep as O'Neill's creations, in part because they don't yearn for anything. O'Neill's drunks used to believe in something—God, love—but have lost or misplaced their faith, because of life, not in spite of it. Their pipe dreams—dreams that express their interior world—would be out of place here, where no one shows anything that could be called interest in another person.

Things have changed in Harry's world. Hanging has been abolished, a certain political sense is entering the country, and a young reporter named Clegg (Owen Campbell) would like a comment about it all, but Harry brushes Clegg off, belittling him. Change has no place in Harry's world. The government—*his* government—is something that he doesn't need to question or interpret; it's all he knows and wants to know. As he says to Bill:

> Cos one thing I've always prided myself on, for right or for wrong, I'm not saying I'm a special man, but one thing I've prided myself on is that, on the subject of hanging, I've always chosen to keep me own counsel. I've always chosen not to say a public word on this very private matter, and why have I chosen to do that you may ask? . . . For the past twenty-five years now I've been a servant of the Crown in the capacity of hangman.

Harry longs for the authority that comes with order—established order—while Mooney (the very attractive Johnny Flynn), a newcomer to the pub, represents something like disorder, an alluring controlled chaos, the cool turbulence of the dandy. Stepping sharply in his Beatles boots, Mooney's another bloody Londoner, whose very presence shows up the shabbiness of the place, the tiredness of the men's talk. He's just passing through, but he likes jostling with these rubes. Not only does he flirt with Alice, but, when her fifteen-year-old daughter, the pudgy Shirley (Gaby French), relieves her father behind the bar, he starts messing with her, too. Mooney's the kind of guy folks can't take their eyes off; he radiates something bad and exciting, or he's exciting because he's bad. Before he offers his opinion about a dim-witted friend of Shirley's who's been sent to an institution, he eggs Clegg on to go up the road and interview Pierrepoint, who was a *better* hangman. That gets Harry started. But to what end? Mooney isn't so much a McDonagh character as McDonagh's idea of a Pinter character—Lenny in "The Homecoming," say, a menace who changes the established order just by being, and hating what others do with their being. Sitting down with his pint, Mooney laughs out loud, and when someone asks why, he says it's because of a picture of a funny-looking black chap in the newspaper.

Throughout his career, McDonagh has wrestled with the idea of authority. That's what continues to make his 2003 play "The Pillowman" his best work. It looks at why people generally need Big Brother, if not Big Daddy: because living in the adult world means having to choose and to answer for one's actions. (Harry feels like a leftover from that play.) Being a crippled man-child, divested of responsibility, takes on a kind of erotic aura in "The Pillowman," and McDonagh could have been something truly new—an Orwell of the stage—if he hadn't opted, ultimately, to be the Big Daddy himself, in 2010's dreadful play "A Behanding in Spokane," and again here. Look at those blacks—at least we're not *that*, he and his characters seem to say in both works. (I stopped watching "Three Billboards" for the same reason.) None of the people of color in McDonagh's plays exists outside his dream of whiteness versus that "other." It took a moment for Mooney's hateful laugh to sink in, because at first I thought, O.K., guys like that, at that time, spoke that way. But, later, when Bill gratuitously describes an encounter with a black man at the bookie's who's maybe all right—for a black man—I just couldn't rationalize it. Were there no other signs of difference in class-conscious England—the poor, the unemployed, the general "problem" of immigration—for McDonagh to use to make his characters feel superior? You can see how McDonagh has influenced my criticism here: I am shamefully calling for him to pick on another marginalized group. But after nearly a decade of seeing and reading his plays, one revolts at being told, again and again, that one is revolting.

"Hangmen" is a pastiche about the patriarchy, old and new, and when, at the end of the play, Mooney has to pay for his cat-and-mouse sadism, the violence and the casualness with which that violence is met are simply proof of Harry's right to keep his own counsel. McDonagh performs another version of that on the page. "Hangmen" would have been infinitely more interesting—more energetic and more true—had McDonagh's point been to show how illusory power is, and how destructive. Harry's need for empire and Mooney's racism come from the same place: a love of the only power they can recognize—the old male power that builds and destroys lives and kingdoms with a laugh and little real feeling for the lesser body falling through that trapdoor. ♦

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ON TELEVISION

FAM AND CHEESE

Family drama on "Here and Now," "This Is Us," and "The Fosters."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

In the first episode of "Here and Now," on HBO, a liberal Portland mother, played by Holly Hunter, defends her choice of party supplies to her daughter. "Bamboo is sustainable!" she says. "The world is *bigger* than us." Her daughter scoffs. "Sweetie, remember," Hunter coos back. "Thoughts create reality."

If only that were true. "Here and Now" crashes to the shore on a glittering wave of high hopes, with an A-list cast that includes Hunter and Tim Robbins; it's made by the beloved showrunner Alan Ball, the creator of the much missed "Six Feet Under" (and also the less missed but still fun and filthy "True Blood"). Sadly, the first four episodes are—despite a very HBO combination of worldly themes and superhorny sex scenes—more of an irritant than an intoxicant. "Six Feet Under" was not a perfect show, either, but it was an amazing one: a comedy about death, with great characters and a uniquely Californian embrace of decadence. It was also the first real "traumedy," presaging many of the best modern shows, from "Transparent" to "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" and "Orange Is the New Black"—genre blends that are at once generous and unsentimental about damaged people.

"Here and Now" is a family drama. It wears its good intentions on its expensively tattered sleeve. But, in place of Ball's trademark playful anarchy, it is weighed down by a deadening self-consciousness: it's a Way We Live Now show, about a multiracial family colliding with the Trump era. ("We lost, folks. We lost," Robbins growls, in one typical speech.) Robbins and Hunter play Greg Boatwright and Audrey Bayer, a cranky philosopher and his high-strung wife, a former therapist who now runs a nonprofit called the Empathy Project. The couple, who are white, have a teen-age daughter, the snarky Kristen (Sosie Bacon). They also have three older kids, who were adopted from countries harmed by U.S. policies. Jerrika Hinton plays Ashley, a Liberian-born fashion marketer married to a white Republican, with a biracial child. Raymond Lee is Duc, a Vietnamese-born sex addict/celibate who works as a "motivational architect." Daniel Zovatto is Ramon, a gay orphan of the Colombian drug wars who is a video-game designer. He sees a psychiatrist (the terrific Peter Macdissi, who is Alan Ball's partner and a co-producer of the show), an Iranian secular-Muslim immigrant married to a more devout Palestinian; they have a gender-fluid son.

So, you know, it's a lot. In the first episode, Ramon has a spooky hallucination that involves the number 1111; he also has a dream that is tied to his psychiatrist's painful past. His mother suspects schizophrenia, but the show quickly begins to hint at other, gooier explanations—perhaps some kind of mystical globalism, a special gift that lets one cup of trauma spill into another. It's "Parenthood" crossbred with "The Leftovers," basically—the kind of concept that tilts fast from grand to grandiose. It also gave me worrisome flashbacks of another philosophy-stuffed HBO drama that sniffed way too hard at the fumes of the supernatural, "True Detective."

The bigger problem with "Here and Now" is that, when characters are not seeing portents, they're giving speeches. You know the people who say, "I don't make small talk"? This is them. An obsequious philosophy T.A. gushes, "The way you marry epicureanism with presentism and then reboot them both into something so deeply, deeply moral!" Ramon describes his new video game

"Here and Now" wears its good intentions on its expensively tattered sleeve.

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as an exploration of "how we perceive impossibility." In one truly cringeworthy scene, Ashley and Duc banter about racial microaggressions in a manner so inorganic that it would be banned from any Portland co-op: "You're sassy!" "You're inscrutable!" The show wants to poke fun at liberal neuroses, but it's so focussed on meaning that it's a huge fun-suck. Even a ludicrously unconvincing gang of "alt-right" teen-agers deliver talking points: it's like Twitter, the TV show.

A few characters—especially the insecure, arrogant Duc and the mournful therapist, Farid—do resonate. And the show's basic model, which might be summed up as "hot people yammering about abstractions," can feel charmingly theatrical, like George Bernard Shaw for stoners. The homes are luscious, rich-hippie real-estate porn; the chemistry between Ramon and his tattooed beardo of a boyfriend, Henry, is almost worth the price of admission. But depth requires digging. "Here and Now" clearly wants to be part of the resistance. So far, it's more the sort of thing that makes people mutter, "This is why he won."

The current series that "Here and Now" most closely resembles is this year's monster hit "This Is Us," on NBC, another family weepie about a diverse-ish family (fat daughter, addict son, black son adopted by white family). Aesthetically speaking, it's like the middle-class analogue to HBO's gated community: we get product placement instead of threesomes and speeches that are heartfelt rather than pseudo-intellectual. At one point, I tried to watch it on my computer but clicked on what appeared to be an hour-long ad for the Jeep Wagoneer. Nope, that was the latest episode. "This Is Us" is way more heavy-handed than the best shows in its lineage—"Friday Night Lights," "Once and Again," "My So-Called Life." But, when you add butter, food tastes good. "This Is Us" makes people cry, even me, and, as far as I'm concerned, that's serving a public purpose, if only because, unlike its more ambitious predecessors, it's not constantly on the verge of cancellation.

Sadly, my own favorite, "The Fosters" (on Freeform), is ending this summer. Like "Here and Now" and "This Is Us," "The Fosters" is about a multiracial family built through fostering and adoption: two moms, one a white cop and the other a biracial vice-principal; a white son from the cop's first marriage, to a man; Latino twins, fostered to adoption; and two newly adopted white kids, Callie and her sweet younger brother, Jude, who were abused in their previous foster home. It's had its ups and downs, in five seasons, with a few spikes of melodrama that went to eleven. (It was not strictly necessary to have Adderall addiction and a nail-gun-induced brain injury in the same episode.)

And yet "The Fosters," for all its bumps and swerves, is a show whose loss is worth protesting—a soothing, empathetic alternative universe in a world that needs them, badly. It has layered performances, especially by Teri Polo and Sherri Saum as the moms, Hayden Byerly as Jude, and Cierra Ramirez as Mariana, one of the twins. On "Here and Now" and "This Is Us," cross-racial adoption feels suspiciously like a structural shortcut to a diverse cast. Not so on "The Fosters," where the relationships are less stylized, more lived in, with funk and warmth and looseness that feel like real life, capturing the bickering bonds among parents and teens. It's an issues show, for sure—over the years, "The Fosters" has folded everything from DACA to sex-offender registries into the lives of its sprawling ensemble. But the themes are grounded and granular, the characters allowed to grow and change. Jude, once a saintly child, has matured into a likably messy gay teen-ager, far better than any mere empowering role model. But, really, no one on "The Fosters" is just a symbol: they live in the here and now.

The show has basic aesthetics: close-ups, pop ballads, nothing fancy. But ordinary TV tools allow for quietly radical moves, such as showing a trans boy in a love scene with his shirt off, scars visible. In a recent episode, that character, Aaron, was arrested while protesting an ICE raid, then had to decide whether to "come out," to avoid being placed with male prisoners—a plot that may sound like clickbait thrown into a Crock-Pot. But the story was hugely affecting, because the terrific trans actor Elliot Fletcher, as Aaron, and Maia Mitchell, as Callie, played it not as social-justice theatre but as something intimate, ordinary. "When you come out as gay," Aaron told Callie, "people see you as being more authentic. Whereas, when you come out as trans, people sometimes think you've deceived them." It was an educational message, no doubt. But it felt like a talk, not a TED talk. ♦

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THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

THE FINALISTS

“I can't seat you until you are fully present.”
Sandra Miller, Arlington, Mass.

“The food's good, but the atmosphere's a little thin.”
Matthew Raihala, Madison, Wis.

“Enlightened or non-enlightened?”
Daniel Ingman, Seattle, Wash.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“I thought you said it wouldn't need much attention.”
Peter Gynd, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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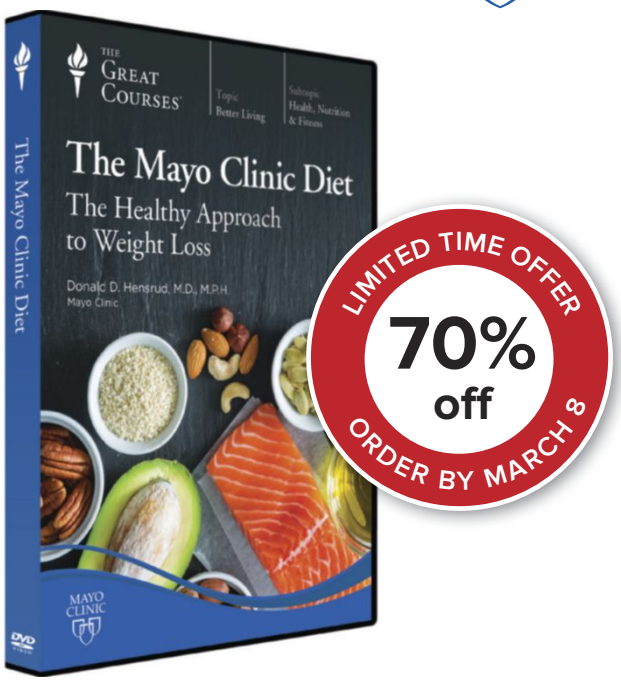

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