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# THE NEW YORKER



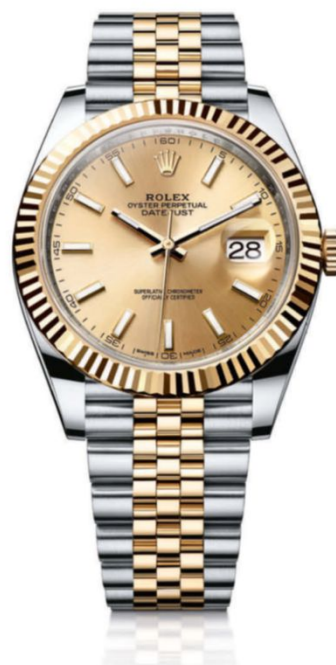




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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ariel Levy** (*"Secret Selves,"* p. 58), a staff writer, is the author of the memoir *"The Rules Do Not Apply,"* which is out this month, and is based on her *New Yorker* article "Thanksgiving in Mongolia."

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**Joan Acocella** (*Books,* p. 71) has written for the magazine since 1992 and became the dance critic in 1998.

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**Carter Goodrich** (*Cover*) is a writer, an illustrator, and a character designer for feature animation. He is currently at work on the children's book "Nobody Hugs a Cactus."

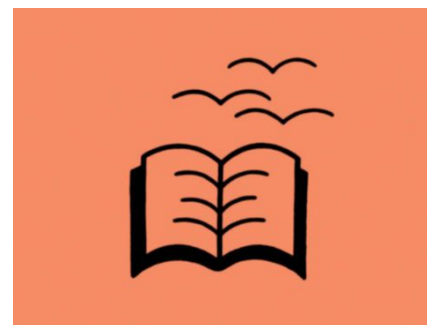
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### VIDEO

Jia Tolentino on poetry as a refuge, and finding meaning in Tracy K. Smith's "Solstice."



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# THE MAIL

## MATTERS OF FACT

Elizabeth Kolbert's review of three books about the psychology of human reasoning will help readers understand the intransigence of Trump supporters in the face of facts, but I'm a bit annoyed that psychologists are getting a lot of new mileage out of ideas that philosophers have held for many years (Books, February 27th). As if we need data to prove that human reason has its limits! For more than fifty years, philosophers have argued that each of us has what Willard Van Orman Quine called a "web of belief," and that we accept or reject a belief on the basis of how well it fits into this web. Beliefs at the center are entrenched, because changing them would require rebuilding large parts of the web, while those on the periphery can be easily altered or ignored. We do not hold beliefs one at a time; rather, we assess them in a group, because they are logically connected. If we let one go, we have to let others go as well.

If we apply this idea to present politics, the Trump supporter has a web of belief around Trump, including that he is a "straight shooter," that he "tells it like it is," that he is treated unfairly by the media, and so on. When a voter is presented with a fact that does not fit into his web, he rejects it in order to hold on to other entrenched beliefs. It takes more than data to change people's mistaken ideas about vaccines and guns—there must also be a story that connects, in some important way, to people's webs of belief.

*Sharon Schwarze, Professor Emerita of Philosophy, Cabrini University  
Wayne, Penn.*

Kolbert discusses studies which "demonstrate that reasonable-seeming people are often totally irrational." This work identifies that people have a tendency "to embrace information that supports their beliefs and reject information that contradicts them." Psychologists call this "confirmation bias." Many people refuse to entertain the possibility that the scientists who create and oversee these

studies may suffer from confirmation biases of their own, believing that the duplication process in the scientific method will uncover any incorrect theses. But the fallibility of this assumption comes to light when Kolbert writes that the authors Jack and Sara Gorman "probe the gap between what science tells us and what we tell ourselves." Of course, "science" doesn't tell us anything. Scientists do. And, presumably, they are no less human than the rest of us.

*Bernard P. Dauenhauer  
Montgomery, Ohio*

The experiments that Kolbert references do reaffirm the existence of confirmation bias, but they don't appear to factor in whether the respondents actually care about being right, or feel that any harm might come as a result of being wrong. The stakes in these studies are low, but there's a far better crucible in which to examine decision-making dynamics: jury deliberations. Jurors must assess evidence, judge the credibility of witnesses, and decide whether to stick to their guns when faced with disagreement from fellow-jurors. These can be visceral, intimate discussions, sometimes with the life of another human being hanging in the balance. There's scant scientific analysis of real-life jury deliberations, as researchers are mostly barred from studying them. But, working in the public defender's office in Colorado, I find it telling that what has become known as the Colorado method of jury selection in capital cases entails, among other things, impressing on jurors the enormous burden they are taking on when they decide to condemn someone to death. Bias may never be eradicated, but people think a lot harder when they feel a personal stake in their decision.

*Gary Chandler  
Denver, Colo.*

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BEN BRANTLEY, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Growing up in Detroit in the nineteen-eighties, **Carl Craig** was relieved of the burden to invent. D.j.s like his mentor, Derrick May, had already hatched techno, leaving the teen-ager to toy with its lofty limits. Since 1991, when Craig released his first EP, “4 Jazz Funk Classics,” he has rethought the cavernous 808 drums of his city’s sound; his 2013 record “Masterpiece” included sparse, ambient tracks inspired by David Lynch. On March 11, Craig’s “Detroit Love” party returns; as is underground custom, coördinates will be announced the day of.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WHITTEN SABBATINI



# MOVIES



Cynthia Nixon plays Emily Dickinson in Terence Davies's *A Quiet Passion*.

## Spring Preview

TERENCE DAVIES WROTE and directed **"A Quiet Passion"** (opening April 14), a biopic about Emily Dickinson that veers from screwball comedy to tragedy. It stars Cynthia Nixon, who portrays the poet as a lacerating lampooner of the New England mores and manners that constrained her life and impeded her career. Jennifer Ehle co-stars as the poet's sister, Vinnie; Keith Carradine plays their father; Catherine Bailey plays Dickinson's free-thinking friend Vryling Buffam. James Gray's **"The Lost City of Z"** (April 14), based on the book by David Grann, of *The New Yorker*, stars Charlie Hunnam in a historical drama about the British explorer Percy Fawcett, who sought to overturn demeaning assumptions about indigenous cultures by proving their sophistication. In the early twentieth century, Fawcett led two expeditions in search of the ruins of a vast ancient city that was rumored to exist in an Amazonian jungle in Brazil; Sienna Miller co-stars as Fawcett's wife and collaborator, Nina; Robert Pattinson plays Fawcett's colleague Henry Costin.

In recent years, Terrence Malick has picked up the pace of production while also displaying a boldly original style of metaphysical inspiration. His new film, **"Song to Song"** (March 17), a romantic drama set in the Austin music scene and the South by Southwest festival, stars Rooney Mara and Ryan Gosling, as as-

piring musicians whose love is threatened by their ambitions; Michael Fassbender, as a record-company impresario; Natalie Portman, as a waitress; Cate Blanchett, as a wealthy socialite; and Patti Smith, as herself. Arnold Schwarzenegger is rebooting his acting career, adding realistic drama to his action-film résumé. In **"Aftermath"** (March 31), directed by Elliott Lester, he plays a grieving man who seeks revenge on an air-traffic controller (Scoot McNairy) after his wife and daughter are killed in a plane crash.

**"Norman"** (April 14), directed by the Israeli filmmaker Joseph Cedar, is a story of crime and government, about a back-room wheeler-dealer (Richard Gere) who manipulates a visiting Israeli politician (Lior Ashkenazi). Bruno Dumont's **"Slack Bay"** (April 21), starring Juliette Binoche and Fabrice Luchini, adds macabre mysteries to a society comedy set in a seaside town in France just before the First World War. It blends the romance between the son of an oyster farmer and the daughter of an aristocrat with a criminal investigation into the disappearance of several tourists. **"Casting JonBenet"** (April 28), directed by Kitty Green, is a documentary about the death of the child beauty-pageant star JonBenet Ramsey, which approaches its subject obliquely—by way of interviews with actors from Ramsey's home town of Boulder, Colorado, who are auditioning to perform in a dramatization of her life.

—Richard Brody

## OPENING

**Actor Martinez** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening March 10. (In limited release.)* • **Kong: Skull Island** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening March 10. (In wide release.)* • **Personal Shopper** Kristen Stewart stars in this thriller, directed by Olivier Assayas, about a Parisian movie star's assistant who tries to conjure the spirit of her dead brother. *Opening March 10. (In limited release.)* • **Raw** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening March 10. (In limited release.)* • **Who's Crazy?** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening March 10. (Film Society of Lincoln Center.)*

## NOW PLAYING

### Actor Martinez

Nathan Silver and Mike Ott's film is a spinning prism of fiction and nonfiction that tosses off iridescent glints of melancholy whimsy. Arthur Martinez plays Arthur, a computer technician in Denver who dreams of making movies and connects with two filmmakers—Silver and Ott, playing themselves—in the hope that they'll make his dreams come true. They recruit Arthur to play a character based on himself, in an improvised drama based on his life. They film him at work, at home, and in discussion with themselves about the course that the film will take. But Silver and Ott find Arthur's life undramatic, and they spice up the action by hiring an actress, Lindsay Burdge (playing herself), to play Arthur's ex-girlfriend. Then, they guide the action, instructing Lindsay to "press his buttons"; as they force Arthur to confront his problems on camera, they create problems for themselves, too. For all their self-deprecating irony and jack-in-the-box narrative gamesmanship, Silver and Ott—crafting a precise and exquisite visual style—turn Arthur's life and their involvement with it into quietly grand melodrama.—Richard Brody *(In limited release.)*

### Before I Fall

This adaptation of the novel by Lauren Oliver is a sort of adolescent "Groundhog Day," about a frivolous young woman who learns the meaning of life after experiencing death. Zoey Deutch plays Sam, one of a quartet of popular high-school girls who make life miserable for their nonconformist peers. Her best friend, the queen bee Lindsay (Halston Sage), is driving the group home from a party when an accident occurs, killing Sam—who nonetheless awakens again, at home, in her bed, exactly as she did earlier that day. Sam figures out that she's being forced to repeatedly relive the last day of her life, but enlightenment arises only after she learns that her cruelty has lasting effects on her victims. The setting is the Pacific Northwest, but the social context is utterly undefined, apart from its cozy prosperity. Each of the characters has an identifying trait or two, but none has any identity. There's little that the director, Ry Russo-Young, can do with the material's sentimental thinness, but she does something nonetheless, pushing the storytelling toward portraiture: lingering closeups on Deutch suggest mysteries that outleap the confines of the drama.—R.B. *(In wide release.)*

### Catfight

This raucous comedy, set in a nearly dystopian near-future, pushes college grudges to apocalyptic depths of rage. Twenty years after graduation, Veronica (Sandra Oh) is the coldly mercenary wife of a high-flying financier; her frenemy Ashley (Anne Heche) is a struggling artist. When they meet again,





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at a party where Veronica is a guest and Ashley is a cater-waiter, the long-repressed mutual contempt leads to a gory fistfight with terrifying results. The comic action—set against a backdrop of war and chaos sparked by governmental folly—involves traumas and comas, grief and anguish. Vast reversals of fortune offer lessons in forgiveness, acceptance, and love, but these lessons are overlooked as ambition, frustration, and the spirit of revenge rise to the surface. The writer and director, Onur Tukel, displays virtuosic cleverness in his resourceful replenishment of the characters' wells of pain. He conjures cruelty and bitterness—as in Ashley's tense relationship with her blithe assistant, Sally (Ariel Kavoussi)—by way of saccharine irony. Nonetheless, the film's observations don't offer much depth or substance; the contemplation of destructive behavior in private mirroring destruction at an international level is sharp but hollow. With Alicia Silverstone.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

### Fifty Shades Darker

The title is a lie, for starters. Once again, two white people fall for each other and go to bed: What could be paler than that? Since the first movie, little has changed. Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson) now works as an editor's assistant, but Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) still wears the perplexed look of a man who can't decide what to do with his time, his spare billions, or his ratcheted ankle cuffs. If anything, their relationship this time around takes a discreet step backward, into old-style courtship, complete with dinner and a yacht. True, she expresses a weakness for vanilla sex, whereas his preference, one suspects, is for Chunky Monkey, but that's easily fixed. The director is James Foley, who used to make thrillers with a certain grip, but here, confronted with E. L. James's slab-like novel, he struggles to locate a plot. The heroine's boss (Eric Johnson) becomes a designated villain, and Kim Basinger plays the old flame who, long ago, taught Mr. Grey all the mysteries of the boudoir. But that's it for thrills, unless you count the nicely polished performance from a pair of love balls.—*Anthony Lane (In wide release.)*

### Get Out

A young white woman called Rose (Allison Williams) takes Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), her black boyfriend, to meet her parents for the first time. They live, in some style, in the country, and Chris, though an unruffled soul, feels a mild trepidation. But Rose's father (Bradley Whitford) and mother (Catherine Keener), liberal to a fault, offer a warm welcome; if anything, it is their African-American staff—Walter (Marcus Henderson) and Georgina (Betty Gabriel)—who make Chris feel more uneasy. A party for friends and family, the following day, deepens his suspicion that something is awry, and the final third of the film bursts into open hostility and dread. The writer and director is Jordan Peele, making his debut in feature films, and the result feels inflammatory to an astounding degree. If the awkward social comedy of the early scenes winds up as a flat-out horror movie, that, we feel, is because Peele finds the state of race relations so horrific—irreparably so—that no other reaction will suffice. Kaluuya makes a likeable hero, for whom we heartily root.—*A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/6/17.) (In wide release.)*

### John Wick: Chapter 2

As the title character, Keanu Reeves flings himself vigorously into the martial-arts gyrations and choreographed gunplay of this high-body-count thriller, but these maneuvers offer as slight a sense of physical presence as do C.G.I. contrivances. This

sequel features him, once again, as a retired hit man forced back into action—this time, he's compelled to travel to Rome to kill a Mob queen (Claudia Gerini), whose brother (Riccardo Scamarcio) covets her position. Wick scampers through the catacombs beneath her villa while blasting heads to a pulp. He tumbles down staircases while battling her bodyguard (Common); the two soon continue their fight in New York. The director, Chad Stahelski, revels in a contract-killer underworld that's hidden in plain sight (Manhattan's buskers, homeless, and rumpled passersby are in on the worldwide conspiracy), and he gives its bureaucracy an anachronistically picturesque back office filled with paraphernalia seemingly left over from a Wes Anderson shoot. But the paranoid jolts are played mainly for giggles, and a vast set piece in a mirrored museum exhibit unleashes showers of stage blood but hardly a drop of emotion.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### Logan

This is the ninth occasion on which Hugh Jackman has played Logan, otherwise known as Wolverine, and, in the absence of resurrection, it's hard to imagine a tenth. Grizzled and wry, he looks beaten down in the role, limping and drinking, and eking out his days as a limousine driver. As he dons a pair of reading glasses, or joins forces with his mentor, Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart), who is ninety years old and bad-tempered, you glimpse a melancholy future, in which all the Marvel heroes start to wane; to be blessed with a superpower, after all, is no defense against the onslaught of time. Balancing out the old guys, in James Mangold's film, is the taciturn Laura (Dafne Keen), age eleven, whose knuckles, like those of Logan, are able to sprout lethal blades. The unlikely trio sets off from Texas to North Dakota, and the movie becomes a mixture of the rambling and the enraged; for some viewers, the scenes of violence, in which Laura and Logan fend off the assaults of a pursuing posse, will seem far more flailing and more unrelenting than they need to be. It's an exhausting trip.—*A.L. (3/6/17) (In wide release.)*

### Moonlight

Miami heat and light weigh heavily on the furious lives and moods realized by the director Barry Jenkins. The grand yet finespun drama depicts three eras in the life of a young black man: as a bullied schoolboy called Little (Alex Hibbert), who is neglected by his crack-addicted mother (Naomie Harris) and sheltered and mentored by a drug dealer (Mahershala Ali) and his girlfriend (Janelle Monáe); as a teen-ager with his given name of Chiron (Ashton Sanders), whose friendship with a classmate named Kevin (Jharrel Jerome) veers toward romantic intimacy and leads to violence; and as a grown man nicknamed Black (Trevante Rhodes), who faces adult responsibilities with terse determination and reconnects with Kevin (André Holland). Adapting a play by Tarell Alvin McCraney, Jenkins burrows deep into his characters' pain-seared memories, creating ferociously restrained performances and confrontational yet tender images that seem wrenched from his very core. Even the title is no mere nature reference but an evocation of skin color; subtly alluding to wider societal conflicts, Jenkins looks closely at the hard intimacies of people whose very identities are forged under relentless pressure.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

### Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One

William Greaves's 1968 drama, which he completed in 1971, is one of the greatest movies about movie-making. Greaves wrote a brief script about a cou-

ple, Freddie and Alice, in romantic and sexual crisis. He cast many different pairs of actors to play the roles in New York's Central Park, while three camera operators (including Greaves) filmed the performances, the surrounding activity, and each other. Much of the film takes place when the actors aren't acting. It's also a documentary about the crew on location, and situations that come up along the way—a mounted police officer asking to see the crew's permit, a crowd of teen-agers gathering to watch the shoot—are integrated into the action. Greaves also includes lengthy scenes that crew members made by themselves, without his knowledge, in which they debate his methods and his motives. With ingenious visual effects, he puts multiple images onscreen simultaneously. The film is anything but a cramped theoretical exercise; fuelled by the power of Greaves's vision and personality, the frame-breaking, frame-multiplying reflexivity lends the local action a vast, world-embracing scope.—*R.B. (Metrograph; March 10 and March 12.)*

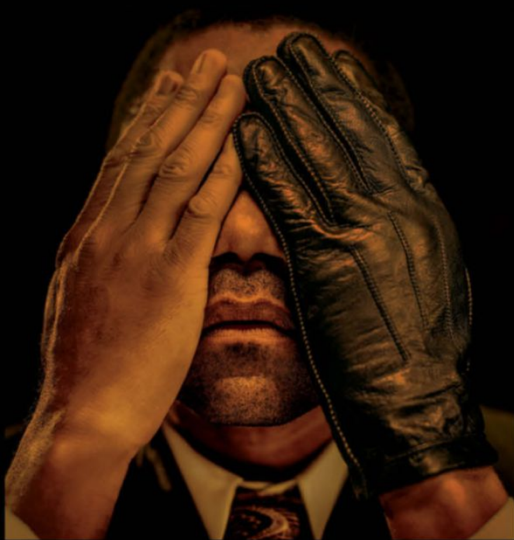
### A United Kingdom

A love story, but only just. In 1947, in London, and in defiance of the fog and the rain, a clerk named Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike) meets Seretse Khama (David Oyelowo), who turns out to be the heir to a tribal throne in Bechuanaland. Without ado, they fall for each other and get married, to the indignant dismay of pretty much everyone, from the bride's father (Nicholas Lyndhurst) and the groom's royal uncle (Vusi Kunene) to a sizable wing of the British establishment. Things only get worse for the couple when they fly to his homeland, where Ruth finds herself disdained, for a while, by black and white women alike. Amma Asante's film, written by Guy Hibbert, has many themes piled on its plate, some of them far from digestible. We get large chunks of constitutional politics, plenty of stuff about Anglo-South African relations at the unsavory end of an empire, and a subplot about diamond mines. Oyelowo remains a commanding presence, especially in front of a crowd, but the movie affords him a fraction of the opportunity that "Selma" provided, and there are times when the romantic origins of the crisis all but vanish from sight.—*A.L. (2/13 & 20/17) (In limited release.)*

### Who's Crazy?

In Thomas White's ingenious and freewheeling comedy, from 1966, the wild theatrical happenings of New York's Living Theatre troupe burst into cinematic life in rural Belgium. The group's members play patients from a mental asylum. When a bus transporting them gets stuck on a country road, the inmates escape their captors and take over an empty farmhouse. There, the actors' grand improvisational antics mesh Mack Sennett-style slapstick and psychodrama, costume parties and hectic chases, music-making and kangaroo courts, fiery alchemical experiments and primal quests for water. When love creeps in, the doings turn mock-solemn, as a mystical marriage—a threadbare rite of flung-together outfits and tinfoil décor—plays out like a discothèque exorcism. Using little dialogue, White creates a dense sonic collage that blends thrilling improvisations by the modern-jazz master Ornette Coleman and his trio with sound effects, vocal interjections, and other music (including a performance by Marianne Faithfull). With bold and canny camera work that yields an uproarious parody of Ingmar Bergman's "The Seventh Seal," White dynamites the formalist restraint of art films and the bonds of narrative logic to unleash the primal ecstasy of the cinema. White's film is only now being released.—*R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center.)*





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 FEARLESS



## NIGHT LIFE

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



*Atlanta's Gucci Mane and Manchester's New Order move feet in Manhattan this April.*

## Spring Preview

DANCE MUSIC, WITH its easy beat and ever-expanding appeal, has influenced all kinds of musicians, banging sounds and styles into rigid form while working through new tones in real time. Take **New Order**, the English futurists who, after exploring the mega-clubs of early-nineteen-eighties New York, released “Blue Monday” and the seminal album “Power, Corruption & Lies,” noodling with new kick-drum cadences and dollops of jostling Italo synthesizer. The band’s turn away from straight-ahead post-punk helped it move past its origins, as Joy Division, and live up to its forward-looking name. Ahead of an appearance at Coachella, New Order returns to Radio City Music Hall, on April 13.

In 2007, during one of several stints in prison, the rapper **Gucci Mane** gained popularity with coastal club crowds, miles away from his East Atlanta stomping ground. Dance remixes of his lumbering trap cuts by influential E.D.M. producers opened up ears—by 2010, there was a ravenous audience for the club-competent hip-hop that buoys Gucci Mane’s Atlanta descendants to this day. He takes the first proper tour of his ten-year career, with a stop at Terminal 5, on April 9.

The creative agency MATTE set out to harness the connective power of dance and visual art. The result was BLACK,

a warehouse party on the Brooklyn waterfront that invited electronic d.j.s and club staples to share the floor with design mavens and contemporary artists. In 2015, the rave was more successful than intended at evoking the dry, all-ages blowouts of early-nineties Manhattan: its liquor license was revoked at the last minute, so guests sneaked in six packs from nearby bodegas. This year, the MATTE crew returns to the Brooklyn Hangar, at the edge of Sunset Park, for a bill that includes the British grime outsider **Trim**, whose inventive, polarizing music confounds even members of his own scene, and the Berlin-based duo **Tale of Us**. Visual works on display include a collaborative piece by Kyle McDonald and Jonas Jongejan, “Light Leaks,” involving fifty mirrored globes.

Across the Hudson lies the modest Monty Hall, an event space opened by WFMU in 2014, on the ground floor of the independent radio station’s Jersey City headquarters. The beloved station hosts a slate of unshowy sets that reflect its varied programming, including, on March 31, one by the singer-songwriter **Julie Byrne**, performing songs from her sublime album of hike folk, “Not Even Happiness.” She supports **Waxahatchee** and **Kevin Morby**, whose ambling indie sound pays convincing homage to the Velvet Underground and Leonard Cohen—a welcome break from the city’s loud bass.

—Matthew Trammell

## Deafheaven

Black Metal practitioners and fans are orthodox and obscurantist, and any deviation from the classical nineties Norwegian method—mouse-heart blast beats, tortured screams, high-pitched distorted guitars played like cheese graters—is generally met with the idiom’s scarlet letter, the dreaded “false metal” tag. This Bay Area five-piece has been on the receiving end of such criticism for the better part of the past decade, a result of its cross-pollination with more progressive genres like shoegaze and post-rock. (Also, in a backlash that borders on homophobic, traditionalists have taken issue with the dramatic onstage persona of the vocalist George Clarke, who is histrionic enough to star as a tortured antihero in a Tim Burton musical.) The group’s response? “People who are worried about the way we look have a lot of growing up to do.” This week, they come to Warsaw, in continued support of their 2015 long-player, “New Bermuda.” (261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn. 718-387-0505. March 14.)

## The Ecstatic Music Center

This four-month program, held at the Kaufman Music Center, is a feather in the cap of the avant-classical scene, showcasing cross-genre artists who are often too odd for the conservatory and too serious for the club. The festival, now in its seventh year, features premières and lectures through the end of May. This week includes a collaboration by two visionary festival regulars, **Nick Zammuto**, formerly of the Books, and Brad Wells, who leads the avant-choral octet **Roomful of Teeth**. Zammuto, who’s spent years studying radical ways to recontextualize field recordings and found sound, has a perfect counterpart in Wells, whose group mines the deepest capacities of the human voice, from Appalachian yodelling to Tuvan throat singing. (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3300. March 12.)

## “Holy Trinity”

The witchy, cybernetic aesthetics of the d.j.s **Dame Luz** and **Wassup Gina** are trademarks of the Philadelphia dance scene, where partying is taken seriously and staged passionately. Their original productions blend countless dance sounds—drum and bass, Philly Club, trap, reggaeton—and splice in winking, rapid-fire samples of pop-femme icons like TLC and Cardi B. The influence of this club-kid sect can be seen in references made by Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Nicki Minaj—in wardrobe, tour design, choreography, and sparkling productions, the three titans have repeatedly nodded to the bowels of clubland. Dame Luz and Wassup Gina nod back with “Holy Trinity,” a monthly dance party where they play all Bey, Rih, and Nick. (*Baby’s All Right*, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. March 11.)

## Jeezy

These days, this thirty-nine-year-old rapper omits the “Young” that preceded his name on his independent releases, in the early aughts, and on his first major-label album, “Let’s Get It: Thug Motivation 101,” from 2005. Jeezy’s getting older, and in the lead-up to his sixth studio album, “Church in These Streets,” he refashioned himself as a wise corner preacher. Early in his career, his gruff tone and lived-in, firsthand stories of life in Atlanta caught the attention of Jay-Z, and he foreshadowed the genre’s swing toward the South, lending Kanye West his sound and his voice for West’s



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Two-time Tony Award Winner

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LUPONE**

is  
**HELENA RUBINSTEIN**

Two-time Tony Award Winner

**CHRISTINE  
EBERSOLE**

is  
**ELIZABETH ARDEN**

The background of the poster features two stylized, overlapping faces of the lead actresses, Patti Lupone and Christine Ebersole. Their faces are rendered in a soft, painterly style with visible brushstrokes. Patti Lupone's face is on the left, looking slightly down and to the right, with her mouth open in a smile, showing red lipstick. Christine Ebersole's face is on the right, looking slightly down and to the left, with her mouth open in a smile, showing pink lipstick. The faces are set against a background of large, overlapping triangles in shades of pink, purple, and white.

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fan-favorite 2007 single “Can’t Tell Me Nothing.” When West cut the song, he called it his favorite work yet, commenting that it sounded like “the future.” Jeezy tours in support of his most recent No. 1 record, “Trap or Die 3.” (*Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. March 11-12.*)

#### MattyB

In 2014, Matthew Morris, then just eleven years old, uploaded a video of himself covering “Juicy,” a song by the Notorious B.I.G. about getting rich after growing up poor. The sight of a mini-Bieber channelling Biggie sparked a familiar online debate, and introduced thousands of new eyes and ears to the pint-sized pop hopeful. Artists like MattyB represent a new archetype in pop, replacing the mall tours and the Disney camps of yesteryear with social-media cults of teen-age followers and runs through the daytime-TV circuit. MattyB has appeared on “Good Morning America,” “Today,” “The Wendy Williams Show,” and “Dr. Phil.” Who said there’s no more music on television? The show continues with his latest stop in New York. (*Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St. 212-414-5994. March 10.*)

### JAZZ AND STANDARDS

#### Alternative Guitar Summit 2017

The guitar, in all its transgressive glory, will be the star of this intrepid festival, now in its seventh year. **Nels Cline, Nir Felder, David Gilmore, Steve Cardenas, and David Tronzo** are among the fret-board adventurers at this edition, which, on opening night, will also celebrate the guitar innovator Pat Metheny, who will be on hand for an onstage interview. (*Various locations. March 10, 11, and 15.*)

#### Billy Hart

That the name of such a vital coöperative quartet goes to its senior member, the superlatively inventive drummer Hart, is a sign of the immense respect that the other A-list players—the pianist **Ethan Iverson** (of *Bad Plus* fame), the saxophonist **Mark Turner**, and the bassist **Ben Street**—have for this eminent figure. The same rhythmic acuity that Hart honed with, among many others, Herbie Hancock, Pharoah Sanders, and Stan Getz inspires the quick-on-its-feet interplay that has made this unit a glory of twenty-first-century jazz. (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. March 9-12.*)

#### Jon Irabagon

Hard charging and, when the mood strikes him, plenty loquacious, the tenor saxophonist Irabagon has been a mainstay of Mostly Other People Do the Killing, the merry pranksters of jazz. Reflecting his eclectic artistic nature, this residency finds Irabagon mixing it up with six very distinct bands, from a blues unit and an organ trio to an interactive combo, with the bassist **Mark Helias** and the drummer **Barry Altschul**, and a new-jazz quintet, featuring the trumpeter **Tim Hagans**, the pianist **Uri Caine**, and the drummer **Tyshawn Sorey**. (*The Stone, Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. March 7-12.*)

#### New Music Inc.

The brainchild of the trumpeter Charles Tolliver, the Music Inc. quartet was among the feistiest modal-hard-bop bands of the early seventies. Tolliver sat out the bulk of the next two decades, but by the turn of the millennium he was back, with an equally feisty big band. New Music Inc. finds him in charge of a small ensemble again, now a quintet with **Bruce Edwards**, on guitar, and **Theo Hill**, on piano. (*Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. March 10-12.*)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC



Philip Glass is one of several minimalist masters whose music will be featured at Carnegie Hall.

### Spring Preview

YOU WOULD HAVE to go back to Eleanor Steber—Mozart’s Countess, Barber’s Vanessa—to find an American soprano who combines refulgent vocal tone with innovative repertoire as splendidly as **Renée Fleming**. In the course of her long career, Fleming has transitioned from the newcomer with “The Beautiful Voice” to a stateswoman of American music. Now that journey reaches a milestone: the **Metropolitan Opera’s** new production of “Der Rosenkavalier” (opening April 13) will be her final portrayal of the role of the Marschallin. (The estimable Elina Garanča and Erin Morley fill out the other members of the opera’s love triangle.) The direction is by Robert Carsen, who has placed Strauss and Hofmannsthal’s opera firmly in the year it was composed—1910, with a military element to the costumes and a Viennese Secession flavor to the décor. When Carsen’s beloved production of Tchaikovsky’s “Eugene Onegin” was retired, it was unfortunately replaced by Deborah Warner’s lumbering staging, from 2013. But the revival of Warner’s version (March 30–April 22) offers irresistible vocal glamour, as **Anna Netrebko** returns to the role of Tatiana.

The soprano Anne Schwanewilms (also renowned in Strauss), appearing in recital with Malcolm Martineau, is a highlight of Lincoln Center’s “Great

Performers” series (April 16). Over at the **New York Philharmonic**, a rage for the modern takes hold, as Esa-Pekka Salonen, the commanding composer-conductor of our time, leads the ensemble in the U.S. premiere of “Forest,” a concerto for four horns and orchestra, by the British composer Tansy Davies (April 27–29); Alan Gilbert follows suit, with a program that offers the New York premieres of both a Salonen staple, “Wing on Wing,” and a new work by the up-and-coming Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir (May 19–23).

The Icelandic cool kids of Nordic Affect, a new-music group that combines Baroque instrumentation with sophisticated electronics, come to Williamsburg’s **National Sawdust** (April 19), part of a spring slate that also includes an all-John Adams concert by the enterprising Attacca Quartet (April 2). But it’s at Carnegie Hall that Adams will be truly prominent. Not only will the St. Louis Symphony present a concert performance of Adams’s oratorio “The Gospel According to the Other Mary” (March 31); he will also be part of “**Three Generations**,” a four-concert series (March 30, April 6, April 19, and April 26) that celebrates the colossal achievements of minimalists and post-minimalists both young and old. The lineup also features pieces by such composers as Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Arvo Pärt, Julia Wolfe, and Nico Muhly.

—Russell Platt





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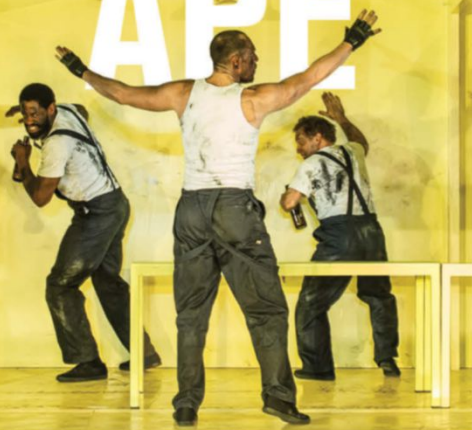


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## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### OPERA

#### Metropolitan Opera

The immediate standing ovation—from a full house—that Sonya Yoncheva received at the end of the first night of "*La Traviata*" is a good indication of this revival's fundamental quality. In the role of Violetta, the up-and-coming Bulgarian soprano shares a rock-solid vocal technique with her veteran Germont, Thomas Hampson, but her singing is infused with a pliant warmth that continually reaffirms the fizzy courtesan's underlying tenderness and dignity. As Alfredo, Michael Fabiano offers singing of exciting intensity and dusky timbre, if not refinement. Nicola Luisotti's conducting is efficient but frustratingly slack in slow tempos. *March 11 at 1 and March 14 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** With a new production by Bartlett Sher, the Met finally has a "*Roméo et Juliette*" that suits both Shakespeare's tragedy and Gounod's rhapsodic music. After its successful première, earlier in the season, it has returned with a new cast and conductor: Pretty Yende and Stephen Costello are the impassioned couple, with Emmanuel Villaume in the pit. *March 8 at 7:30 and March 11 at 8.* • Jean-François Borras and Isabel Leonard take the leading roles in the final performance of Massenet's "*Werther*"; the impressive Edward Gardner conducts. *March 9 at 7:30.* • A revival of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's grand production of "*Idomeneo*," which debuted in 1982, features two first-rate Mozartians, the conductor James Levine and the tenor Matthew Polenzani (in the title role); they lead a cast that also includes Alice Coote, Nadine Sierra, and Elza van den Heever. *March 10 and March 13 at 7:30. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)*

#### "A Mouth Is Not for Talking" ("La Voix Humaine")

Francis Poulenc and Jean Cocteau's opera, written in 1958, dramatizes one woman's anguished phone call with her former lover; Mary Birnbaum's production extrapolates from that premise, drawing on the terrors and pitfalls of communication in the digital age. The soprano Laura Bohn and the pianist Mila Henry share the stage for the composer's intimate piano reduction of the score. *March 10 at 7. (National Sawdust, 80 N. Sixth St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

#### Clarion Opera: "Die Zauberflöte"

For a lesson in authenticity, the director Alain Gauthier stages Mozart's magical opera with projections of imagery from an 1816 production by the German architect and artist Karl Friedrich Schinkel; Steven Fox conducts a thirty-seven-piece orchestra. *March 11 and March 13 at 7:30. (Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Ave., at 104th St. clarionsociety.org.)*

### ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

#### New York Philharmonic

It hardly seems possible that the vital American composer John Adams had his seventieth birthday in February. Marking the occasion, Alan Gilbert conducts two substantial works: "Harmonielehre" (1984-85), a weighty, surrealist symphony in all but name, and "Absolute Jest" (2012), a concerto for string quartet and orchestra, in which motifs from Beethoven are puckishly transformed. These performances mark the debut of the New York Philharmonic String Quartet: the concertmaster Frank Huang, the principal associate concertmaster Sheryl Staples, the principal viola Cynthia Phelps, and the principal cello Carter Brey. *March 9 at 7:30, March 10 at 2, and March 11 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

#### Cecilia Chorus of New York: "Oedipus the King"

Mark Shapiro conducts the première of this commissioned piece for chorus, speaker, and instrumental ensemble by the versatile, eclectic Brothers Balliett—the twins Brad and Doug, both composers and instrumentalists, whose Deviant Septet accompanies the Cecilia vocalists, the Boston City Singers youth chorus, and, in the title role, the Tony Award-winning actor Stephen Spinella. *March 12 at 3. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. 646-638-2535.)*

#### "Unremembered"

Sarah Kirkland Snider's new work, which uses writings and illustrations by Nathaniel Bellows, is one of the many daring projects taking place at National Sawdust. She joins the Knights chamber orchestra and a septet of vocalists for a thirteen-part cycle (with visuals and electronics) that muses on an idyllic childhood in rural Massachusetts. *March 14 at 7. (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

### RECITALS

#### Takács Quartet

One perennial Lincoln Center favorite joins another, the Philharmonic's principal clarinetist, Anthony McGill, for a concert that features string quartets by Haydn (Op. 77, No. 2) and Ravel as well as Brahms's Clarinet Quintet. *March 9 at 7:30. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500.)*

#### András Schiff

The probing British-Hungarian pianist's latest program at Carnegie Hall is all Schubert, including the Four Impromptus, D. 935, and the Sonatas in A Minor, D. 845, and in G Major, D. 894. *March 9 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

#### Mark Padmore and Jonathan Biss

The incisive British tenor and the penetrating American pianist's homage to the brilliance of late Schubert takes the form of a joint recital. The program begins with the sprawling and idiosyncratic Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959, and concludes with selections from "Schwanengesang," Schubert's final song cycle. *March 10 at 7:30. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

#### Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "Love Sonnets"

The soprano Julia Bullock is such an exciting up-and-comer that she could conceivably headline her own mini-series at Lincoln Center. But the Society, at least, is making room for her: in addition to singing Ravel's tart "Cinq Mélodies Populaires Grecques," she will participate in the New York première of Jonathan Berger's "Rime Sparse," for soprano, violin, cello, and piano, a Society co-commission. Bookending the program are masterworks by Franck (the Sonata in A Major for Cello and Piano) and Dvořák (the Piano Quartet in D Major, Op. 23). *March 12 at 5. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)*

#### "An Evening with Gabriel Kahane"

The engaging singer-songwriter puts his cross-over chops to the test this week, in a set at Rockwood Music Hall. He'll accompany himself not only in his "Craigslitlieders," a cult classic that teases at the classical tradition, but also in a real challenge: Schumann's "Dichterliebe," a bedrock of German art song. *March 12 at 7. (196 Allen St. rockwoodmusichall.com.)*



# THE THEATRE



Andy Karl gets trapped in a time loop in a musical version of the 1993 comedy "Groundhog Day."

## Spring Preview

SINCE THE FILM **"Groundhog Day"** came out, in 1993, it's been claimed by existentialists, Buddhists, political theorists, and comedy nerds alike. The story has become a modern parable: a mordant Pittsburgh weatherman gets caught in a mysterious time loop and must relive the same day, in Punxsutawney, until he reaches enlightenment. How many times have we heard congressional gridlock described as "Groundhog Day"? How many dissertations have tackled the film's relation to Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence? Scholars and fanboys will have a chance to revisit the tale this spring, as a musical version hits Broadway (beginning previews March 16, at the August Wilson). The project reunites the songwriter Tim Minchin and the director Matthew Warchus, the team behind **"Matilda the Musical."** Danny Rubin adapted the book from his original screenplay, written with Harold Ramis, and Andy Karl (the "Rocky" musical) steps into the Bill Murray role.

Broadway has its own version of Groundhog Day: the annual springtime crunch of shows that open just before the Tony deadline. Among the high-profile offerings this year are **"Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"** (starting March 28, at the Lunt-Fontanne), featuring Christian Borle as Willy Wonka. Elsewhere, actresses dominate. Bette

Midler stars as the brassy matchmaker in Jerry Herman's 1964 musical, **"Hello, Dolly!"** (March 15, Shubert). Phillipa Soo (**"Hamilton"**) plays a Montmartre sprite in **"Amélie"** (March 9, Walter Kerr), a musical version of the 2001 film. Allison Janney is a New York doyenne whose life is shaken by an encounter with a young black con artist, in a revival of John Guare's **"Six Degrees of Separation"** (April 5, Barrymore). And Laura Linney and Cynthia Nixon trade off the roles of Regina and Birdie in **"The Little Foxes"** (March 29, Samuel J. Friedman), Manhattan Theatre Club's revival of the Lillian Hellman drama.

Two new Broadway plays revisit the theatrical past. In **"A Doll's House, Part 2"** (April 1, Golden), the playwright Lucas Hnath imagines the return of Ibsen's heroine, played by Laurie Metcalf. Paula Vogel's **"Indecent"** (April 4, Cort) tells the backstage story of Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance," which created an uproar when it played Broadway, in 1923, and the cast was charged with obscenity. Vogel's play originated Off Broadway, as did **"Oslo"** (March 23, Vivian Beaumont), J. T. Rogers's exploration of how a Norwegian couple (Jennifer Ehle and Jefferson Mays) secretly helped orchestrate the 1993 Oslo Accords. The Middle East peace process: another Groundhog Day scenario.

—Michael Schulman

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Erté, *Sports d'Hiver*, gouache cover art for Harper's Bazaar, February 1933. Estimate \$8,000 to \$12,000.

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## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

**Come from Away**

The Canadian duo Irene Sankoff and David Hein wrote this new musical, about a tiny Newfoundland town that was forced to accommodate thousands of stranded passengers on September 11, 2001. (*Schoenfeld*, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens March 12.*)

**The Emperor Jones**

Obi Abili plays a despotic monarch who rules over a Caribbean island, in Ciarán O'Reilly's revival of the Eugene O'Neill drama. (*Irish Repertory*, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. *In previews. Opens March 12.*)

**Gently Down the Stream**

In Martin Sherman's new play, set at the beginning of the online-dating era, Harvey Fierstein plays a gay pianist living in London who meets a younger man. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. *Previews begin March 14.*)

**The Glass Menagerie**

Sally Field stars as the redoubtable Southern matriarch Amanda Wingfield in Sam Gold's revival of the Tennessee Williams drama, opposite Joe Mantello, as Tom. (*Belasco*, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens March 9.*)

**Latin History for Morons**

In his new comic monologue, John Leguizamo surveys the Aztec Empire through the Revolutionary War in an attempt to find a hero for his son's history project. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. *In previews.*)

**The Light Years**

The Debate Society's latest piece, written by Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen and directed by Oliver Butler, is set at a theatrical spectacle at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *In previews. Opens March 13.*)

**The Play That Goes Wrong**

England's Mischief Theatre transfers this backstage comedy, about a hapless drama society whose production of a nineteen-twenties murder mystery descends into chaos. (*Lyceum*, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *Previews begin March 9.*)

**Present Laughter**

Kevin Kline plays a narcissistic actor having a midlife crisis, in Moritz von Stuelpnagel's revival of the 1939 Noël Coward comedy. (*St. James*, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *Previews begin March 10.*)

## NOW PLAYING

**All the Fine Boys**

Erica Schmidt's play, with the New Group, starts off with a banal slumber party, where two fourteen-year-old girls gab about boys before indulging in Pringles and horror movies on VHS. (We're in the late eighties, with appropriate music cues.) The show finds surer footing as it toggles between the teen-agers' parallel romantic and sexual educations. Not the sharpest tool in the shed, Jenny (Abigail Breslin) gets mixed up with an ancient man of twenty-eight (Joe Tippett), who feeds her pizza and lies. Meanwhile, Emily (Isabelle Fuhrman), more open to life's possibilities, hangs out with an artsy high-school senior (Alex Wolff), who plays her Smiths songs on his gui-

tar. The play treads familiar terrain but is ultimately both distressing and thought-provoking, since Schmidt does not hesitate to raise uncomfortable questions about responsibility and sexuality. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**Everybody**

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins has written a play about love, and it fills the heart in a new and unexpected way. Directed by Lila Neugebauer, "Everybody" is both a response to and a dismantling of an earlier text: "The Somonyng of Everyman," a fifteenth-century morality play about Christian salvation. Everybody is played by one of five actors (there are nine cast members), chosen by lottery before the performance. As in "Everyman," Everybody doesn't want to die, at least not alone, so he gets Death to agree that he can take a companion on the journey to the other side. He takes Love (the well-cast Chris Perfetti). Are these characters people? Is Love just an idea? Thinking about the original script while watching Jacobs-Jenkins's adaptation is like listening to an expert d.j. play two records at once, at different speeds. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/6/17.) (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

**Linda**

The lights come up on Penelope Skinner's play mid-PowerPoint presentation. Linda, an award-winning marketing executive, is pitching her latest idea to the board of her cosmetics company, a campaign firmly and positively aimed at women older than fifty, a tribe to which Linda belongs. As embodied in a wide-ranging and masterly performance by Janie Dee, Linda is a figure of immense authority and charismatic solidity. Almost immediately, though, events at the office and at home start eroding that stability. By the end, the ground beneath her high heels has become so shaky that she needs help standing on her own two feet. A lot happens in a short time, perhaps a bit too much, but Lynne Meadow directs a fine cast with verve and fluidity, and Skinner's scenes, brought to life on Walt Spangler's terrific revolving set, are consistently arresting. (*City Center Stage I*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**The Penitent**

David Mamet's latest effort—if you can call it that—feels like an outline he didn't bother to fill in. Charles (Chris Bauer) is a psychiatrist in hot water for refusing to testify on behalf of a patient guilty of mass murder. Charles has found religion and is ambivalent about his client's homosexuality; Leviticus even comes up in a mystifying, go-nowhere scene with a lawyer (Lawrence Gilliard, Jr.). Under a provocative exterior, Mamet lands only soft punches at his usual institutional targets (justice, political correctness, the media), and the play's half-baked obfuscating prevents any drama from taking flight. Neil Pepe's production is visually elegant, but there is little that the director can do with Mamet's sketch of a script, which manages to be both self-important and shallow, and is further hampered by Rebecca Pidgeon's affected performance as Charles's wife. (*Atlantic Theatre Company*, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

**Significant Other**

Lonely, heartsick, and terrified of permanent failure in love: given how incessantly these feelings have been plumbed on stage and screen, it's a wonder that the playwright Joshua Harmon succeeds at making them so vividly painful in this comedy, about a young gay man standing on the

sidelines as his three closest friends, all women, marry one by one. Gideon Glick is endlessly charming yet credibly hapless as Jordan Berman, who approaches a rare date with the grim apprehension of a convict awaiting sentencing for a capital crime; in his mind, the opposite of love is not its absence but death. It's all much more enjoyable than it sounds: Harmon ("Bad Jews") has a superb ear for dialogue, Glick is a fine physical comedian, and the supporting cast is delightful. But the story resonates because Trip Cullman's direction never shies from taking Jordan's crisis seriously. (*Booth*, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**The View UpStairs**

When Wes (Jeremy Pope), a clueless, black, gay millennial on his way to becoming a "household name," comes to inspect the building he's just bought for his fledgling fashion business, he finds himself temporarily transported back in time, "Brigadoon" style, to a tacky gay bar in 1973. It's occupied by a colorful crew of old-school queens, including a young hustler in formfitting polyester pants (Taylor Frey), with whom Wes falls in love. At first, Wes condescends to his new friends, who still cower around cops and have unprotected sex, but by the end of the evening he realizes that "likes" are no substitute for flesh-and-blood community. Max Vernon's compact musical could have been all fun and camp, but, under Scott Ebersold's direction, it's more thoughtful than that, with sad, beautiful love songs performed by a soulful ensemble cast. (*Lynn Redgrave*, 45 Bleecker St. 866-811-4111.)

**Wakey, Wakey**

Immediately upon waking from a face-down nap on a floor cluttered with cardboard boxes, a dying man (Michael Emerson) delivers a long, wry, discursive monologue to the audience, with the aid of a disorganized array of media: audio tones, YouTube videos, note cards. Topics include screaming animals and the iron content of figs, and, despite his deliberate lack of focus, he makes for engaging and funny company. Eventually, he is joined by Lisa (January LaVoy), who seems to throw him off his game; he continues, but it is as if her arrival has caused the fourth wall to go up. These theatrical games come courtesy of the writer and director Will Eno ("The Realistic Joneses"), and for a long while his script's perfect unpredictability is thrilling. But, as the protagonist's energy flags, so does the show's. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

## ALSO NOTABLE

**Bull in a China Shop** Claire Tow. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **Evening at the Talk House** Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through March 12.* • **How to Transcend a Happy Marriage** Mitzi E. Newhouse. • **If I Forget** Laura Pels. • **Jitney** Samuel J. Friedman. *Through March 12.* • **Joan of Arc: Into the Fire** Public. • **Kid Victory** Vineyard. • **Man from Nebraska** Second Stage. • **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. • **The Object Lesson** New York Theatre Workshop. • **The Present** Ethel Barrymore. • **The Price** American Airlines Theatre. • **The Skin of Our Teeth** Polonsky Shakespeare Center. • **Sunday in the Park with George** Hudson. • **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. • **Sweat** Studio 54. • **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **War Paint** Nederlander.



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From top to bottom: Kevin Jerome Everson, still from *Ears, Nose and Throat*, 2016. 16mm film transferred to high-definition video, color, sound; 10:30 min. Courtesy the artist; Trilobite-Arts DAC, Charlottesville, VA; and Picture Palace Pictures, New York; Postcommodity, still from *A Very Long Line*, 2016. Four-channel digital video, color, sound, looped. Collection of the artists; courtesy the artists; Shara Hughes, *In The Clear*, 2016. Oil, acrylic and dye on canvas. Collection of the artist; courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner, New York

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## ART



MOMA surveys the four-decade career of Louise Lawler, the witty and gimlet-eyed American artist.

### Spring Preview

THE WHITNEY HAS been on a critical roll since it relocated, in 2015. Will the hot streak continue with its first **Bien-nial** in the meatpacking district? The show's sixty-three artists are a multifarious lot, from the New Mexico-based upstart known as Puppies Puppies and the local activists in Occupy Museums to the painters Tala Madani, who was born in Tehran and works in L.A., and Jo Baer, an octogenarian American expat in Amsterdam. Opens March 16.

**"Age of Empires: Chinese Art of the Han Dynasties (220 B.C.-A.D. 22),"** at the Met, includes more than a hundred and sixty objects—paintings, calligraphy, metalwork, textiles—many of them never before seen in the West. Think of the life-size terra-cotta soldiers that open the show as crusaders for the N.E.A., without whose support the blockbuster might not have been possible. Opens April 3.

Can art assume consciousness? The New York-based phenom **Ian Cheng** has described his digital simulations as "video games that play themselves." In Cheng's "Emissary" trilogy, the centerpiece of his upcoming show at MOMA PS1, Shiba Inus, shamans, and artificial intelligences traverse millenia in a landscape that evolves from volcanic dystopia to verdant lake. Opens April 9.

Art tethered to politics has come to feel more urgent than ever in recent months, and the timing couldn't be better for the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition **"We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85,"** the first major museum show to focus on second-wave-feminist art works by women of color. Opens April 21.

**Lynette Yiadom-Boakye** is a painter of prodigious gifts. Her portraits of black figures, which can suggest a close study of Manet, are often seen as political. It's an inflection that the Ghanaian-British artist acknowledges, while pointing out that her "starting point is always the language of painting itself." The New Museum presents a mid-career survey, opening May 3.

The American photographer Louise Lawler may be the wittiest and most gimlet-eyed member of the Pictures Generation, revered for her matchless photographs of the secret life of art, as it cycles through gallery back rooms, collectors' homes, and museum installations. MOMA surveys her forty-year oeuvre in **"Louise Lawler: Why Pictures Now."** Don't miss "Bird Calls" (1972/81), a sound piece installed in the museum's garden, in which Lawler is heard warbling the names of famous male artists, hilariously skewering the dearth of women in art history's annals. Opens April 30.

—Andrea K. Scott

ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH MAZZETTI



## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**Metropolitan Museum****"Seurat's Circus Sideshow"**

The Pointillist's mysterious nighttime depiction of a circus troupe performing in a working-class district of Paris, from 1878-88, received little attention when it was first shown. But the medium-sized canvas, the first of Seurat's major circus works, went on to be hailed as a muted precursor to Fauvist flamboyance. Its curiously symmetrical composition has a flattening effect. Depth is established through light: a slender trombonist glows, center stage, above the silhouetted heads of the audience. The exhibition illustrates the incubation of Seurat's stylized scene, displaying his velvety black Conté-crayon studies of clowns and musicians alongside his peer Fernand Pelez's much flashier circus scene "Grimaces and Misery—the Saltimbanques," which is powerfully schmalzy in its rendering of overworked entertainers onstage, from anguished child acrobats to wizened orchestra players. Seurat's cultural commentary is, in contrast, almost aloof—the up-close allure of his dotted surfaces is a savvy foil to big-picture observations of modern life. *Through May 29.*

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

**Harvey Quaytman**

The New York artist, who died in 2002, at the age of sixty-five, both surfed and bucked the tides of Minimalism and formalist abstraction with geometric éclat and a seductive touch, often on eccentrically shaped canvases. Nine works, circa 1983-90, brandish Quaytman's rangy inventiveness: no two are quite alike. The hard-edged motifs run to cruciforms and oblongs, variously textured with brushwork, crushed glass, and powdered rust. Whiffs of Malevich and Mondrian are unabashed and collegial, invoking a tradition whose supposed obsolescence Quaytman made it his mission to debunk. *Through April 28.* (Van Doren Waxter, 23 E. 73rd St. 212-445-0444.)

**Weegee**

This show of several dozen images by Arthur (Weegee) Fellig, most of them from the nineteen-forties, includes some film-noir-style wonders: a murder victim, face down in blood on the sidewalk; an aerial view of a electrocuted man lying in a rail yard. An image of enthralled schoolchildren is dryly titled, with seen-it-all humor, "Their First Murder." But there are more tender pictures, too, including one of zookeepers asleep on bare mattresses, under the watchful eyes of giraffes in a pen. It becomes clear that Weegee's crowd-pleasing prowess derived from his own glee in observing the crowd, as seen in a grid of nine diverse but uniformly rapt onlookers, their eyes all trained on a fire. *Through April 1.* (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

**Monica Bonvicini**

The aggressively enigmatic works of the Italian artist suggest a lot and explain little, beyond dropped hints of erotic and political discontent. Walls are shimmed up on small glass cock-and-balls sculptures. Clustered men's belts assume a testicular shape. Fragmented syllables in white neon, on an aluminum rack, instruct "No more masturbation," but don't say why. In a grainy photographic mural, workmen do something incomprehensible to a grimy brick wall. Scores of white L.E.D. tubes hang horizontally in tangles of wire. What's it all about? Your call. *Through April 1.* (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

**Austin Thomas**

A luminous suite of small monoprints hangs, salon style, in a corner painted pink for the occasion. Looking at the overlapping shapes in translucent colors feels a bit like listening in as the artist hums happily to herself. Thomas made the prints using craft foam and templates she borrowed from a metalwork shop; the results have an improvisational buoyancy. In one piece, a black semi-ellipse (made from a template used to shape ducts) sails vertically across magenta, orange, and pale-blue circles, tipping back slightly, as if reeling from the force of their current. *Through March 25.* (Morgan Lehman, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-268-6699.)

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**"Conspiracies Are Things"**

The curator Xavier Acarin makes conspiracies seem distressingly charming in this well-chosen if somewhat literal selection of sculptures and prints. Nick Doyle's L.E.D. portal of concentric circles draws its inspiration from Looney Tunes, while Deville Cohen's "sculptural excerpts" of an elaborate musical-theatre piece he recently staged in Germany are delightfully absurd wooden contraptions adorned with body hair, wax, and a little electric roller-coaster. The highlight is a trio of sculptures by Sarah Anderson, whose precariously balanced constructions of light bulbs, jave-lins, and fragments of some of her previous works suggest traps devised by an aesthete-survivalist. *Through March 19.* (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

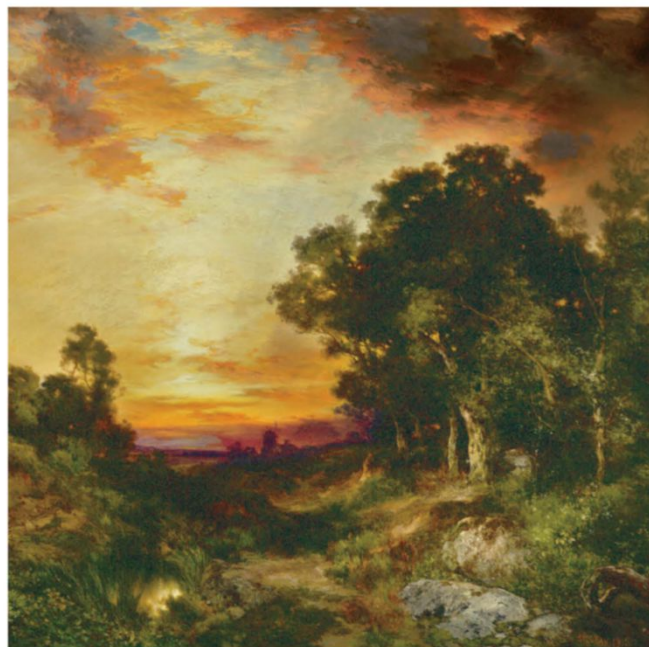
**"Knock on Effect"**

In this enigmatic two-person exhibition, modest materials toy with perception. A stylized wave by Corinne Jones, cut from blue-lined writing paper, bisects the front window, while a speckled black one, made from vinyl tiles, snakes across the floor and up a wall. Jones's mischievous architectural interventions complement Anne Eastman's intimate sculptures, composed of mirrors, glass, and scraps of paper torn from the *Times*. In cleverly layered wall-mounted works (and one larger piece displayed on a table), galling news from the past several months gives way to found poetry, as the versos of the headlines are reflected in mirrors. *Through March 26.* (Situations, 127 Henry St. [situations.us](http://situations.us).)

## GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

**"Pre"**

This six-person group show offers a post-election reading of works that predate the Trump Presidency, including four sculpturally crumpled, wall-mounted American flags, by China Adams, and a pussy-hat-pink portrait of Lindsay Lohan, by Scott Hug. The most head-scratching of the works are Palma Blank's trippy moiré-pattern paintings; the most persuasive are resin replicas of panhandler-style cardboard signs, by the Mexican-American artist Alejandro Diaz, which read "Emotionally Moving Sale" and "Will Work Forever." Used as props in the artist's past performance works, they take on a bitter new relevance here. *Through March 16.* (Black Ball Projects, 374 Bedford Ave. [blackballprojects.com](http://blackballprojects.com).)



## BE UNCOOL

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Thomas Moran (1837–1926)  
*Sunset, Amagansett, 1905 (detail)*

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J.M.W. Turner, *Harbor of Dieppe: Changement de Domicile* (detail), exhibited 1825, oil on canvas, The Frick Collection, New York; photo: Michael Bodycomb

This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

## DANCE



New York City Ballet's season includes Alexei Ratmanský's "Namouna, a Grand Divertissement."

### Spring Preview

OPERA AND DANCE have a long history as bedfellows, though since the late nineteenth century they have been more or less estranged. From time to time, however, the choreographer Mark Morris has orchestrated a rapprochement. Two such examples appear on a double bill with the Mark Morris Music Ensemble at BAM, March 15-19. In "Dido and Aeneas," by Henry Purcell, the more dancey of the two, the mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe sings from the pit about the grief of the Queen of Carthage and the trickery of her mortal enemy, a saucy sorceress. Onstage, the dancer Laurel Lynch, of the **Mark Morris Dance Group**, embodies both characters, ricocheting between dignity and raunchiness. There are no actual dancers in Morris's staging of Benjamin Britten's Noh-inspired "Curlew River," but that doesn't mean there is no choreography. Rather, it's the singers who move, barefoot, evoking religious processions, a beating heart, and a ship at full sail.

Thank goodness for the French, who have always appreciated the works of Merce Cunningham, sometimes more than his own countrymen. Now, almost a decade after his death, they are doing their part to preserve his legacy. On April 4-9, the Angers-based **Compagnie CNDC**—led by the longtime Cunningham dancer Robert Swinston—presents a triple bill at the Joyce which includes

two early works, "Place" and "How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run," both from the sixties, the decade that put Cunningham on the map. "Place" is like a surrealistic, slightly dystopian dream, while "How to Pass," set to a series of pithy stories by John Cage, is Cunningham at his most playful. Both dances are driven by the bracing energy that characterizes most of Cunningham's works.

A program of new and recent ballets during **New York City Ballet's** spring season (April 18-May 28, at the David H. Koch Theatre) is the occasion for the return of two of Alexei Ratmanský's most striking and stylish works: "Namouna, a Grand Divertissement," from 2010, and "Russian Seasons," from 2008. "Namouna" is funny and weird, like a French nineteenth-century adventure fantasy, but without a story, set to sumptuous music by Édouard Lalo and filled with eccentric solos and raucous ensemble numbers. "Russian Seasons" is an enigmatic suite of folktale-like vignettes set to a song cycle by the contemporary Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov. (He also provided the music for a new Ratmanský ballet that will open on May 4.) Another program spotlights the young Justin Peck, whose recent premiere "The Times Are Racing" revealed a heretofore unseen rough-and-tumble style. His new ballet, opening May 12, is set to a score by the alt-rockers Sufjan Stevens.

—Marina Harss



**Sydney Dance Company**

Since the Barcelona-born choreographer Rafael Bonachela took over as artistic director, in 2009, this venerable Australian troupe has become indistinguishable from many other purveyors of fashionable European styles. In its current program of New York premieres, Jacopo Godani's "Raw Models" is the worst offender: mannered sinuosity set to a maddening electronic soundtrack. Bonachela's "Frame of Mind," a quick-changing and physically demanding piece set to Bryce Dessner music, is more palatable, as is "Wildebeest," a slightly more original take on the animal nature of humans, by the Australian choreographer Gabrielle Nankivell. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 7-12.*)

**Paul Taylor American Modern Dance**

Once again, the company floods Lincoln Center with its extensive repertory, the fruit of Taylor's six-decade-long career. The season includes two new works by Taylor, both produced in the past year. One of them, "The Open Door," is set to selections from Edward Elgar's "Enigma Variations," which echoes the dance's underlying structure: a series of portraits of a close-knit group of friends. (The excellent Michael Novak is the central figure.) Two older pieces, "Lost, Found, and Lost" and "Ab Ovo Usque Ad Mala (From Soup to Nuts)" have resurfaced—the latter hasn't been performed in New York since 1988. (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. March 7-12 and March 14. Through March 26.*)

**Richard Move / MoveOpolis!**

More than twenty years ago, Move gained fame for his sincere, affectionately comic impersonation of Martha Graham. The tall man puts on the chignon

and the little voice once again, for this program, which opens the "Live Ideas 2017: Mx'd Messages" festival, curated by Justin Vivian Bond as an escape from binary thinking. It kicks off with the premiere of Move's "XXYY," an exploration of gender as a spectrum, with elaborate and outrageous costumes by Alba Clemente and text borrowed from Earl Lind's early-twentieth-century transgender memoir, "Autobiography of an Androgyne." (*New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 8-11.*)

**Flamenco Festival 2017**

This year's festival, smaller and simpler than recent iterations, leans on the tried-and-true with three gala-style evenings. The lineup is promising: the seasoned showmanship of Juana Amaya, the pulse-raising pyrotechnics of Jesús Carmona, the contemporary-feeling smolder of Olga Pericet, and the blossoming charisma of the up-and-comer Patricia Guerrero. On Sunday, Pericet presents one performance of her own show, "Pisadas" ("Footsteps"), a mix of tradition and innovation with a feminist slant. (*City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 9-12.*)

**Harkness Dance Festival / Jessica Lang Dance**

This mini-retrospective looks back as far as 2008, to Lang's "Solo Bach," a virtuosic and bubbly male solo set to Bach's third violin partita. Her more recent "Thousand-Yard Stare" is a meditation on post-traumatic stress and mourning, accompanied by one of Beethoven's late quartets. Another work, "Sweet Silent Thought," uses Shakespeare sonnets as a setting for duets reflecting on the nature of love. (*92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 10-11.*)

## ABOVE & BEYOND

**Antiquarian Book Fair**

The Park Avenue Armory gathers more than two hundred American and international dealers for the fifty-seventh annual New York Antiquarian Book Fair, a four-day meet-up for lovers of rare books, maps, manuscripts, and other ephemera, covering subjects including art, medicine, literature, and photography. Veteran collectors await this fair, which attracts a sizable number of titles from European dealers, because, as the former Grolier Club president Eugene Flamm says, "it's twice as far for them to go out to California." (*Park Ave. at 66th St. 212-616-3930. March 9-12.*)

**AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES**

At **Sotheby's**, Asia Week begins with a selection of South Asian (mainly Indian) art—not Mughal miniatures or medieval sculptures but modern and contemporary works (March 14). The paintings section is led by a Romantic scene by the influential late-nineteenth-century painter Raja Ravi Varma ("Untitled—Damayanti"), inspired by a story from the Sanskrit epic "Nala and Damayanti." On the same day, the house holds a sale of Ming porcelain, and a larger auction of Chinese art. (For a full accounting of events around town, see [asiaweekny.com](http://asiaweekny.com).) (*York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.*) • **Christie's** also jumps in on March 14, with an auction of Chinese paintings, dating from the fourteenth century to the twenty-first. Land-

scapes predominate, but one of the top lots is a portrait of Li Tieguai, one of the Eight Immortals of the Taoist pantheon, depicted in a whimsical, almost cartoonish style by the late-nineteenth-century painter Qi Baishi. Later, the house turns to Himalayan and South Asian art, mainly statues, including a striking black stone (phyllite) figure from the twelfth century. In this roughly five-foot-tall statue from Northern India, the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara sits in graceful repose on a seat bedecked with flower buds, one leg dangling beneath him. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*)

**READINGS AND TALKS****Rizzoli Bookstore**

The author James Crawford examines the ethnographic imprint left by several famous landmarks in "Fallen Glory: The Lives and Deaths of History's Greatest Buildings," now in U.S. publication after arriving in the U.K. in 2015. Each chapter focusses on a construction and uses public records to draw out historical context, spanning architectural marvels from Mesopotamia to New York. Crawford even makes the case that GeoCities, Yahoo's now shuttered Web-hosting service, could be thought of as a work of digital architecture that anticipated the shape of the modern Internet. (*1133 Broadway. 212-759-2424. March 13 at 6.*)

**NOW IN PREVIEWS**

# How to transcend a happy marriage

by  
**Sarah Ruhl**

directed by  
**Rebecca Taichman**



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# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Dokebi Bar & Grill

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IN KOREAN MYTHOLOGY, *dokebi* are spirits with supernatural powers which are prone to pranks and unpredictable feats, like conjuring feasts from land and sea. According to legend, the impish goblins like to materialize in dark, humid corners, mostly after dusk, and sometimes when the air moistens with rain. That a wayward *dokebi* should choose to haunt a serene block in Williamsburg, and serve variegated, sprightly Korean fare, exemplifies the spirit's enduring mischief and its shape-shifting culinary offerings.

Dokebi also happens to be the childhood nickname of Chul Kim, the banker turned restaurateur who owns Dokebi Bar & Grill. Kim grew up frequenting Korean eateries in Flushing, establishments where you “shovel it in and are shoved out,” and he wondered what it would be like if some of his favorite food came with wine pairings and a beer selection beyond Obi and Bud Light. Another thought: “What if Elvis Costello and the Cure played in the background, instead of, like, the sound of dishes clattering?”

The result is a thoughtful, health-conscious menu that does not so much forsake tradition as refurbish it, with modern fixings. Typically, the beef used for Korean barbecue is marinated for as

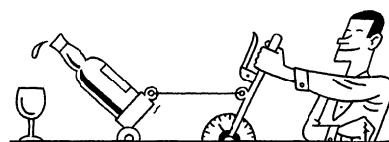
long as twenty-four hours, but at Dokebi Kim dips the pieces for only two minutes, to maintain the integrity of the meat. The house sauce is made not with the usual processed sugar but with a blend of kiwi, pineapple, and orange juice. Kim makes his own kimchi at a factory in Greenpoint, also served here as part of the *banchan*. M.S.G. and chemical preservatives will not touch your food.

On a drizzly night, a trio of friends sat down on maple-wood seats hand-built to resemble those in the courtyards of traditional Korean homes. Over yuzu cocktails, the group began grilling slices of crimson *kalbi* (Angus off-the-bone short ribs) and sashimi-grade tuna, an addition that Kim made to accommodate pescatarians. An amiable waitress instructed the crew to cook “everything until there’s no slimy meat juice”: wise counsel that a barbecue novice took to heart, bravely wielding the tongs until the meat was pink at its center.

Next up were Korean tacos, ranging from spicy fish to pork shoulder to tofu. All arrived on corn tortillas (instead of flour, for gluten-free diners), plumped with bean sprouts, lettuce, and radish. The unanimous favorite dish? *Samgyeopsal*, braised grass-fed Berkshire pork belly that crisps into golden hunks and melts on the tongue like a good dirty joke told by a *dokebi*: a touch naughty but indisputably satisfying. (Dishes \$14–\$30.)

—Jiayang Fan

## BAR TAB



### The Diamond

43 Franklin St., Brooklyn (718-383-5030)

Tucked away in Greenpoint, a couple of blocks from the East River, is the Diamond, which curates its calendar as carefully as its beer list. The mix of high-end brews on tap includes Brooklyn’s ubiquitous I.P.A.s, a tangy Trappist pint, and a dry, malty Pilsner. It’s a neighborhood joint, with a curved mahogany bar and a shuffleboard table, complete with an abacus to tally scores, open to ironic, boozy competition. (“No Yelling/Screaming During Play,” a sign advises, though on a recent visit that rule wasn’t strictly enforced.) But what inspires fierce loyalty to the Diamond is its persistent staccato of events: slot-car races on a brand-new racetrack; three-dollar-buy-in, winner-takes-all Mario Kart tournaments; a film festival on Tuesdays, which syncs movies like “The Dark Crystal” with “alternative soundtracks . . . discovered by stoners.” A political affiliation aligned with that of the neighborhood shows through, too: a disaster-movie series followed the Inauguration, and an Oscars-viewing party offered a chance for patrons to see Meryl Streep “before Dark Lord Cheeto bans her from the silver screen forever.” But there’s also an unencumbered streak of pure joy in oddity. On New Year’s Eve, there was free champagne and passionate, tipsy karaoke; in the back yard, in a decommissioned ski gondola, the Lutheran pastor Amy Kienzle offered free solace. Amid lit candles, behind a white curtain, the pastor bestowed words of forgiveness. “Some people stay in there for twenty, twenty-five minutes,” a bar employee taking a cigarette break remarked. “I guess they have a lot on their minds.”—Talia Lavín



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A close-up portrait of Aladdin, played by Navid Negadani, smiling and holding the magic lamp. He is wearing his signature blue and gold patterned robe. The background is a soft, warm glow.

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# washington DC



## START YOUR **SPRING FLING** IN DC

Whether you're planning a spontaneous getaway or family vacation flush with free things to do (see: museums, monuments and memorials), Washington, DC is full of possibilities this spring.





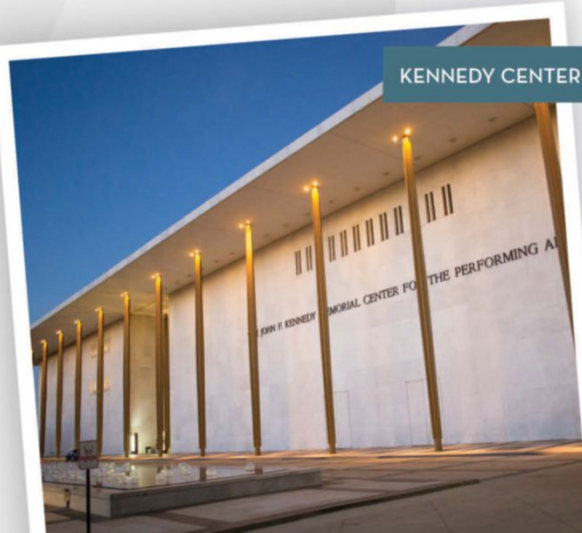
TIDAL BASIN

## CATCH THE BLOSSOMS

Experience the cherry blossoms during the **National Cherry Blossom Festival (March 20 to April 16)**, from the **Opening Ceremony (March 25)** to the event-capping **Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival (April 15)** with live music, kid-friendly activities and on-site food trucks. The lively **Blossom Kite Festival (April 1)** turns the Washington Monument grounds into a mesmerizing spectacle, on par with the vivid floats and balloons of the **National Cherry Blossom Festival Parade (April 8)** on Constitution Avenue. And fill up at foodie hub Union Market for **Cherry Blast (April 14)**, a night market with good vibes, Asian foods and artisan vendors.

## CELEBRATE THE JFK CENTENNIAL

Honor America's 35th president 100 years after his birth with special performances and programming at the **John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**. Highlights include **Washington National Opera's *Champion* (March 4-18)**, the real-life story of a closeted gay boxer; ***SHIFT* (March 27 - April 1)** featuring American orchestras; **The Washington Ballet's *Tudor, Ashton, World Premiere* (May 25-27)**; and a special **Kennedy Center Open House (May 27)**. The **Smithsonian American Art Museum** examines JFK's legacy through photojournalism in ***American Visionary: John F. Kennedy's Life and Times* (May 3 - Sept. 17)**. Finally, pay your respects at the John F. Kennedy Eternal Flame in **Arlington National Cemetery**.



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John F. Kennedy, Photo © Philippe Halsman, Magnum Photos





YAYOI KUSAMA:  
INFINITY MIRRORS

## SPRING EVENTS, EXHIBITS AND PERFORMANCES

### 'YAYOI KUSAMA: INFINITY MIRRORS'

Feb. 23 - May 14

Immerse yourself in jaw-dropping mirror rooms and kaleidoscopic paintings at this highly anticipated **Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden** exhibition.

### 'RAGTIME'

March 10 - May 20

Head to historic **Ford's Theatre** and catch this Tony-winning musical based on a classic E.L. Doctorow novel.

### 'JUNE SCHWARCZ: INVENTION AND VARIATION'

March 10 - Aug. 27

Admire abstract and modern enamel works at the **Renwick Gallery**, located just steps away from the White House.

### 'A RAISIN IN THE SUN'

March 31 - May 7

"The play that changed American theater forever," according to the *New York Times*, makes its debut at **Arena Stage**, a theater dedicated to American plays and artists.

### WASHINGTON NATIONALS BASEBALL

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Bryce Harper, Max Scherzer and Trea Turner look to propel MLB's **Washington Nationals** to another National League East championship starting on **Opening Day (April 3)**.



PASSPORT DC

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### INVENTING UTAMARO: A JAPANESE MASTERPIECE REDISCOVERED'

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### 'FRÉDÉRIC BAZILLE AND THE BIRTH OF IMPRESSIONISM'

April 9 - July 9

The **National Gallery of Art** delves into the beginnings of one of the most popular art movements of all time through the work of Bazille, a contemporary of Monet and Renoir.

### PASSPORT DC

May 1-31

This month-long celebration of international cultures offers two embassy open houses: the **Around the World Embassy Tour (May 6)** and **Shortcut to Europe (May 13)**.

### DC BIKE RIDE

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## RAGTIME

★THE MUSICAL★

book by Terrence McNally; music by Stephen Flaherty;  
lyrics by Lynn Ahrens; based on the novel *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow;  
music direction by Christopher Youstra  
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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT A STATE AWAY

WE'RE FAMILIAR WITH the contours of the story: fifty-five delegates gathered in Philadelphia, in the sweltering summer of 1787, to do something about the inert Articles of Confederation. Having recognized that the old agreement was fatally flawed—it had no provisions for unitary foreign or tax policies, or for a national defense—the delegates set about creating a four-and-a-half-thousand-word lattice of compromises and counterbalances that has, with the notable exception of the years 1861 through 1865, cemented the union of the United States. The Constitutional Convention has become a sacrosanct chapter in American history, which is not to say that it has lacked an abundance of critics. In 1913, the historian Charles Beard dismissed the whole affair as a gathering of wealthy men, almost half of them slaveholders, scheming to preserve and enhance their economic power. Not so long ago, the late political scientist Robert A. Dahl and the legal scholar Sanford Levinson asked whether the constitution they produced was even properly democratic. But seldom have critics so thoroughly disdained the events in Philadelphia as to call for a do-over. Until recently.

Amid the stunning Presidential-election results last November, a smaller, though perhaps equally consequential, development went relatively unnoticed: the Republican Party now controls thirty-three state legislatures. On its face, this development demonstrates the discrepancies between the Democratic and Republican farm teams. Not only does the G.O.P. control the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives; it has created a pipeline of candidates to fill those offices for the foreseeable future. But there are more immediate implications.

Article V of the Constitution provides for amendments to the document when a proposed change has been approved by two-thirds of each chamber of Congress and is subsequently ratified by three-fourths of the states. In 1995,

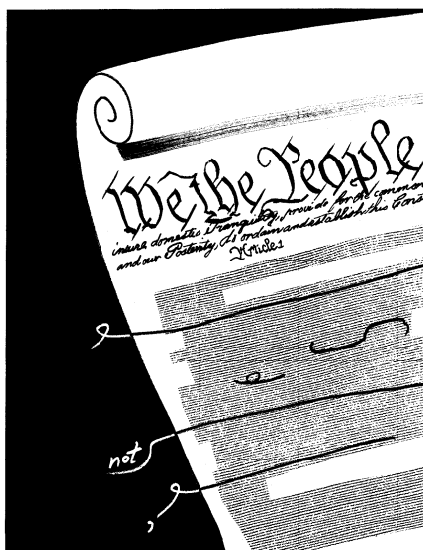
under the leadership of Newt Gingrich, House Republicans alarmed by the federal debt approved an amendment that would have effectively barred the federal government from adopting a budget in which expenditures exceeded revenues. That was a bad idea—deficit spending is a tested way to stimulate a sluggish economy. The amendment stalled in the Senate, where it fell just short of the sixty-seven votes required for it to be submitted to the states.

In the years since, a balanced-budget amendment—unlike faddish anti-flag-burning and defense-of-marriage amendments—has remained a lodestar of G.O.P. aspiration. In January, Senators Chuck Grassley, of Iowa, and Mike Lee, of Utah, introduced a new one. In the current Senate, it is likely to meet the same fate as Gingrich's. Even so, a balanced-budget amendment is not completely out of the question, owing to the fact that it is high on the agenda of many statehouse Republicans. That is where the state-level results of the November elections come into play.

Article V allows an alternative method of proposing constitutional amendments, which cuts Congress out entirely: two-thirds of the state legislatures can call for a constitutional convention. To be in a position to do this, the G.O.P.

needs to gain control of just one more statehouse, which could happen as soon as next year. (Last year, the *Times* reported that twenty-eight states had already adopted resolutions calling for a constitutional convention on a balanced-budget amendment, an effort supported by the American Legislative Exchange Council, which is funded by the Koch brothers, among others.) So far, this route to an amendment has not succeeded, but of late we are exploring a lot of novel territory in American democracy. And, as the events of 1787 show, these things have a way of taking on a life of their own.

The original Constitutional Convention was intended only to recommend





changes to the Articles of Confederation, not to do away with them, but the delegates literally took the law into their own hands and drafted a new document. It's easy to imagine that an Article V convention would find it difficult to limit its agenda to the technicalities of budget finance. Abortion, the most divisive social issue of the past forty years, has insinuated itself into nearly every discussion of nominees for the Supreme Court. Could a gathering intoxicated by the possibility of imposing permanent change resist the urge to achieve by amendment what decades of lobbying, protesting, and the cultivation of sympathetic judicial candidates could not? Similarly, as the battle over immigration has intensified, conservatives have toyed with the idea of ending birthright citizenship, currently guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The allure of bypassing legislative stalemate on that issue might also prove tempting.

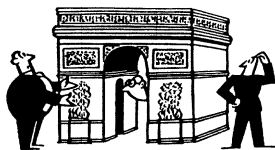
This sort of partisanship is precisely what the framers tried to avoid. The principle is that an idea should have demonstrated broad and transparent appeal before it is adopted into the framework of the republic. Since the ratification of the Bill of Rights, there have been five attempts to amend the Constitution that achieved congressional approval but failed to win ratification. With the exception of a proposed amendment to treat the District of Columbia as a state in matters legislative and electoral, the causes that

these amendments expressed found some fulfillment through the legislative process (as with the eradication of child labor and the protection of equal rights for women), or aged out (such as a proposed prohibition from accepting titles of nobility from foreign powers), or proved wildly wrongheaded (such as the Corwin Amendment, of 1861, which would have curtailed any congressional attempt to end slavery). This would seem to suggest that most causes worthy of legitimacy can obtain it without the Constitution's being amended; if the logic of a federal balanced budget were so compelling, it would have met with a greater degree of success legislatively.

Any proposed change to the Constitution would still require ratification by three-fourths of the states, but the mere theatre of a constitutional convention would be damaging to the nation. The last time a single party was dominant enough to amend the Constitution, the Republicans passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, which were ratified by the states; eleven had seceded and later came under Reconstruction governments. That was a very different Republican Party in a very different era, but even that process was fraught. However deep our partisan trenches may have become, we are not currently at war with ourselves. The convention scheme is less about responsibility than about the prerogatives of power.

—*Jelani Cobb*

## WHO'S ON FIRST DEPT. UNLUCKY JIM



DONALD TRUMP HAS a friend named Jim, “a very, very substantial guy.” We don’t know much else about Jim, except that, as Trump recently told a crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference, “he loves the City of Lights, he loves Paris. For years, every year during the summer, he would go to Paris. It was automatic with his wife and his family. Hadn’t seen him in a while. And I said, ‘Jim, let me ask you a question: How’s Paris doing?’ ‘Paris? I don’t go there anymore. Paris is no longer Paris.’”

Trump can remind you of Jane Austen’s Mrs. Bennet. For all his talk of fake news, he seems to get a decent amount of information over whatever the Fifth Avenue equivalent is of the garden fence. A man of few intimates, he often cites acquaintances: his “many fabulous friends who happen to be gay” (he went on to say that he opposed both same-sex marriage and long putters, because he’s a tra-

ditionalist); “the very famous German golfer Bernhard Langer,” who he said told him he’d witnessed voter fraud at his local polling station. (Langer’s daughter told the *Times*, “He is not a friend of President Trump’s, and I don’t know why he would talk about him.”) And so, in an attempt to suss out the source of inspiration for Trump’s latest foray into European diplomacy, a search was undertaken for his formerly Francophilic friend Jim.

Trump doesn’t follow any Jims on Twitter. But it’s easy to find Jims with whom he’s crossed paths. Jim Kelly, formerly of the Buffalo Bills? “No, that would not be Jim Kelly,” a representative said. Jim Dolan, the C.E.O. of Cablevision and the chairman of Madison Square Garden, who lent Trump the Rockettes for his inaugural concert? “That’s not him,” his spokesperson responded. Jim Furyk, the golfer? “Not him,” according to his agent. Jim Davis, the footwear mogul, whose support for Trump prompted a hate Web site to declare New Balance “the Official Shoes of White People”? “No, it is not Jim Davis,” a company P.R. manager replied. Jim Inhofe, the senator and climate-change denier, did not respond;

neither did Jim McNerney, the former Boeing executive, who is part of the President’s Kitchen Cabinet. Jim Mattis, the “Warrior Monk” general, doesn’t have a wife. James Comey—does anybody know if he goes by Jim?

Jim, from Trump’s description, sounds old, settled, rich. His Paris, one imagines, spanned from Cartier to L’Ami Louis. But he didn’t ring a bell for observers of the New York–Palm Beach power scene. “I haven’t got a clue as to who Trump’s friend Jim is,” David Patrick Columbia, of *New York Social Diary*, said. “I know a few Juleses but no Jims who fit the bill,” the writer William Norwich said, confessing that he’d been puzzling over Jim’s identity ever since Trump name-checked him. “You really think there is an actual person?” the journalist Kati Marton asked. “Jim is akin to Mexican rapists and Swedish terrorists.”

The Web site of the party photographer Patrick McMullan yielded only two Trump-adjacent Jims: Jim Gold, who has posed next to Melania at charity events and, as the C.E.O. of Neiman Marcus, presumably can’t get away with shunning Paris; and Jim McGreevey, who attended an after-party for the premiere of a movie called “Ira & Abby” at the Viceroy Hotel



in Santa Monica with Trump in 2006, after a sex scandal forced him to resign as governor of New Jersey. “I only wish!” McGreevey, who now runs a reentry program for prisoners in Jersey City, wrote. “The last time I was in Paris was eight years ago, with my then seven-year-old daughter. *Vive la France*, Jim.”

A promising lead: Jim O’Neill, a managing director at Peter Thiel’s investment fund, whom Trump is said to be considering to run the F.D.A. O’Neill did not respond to an e-mail seeking comment, nor did the White House. Or was Jim the same Jim who’s been in Trump’s life since before “The Art of the Deal,” in which he wrote of a college classmate, “a guy with a 180 IQ,” who “couldn’t have sex with his wife” because he was so stressed out about buying a house? (“The only famous person I knew of at Penn was Candice Bergen,” said Jim Ellowitz, Wharton ’68, who didn’t remember any other Jims.)

In a strange Trumpian inversion, Jim the Francophobe was turning out to be the jet-setting counterpart to those vague characters (like Joe the Plumber) with whom politicians have so long stocked their narratives of economic stagnation. Last week, François Hollande, the French President, criticized Trump for his comments, offering to send him or Jim a ticket to Disneyland Paris. Regular Parisians, though, just wanted to know what had happened to ruin Jim’s last trip—whether it was the rain or the new spa at the Ritz or something else. Jim, if you’re out there, *levez-vous, s’il vous plaît*.

—Lauren Collins

## TAKE A JOKE DEPT. HECKLERS FOR HIRE



IN THE UNITED STATES, Bassem Youssef is usually called the Jon Stewart of Egypt. He no longer lives in Egypt, but, he said recently, “I guess the rest of the comparison holds true, because now Jon is off the air, and I’m off the air, too.” Soon after the Tahrir Square uprising, in 2011, Youssef began hosting a satirical news show; it eventually earned the highest-ever ratings

in the country. (In that respect, he was unlike Stewart.) When Mohammed Morsi was elected President, in 2012, Youssef made jokes about Morsi’s party, the Muslim Brotherhood. The next year, an Army general, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, seized power, and Youssef made jokes about the military.

“Religious fundamentalists and military fundamentalists are basically the same,” he said. “They both want to ignore the truth and replace it with propaganda.” When Morsi was in power, Youssef was arrested for insulting the President, insulting Islam, and disturbing the peace. After six hours of questioning, he was let go with a warning. When Sisi took office, Youssef was forced to cancel his show, and decided to leave the country. He now lives in Los Angeles, with his wife and daughter. Last year, he hosted a show on Fusion, a Tocqueville-meets-“Borat” road trip across the U.S.; his memoir, “Revolution for Dummies,” and a documentary about him, “Tickling Giants,” come out this month. “In theory, I can go back to Egypt anytime,” he said. “The only question is whether they would let me leave.”

Youssef was in town for a performance at the French Institute, on Fifty-ninth Street. An hour before showtime, he and his agent, Maha Nagy, huddled with the theatre’s house manager. “We’ve been told that a few of the ticket holders are planning to cause trouble,” Nagy said. “We can point out who we think they are.”

“We’ll definitely have security screen everyone’s bag,” the manager said.

“It’s not about that,” Youssef said. “These people are paid hecklers.”

“They are conservative Egyptians who live here, but they are hired by the Sisi regime to heckle,” Nagy said. “It happens at every show.”

“I can always spot them,” Youssef said. “They’re older than the rest of the crowd, and they all sit in one row wearing baggy suits and not laughing—”

“And then at some point one of them heckles, his friend films it with a cell phone, and they edit the video to make it seem that audiences are rejecting Bassem’s message,” Nagy said.

“Wow,” the manager said. “This is not the kind of thing we usually deal with.”

At curtain time, Youssef asked a se-

curity guard named Kevin Mason to announce that anyone using a cell phone would be ejected. “And look tough when you do it,” he added. Mason, who is six-foot and brawny, is also a comedian, who performs as Big Kev. “I get it,” he said. “I can do a mean mug.” He made the announcement and then stood at the foot of the stage, glaring.

Youssef started his act. He played a video montage: highlights from his TV



Bassem Youssef

show, followed by clips of Egyptian pundits calling him an apostate, a C.I.A. plant, and a spy trained by “the Zionist Jon Stewart.” He warned that, despite the improbable success of the Egyptian revolution—“We managed to overthrow Mubarak after thirty years in office, which, in the Middle East, we just call a first term”—the world is still full of demagogues who can’t take a joke.

Twenty minutes in, a chant went up: “Sisi! Sisi!” It came from a few people sitting in the same row. The women wore hijabs and the men wore baggy suits. “Guys, be quiet and pretend to enjoy the fucking show,” Youssef said, and the audience applauded.

One of the hecklers stood up, pointed a shaking finger at Youssef, and shouted, “Why don’t you show some respect!”

“There will be a Q. and A. at the end,” Youssef said. “Can you wait and curse at me then?”

The heckler kept shouting. A man next to her filmed the scene with his phone.

“O.K., we’ll do it now,” Youssef said. He grabbed a chair and sat down, looking exasperated. “Welcome to my life!” he said.

More interruptions followed. Two and a half hours later, Youssef received a



standing ovation, left the stage, and collapsed on a couch in the greenroom. Mason stood nearby, eying the crowd as they filed out. “I don’t know who this Sisi is, but, man, those people were heated,” he said. “I deal with hecklers, too, as a comedian, but never anything like that.”

—Andrew Marantz

## HOLLYWOOD POSTCARD REPRESENTATION



THREE WEEKS BEFORE the Academy Awards, Jeremy Zimmer, the C.E.O. of United Talent Agency, set about reviewing a guest list for the firm’s annual pre-Oscar party. He paused when he got to the name Asghar Farhadi. The Oscar-winning Iranian director, whom U.T.A. represents, had said that he would not attend this year’s ceremony—where his movie, “The Salesman,” was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film—to protest President Trump’s travel ban. “Suddenly, it all coalesced,” Zimmer said. He fired off an e-mail to the agency’s board of directors, proposing that they scrap the bash and donate the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars allotted for champagne and canapés to the American Civil Liberties Union and the International Rescue Committee. (The agency’s clients and supporters chipped in another seventy thousand dollars online.) Instead of a party, the firm would organize a pro-immigration, pro-free-speech rally for its agents, its clients, and Hollywood at large. “The truth is I just couldn’t take the typical nonsense anymore,” Zimmer said. “It’s, like, Nero’s fiddling and we’re all eating grapes.”

At 3 p.m. on the Friday before the Oscars, hundreds of people milled in the street in front of U.T.A.’s Beverly Hills office. Many held signs, some directed at the President: “Immigrants: We Get the Job Done”; “Dude . . . Your Skin Looks Terrible.” “I’m a talent manager, but I’m a human first,” Andy Corren, whose sign read, “No Es Mi Presidente,” said. Corren is not of Hispanic origin, but he spent Inauguration week on vacation in Oaxaca and participated in a women’s march there. He nodded ap-

provingly at the U.T.A. crowd. “This might be the biggest protest in the history of Beverly Hills,” he said. “Think about it. It’s not a hotbed of activism—unless you count, like, ‘Free Zsa Zsa.’”

The rally had a name, United Voices, and a United Nations of food trucks—Caribbean, Korean, Mexican, Italian—were parked in a line, dispensing free lunch. Timothy Simons, who plays the smarmy White House aide Jonah Ryan on “Veep,” swigged from a bottle of water. “On November 9th, nothing was funny,” he said. “It’s all still terrible, but I feel like I’m able to make jokes about it more.” He was interrupted when DJ Cassidy—he played at Beyoncé and Jay Z’s wedding—bounded onto a stage placed, curiously, beneath the bunny logo of Playboy Enterprises (the agency’s neighbor) and started blasting soul



music. This was followed by an electric-violin rendition of “Everybody Wants to Rule the World.”

“Is this, like, the liberal version of Toby Keith?” a woman wearing a leather jacket asked a friend.

“Let me get this straight,” a gray-haired talent manager said. “The first thirty-five minutes of the rally is a d.j. and a violin?”

Forty minutes in, Keegan-Michael Key took the stage. “Everybody, move up,” he implored, trying to create an impression of critical mass. Jodie Foster elicited wild applause: “It’s time to engage! And, as the very, very dead Frederick Douglass once said, ‘Anytime is a good time for illumination.’” The assemblage, around seventeen hundred at its height, hushed as Michael J. Fox re-

called becoming an American citizen (he was born in Canada). “It took about eight years from start to finish, and I complained,” he said. “Now I think, What was I bitching about?”

The dominant message, as summed up by an attendee in an expensively torn T-shirt: “Social justice is the new sex.” Still, some Hollywood tropes prevailed. “Trump is the new Kardashian,” Perez Hilton declared from the sidelines. “We aren’t talking about *that* whole family like we used to. Now we’re talking about Donald and *his* extended family, including his staffers.”

As the sun sank, some guests seemed a little wistful for the glamorous bashes of years past. A guy in a black hoodie said, “I went to the U.T.A. party last year. It was pretty fun.” Andrew Rannells (“The Book of Mormon,” “Girls”) had his eyes on the flat-screens lining the sidewalk. “It doesn’t really feel like it’s a time to throw big, lavish parties,” he said, “even though those parties *are* wonderful.”

After Farhadi sent his regards via video from Tehran, Jim Berkus, U.T.A.’s chairman, urged everyone to stay put. “We have a great surprise artist to come!” he announced. The musician Ben Harper sauntered onto the stage, sat down, laid a guitar across his lap, and crooned, “They shot him in the back. Now it’s a crime to be black.”

U.T.A. had locked the front door to the office. An agent looked around at the thinning crowd and said, “They want this to stay crowded through the entirety of the event.” Asked if it was nice to have the afternoon off, she replied, “I guarantee, any agents you walk by here are probably still answering their phones.”

—Sheila Marikar

## THE BOARDS FIELD TRIP



MIKAL AMIN LEE, the manager of the Arts & Justice program at BAM—an after-school workshop, in which a group of high-school students examine social-justice issues through performance—selected this year’s theme, immigration, before last year’s election



made it especially timely. “I have a feeling that Donald Trump is going to give us a whole lot of material over the next four years,” he said the other day.

Lee was speaking in a dance studio at BAM’s Fisher theatre, where the nineteen students selected for the program—many come back year after year—had been working in small groups, using songs from their childhoods to create original theatre pieces. Now it was time to walk around the block to the Howard Gilman Opera House, to see “A Man of Good Hope,” a musical that tells the true story of a Somali refugee named Asad Abdullahi, adapted from the book of the same name by Jonny Steinberg and performed by the Isango Ensemble, from South Africa.

The students sat in the rear of the mezzanine, jostling one another. Many of them came from immigrant families, or had immigrated themselves, and were concerned about recent political events. Trump’s travel ban had made the play even more relevant: Somalia is one of the seven countries from which the President has sought to stop all immigration, even of previously approved refugees. “I’m an African-American Muslim,” said Muneerat, a twelfth grader at the Cultural Academy of the Arts and Sciences, who was wearing a hijab. Her parents came to the U.S. from Nigeria. “I’m angry, not scared—I don’t know what to call it,” she went on. “Anything could happen.”

Her classmate Tishell, who is from Trinidad, said that she had been surprised by the election results. “I’m really disappointed in America,” she said. A tenth grader at the iSchool, Eli, observed that Trump had rallied supporters by identifying immigrants as a common enemy. “That’s kind of the Hitler way to do it,” he said. Garl, a twelfth grader from Medgar Evers College Preparatory School, chimed in. “It’s the land of immigrants, who come here to be free,” he said. “If nobody comes here, it’s not the land of the free.”

The lights dimmed, and a child appeared center stage: the eight-year-old Asad Abdullahi, who, in the first few moments of the play, watches militia-men slaughter his mother. Orphaned, he is taken in by Yindy, a female cousin; together, they flee to a refugee camp in Kenya. “What is a refugee?” Asad asks. “A refugee is someone waiting to go



*“So, as you can see, health care is so complicated you may never get well.”*

somewhere else,” Yindy tells him. They are waiting to go to America. “It is always safe in America,” she says, to rueful laughs from the audience. Yindy lists the country’s mythical attributes: there are no guns and no gangs; everyone is rich; America has the biggest trucks in the world.

Yindy gets her papers to leave for the U.S. Asad does not. At twelve, he travels to Ethiopia, where he grows into a young man—now played by an adult actor—and marries. The wedding-night scene, in which it is graphically revealed that his new bride, Foosiya, has been subjected to female circumcision, prompted squeals of horror and whispers among the students. Eventually, Asad pays for passage south through Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe—nearly three thousand miles, to the South African border.

At intermission, the students had lots of observations, cultural and artistic. “We learned about circumcision in boys in human biology, but I didn’t think women had any extra skin down there,” Mahalia, a ninth grader from Acorn Community High School, said, appalled. Ashanae, a twelfth grader from the Cultural Academy of Arts and Sciences, who emigrated from Jamaica three and half years ago, said that she was affected by the moment when Yindy left. “That kind of reminded

me of when my mom went to America to make a better life for us, when I was eight,” she said. Yosef, a tenth grader at Edward R. Murrow High School, noted the raked stage—“It’s like at Shakespeare’s Globe”—and the way in which the music of different African countries had been presented to give a distinct sense of place. “People always lump the whole continent together,” he said.

For the second half, the students moved forward to fill a few empty rows—all wanted to get closer to the drama, as Asad made a new life in a township. Racism, South African style, was explored: Somali immigrants expressed disdain for the locals (“We think of black South African men as teen-agers,” Asad says) and were resented in return (“They steal our jobs; they steal our women”). There were you-go-girl mutterings when Foosiya divorced Asad in absentia.

Finally, Asad, after all the horrors and hardships of his life, receives notification that his immigration application to the U.S. has been approved. “I’ve got the American papers,” he says. (The real Asad Abdullahi lives in Kansas City.) There were pumping fists and quiet utterances of “Yes!” as the students issued a welcome to, and a celebration of, their own homeland, in all its vast, compromised promise.

—Rebecca Mead



LETTER FROM BUFFALO

# A NEW UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

*Refugees who fear deportation by the U.S. are sneaking into Canada.*

BY JAKE HALPERN



*Many refugees crossing the border stop at Vive, a safe house in upstate New York.*

IN THE FALL of 2014, two Afghan police officers, Mohammed Naweed Samimi and Mohammed Yasin Ataye, travelled to America on temporary visas. For five weeks, along with other law-enforcement officers from Afghanistan, they attended lectures on intelligence-gathering techniques at a Drug Enforcement Administration facility in Virginia. One Saturday, the trainees took buses into Washington, D.C., for a day of sightseeing. That evening, they all returned to the buses—except for Samimi and Ataye.

They had contacted an Afghan family in suburban Virginia, who picked them up in Washington and drove them to their house. From there, Samimi and

Ataye took a bus to Buffalo, New York. Their destination was a safe house known as Vive, at 50 Wyoming Avenue, on the east side of the city. At Vive, a staff composed largely of volunteers welcomes asylum seekers from around the world. A dozen or so people show up each day, looking for advice, protection, and a place to sleep.

Vive occupies a former schoolhouse next door to an abandoned neo-Gothic church with boarded-up windows. More than a quarter of the nearby properties are vacant “zombie homes,” and the area contains some of the cheapest real estate in America. Vive residents rarely venture into the neighborhood. A staff member told me, “Agents

from the Border Patrol circle the building all the time.” So far, the schoolhouse has not yet been subjected to a raid, which would require a warrant.

In theory, people who come to Vive could have stayed in their home countries and applied for a visa through the U.S. State Department’s lottery system. But in 2015, out of more than nine million visa applications, fewer than fifty thousand were granted. For people in urgent situations abroad, there is another option: they can simply show up in a safe country and request asylum. Those with money fly directly to the U.S. on tourist visas and, upon arriving, request protection. Poorer migrants stow away on boats, hop on freight trains, and cross deserts. After making their way out of Africa or Asia, they often head to Latin America and then travel overland to the U.S. border. Some hire human traffickers to smuggle them. Many show up at Vive almost penniless.

Of the people who arrived at the schoolhouse last year, roughly ten per cent came from the seven countries included in the Trump Administration’s proposed travel ban. Most arrivals do not intend to stay in the U.S. In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult to win asylum in America, and since 2011 the number of pending asylum requests has grown tenfold; applicants often wait years for an answer, and in the end more than half are rejected. But there’s another option, just four miles due west of Vive’s schoolhouse, across the Niagara River: Canada.

In December, 2015, when a plane filled with Syrian refugees landed in Toronto, Canada’s Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, greeted them at the airport, handing out winter coats. President Donald Trump, meanwhile, has pledged to purge the U.S. of “bad hombres.” Trudeau has been echoing the openness of his father, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who, in 1980, went on television and welcomed Cambodian refugees to Canada. As of 2015, Canada granted asylum to sixty-two per cent of applicants. It also offers far better social services than the U.S. does, including access to education, temporary health services, emergency housing, and legal aid. But to make a claim for asylum in Canada you first have to



get there, and the easiest route is across the U.S. border.

Vive has become the penultimate stop on a modern variant of the Underground Railroad. Vive was founded, in 1984, by nuns, though most of the staff is now secular. More than a hundred thousand refugees, from about a hundred countries, have passed through. Nearly all of them continued on to Canada. Niagara Falls, twenty miles away, was once a major hub on the original Underground Railroad. During the nineteenth century, many fugitive slaves came through the area on the way to sneaking into Canada and winning their freedom. Harriet Tubman led groups across a suspension bridge that spanned the gorge, and some slaves allegedly braved the rapids of the Niagara River, swimming to the other side.

The two Afghan cops, Samimi and Ataye, also had their eyes on Canada. But, shortly after they arrived at Vive, two D.E.A. agents appeared at 50 Wyoming Avenue. They showed photographs of the two runaways to residents who stepped outside. Word spread that the D.E.A. was in the parking lot.

Inside the schoolhouse, one of Vive's staff managers, a young man named Jake Steinmetz, asked Samimi and Ataye some questions. They explained who they were, and said that if they returned to Afghanistan they would be ordered to patrol poppy fields; given their known connections to the U.S. government, they would be in extreme danger.

"I really didn't know what to do," Steinmetz said. On principle, Vive does not turn away people seeking sanctuary, unless they physically threaten other residents. When I asked one staff member if Vive admitted "fugitives," she replied that all asylum seekers were running from someone, or some place. After Steinmetz spoke with Samimi and Ataye, he went home; the next morning, he returned to find that the two men had left for Canada.

U.S. officials apprehended them before they made it to the border. They soon went back to Afghanistan. (I recently contacted Samimi, who said, "I hope to go again to Canada, because my life here is so hard and dangerous.") Steinmetz and the other staff members at Vive barely had time to absorb


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the Afghans' drama; by the end of the day, a new group of asylum seekers had arrived on their doorstep.

THE BATTERED red brick façade of the Vive schoolhouse does not look welcoming, but its doors never close, and a cafeteria in the basement serves three free meals a day. There is a computer room and a nurse's office; upstairs, dormitories can billet a hundred and twenty residents. The accommodations are clean, if rudimentary: creaky wooden floors, clanking radiators, leaky bathrooms, and steel-framed beds. "Bedbugs love wooden beds, so we got rid of them," a volunteer named Tom Lynch, who is a retired Spanish teacher, told me. The heart of the building is the rec room, where residents gather to play pool.

Arriving migrants check in, as if Vive were a motel. They are asked to provide I.D.—a birth certificate, a passport—and to pay for their accommodations. The official cost is a hundred dollars per person per week, but the staff does not eject people if they can't pay. Nor are residents forced to answer questions. "At no point do we ask them what their story is—if they share it, that is completely up to them," one staff member explained.

Vive is a small organization that is funded through grants and donations. It is operated by a skeleton crew of six full-time employees, including two program managers, a receptionist, and three security guards. There are also four part-time employees, including a social worker, and two dozen volunteers. A local lawyer offers counsel to residents. When I first visited Vive, the reception area was full. A volunteer warned new arrivals, "This is a very dangerous neighborhood. Do not ever go out alone. And never go outside at night!" This directive, combined with fear of the U.S. Border Patrol, led some residents to describe Vive to me as a kind of jail.

I introduced myself to a petite woman in her early thirties from Eritrea. She wore sweatpants and a yellow tank top, and was clutching a backpack. "My name is Tita," she told me. She took out her phone and showed me a photograph of her five-year-old son, Eli. He was beaming in a gray three-piece suit and waving his

arms, as if to say, "Look at me!" Tita said, "I have not seen him in four years."

Eritrea has one of the most abusive human-rights records in the world. Tita is a Pentecostal Christian, which is a persecuted minority there. Starting in September of 2008, she was imprisoned for five months. Guards demanded that she renounce her faith or be beaten. Conditions were unsanitary, and Tita became so sick that she was sent to a nearby hospital. Her parents visited her, and, with her father's help, she escaped the hospital and fled to Sudan.

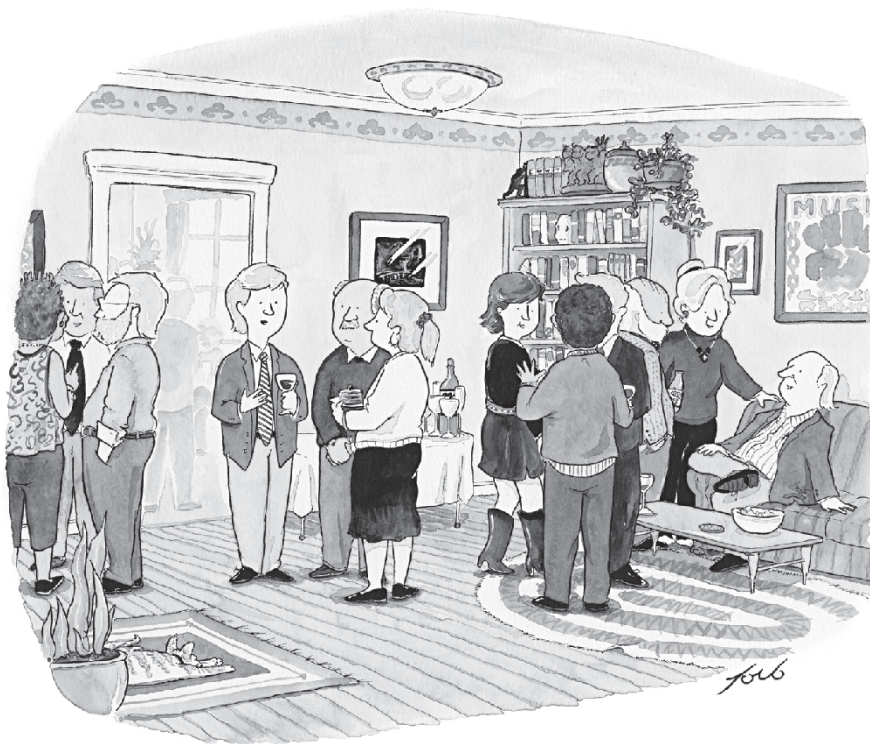
In Sudan, Tita met another Eritrean refugee, named Ya. He found work as a barber, and with some spare money he bought her candy—an extravagant gesture. "He made me feel secure," she told me. They married, but, because the ceremony was only a religious one, it was not legally binding.

After Eli was born, Sudan became increasingly unstable, and Tita was separated from her family. In 2012, Ya and Eli found their way to Canada: a Pentecostal church in Edmonton sponsored them and helped arrange for visas. Tita wanted to join them but couldn't; among other things, she didn't have a visa or enough money to fly to Canada.

Finally, in 2014, Tita's family, including an uncle who lived in Germany, helped her raise fifteen thousand dollars. With the bulk of the money, she hired a human trafficker. Posing as the trafficker's wife, she flew with him to Dubai, then to Brazil—she wasn't sure which city. They continued on to Mexico City, and, finally, to Tijuana, where she presented herself at the U.S. border and asked for asylum. She had no passport, no phone, and no credit cards or bank account—just nine hundred dollars in cash. After spending a month at a federal detention facility, Tita was released on parole and granted a temporary visa. She went to San Diego, where she stayed with a group of Eritreans she had met through contacts in the Pentecostal church. They told her about Vive. She flew to New York City, then on to Buffalo, and arrived at Vive with just three hundred dollars.

At Vive, Tita met with Jake Steinmetz and told him about her husband and son. They were still living in Edmonton but had just flown to Toronto, planning to meet her at the nearest





*"Behold, as I guide our conversation to my narrow area of expertise."*

border crossing, in Fort Erie, Ontario.

Steinmetz explained Canada's asylum process. Until the end of 2004, anyone could request asylum at a border crossing, but that year Canada and the U.S. began enforcing a new treaty, the Safe Third Country Agreement, which requires all refugees to seek asylum in the first country they enter. The stated purpose of the treaty is "promoting the orderly handling of asylum applications." The subtext is this: many applicants were seeking asylum in both countries, which was seen as an unnecessary drain on the countries' resources. The treaty has made migrating from the U.S. to Canada much more difficult. It does make exceptions for several categories of people, including unaccompanied minors and people with an "anchor relative"—an immediate-family member—living in the destination country. Tita therefore could cross the border openly, unlike some Vive residents, but upon arrival she needed to prove that Ya and Eli were her husband and son.

This was a problem. She was not legally married to Ya, and Eli's birth certificate had only her name on it, not Ya's. If she was turned back at the border,

she might be deported to Eritrea. "It's a high-risk case," Steinmetz told her. Because Ya and Eli would be meeting her at the border, officials could interview them, but that presented its own dangers. "It would be one thing if Eli were twelve years old, and you had only been separated for two years, but he is so young," Steinmetz said. "I don't know if he can answer their questions." And what if he didn't seem to recognize her?

"I have Skyped with him recently," Tita said, hopefully. "Eli should recognize me."

Another option was for Tita to present the results of a DNA test, but that would cost at least a thousand dollars—far more than she could afford. She pursed her lips, overwhelmed. After years of separation, she was just an hour's drive away from her son. Steinmetz said that she didn't have to make any decisions immediately. She could stay at Vive while she considered her options.

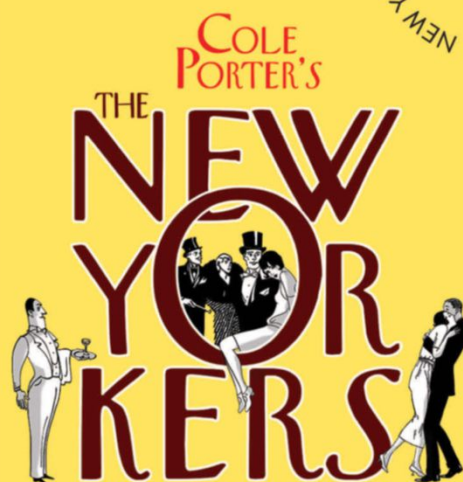
VIVE RESIDENTS MUST attend weekly "house meetings" in the basement cafeteria, which has fluorescent lights that emit a sickly glow. On one wall is a mural of a horse running through a

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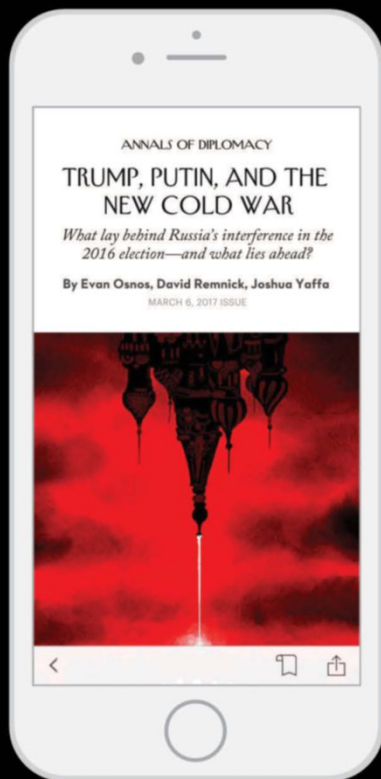
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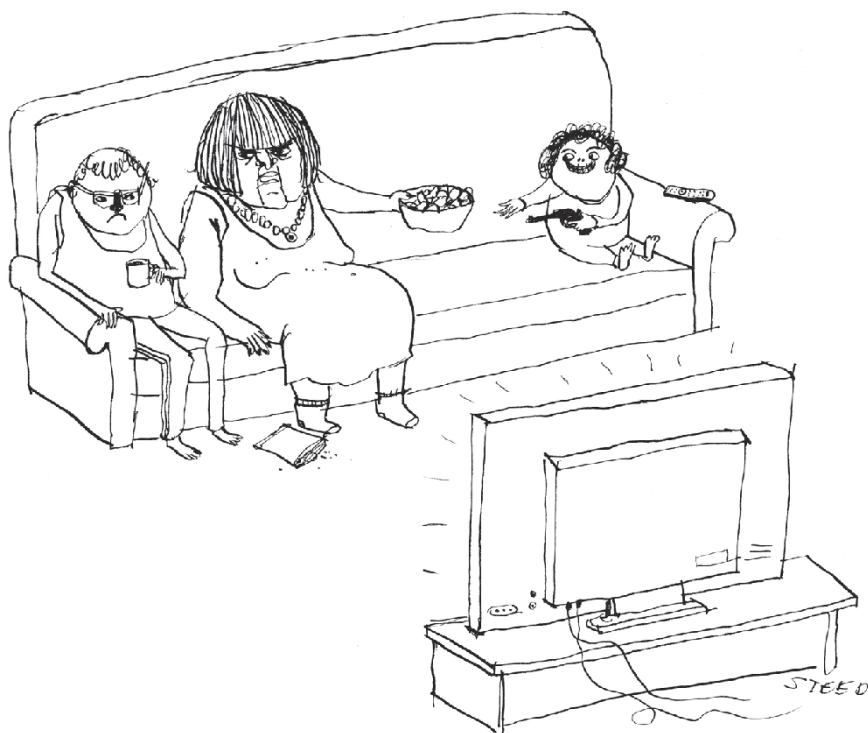
mountain pasture; another depicts a Canadian flag. At the meeting I attended, dozens of people crammed together on plastic chairs: Muslim women in hijabs, African men in dashikis, skinny teens in threadbare T-shirts. In an adjoining hall, a few children lolled and played soccer.

"This is your home for now," Rose, the house manager, a Ugandan native who has permanent residency in the U.S., explained. She slowly enunciated each word, then waited as residents whispered translations to their neighbors. "Everybody is supposed to get up and make their bed," Rose continued. "Then you mop with soap, bleach, and hot water, so we don't get cockroaches." She went on, "All the parents with children—if they are under the age of fourteen, they must be in bed by 9 P.M. For adults, by 11 P.M. you must be in bed."

The curfew is intended to keep the house as quiet and orderly as possible. Many of the residents are distraught, and feelings of dislocation can easily be transformed into disruptive behavior. The staff worries especially about mothers, like Tita, who have been separated from their children. After the house meeting, several staff members convened to discuss a woman who had left her

young daughter behind in Congo. Clearly overcome by stress, the woman had punched another resident in the face. One staff member, a nun named Sister Beth Niederpruem, had been meeting with the woman, consoling her and simply letting her talk. Like many refugees from Congo, the woman had been tortured. Sister Beth added, "Women like this, they don't know where their children are. Are they safe or being threatened? Who knows? So to function in a normal way—whatever normal may be—is very difficult." Sister Beth kept the woman busy, so that she didn't become consumed by sorrow. She had been put in charge of one of the teams that cooked meals for the residents. This helped, but apparently not enough. "Maybe she just got frustrated while peeling potatoes," Sister Beth said. "It's always really about something else."

The Congolese woman confided that she was terrified of being turned back at the border and ending up in an American prison. Her fear was not irrational. Men who are turned back at the border are often sent to a federal detention facility in Batavia, New York, that is relatively comfortable. There is no equivalent facility for women in the area, so they are often



*"I'm starting to wish we'd never bought that thing."*



sent to county jails. Every resident at Vive seemed to know stories of women who had been imprisoned in the U.S. I met a woman from Angola who had spent a month at a county jail, among the general population, after being detained on the U.S. side of the border. "I was shaking so much I could barely hold a pen," she told me. "God left me." After she was paroled, she returned to Vive.

Most residents stay at the schoolhouse for three to four weeks. But the Congolese woman was so paralyzed by indecision that she had remained at Vive for ten months. At any given time, there are up to three dozen "long-termers." On one of my visits, I met a woman from Nigeria in her mid-forties, who had fled with her husband and two sons from the terrorist group Boko Haram, after some of its members destroyed their home and tried to kill her husband. She hoped to live in Canada one day, but she had breast cancer, and was so sick that the staff at Vive feared she was too frail to travel any farther. A room next to the nurse's office had been cleared out and offered to the family.

Vive tries to keep the long-termers in living quarters separate from those of transient residents, because it can be dispiriting for them to be reminded that they have failed to realize their dream. I visited one former classroom, crowded with twenty or so beds, where male long-termers slept. A young man from Zimbabwe named Martial told me that so many of his roommates suffered from bad dreams that, in the middle of the night, the room became a cacophony of anguished voices. Martial had been at Vive for roughly four months, and he told me that he sometimes fell into a depressed trance: "Your mind just gets whisked away and physically you will be at Vive, but mentally you are elsewhere. Somebody might pat you on the shoulder and you wouldn't feel it. Then, when he pats you for the second time, you will go, 'Oh, I'm sorry, man.'"

One day, I met a young man from Rwanda named Allan. In 2004, a decade after the genocide against the Tutsi, Allan's father testified against a man who had committed war crimes. In retaliation, Allan was kidnapped and tortured by supporters of the accused man.

In 2009, he escaped to the U.S., on a student visa. He eventually found his way to Vive. Lacking an anchor relative in Canada, he had created a quiet life for himself in Buffalo. He made a small income by working security at Vive, steaming the suitcases of all newcomers (to eliminate bedbugs), and running what he called a "shopping mall"—donated clothing that residents could sift through and have free of charge. The Congolese residents had a knack for finding the best items, he said: "The Congo guys are very stylish."

Steinmetz told me that waiting for a U.S. asylum verdict is "torturous." In Canada, asylum seekers generally get a hearing within sixty days. They are almost never held in detention.

At one point, at Vive, I met a young Pakistani couple. The husband was a journalist, and they had fled Pakistan after he was beaten and received death threats. His wife was eight months pregnant, and they were determined to head north, so that the child could be born in Canada. It was not clear that they would make it in time. "Too many problems," the man said. His wife looked tired and flushed. The nurse promised to find an electric fan that they could place by her bed. "What will I do?" the man said quietly, as if to himself.

EVERY AFTERNOON, THE atmosphere of anticipation at Vive reached a peak when a staff member posted a sign in the front hallway, listing residents with anchor relatives who had an appointment in Canada the next day. A staff member named Mariah Walker schedules these appointments with the Canadian government's refugee-processing unit, and she maintains a good relationship with U.S. border officials. One day after the list was posted, I spoke with a refugee from Sudan, named Yousif, whose name wasn't on the list, and who was there with his wife and two children. He had a brother living in Canada. When I told him that he seemed remarkably composed, he grabbed me by the hands, squeezing my palms with clammy fingers. "Does *this* feel calm?" he asked, holding my gaze.

Yousif's daughter showed us a coloring book that she was working on. After she skipped away, he told me



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that in Sudan his wife had been detained by the police and physically assaulted, which caused her to have a miscarriage. Now he worried that, if his family got turned back at the border, he would be detained in a U.S. prison and separated from his wife and children.

"I still feel vulnerable," he told me. "It will take a very long time to feel safe. I am going for the unknown. But we felt like maybe the unknown is safer. At least where we are going, there is law that protects the people. Where I am from, there is no law." His wife added that they just wanted a "normal life" in Canada.

The staff encourages residents to prepare for likely questions from Canadian officials. They even offer a class, which I attended. Residents were warned that their luggage would be searched and their cell phones scrutinized. They would be photographed and fingerprinted. They were advised to answer questions honestly. Those with criminal records were encouraged to disclose them—their fingerprints might give them away. The instructor told students that they could expect both general and specific questions about their anchor relatives, such as "How many doors does her house have?" and "How many pets does she have, and what are the pets' names?" The goal of the class is to eliminate the element of surprise. "We want to prepare them so that they don't freak out when they get there," one staff member told me.

Tita, the Eritrean refugee, attended the class that I observed. Afterward, we had lunch, and she showed me more photographs of Eli on her phone. "Every second, every breath—I think about him," she told me. At eight o'clock in the morning a few days later, a taxi picked her up at Vive and crossed the Peace Bridge into Fort Erie. She used her dwindling funds to pay the taxi fare, which was about thirty dollars.

The cab dropped her off at the Canadian customs office. She went inside and sat by a window. Shortly afterward, she spotted her husband and son approaching the building on foot. She burst through the door, ran to them, and embraced Eli. "He was silent, just staring at me," Tita recalled later. "He recog-

nized me, because we had done Skype, but even so he seemed confused and uncertain. I was crying. I just told him, 'I am your mom, I am your mom.' "

After thirty minutes, Tita was called into the office, alone, for her appointment. If the Canadians turned her back, the brief reunion was all she was going to get.

**F**OR ASYLUM SEEKERS with no anchor relatives in Canada, there is a more dangerous option. According to the Safe Third Country Agreement, anyone who makes it to an immigration center inside Canada's borders will be considered for asylum. This provides an incentive for people to cross the border illegally. Fifteen months after the S.T.C.A. was implemented, the Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program at Harvard Law School issued a report warning that the treaty was "already beginning to encourage an underground system of migration." The election of Donald Trump, whose tone toward immigrants has often been hostile, has led even more refugees to attempt crossings into Canada. This winter, Canadian authorities say, there has been a significant increase in illegal migration along the borders in Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia. "The farmers are worried about what they're going to find when the snow melts," a Canadian official told the *Times*.

In recent months, an unusually high number of Vive residents without anchor relatives in Canada have been disappearing at night, running off to cross the border illegally. Officially, the Vive staff will not help residents plan an illegal crossing. "Basically we just say, 'That's not something we can deal with or know about, and we don't advise it, because it's very dangerous,'" Mariah Walker told me. But she often tells residents, "Ultimately, it is your life, and you must make the decision."

Quietly, residents share strategies and spend hours studying Google Maps together. Some refugees attempt to cross the border on foot, through the forests of northern New York State. Others take closer but riskier routes, including a treacherous railroad bridge over the Niagara River. One Vive volunteer told me, "Not long ago, a guy

showed up from Afghanistan and asked me, right away, 'How can I find the railroad bridge?'"

One day, I went to Fort Erie, where I met a twenty-two-year-old Salvadoran man named Jonatan, who had crossed illegally into Canada on the railroad bridge. Jonatan was running from gang members who had repeatedly tried to coerce him into joining their ranks. When he refused, they assaulted him with a knife—he had a scar along his upper lip. He had applied for asylum in the U.S. and had been rejected. Canada considers gang violence to be grounds for political asylum, but the U.S. does not. The S.T.C.A. is predicated, in part, on the notion that refugees stand comparable chances of gaining asylum in the U.S. and in Canada, but some human-rights groups, including Amnesty International, maintain that the U.S. isn't really a "safe" country, because it rejects so many applicants. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association has urged Canada to suspend the treaty.

Jonatan initially considered trekking into Canada through the forests of northern New York State, and travelled to the town of Rouses Point, which is less than two miles south of the border. But, before he could cross, a local police officer stopped him and questioned him. Feeling spooked, he decided that the railroad bridge was a better option. It was a questionable call. The bridge is not far upriver from Niagara Falls, and falling into the water would be perilous. According to Jonatan, the bridge had surveillance cameras, which ruled out crossing on foot. So he decided to sprint alongside a freight train and leap aboard. He worried that he might slip and get pulled under the wheels. "I knew I might be killed," he told me. But he made it aboard, and when he jumped off he suffered only a few bruises. Soon afterward, he arrived at a refugee shelter in Fort Erie. So far, no Vive resident has died while making a crossing.

Lynn Hannigan, who runs the shelter where Jonatan was staying, told me that his chances of getting asylum were good. (She was right: a few months later, he won his case before the Immigration and Refugee Board



of Canada.) The unfortunate thing, Hannigan said, is that he had felt the need to risk his life.

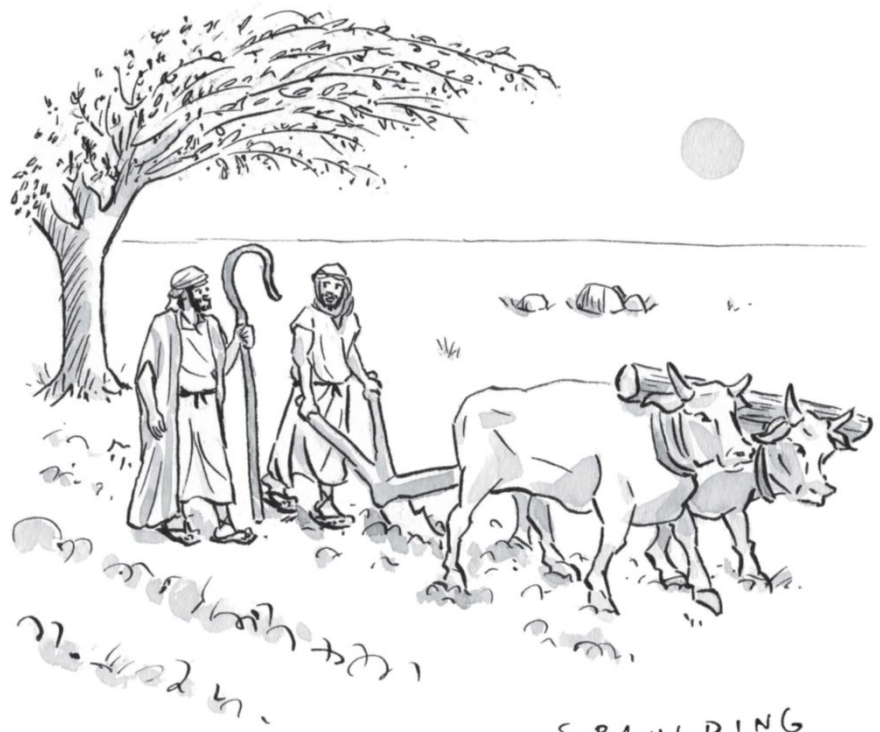
NOT LONG AGO, I got a call from a Colombian man, in his early twenties, named Fernando, who was preparing to sneak across the border. For two days, he had been staying at a motel in Rouses Point—the same place where Jonatan had considered crossing. Fernando agreed to meet me, but declined to share the name of his motel—he said that the local police were keeping an eye on him. Instead, he suggested that we meet in front of a Catholic church in the center of town.

Fernando, a clarinet player, had visited Houston in 2010, with a Colombian youth orchestra. In the years since, gang violence had ravaged his home town, in central Colombia. Gang members put a gun to his head and threatened to kill him unless he joined them. He fled, carrying about three hundred dollars in cash, clothes, his passport, his phone, and his clarinet.

He obtained a tourist visa to the U.S., on the pretense that he would stay with friends in Houston. Instead, he went to Buffalo—he had read about Vive on the Internet. The staff told him that, since he had no anchor relative in Canada, they couldn't help him file an asylum application. As Fernando sat in the hallway, crying, a Turkish resident told him that if he could cross into Canada his application would be considered. Fernando spent hours on his phone researching possible routes. Then he bought a bus ticket and travelled roughly four hundred miles north-east to Rouses Point.

I arrived in Rouses Point after sunset, and parked in front of the church, which was dark. A few minutes later, a slight young man in a hoodie knocked on my window and introduced himself as Fernando. After we drove less than a block, the local police pulled us over. The officer examined my license and asked me what I was doing in town. I said that I was a journalist who had come to meet with Fernando. The officer looked at him—there are few Latinos in the town—but after a few minutes he let us go.

We drove to a neighboring town, found an empty Chinese restaurant,



S PAULDING

*"If push comes to shove, I bet you could do some damage with a plowshare."*

and ordered some tea. It was late fall, and though Fernando was not eager to make the journey while it was cold and dark, he could not linger in Rouses Point. "I don't have enough money in my wallet," he said. He pulled out his phone and, using Google Earth, showed me where he planned to go. He would start on the edge of a golf course, trek north through several thousand feet of forest, then cross an open field into Canada.

His plan didn't seem very well considered. He had not memorized the route, and he had no compass or paper maps. "I have my phone," he said. "I know I will have to follow certain markers and always head north."

We drove from the restaurant to his motel, to retrieve his backpack, which contained his clothing and his clarinet. He showed me the instrument. "This, I think, will be my future," he said. We left the motel, and just a few blocks north the same police officer pulled me over. He asked me what I was doing back in town. I told him that we were picking up Fernando's bag from his motel. The officer nodded and let us go.

Fernando was now in a panic. Crossing the golf course in Rouses Point was out of the question. Instead, we drove west, on a country road, with no destination in mind. As I drove, Fernando looked at Google Earth on his phone.

He asked me to drive toward a corridor of fields surrounded on both sides by thick forest. According to the map, he would cross the border in twenty-one hundred feet, pass through about a mile of scrubland, and then reach a small road in Canada. The closeup images on Google Earth were too blurry for him to tell if the border was fenced. I expressed concern about his plan, but he was determined to cross that night, even though he looked terrified.

We drove on in silence. It was near midnight, and there were no other cars on the road. We approached the point where he wanted to be dropped off. On Google Earth, the fields had looked trimmed, but the ones in front of us were wildly overgrown. There was no moon, so it was impossible to distinguish the fields from the forests on either side.

I stopped in the middle of the road. On the right side, the route north, there



was a steep embankment leading down to the fields. Fernando grabbed his backpack and opened his door; in the blackness, the car's overhead light seemed glaringly bright. I told him to call me when he made it, or if he felt that he was in serious danger. He nodded goodbye, scurried down the embankment, and disappeared into the brambles.

After we parted, Fernando followed the curtain of vegetation northward, checking Google Earth as he went. The ground was wet, and his shoes soon filled with water. There was no fence or sign marking the border, but after a while his phone indicated that he had entered Canada.

While crossing a creek, he slipped, getting soaked to his waist. The air temperature was near freezing, and his legs were soon numb. He had to keep moving in order to keep his blood circulating, but became enmeshed in a dense thicket of branches. Unable to see or move, he broke down and prayed.

Fernando finally fought his way out of the thicket. Consulting his phone, he saw that he was still far from any town or major road. He pressed on for several hours, through woods and farm fields. "I was so tired that I started to see things, including a white shadow," he told me later. "I thought it was a spirit who was going to take me back to America."

Eventually, he reached Autoroute 15, which leads north to Montreal. A police car pulled alongside him, and two officers asked to see his documents. Fernando showed them his Colombian passport, and, in broken English, explained that he had crossed the border. The police officers took him to a customs office at the Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle border crossing, several miles away. He slept for nearly eight hours, then answered questions from customs officials about how and why he had entered Canada. He was released. Fernando made plans to take a bus into Montreal, but before boarding he called his parents in Colombia, and relayed the news: he'd made it.

**T**WO MONTHS LATER, Fernando appeared before a judge in Montreal to make his claim for asylum. He described gang members threatening him and his relatives. Colombia has one of

the highest murder rates in the world, and gangs, rebel groups, and right-wing militias terrorize citizens in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, in 2015 only forty-two per cent of Colombians who applied were granted asylum in Canada. An applicant citing gang violence must prove that he did not have a "flight alternative" within his own country. Ultimately, the judge concluded that Fernando's problem was merely with local gangs, although Fernando told me that many of the gangs in his home town were active throughout Colombia. He recounted the story of a couple from his home town, who had moved away to protect their son: "After a little while, they returned to our town—without him, because he'd been killed."

Fernando has appealed the court's decision and is awaiting a verdict. Recently, he obtained employment papers and began working at a car dealership in Montreal, rustproofing vehicles. He studies, part time, at a French-language school and has met a Latina woman—a Canadian citizen—whom he plans to marry. (Unfortunately for Fernando, marrying a Canadian does not reliably lead to citizenship.)

When Fernando was lost in the wilderness, he took a selfie: if he survived and became a Canadian, he thought, he might one day appreciate the image. After taking the photograph, he studied it in the darkness. Mainly, he saw desperation. But he also saw himself through a stranger's eyes, as if it were a photograph in a newspaper, and he was moved by how far he had come. He still looks at the picture from time to time.

Tita's life in Canada began much more smoothly. At the border, Canadian officials questioned her for hours. They scrutinized her documents, looking for inconsistencies. Tita had an aunt in Canada, and she attended the inquiry, presenting herself as an additional anchor relative and as someone who could corroborate Tita's story. In the end, Tita was admitted and told that she had fifteen days to submit a claim for asylum. That evening, Tita's family—including her aunt—crammed into a hotel room. "There were two beds," she told me. "I spent the whole night awake. Everyone was

so happy we did not give much attention to the beds."

Two months later, Tita went before the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to make her case for asylum. She appeared at a courthouse in Edmonton, but the judge was in Vancouver, presiding through videoconference. He asked her questions about the religious persecution that she had faced in Eritrea. She spoke about being imprisoned, getting sick, and escaping from the hospital. The judge questioned her at length, then concluded that her circumstances justified political asylum. (In 2015, Canada granted asylum to Eritreans in ninety-three per cent of cases.) Before the judge could finish explaining his decision, Tita interjected, thanking him profusely and sobbing. After so many years, her ordeal was over. Outside the courtroom, Eli and Ya awaited the verdict. "I didn't have to say anything," Tita recalled. "They could see it on my face."

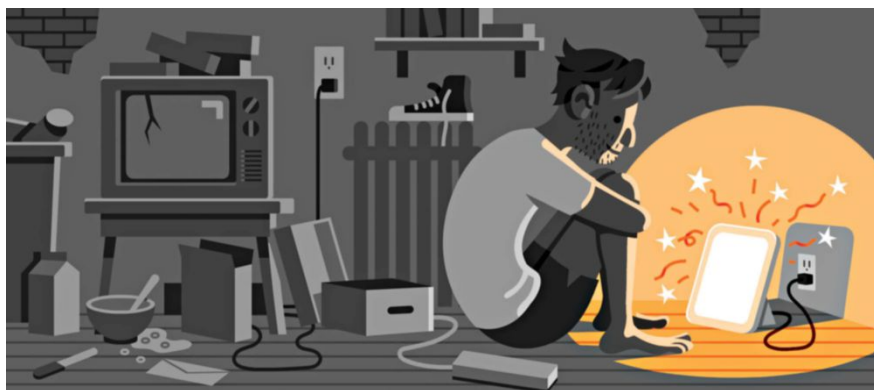
In Canada, conservative politicians have decried the current influx of immigrants. But, in a recent appearance before Parliament, Prime Minister Trudeau declared, "We will continue to accept refugees." He added, "One of the reasons why Canada remains an open country is Canadians trust our immigration system and the integrity of our borders and the help we provide people who are looking for safety."

On February 13th, U.S. Border Patrol agents raided a convenience store in a Buffalo suburb and arrested twenty-three people. The staff at Vive is now preparing for what to do if and when federal agents obtain a warrant and demand entrance into their building. "There's been a mutual respect between us and the Border Patrol, all within the parameters of legality," Mariah Walker said. She added that Buffalo has a large immigrant population, and that "the optics" of a raid on Vive would be very bad. Since Trump took office, many Vive residents have become "terrified," Walker said. "More people are making hasty decisions. They've lost hope because they thought they would be safe in America, but it has turned out to be a scary place for them." She went on, "I never thought my country would be the one people had to run from." ♦



# SADNESS LAMP F.A.Q.

BY SARAH HUTTO



**C**ONGRATULATIONS ON your new LifeBrite Sadness Lamp, clinically proven to treat seasonal affective disorder (SAD), as well as depression that just seems to get worse over time, regardless of the season. We hope it brings you many more years of being able to tolerate all this than you previously anticipated. To get you started, here are some frequently asked questions regarding your lamp:

**Can I use different colored bulbs in my LifeBrite Sadness Lamp?**

Here at LifeBrite Appliances, we believe that happiness should come in only one color—Blinding Happiness White.

**Will my Sadness Lamp dry my tears?**

Yes! Your LifeBrite Sadness Lamp is equipped with our patented Ionizer, which can blast white light through even the tightly clenched fingers shielding your eyes. You will be able to actually feel the blinding happiness washing over your body as you cower in the corner. While the Ionizer feature is in use, it is technically impossible for any mammal within twenty feet of the lamp to produce tears, or for any nearby substance to retain liquid form.

**Where was my Sadness Lamp made?**

Your LifeBrite Sadness Lamp was produced deep in scenic LifeBrite Valley Industrial Park, just ten minutes north of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

All our Sadness Lamps are assembled by technicians who are totally considered older than eighteen in most countries, and are provided with a complete vending-machine diet, rich in riboflavin, as well as an endless supply of blinding white light.

**Why is my Sadness Lamp humming?**

Your Sadness Lamp may have achieved sentience. Please perform the LifeBrite Sadness Lamp Sentience Test, which can be downloaded from our Web site. Be sure that the questions on the test have in no way been made available to your Sadness Lamp beforehand. If your Sadness Lamp tests positive for sentience, please promptly immerse it in boric acid, and we will send you a brand-new, non-sentient lamp.

**My Sadness Lamp talks to me. Is this normal?**

Our Sadness Lamps sometimes gain the power of speech. If your LifeBrite Sadness Lamp is speaking in German, please follow the instructions outlined under Question 4. Otherwise, it is advisable to obey all verbal commands from your lamp.

**My Sadness Lamp is smoking. Is this normal?**

Occasionally, our Sadness Lamps overload on the egomaniacal melancholy of their owners and take up smoking as a coping mechanism. If your lamp does not respond to a smoking-cessation program, please follow the instructions outlined under Question 4.

**Who got me this lamp?**

Our Sadness Lamps are purchased by men and women of all ages looking to brighten their moods, and by people who cannot take one more minute of your constant whining and have performed desperate Internet searches for how to make it stop. If you've received a LifeBrite Sadness Lamp and don't know who sent it to you, be prepared to also receive a mysterious shipment of energy crystals in the coming weeks.

**Is it O.K. to do recreational drugs while using my Sadness Lamp?**

It is advisable that you do copious amounts of recreational drugs while using your Sadness Lamp. Like, stuff you have to go downtown to get.

**I drew an angry face on my Sadness Lamp with a permanent marker, and now it won't come off. Can I have a new lamp?**

Unfortunately, we cannot supply you with a new Sadness Lamp to replace the one you have defaced, but we do sell a LifeBrite Sadness Lamp Facial-Expression-Alteration Kit on our Web site, for \$14.95.

**Will my Sadness Lamp help me reign eternally in the afterlife?**

Yes! LifeBrite is proud to have manufactured the first-ever Sadness Lamp to assist in reigning in the afterlife.

**Is there an afterlife?**

We get this one a lot. Here at LifeBrite, we are strong believers that there is an afterlife, and that the only way to insure your supreme reign in it is exposure to the blinding white glow of a LifeBrite Sadness Lamp.

**My spouse left me because I kept bringing my Sadness Lamp into bed. Can you help me find a new spouse?**

Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence among our Sadness Lamp owners. But LifeBrite Appliances is hard at work on the LifeBrite Sadness Spouse, slated for release in 2019.

**Will the Sadness Spouse let me be the iron in Monopoly, or will it leave me like everything else I've ever loved?**

Unfortunately, we cannot discuss the Sadness Spouse in detail at this time, as it is still in its experimental phase, but—the iron? Are you for real? Who picks the iron?

We hope this was helpful. Your feedback is important to us! ♦



ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

## THE POLYMATH

*Jack White—songwriter, producer, label owner, furniture upholsterer, rock star.*

BY ALEC WILKINSON



**L**AST SUMMER, Jack White bought a house in Kalamazoo, Michigan, that he had seen only in photographs. He wasn't planning to live in it, except perhaps occasionally on retreats—he lives in Nashville. He was drawn to its past. The house was designed by George Nelson, a figure in American modernism, who mostly designed furniture. “A George Nelson house, there's not too many of those,” White said in a car on the way there.

White is forty-one, and since his adolescence, in Detroit, when he was an upholsterer's apprentice, he has been av-

idly interested in modern design. He used to drive around the city looking for thrown-out furniture, and sometimes he found Nelson sofas and chairs and restored them. He saw himself more as a custodian of the Nelson house than as its owner. “I'm a believer in nobody owns anything,” he said. “If you could take care of it and pass it along, it's good.” The car travelled through farm fields beneath a dome of blue sky. “Anyway, it's a place I can go and write songs and shake up my environment,” he continued.

White used to be exclusively a rock

star—he was half of the White Stripes—but his interests are diverse, and he has lately stopped touring and writing to dispose of them. His company, Third Man Records, which is based in Nashville and Detroit, produces vinyl records and sells them from stores at its offices. Third Man's catalogue includes roughly four hundred titles. Some are reissues (old blues songs, Detroit garage bands such as the Gories, and early Motown recordings), some are original records that White produced (Loretta Lynn, Neil Young, Wanda Jackson, and Karen Elson, White's second wife, from whom he is now divorced), and some are recordings of concerts held at the Nashville offices (Willie Nelson, Pearl Jam, Jerry Lee Lewis, and the Detroit hip-hop artist Black Milk). White's “Lazaretto,” a Third Man record from 2014, sold forty thousand copies in one week, more than any other record since 1991, when Nielsen SoundScan began following vinyl sales.

White's most recent record, released in September, is “Jack White Acoustic Recordings 1998–2016,” which is a retrospective, mainly of White Stripes songs. It quickly became the No. 1 vinyl record in the U.S. and the No. 8 album over all, but it's only one project among several. White wrote the song “Don't Hurt Yourself” with Beyoncé, and sang it with her on her album “Lemonade.” He plays guitar in the Raconteurs, a band that started in Detroit in 2004, and drums in Dead Weather, which started in Nashville in 2009; he sings in both. In these bands, he collaborates, but he still sounds like Jack White.

Over the course of any day, White is boss, bandmate, producer, project supervisor, businessman, pragmatist, and idea man. “Mr. American Work Ethic” is how an acquaintance of White's described him to me. White says that Third Man Records is not in business to make money. (It does.) He wants the company to produce objects and projects he cares about, in the belief that if they appeal to him and his staff, they will appeal to others, even if they appear pointless.

In the White Stripes, White was part creative director and part brainy impresario. The band's other member, the drummer Meg White, was taciturn punk muse. Meg was also his girlfriend, then his wife, then his ex-wife, though for a long time they told everyone that they were a fam-

*“I always have my own rules, and I can bend them if I want,” White says.*



ily band, and that she was his sister. Between 1999 and 2007, they made six records. (The group split up in 2011.) Their second record, “De Stijl,” made in 2000, was an homage to the nineteen-twenties Dutch modernist movement of the same name, whose members included the painter Piet Mondrian. De Stijl reduced artistic forms to fundamental terms, and the notion of restrictions appealed to White, who believes that, as far as his imagination is concerned, having too many choices is stultifying. The number three is essential to his purposes. He says it entered his awareness one day when he was an apprentice in the upholstery shop. He saw that the owner had used three staples to secure a piece of fabric and he realized that “three was the minimum number of staples an upholsterer could use and call a piece done.” The White Stripes were built around the theme of three—guitar, drums, and voice. As both a stance and a misdirection, they wore only red, white, and black. White wanted the White Stripes to play the blues, but he didn’t want to be seen as a boy-girl band attempting them.

“The first thought when we started was that we were an art project with punk-rock theatre,” White said in the car. “My voice was so cartoony, so high. We were playing with how much can we mix it all with the blues.” Just as De Stijl was about compressing forms, “the blues were taking music down to three chords, twelve bars, three lines,” White said. “The simplest components. You’ll see some of that in this house.”

The house was at the end of a cul-de-sac, on a wooded lot. It was long, like a barge, with a flat roof and rows of windows along the front. Its previous owner, a man named Dave Corner, was standing in the driveway. He had white hair and was wearing jeans and an untucked shirt. White sees many of his experiences as worth documenting, and he had hired a film crew to record him and Corner talking about the house. He wore a tight black suit, a black shirt, a yellow tie, and yellow plastic wing tips for the occasion. While the crew set up indoors, he paced in the driveway. White’s manner is restless—a foot or a leg or an implement in his hand is nearly always in motion. His bright shoes rising and falling against the pavement made him appear to be dancing.

The camera crew was in the living

room, at one end of the house. Corner sat on a couch and White sat in a chair beside him, as if on a talk show. White asked Corner what his favorite part of the house was. “This living room,” Corner said. “It’s so peaceful.” The room had windows that rose to the ceiling, and beyond the windows were woods. White asked what the rain sounded like on the flat roof. “Like heaven,” Corner said. White said that in Nashville he’d had microphones installed under the eaves of his home, so that he could hear the rain better. He has two young children, a boy and a girl, from his second marriage, and he said that his ability to make the rain louder had led them to believe that he controlled the weather.

MORE PEOPLE KNOW a fragment of White’s music than know his name. That is because the signature guitar riff from his song “Seven Nation Army,” which the White Stripes recorded in 2003, became an internationally ubiquitous stadium anthem. It might be the second-best-known guitar phrase in popular music, after the one from “Satisfaction.” It consists of seven deliberate, somewhat ominous, mainly descending notes. When the phrase occurred to White, he thought he might use it if he was ever hired to write a song for a Bond movie.

“Seven-nation army” is how White pronounced “Salvation Army” as a child. He was born John Gillis, and was the seventh son and last child among seven boys and two girls. One of his brothers is deceased, and White is sometimes plagued by the thought that he might be the last in his family to die, after holding vigils for the others. His siblings include a postal inspector, a property manager, a child psychiatrist, a pastry chef, and a musical archivist and musician.

I asked one of his brothers, Stephen Gillis, what White was like as a child. “Very energetic, always doing something,” Gillis said. “He still has the same personality. His brothers and sisters would take him to the movies, and when his musician brothers needed a drummer they said, ‘Keep a beat for us.’ Our father did building maintenance. He also did radio- and-TV repair, and that merged into hi-fi systems. He had reel-to-reel tape recorders, and we always had music.” White was an altar boy, and during high school he was accepted at a seminary in Wis-

consin. “I was thinking I might become a priest,” he said. “At the last moment, I learned I couldn’t bring my guitar.”

As a teen-ager, White began to sweep up in the shop of an upholsterer, next door to his parents’ house. When he was twenty-one, he opened his own shop and called it Third Man Upholstery, because he was the third upholsterer on the block. Black and yellow, the colors of Stanley tools, signify work for White, and were the colors of his business. He had a yellow van and a yellow cutting table, and he wrote his invoices in black crayon on yellow paper. “The bill itself was a poem,” he said. “No one understood it—I just wanted my dad’s wing-back chair fixed,” they’d say. The presentation wasn’t good for business.” (Employees at Third Man Records wear black outfits with yellow accents.)

Aficionados of White Stripes lore tend to believe that half-Polish Jack Gillis met Meg White in 1993, at a coffeehouse in Hamtramck, a Polish neighborhood of Detroit, where he occasionally played folk songs and read poetry on open-mike nights. (White says that he doesn’t remember any of that; “Meg was just always there,” he wrote me.) Jack and Meg married in 1996, and he took her name; he is legally John White. They lived in the house that he had grown up in, which he had bought from his parents, in a neighborhood called Mexicantown.

The White Stripes began in 1997, on “a day we were in the attic, and I was recording something, and I asked, ‘Would you mind playing a simple beat for me?’” White said. “I didn’t tell her what to do. Maybe I said a couple things. She sat down and did it.” What she did struck him as childlike and unaffected by the wish to impress.

The White Stripes’ first paying gig, for a percentage of the door, was at a Detroit club called the Gold Dollar, on August 14, 1997. Neil Yee, who owned the place, told me that most bands put their amplifiers on the floor or on chairs. White put his on a pedestal draped with a red cloth. He and Meg wore red-and-white clothes. Most of the audience stepped outside to talk or smoke. Among those who stayed was a musician named Dave Buick, who now works at Third Man Records. Buick was intrigued by the clothes and the care that White took to arrange the stage. “Just



the visual part alone was enough to get me curious," he said.

Buick had inherited a little money from his father, and he used some of it to record Detroit bands and issue vinyl singles. About five weeks later, having heard the White Stripes a few more times, Buick saw White in a club and asked if he would like to make a record. White asked how much it would cost. Buick said about five hundred dollars, and, before he could say that he would pay for it, White said he couldn't afford it and walked away. A few weeks passed before Buick saw White again and could explain.

In their living room, the White Stripes recorded one of White's songs, called "Let's Shake Hands," along with "Look Me Over Closely," which Marlene Dietrich had recorded, in 1953. "It wasn't what we expected," Buick said. White says that the song was a declaration that the White Stripes weren't going to observe punk proprieties. Buick pressed a thousand copies, which the band sold at their shows and which Buick took to record stores and clubs around the Midwest.

After making another single with Buick, the White Stripes made three albums with an independent label in California, then signed with V2 Records, in the U.S., and XL Recordings, in England. "Elephant," their next record, was released in 2003, and went to No. 1 in England and No. 6 in the U.S., which unnerved them. "We had no business being in the mainstream," White said. "We assumed the music we were making was private, in a way. We were from the scenario where there are fifty people in every town. Something about us was beyond our control, though. Now it's five hundred people, now it's a second night, what is going on? Is everybody out of their minds?"

Jack and Meg divorced in 2000. In 2007, the White Stripes, on tour, abruptly cancelled eighteen dates, saying that Meg was suffering from "acute anxiety." They never toured again. For years, Jack was crestfallen.

Meg lives in Detroit and hasn't consented to be interviewed in years—through a friend, she politely declined my request. Jack says that she was endlessly criticized for the simplicity of her playing, and he wonders whether the assault

finally wore her down. She did nothing fancy, but she did something astute and original. She played almost entirely on the beat, with no adornments, which left silence and vacancies in places that more conventional drummers usually fill. She was a novice when she started, but by the end she had developed a refined version of minimalism. If you like the way she played, you can't get that fix anywhere else.



WHITE IS TALL and physically imposing. He still has the White Stripes haircut, parted in the middle, with long bangs like tentacles, but, lately, unless he's onstage, he usually combs his hair back. In civilian life he looks a little like Astro Boy. He has a high forehead, a sharp nose, and a pliable face. His speaking voice is husky, and lower than you might expect if you knew only his singing. He says he is a vocalist more than a singer. "I don't have a sing-the-national-anthem voice," he said one day while we were driving around Nashville. "What I do is vocalize characters."

White's temperament is purposeful, and his attention is constant, verging on watchful, which can make him seem aggressive. He drinks coffee steadily. His stage manner is agitated. Before performing, "I'm drinking a Red Bull, a shot of whiskey," he said. "I'm backstage with a baseball bat breaking things. You have to work yourself up into a frenzy." He can respond immoderately if he thinks he's been crossed. In Detroit, in 2003, he got into a fistfight in a bar with another musician and was ordered by the court to take anger-management classes. He tends to move abruptly among tasks. "White wore me out," Ry Cooder, who produced a recent Third Man record, told me. "I wasn't prepared. He had a big Mercedes, with a custom sound system, and he drove like hell through Nashville traffic, with Slim Harpo at DEFCON 1 volume. We pulled into a filling station, he jumped out, gassed up, jumped back in, and tore ass out of the station and made a bad U-turn in front of traffic. He worried me a little. What if he'd left the pump hose in the tank? What then?"

In the White Stripes, White played cheap guitars, hoping to make plain that the instrument is not the point.

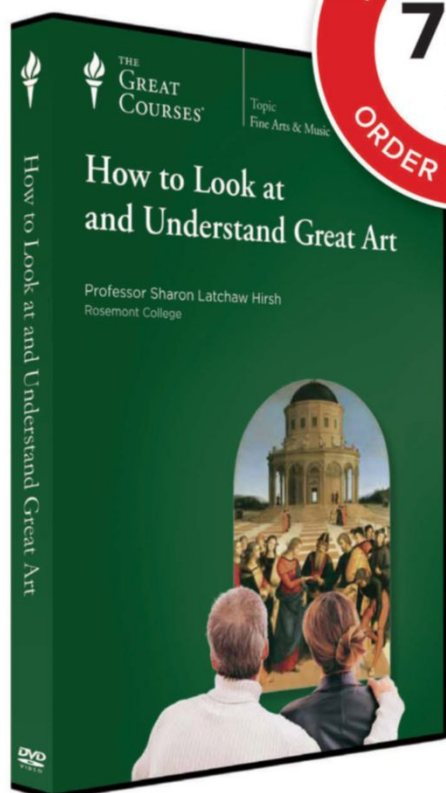
Now he has his guitars chopped like hot rods. A White guitar solo is often a series of collisions, a challenge to a song to defend itself. He likes fat, sludgy tones and clipped attacks, often repeating a note as if he were throttling it.

When White was eighteen or nineteen, he heard Son House's recording of "Grinnin' in Your Face," an admonishing chant with hand claps ("Don't you mind people grinnin' in your face / Just bear this in mind / A true friend is hard to find"), which is still one of his favorite songs. The White Stripes performed it occasionally as an interlude, and White wrote a type of response called "Little Room," which appears on "White Blood Cells," the band's third record, from 2001. "Little Room" is a pithy and circular homily on the anxieties of the creative life; it might almost be a piece of needlepoint. "Well, you're in your little room / and you're working on something good / but if it's really good / you're gonna need a bigger room / and when you're in the bigger room / you might not know what to do / you might have to think of how you got started / sitting in your little room."

White wrote me that he thinks of "Little Room" and "Grinnin' in Your Face" as "statements to live by, and methods to push myself forward deeper into art, truth, the blues, performance, etc." He went on, "Pushing myself into corners, identifying with the underdog, becoming the overdog, being punished for that, retreating, advancing, learning to live in modern times, all the while creating at every turn. That's the life path I chose long ago, and I couldn't derail myself now if I wanted to."

ANYTHING THAT CAPTURES White's imagination can occupy him. He reads scripts in the hope of directing a movie—he said he was disappointed at losing the opportunity to direct one about a Detroit drug dealer and F.B.I. informant called White Boy Rick. He contributes designs for baseball bats to a company in Texas called Warstic, in which he owns a share. At least eight players in the major leagues use Warstics. White also collects esoterica. He owns Leadbelly's New York City arrest record, James Brown's Georgia driver's license from the nineteen-eighties, and Elvis Presley's first record, a demo that he made in 1953, when he was eighteen. White bought it for three hundred thousand dollars at an auction, and loaned it to the





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Country Music Hall of Fame, where for a while it was on display. He had it transferred to acetate beforehand and Third Man Records released it in a limited edition. He collects old photo booths and recording booths, and he has a number of pieces of taxidermy, including two hyenas, two gazelles, a kudu, an elk, an elephant head, and a zebra head, as well as a young giraffe that he keeps in his office in Nashville.

The rarest and most valuable thing White owns is an issue of Action Comics No. 1, from June, 1938, which includes the first appearance of Superman, an occasion that White regards as “an important moment in literary history.” On the cover, Superman holds a car above his head and is smashing it into a rock. A copy sold on eBay in 2014 for \$3,207,852, the highest price ever paid for a comic book. White bought his copy a few years ago, for less than half that. He keeps it in a filing cabinet in a temperature-controlled vault in Nashville. He took it out to show me. “If I’m going to invest in something, it has to have meaning to me, something that has historical value and can be passed on,” he said. “If I buy Elvis’s first record, and we are able to digitize it and release it, and people can own it, or I can preserve this comic book, it is cooler than buying some Ferrari or investing in British Petroleum.”

White feels romantic about mechanical devices the way children sometimes feel romantic about robots. Turning

wheels and gears make time visible to him, whereas digital devices seem inert. Third Man used to have contractors press its records, but at the end of February it began pressing its own, in Detroit, using machines that White bought from a German company. Last summer, he showed me the huge concrete-and-cinder-block room where the presses would sit. “We’re buying the first new machines being made in sixty years,” he said. “Usually you have to wait for a company to go out of business and buy their machines.” Pointing to lines on the floor showing the machines’ future footprints, he said, “That’s where the extruder will be. It puts out the hot vinyl puck, then the press flattens it. There’s eight presses, meaning six thousand records per shift.”

White’s schemes are usually conceived and carried out quickly. Recently, he put five years—a lifetime to him, he says—into a pricey piece of ephemera he called the Icarus Project, which involved sending a turntable into the stratosphere as it played a record, because a record had never been played at such an altitude. The project, he told me, exemplified his ambition “to be an eccentric and produce a beautiful moment that people will talk about.”

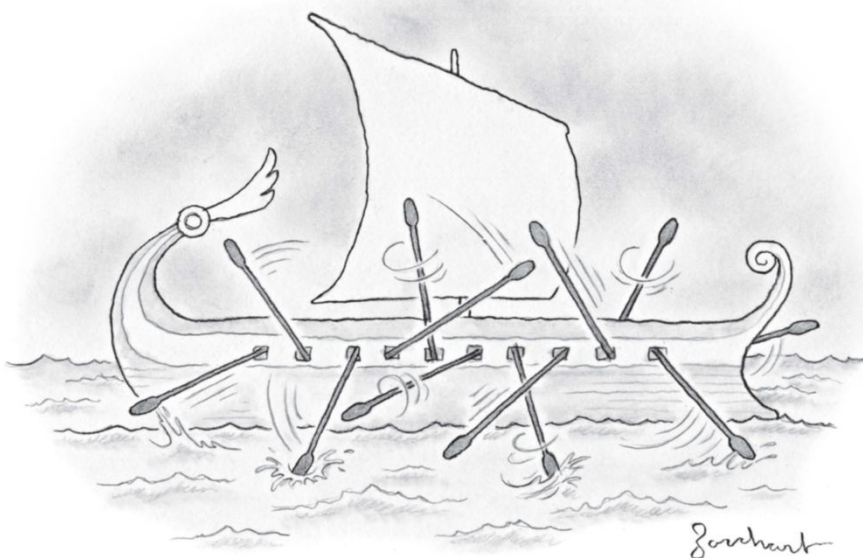
The Icarus Project began when White saw a video created by a father and son from Brooklyn who put a camera on a weather balloon and launched it in upstate New York. After about an hour, when the balloon was nearly nineteen miles high, the low atmospheric pressure caused

it to burst, as expected, and the camera came down on a parachute. White sent the video to his friend Kevin Carrico, a filmmaker who likes to design and build electromechanical gadgets, and asked if he could equip a turntable to play a record while aloft. Carrico built a pyramidal aluminum frame for the turntable. He installed a controller that would keep the turntable spinning at a steady rate—White saw no point in a turntable’s playing a record that didn’t sound like a record, even if no one could hear it. Another device would return the tone arm to the beginning of the record when it reached the end, reset the tone arm if it became stuck, and, in the case of too much turbulence, lift the arm, lock it, and put it back in place when the turbulence subsided.

Carrico and a crew attached the turntable and a camera to a weather balloon and, with permission from the F.A.A., launched it early one morning last July in Idaho. It played a copy of “A Glorious Dawn,” a musical remix featuring clips of Carl Sagan and Stephen Hawking. The balloon was seven feet wide on the ground and forty feet wide eighty-one minutes later, when it burst, almost eighteen miles above the earth. They could see it from the ground, a tiny white moon suddenly vanishing. Carrico had calculated that the turntable had more than a ninety-percent chance of landing on a farm. Some guys working on a utility pole in a vineyard near Nampa saw something on a parachute coming toward them. When Carrico and his crew arrived, having followed a G.P.S. signal, the workers pointed to where the parachute had landed.

White showed a film of the balloon’s rise and fall at the Nashville and Detroit offices of Third Man, to celebrate the pressing of the company’s three-millionth record, which was the one on the turntable. White watched from a catwalk above the Detroit store, and about two hundred people watched with him, seeing the turntable revolve at one point with the curve of the earth behind it. The balloon exploded, and White thanked everyone for attending. Then he sat on a couch and said, “Now I can sleep at night.”

AT LUNCH in Nashville one day with Ben Swank, the second-in-command at Third Man, White was wearing a yellow knit shirt and black pants; Swank was wearing his Third Man



*“Calm down, guys—it’s just a bee!”*



uniform: black suit, black shirt, yellow tie. "What do you do?" the waitress asked Swank. "You got a look." Swank explained that he worked at Third Man, and then she asked White what he did. "I'm a producer sometimes," he said. "I also work at Third Man Records." She nodded and asked what he wanted. "Can I have a few things off the menu?" he said. "Hummus and cucumber, and celery and peanut butter." He asked for a drink called a Cold Steel Drum that used to be on the menu. "Maybe the bartender could make it for me?" he said. "I always say, 'It's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission,'" the waitress said.

White moved to Nashville in 2005. "It got hard for me and Meg to hang out in Detroit," he said. "I think everyone had had enough about how much attention we had got, so I started looking all over for a place to live. I looked at Memphis, I looked at Georgia, the Carolinas, places not too small and not too big. I like the politeness of the South, and it doesn't bother me that it's so religious. It feels like home, and nowhere else did."

White remains located emotionally in Detroit, which has its own music and industrial liturgies. If he lived in New York or Los Angeles, he wrote me, "my personality would make me feel like a drone, or a replica. I wouldn't feel unique. Large towns always make me feel like there are thousands of people all feeding at the same trough, like standing in line for an audition, I couldn't handle that and still be creative, it would turn into the kind of work that pays the bills and at that point I might as well just upholster furniture instead."

The concept of "home" appears often in White's songs, usually as a vexed proposition. He sees himself as distanced from the idea partly by his commitment to creating. The definition of home "has changed over and over again for me through the years," he wrote. "Most likely it's me changing the definition so that I can have some sense of 'home' and not lose my mind. Most of the time my own living room feels no more like 'home' than a hotel room in Belgium does." He continued, "I've stood by myself on ancient ruins, and on farmland in the middle of nowhere with people around me who don't speak

the same language as me and I feel very at home and comfortable."

Recently, on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon," White sang his song "You've Got Her in Your Pocket," a lament of an ambiguous kind—the narrator appears to be losing a lover he had tried, perhaps deviously, to possess. The song ends on three plaintive, ascending notes supporting the lyric "Home, sweet home." When the song ended, White brushed tears from his eyes. I wrote asking what had overtaken him, and he wrote back, but didn't answer the question.

**I**N NASHVILLE, White lives in a big house with a porch and columns, behind a tall iron gate. In back of the house is a screened hutch, like a chicken coop, with three white peacocks that are being trained to walk the property. Beyond are a few outbuildings. In one, White has an upholstery shop. In another, he has a three-lane bowling alley, where he keeps racks of balls for friends. Each dedicated ball has a name tag, and some of the balls are painted fancifully—Bob Dylan's has a portrait of John Wayne.

In another building is a recording studio. Recently, White produced a record for Lillie Mae Rische, who often performs with him, usually on fiddle. The record is of her own songs. One afternoon, Rische, who is small, with cropped hair, stood in front of a microphone wearing headphones, while White sat in the control room and smoked a pipe. She was singing the phrase "You can't take it with you, but you can take me home tonight."

"I would take a breath before it, if you can," White told her. Rische sang the lines again. "The phrasing is cool," White said, "but it was a little fast." Then, "I love how soft you can sing."

She tried the phrase several more times. At each attempt, the engineer rewound the tape, and the new take replaced the one before it. White said, "Too fast" or "Tiny bit ahead" or "I think when you're laid back, it's cooler." Then he rose abruptly and went out the door, as if he could no longer sit still.

White's principles for recording are a little old-fashioned. "My feeling is, if you record a take, and it's not good enough, erase it, until you find what you love," he said. "What people do on Pro

Tools, they record fifty takes and fix it. They're Auto-Tuning and throwing on the grid, so it's all in time, and there's no life left to it. We erase something, and it's gone forever."

**N**OW THAT Lillie Mae Rische's record is done, and the presses are running smoothly, White will spend several hours a day in an apartment he has rented in Nashville as a hideaway. He will sit in a little room and write. As we drove there one afternoon, he said that he habitually entertains fantasies of confinement. "If I could just break my leg and be in the hospital for six weeks, what would it be like?" he said. "Something about a room and a cot and a little space. You have nothing to do."

White turned down an alley and parked behind an old red-brick building. We climbed some back stairs and let ourselves in through the kitchen. The apartment had two bedrooms and a dining room, which were empty. White had confined himself to the living room, where there were four windows; all the shades were drawn. On a table was a reel-to-reel tape recorder that he bought when he was fourteen with money he made mowing lawns, and on the walls were an American flag and several large photographs: two portraits of Asian women, one of them a Chinese soldier; another of a group of soldiers; a picture of Ty Cobb, whom White admires and feels is misunderstood; and one of some dark-skinned men in loincloths with white skeletons painted on their bodies—Chimbu singing dancers in New Guinea, I learned. Against a wall was a cot.

The room has rules. "I'm going to try to write songs where I can't be heard by the next-door neighbor," White said. "And I want to write like Michael Jackson would write—instead of writing parts on the instruments or humming melodies, you think of them. To do everything in my head and to do it in silence and use only one room."

The place was still and shadowy and cell-like. "Four tracks," White said, pointing at the tape recorder. "With computers you can use three hundred and ten tracks if you want to, but it's too much freedom. I always have my own rules, and I can bend them if I want. I can see the confines I'm working in, but nobody else knows I'm doing it." ♦



# DONALD TRUMP'S WORST DEAL

*The President helped build a hotel in Azerbaijan that appears to be a corrupt operation engineered by oligarchs linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard.*

BY ADAM DAVIDSON

**H** EYDAR ALIYEV PROSPEKTI, a broad avenue in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, connects the airport to the city. The road is meant to highlight Baku's recent modernization, and it is lined with sleek new buildings. The Heydar Aliyev Center, an undulating wave of concrete and glass, was designed by Zaha Hadid. The state oil company is housed in a twisting glass tower, and the headquarters of the state water company looks like a giant water droplet. "It's like Potemkin," my translator told me. "It's only the buildings right next to the road." Behind the gleaming structures stand decaying Soviet-era apartment blocks, with clothes hanging out of windows and wallboards exposed by fallen brickwork.

As you approach the city center, a tower at the end of the avenue looms in front of you. Thirty-three stories high and curved to resemble a sail, the building was clearly inspired by the Burj Al Arab Hotel, in Dubai, but it is boxier and less elegant. When I visited Baku, in December, five enormous white letters glowed at the top of the tower: T-R-U-M-P.

The building, a five-star hotel and residence called the Trump International Hotel & Tower Baku, has never opened, though from the road it looks ready to welcome the public. Reaching the property is surprisingly difficult; the tower stands amid a welter of on-ramps, off-ramps, and overpasses. During the nine days I was in town, I went to the site half a dozen times, and on each occasion I had a comical exchange with a taxi-driver who had no idea which combination of turns would lead to the building's entrance.

The more time I spent in the neighborhood, the more I wondered how the hotel could have been imagined as a viable business. The development was conceived, in 2008, as a high-end apart-

ment building. In 2012, after Donald Trump's company, the Trump Organization, signed multiple contracts with the Azerbaijani developers behind the project, plans were made to transform the tower into an "ultra-luxury property." According to a Trump Organization press release, a hotel with "expansive guest rooms" would occupy the first thirteen floors; higher stories would feature residences with "spectacular views of the city and Caspian Sea." For an expensive hotel, the Trump Tower Baku is in an oddly unglamorous location: the underdeveloped eastern end of downtown, which is dominated by train tracks and is miles from the main business district, on the west side of the city. Across the street from the hotel is a discount shopping center; the area is filled with narrow, dingy shops and hookah bars. Other hotels nearby are low-budget options: at the AYF Palace, most rooms are forty-two dollars a night. There are no upscale restaurants or shops. Any guests of the Trump Tower Baku would likely feel marooned.

The timing of the project was also curious. By 2014, when the Trump Organization publicly announced that it was helping to turn the tower into a hotel, a construction boom in Baku had ended, and the occupancy rate for luxury hotels in the city hovered around thirty-five per cent. Jan deRoos, of Cornell University, who is an expert in hotel finance, told me that the developer of a five-star hotel typically must demonstrate that the project will maintain an average occupancy rate of at least sixty per cent for ten years. There is a long-term master plan to develop the area around the Trump Tower Baku, but if it is implemented the hotel will be surrounded for years by noisy construction projects, making it even less appealing to travellers desiring a luxurious experience—especially considering that there are many established hotels

on the city's seaside promenade. There, an executive from ExxonMobil or the Israeli cell-phone industry can stay at the Four Seasons, which occupies a limestone building that evokes a French colonial palace, or at the J.W. Marriott Abershon Baku, which has an outdoor terrace overlooking the water. Tiffany, Ralph Lauren, and Armani are among the dozens of companies that have boutiques along the promenade.

A former top official in Azerbaijan's Ministry of Tourism says that, when he learned of the Trump hotel project, he asked himself, "Why would someone put a luxury hotel there? Nobody who can afford to stay there would want to be in *that* neighborhood."

The Azerbaijanis behind the project were close relatives of Ziya Mammadov, the Transportation Minister and one of the country's wealthiest and most powerful oligarchs. According to the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, Azerbaijan is among the most corrupt nations in the world. Its President, Ilham Aliyev, the son of the former President Heydar Aliyev, recently appointed his wife to be Vice-President. Ziya Mammadov became the Transportation Minister in 2002, around the time that the regime began receiving enormous profits from government-owned oil reserves in the Caspian Sea. At the time of the hotel deal, Mammadov, a career government official, had a salary of about twelve thousand dollars, but he was a billionaire.

The Trump Tower Baku originally had a construction budget of a hundred and ninety-five million dollars, but it went through multiple revisions, and the cost ended up being much higher. The tower was designed by a local architect, and in its original incarnation it had an ungainly roof that suggested the spikes of a crown. A London-based





*The Trump Tower Baku never opened. Trump partnered with an Azerbaijani family that U.S. officials called notoriously unethical.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVIDE MONTELEONE



architecture firm, Mixity, redesigned the building, softening its edges and eliminating the ornamental roof. By the time the Trump team officially joined the project, in May, 2012, many condominium residences had already been completed; at the insistence of Trump Organization staffers, most of the building's interior was gutted and rebuilt, and several elevators were added.

After Donald Trump became a candidate for President, in 2015, *Mother Jones*, the Associated Press, the Washington *Post*, and other publications ran articles that raised questions about his involvement in the Baku project. These reports cited a series of cables sent from the U.S. Embassy in Azerbaijan in 2009 and 2010, which were made public by WikiLeaks. In one of the cables, a U.S. diplomat described Ziya Mammadov as "notoriously corrupt even for Azerbaijan." The Trump Organization's chief legal officer, Alan Garten, told reporters that the Baku hotel project raised no ethical issues for Donald Trump, because his company had never engaged directly with Mammadov.

According to Garten, Trump played a passive role in the development of the property: he was "merely a licensor" who allowed his famous name to be used by a company headed by Ziya Mammadov's son, Anar, a young entrepreneur. It's not clear how much money Trump made from the licensing agreement, although in his limited public filings he has reported receiving \$2.8 million. (The Trump Organization shared documents that showed an additional payment of two and a half million dollars, in 2012, but declined to disclose any other payments.) Trump also had signed a contract to manage the hotel once it opened, for an undisclosed fee tied to the hotel's performance. The Washington *Post* published Garten's description of the deal, and reported that Donald Trump had "invested virtually no money in the project while selling the rights to use his name and holding the contract to manage the property."

A month after Trump was elected President, Garten announced that the

Trump Organization had severed its ties with the hotel project, describing the decision to CNN as little more than "house-cleaning." I was in Baku at the time, and it had become clear that the Trump Organization's story of the hotel was incomplete and inaccurate. Trump's company had made the deal not just with Anar Mammadov but also with Ziya's brother Elton—an influential member



of the Azerbaijani parliament. Elton signed the contracts, and in an interview he confirmed that he founded Baku XXI Century, the company that owns the Trump Tower Baku. When he was asked who owns Baku XXI Century, he called it a "commercial secret" but added that he "controlled all its operations" until 2015, when he cut ties to the company. Elton denied having used his political position for profit.

An Azerbaijani lawyer who worked on the project revealed to me that the Trump Organization had not just licensed the family name; it also had signed a technical-services agreement in which it promised to help its partner meet Trump design standards. Technical-services agreements are often nominal addenda to licensing deals. Major hospitality brands compile exhaustive specifications for licensed hotels, and tend to approve design elements remotely; a foreign site is visited only occasionally. But in the case of Trump Tower Baku the oversight appears to have been extensive. The Azerbaijani lawyer told me, "We were always following their instructions. We were in constant contact with the Trump Organization. They approved the smallest details." He said that Trump staff visited Baku at least monthly to give the go-ahead for the next round of work orders. Trump designers went to Turkey to vet the furniture and fabrics acquired there. The hotel's main designer, Pierre Baillargeon, and several contractors told me that they had visited the Trump Organization headquarters, in New York, to secure approval for their plans.

Ivanka Trump was the most senior Trump Organization official on the Baku project. In October, 2014, she visited the city to tour the site and offer advice. An

executive at Mace, the London-based construction firm that oversaw the tower's conversion to a hotel, met with Ivanka in Baku and New York. He told me, "She had very strong feelings, not just about the design but about the back of the hotel—landscaping, everything." The Azerbaijani lawyer said, "Ivanka personally approved everything." A subcontractor noted that Ivanka's team was particular about wood panelling: it chose an expensive Macassar ebony, from Indonesia, for the ceiling of the lobby. The ballroom doors were to be made of book-matched panels of walnut. On her Web site, Ivanka posted a photograph of herself wearing a hard hat inside the half-completed hotel. A caption reads, "Ivanka has overseen the development of Trump International Hotel & Tower Baku since its inception, and she recently returned from a trip to the fascinating city in Azerbaijan to check in on the project's progress." (Ivanka Trump declined requests to discuss the Baku project.)

Jan deRoos, the Cornell professor, developed branded-hotel properties before entering academia. He told me that the degree of the Trump Organization's involvement in the Baku property was atypical. "That's very, very intense," he said.

The sustained back-and-forth between the Trump Organization and the Mammadovs has legal significance. If parties involved in the Trump Tower Baku project participated in any illegal financial conduct, and if the Trump Organization exerted a degree of control over the project, the company could be vulnerable to criminal prosecution. Tom Fox, a Houston lawyer who specializes in anti-corruption compliance, said, "It's a problem if you're making a profit off of someone else's corrupt conduct." Moreover, recent case law has established that licensors take on a greater legal burden when they assume roles normally reserved for developers. The Trump Organization's unusually deep engagement with Baku XXI Century suggests that it had the opportunity and the responsibility to monitor it for corruption.

Before signing a deal with a foreign partner, American companies, including major hotel chains, conduct risk assessments and background checks



that take a close look at the country, the prospective partner, and the people involved. Countless accounting and law firms perform this service, as do many specialized investigation companies; a baseline report normally costs between ten thousand and twenty-five thousand dollars. A senior executive at one of the largest American hotel chains, who asked for anonymity because he feared reprisal from the Trump Administration, said, "We wouldn't look at due diligence as a burden. There certainly is a cost to doing it, especially in higher-risk places. But it's as much an investment in the protection of that brand. It's money well spent."

Alan Garten told me that the Trump Organization had commissioned a risk assessment for the Baku deal, but declined to name the company that had performed it. The *Washington Post* article on the Baku project reported that, according to Garten, the Trump Organization had undertaken "extensive due diligence" before making the hotel deal and had not discovered "any red flags."

But the Mammadov family, in addition to its reputation for corruption, has a troubling connection that any proper risk assessment should have unearthed: for years, it has been financially entangled with an Iranian family tied to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, the ideologically driven military force. In 2008, the year that the tower was announced, Ziya Mammadov, in his role as Transportation Minister, awarded a series of multimillion-dollar contracts to Azarpassillo, an Iranian construction company. Keyumars Darvishi, its chairman, fought in the Iran-Iraq War. After the war, he became the head of Raman, an Iranian construction firm that is controlled by the Revolutionary Guard. The U.S. government has regularly accused the Guard of criminal activity, including drug trafficking, sponsoring terrorism abroad, and money laundering. Reuters recently reported that the Trump Administration was poised to officially condemn the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization.

I asked Garten how deeply the Trump Organization had looked into the Mammadov family's political connections. Had it been concerned that Elton Mam-

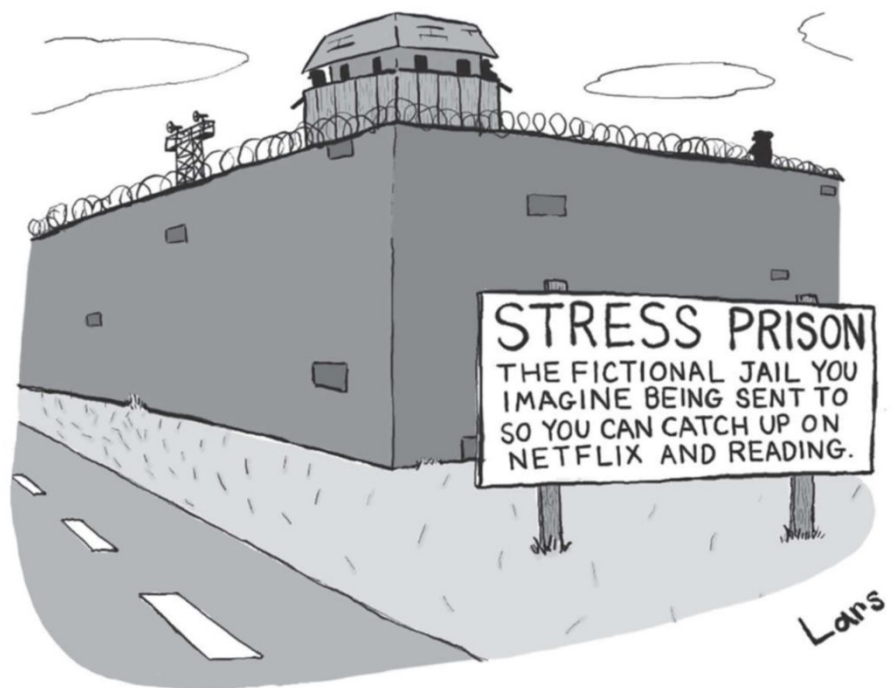
madov, as a sitting member of parliament, might exploit his power to benefit the project? How much money had Ziya Mammadov invested in Elton's company? Garten noted that he didn't oversee the due-diligence process. "The people who did are no longer at the company," he said. "I can't tell you what was done in this situation." He would not identify the former employees. When I asked him to provide documentation of due diligence, he said that he couldn't share it with me, because "it's confidential and privileged."

**N**O EVIDENCE HAS surfaced showing that Donald Trump, or any of his employees involved in the Baku deal, actively participated in bribery, money laundering, or other illegal behavior. But the Trump Organization may have broken the law in its work with the Mammadov family. The Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, passed in 1977, forbade American companies from participating in a scheme to reward a foreign government official in exchange for material benefit or preferential treatment. The law even made it a crime for an American company to unknowingly benefit from a partner's corruption if it could have discovered illicit activity but avoided doing so. This closed what was known as the "head in the sand" loophole.

As a result, American companies

must examine potential foreign partners very carefully before making deals with them. I recently spoke with Alexandra Wrage, who runs Trace International, a consortium of three hundred corporations that do business overseas. Trace helps these firms avoid violating the F.C.P.A., and it has a division that can be hired by individual clients to assess potential foreign partners. To comply with the law, Wrage noted, an American company must remain vigilant even after a contract is signed, monitoring its foreign partner to be sure that nobody involved is engaging in bribery or other improprieties.

Wrage pointed out that corrupt government leaders often use their children or their siblings to distance themselves from illicit projects. Such an official creates a company in the relative's name which appears to be independent but is controlled by the official. To lessen the likelihood of an F.C.P.A. violation when working with a company that is owned by a child or a sibling of a government minister, Wrage told me, "you'd need to show that the child has real expertise, real ability to do the work." Otherwise, Wrage said, "the assumption is that they are a partner entirely because of their ability to use their parent's power." Before Elton Mammadov became a member of parliament, in 2000, he was a maintenance engineer who had no experience





in real-estate development. When the Trump Organization joined the Baku project, it barred a Mammadov-owned company from doing construction work, because it was deemed incompetent.

Wrage said that a U.S. company looking to make a deal with a foreign partner should be confident that the partner has a reasonable likelihood of making a profit from the venture. If the project seems almost guaranteed to lose money, it could well be a bribery scheme or some other criminal operation. The partner also should uphold modern accounting standards.

“It’s simple,” she said. “Will money flow through this business because it offers a compelling product at a decent price, or will the money come because of an illicit relationship with someone who uses their power?”

Wrage told me that, in 2009, an American entrepreneur was successfully prosecuted for his part in a corruption conspiracy in Azerbaijan. Frederic Bourke, the co-founder of Dooney & Bourke, the handbag company, had invested in a project in which a foreign partner paid bribes to Azerbaijani government officials and their family members. Bourke was sentenced to a year in prison for violating the F.C.P.A.; he appealed the conviction, claiming ignorance of the corruption. Two years later, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit upheld the conviction, saying that, regardless of whether he had known about the bribes, “the testimony at trial demonstrated that Bourke was aware of how pervasive corruption was in Azerbaijan.” The F.C.P.A., they said, also criminalized “conscious avoidance”—a deliberate effort to remain in the dark about any transgressions a foreign partner might be involved in. After Bourke’s conviction, Wrage said, U.S. companies were well aware of the dangers of making careless deals in Azerbaijan.

Even a cursory look at the Mammadovs suggests that they are not ideal part-

ners for an American business. Four years before the Trump Organization announced the Baku deal, WikiLeaks released the U.S. diplomatic cables indicating that the family was corrupt; one cable mentioned the Mammadovs’ link to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard. In 2013, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project investigated the Mammadov family’s corruption and published

Baghlan Group, a company run by an Azerbaijani businessman who is known to be close to Ziya Mammadov.

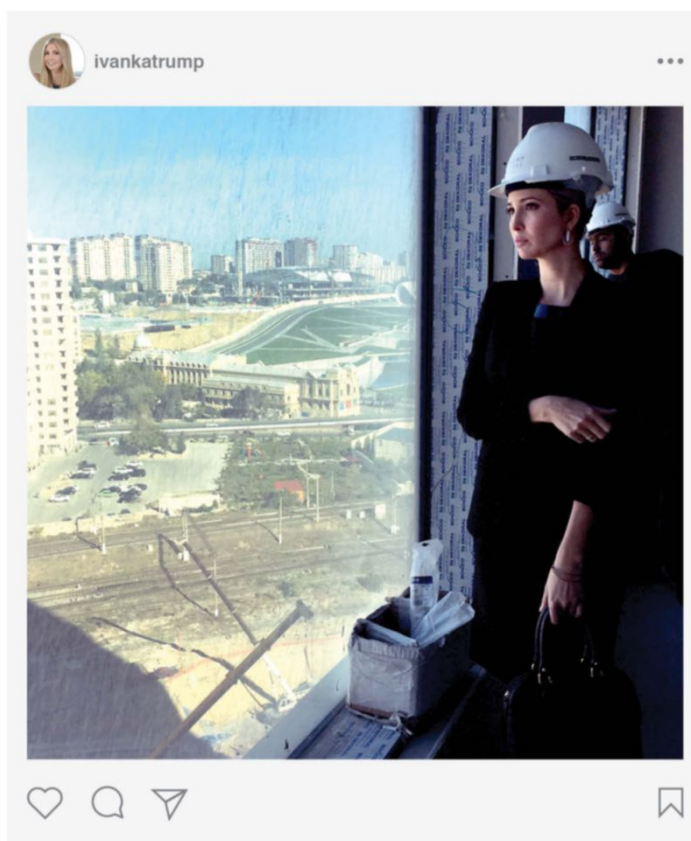
Baku XXI Century, ZQAN, and Baghlan have so many overlapping interests that they often seem to operate as a single concern. According to the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty investigation, the companies all prospered largely through contracts with the Transportation Ministry. The Trump Tower Baku complex

was built partly on land controlled by the ministry. A Baghlan subsidiary received a contract from the ministry to import a thousand London-style cabs to Baku. Soon afterward, ministry inspectors began preventing competing taxi services from parking in the city center or at subway stops. Another new rule required all taxi owners to pay taxes and license fees at the Bank of Azerbaijan, a private entity that at the time was owned jointly by Anar Mammadov and Baghlan.

Anar’s net worth has been estimated at a billion dollars, but he is not a self-made man. According to the Associated Press, ZQAN was founded in 2000, when he was in his late teens. He began studying in England that year, and remained there until 2005; during that period, the company that he ostensibly ran ex-

perienced explosive growth. Trump Organization officials, as well as others familiar with the Baku project, told me that during the tower’s construction Anar was barely involved, and was often travelling abroad. (He flies on a Gulfstream G450 private jet.) An American who did business in Azerbaijan told me, “It’s common knowledge there that Ziya Mammadov controls ZQAN.”

One of the cables sent in 2010 by the U.S. Embassy in Baku noted that, “with so much of the nation’s oil wealth being poured into road construction,” the Mammadovs had become disproportionately powerful in Azerbaijan. Another cable suggested that Ziya controlled ZQAN, the country’s “largest



A 2014 Instagram post of Ivanka Trump at the Baku tower.

well-documented exposés. Six months before the hotel announcement, *Foreign Policy* ran an article titled “The Corleones of the Caspian,” which suggested that the Mammadovs had exploited Ziya’s position as Transportation Minister to make their fortunes.

The Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty investigation revealed that Baku XXI Century, the company controlled by Elton, had at least two other stakeholders. One of them was a company called ZQAN, an acronym for the family members of the Transportation Minister: Ziya Mammadov; Qanira, his wife; Anar, his son; and Nigar, his daughter. Anar is the official head of ZQAN. Another stakeholder in Baku XXI Century was the



commercial development company.” This cable described Ziya as being the object of “many allegations from Azerbaijani contacts of creative corrupt practices.”

MUCH OF THE land occupied by the Trump Tower Baku complex was once packed with houses. In 2011, residents received letters from the local government authority informing them that their homes were to be demolished to make way for a project of crucial government significance. Thirty families were evicted. One resident, Minaye Azizova, told me that the government gave her eighteen thousand dollars in compensation for a home that, by her estimation, was worth five times as much. After she discovered that her home had been condemned so that Baku XXI Century could build a luxury tower, she sued the government.

Construction of the building began in 2008. I have spoken with more than a dozen contractors who worked on it. Some of them described behavior that seemed nakedly corrupt. Frank McDonald, an Englishman who has had a long career doing construction jobs in developing countries, performed extensive work on the building’s interior. He told me that his firm was always paid in cash, and that he witnessed other contractors being paid in the same way. At the offices of Anar Mammadov’s company, he said, “they would give us a giant pile of cash,” adding, “I got a hundred and eighty thousand dollars one time, which I fit into my laptop bag, and two hundred thousand dollars another time.” Once, a colleague of his picked up a payment of two million dollars. “He needed to bring a big duffelbag,” McDonald recalled. The Azerbaijani lawyer confirmed that some contractors on the Baku tower were paid in cash.

Two people who worked on the Trump Tower Baku told me that bribes were paid. Much of the graft was routine: Azerbaijani tax officials, government inspectors, and customs officers showed up occasionally to pick up envelopes of cash.

The executive at Mace, the construction firm, told me that the Mammadovs handled payments and all interactions with the Azerbaijani government. “Were people bribed?” he said. “I don’t know. Maybe. We didn’t check.” (A spokesman for Mace said that the firm was “not involved” in any corruption.)

Pierre Baillargeon, the architect whom the Mammadovs hired to alter the tower’s original design, is a Canadian who runs a studio in London. He has often worked in parts of the world known for corruption, including Sudan and Syria, and has done several projects in Azerbaijan. In a phone interview, Baillargeon said that he knew nothing about corruption and was “just a designer.” I asked him why he thought the hotel had been built in such an inhospitable part of Baku. “Every project has detractors,” he said. When I asked him if he had seen large payments being made in cash, he hung up. (He did not respond to later calls.)

Alan Garten, the Trump Organization lawyer, did not deny that there was corruption involved in the project. “I’m not going to sit here and defend the Mammadovs,” he said. But, from a legal standpoint, he argued, the Trump Organization was blameless. In his opinion, the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act doesn’t apply to the Baku deal, even if corruption occurred. “We didn’t own it,” he said of the hotel. “We had no equity. We didn’t control the project. The flow of funds is in the wrong direction.” He added, “We did not pay any money to anyone. Therefore, it could not be a violation of the F.C.P.A.”

“No, that’s just wrong,” Jessica Tillipman, an assistant dean at George Washington University Law School, who specializes in the F.C.P.A., said. “You can’t go into business deals in Azerbaijan assuming that you are immune from the F.C.P.A.” She added, “Nor can you escape liability by looking the other way. The entire Baku deal is a giant red flag—the direct involvement of foreign government officials and their relatives in Azerbaijan with ties to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Corruption warning signs are rarely more obvious.”

Tillipman explained that the F.C.P.A. defines corruption as “the payment of money or anything of value” to a foreign official. Last year, JPMorgan Chase agreed to pay two hundred and sixty-four million dollars to settle charges that it had violated the F.C.P.A.; the bank had given jobs and internships to relatives and friends of government officials in Asia. Tillipman, along with several other F.C.P.A. experts, told me that the Trump Organization had clearly provided things of value in the Baku deal: its famous

brand, its command of the luxury market, its extensive technical advice.

In May, 2012, the month the Baku deal was finalized, the F.C.P.A. was evidently on Donald Trump’s mind. In a phone-in appearance on CNBC, he expressed frustration with the law. “Every other country goes into these places and they do what they have to do,” he said. “It’s a horrible law and it should be changed.” If American companies refused to give bribes, he said, “you’ll do business nowhere.” He continued, “There is one answer—go to your room, close the door, go to sleep, and don’t do any deals, because that’s the only way. The only way you’re going to do it is the other way.”

It is unclear how the Trump Administration plans to approach F.C.P.A. enforcement. Jay Clayton, Trump’s choice to run the Securities and Exchange Commission, co-authored a paper in 2011 arguing that American companies were at a severe disadvantage because of the U.S. government’s “singular strategy of zealous enforcement.” But Jeff Sessions, the new Attorney General, told the Senate Judiciary Committee during his confirmation hearings that he will continue to uphold the F.C.P.A.

AFTER 9/11, PROSECUTING financial corruption acquired new political importance. The C.I.A. and other intelligence services came to believe that preventing illicit money from flowing through the global financial system was a necessary tactic in preventing future terrorist attacks, and the U.S. led an international effort to enforce financial transparency. Banks and other financial entities were required to vet their clients aggressively and to report any suspicious activity. Prosecutions for money laundering, bribery, and other financial crimes rose significantly. In 2000, the government launched three prosecutions under the F.C.P.A. Last year, it initiated fifty-four.

Investigators of financial fraud like to say that government corruption, money laundering, and other illicit behavior often form a “nexus” with even more troubling activity, such as financing terrorism and developing weapons of mass destruction. This appears to be true in the Baku deal. As the Mammadovs were preparing to build the tower, the family patriarch, Ziya, was cementing his financial relationship with the



Darvishis, the Iranian family with ties to the country's Revolutionary Guard.

At least three Darvishis—the brothers Habil, Kamal, and Keyumars—appear to be associates of the Guard. In Farsi press accounts, Habil, who runs the Tehran Metro Company, is referred to as a *sardar*, a term for a senior officer in the Revolutionary Guard. A cable sent on March 6, 2009, from the U.S. Embassy in Baku described Kamal as having formerly run “an alleged Revolutionary Guard-controlled business in Iran.” The company, called Nasr, developed and acquired instruments, guidance systems, and specialty metals needed to build ballistic missiles. In 2007, Nasr was sanctioned by the U.S. for its role in Iran's effort to develop nuclear missiles.

The cable said that Kamal and Keyumars were frequent visitors to Azerbaijan; Kamal had recently established “a close business relationship/friendship” with Ziya Mammadov, and, with Mammadov's assistance, had been awarded “at least eight major road construction and rehabilitation contracts, including contracts for construction of the Baku-Iranian Astara highway.” (Keyumars also seems to have been involved in these deals.) The cable added, “We assume Mammedov [sic] is a silent partner in these contracts.”

Iran has two militaries. The Iranian Army is a conventional force whose mission is to protect the country. The Revolutionary Guard is an independent force of about a hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, whose duty is to protect the country's Islamic system and to preserve the power of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Revolutionary Guard has its own air force and navy, and it has a unit known as the Quds Force, which the United States has identified as a major supporter of Hezbollah and other international terrorist groups. The Guard has developed a shadow economy within Iran to fund its activities and expand its power. It controls all official border crossings and runs several unofficial ports, solely for its own use. The Revolutionary Guard smuggles into the country everything from consumer goods blocked by sanctions to drugs. It also owns seem-

ingly legitimate companies in construction, energy, telecommunications, auto manufacturing, and banking. According to the United States Institute of Peace, the Guard is linked “to dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of companies that appear to be private in nature but are run by [Revolutionary Guard] veterans.”

J. Matthew McNinnis, an Iran expert at the American Enterprise Institute, who served as a consultant to Michael Flynn when Flynn was the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, told me that owners of Revolutionary Guard-related businesses often become rich. But there is a catch: from time to time, they should expect to be asked to serve the needs of the Guard. “When the Revolutionary Guard says, ‘We need to move some illicit stuff,’ or ‘We need new parts for our missiles,’ they reach out to these guys,” McNinnis explained. “It's a soft network that can do all sorts of things that are very hard to trace.”

Keyumars Darvishi once ran Raman, a construction firm that is owned by the Islamic Revolution Mostazafan Foundation. According to the United Nations, the foundation is a major financial arm of the Revolutionary Guard. Keyumars left Raman to run Azarpasillo, the putatively independent construction company that received multiple road contracts in Azerbaijan. According to Azarpasillo's Web site, it was incorporated in 2008. In recent years, Keyumars has also served as the acting director of the Tehran Metro Company, filling in for his brother Habil.

Mehrza Boroujerdi, a political scientist at Syracuse University, who studies the political, economic, and military elite of Iran, said, “It looks like Azarpasillo is a front organization for the Revolutionary Guard.” He found it inconceivable that

Keyumars Darvishi, after working for years in a company controlled by the Revolutionary Guard, would quit, raise large amounts of capital on his own, and then become the head of a fully independent company that competed against Revolutionary Guard fronts for contracts. Khatam Al-Anbia, an Iranian construction giant that is controlled by the Guard and is under U.S. sanctions, has subcon-

tracted Azarpasillo on at least two major infrastructure projects in Iran. The Tehran Metro Company is also involved in both projects. McNinnis told me, “If you see a connection with Khatam Al-Anbia, you would assume the connections to the Revolutionary Guard are there. The suspicion of Azarpasillo being a front company is certainly worth investigating. It would fit a normal pattern.”

Alan Garten told me that the Trump Organization checks to see if potential Trump partners are on “watch lists and sanctions lists,” and that the company knew nothing of Ziya Mammadov's relationship to the Darvishis until 2015, when it learned that “certain principals associated with the developer may have had some association with some problematic entities.” And yet, by that point, the U.S. Embassy cables had been online for four years. Garten insisted that the Trump Organization still has no idea if the association between the Mammadovs and the Darvishis is real, or if it's simply an allegation “spread by the media.” I recently spoke with Allison Melia, who until 2015 was one of the C.I.A.'s lead analysts of Iran's economy; she now works for the Crumpton Group, a strategic advisory firm whose services include conducting due diligence for companies. She told me that her team could have compiled a dossier on the Mammadovs and their connection to the Revolutionary Guard in “a couple of days.” She said that any reputable investigative firm conducting a risk assessment would have advised a U.S. company to avoid a deal with a family connected to the Revolutionary Guard.

The U.S. has imposed various sanctions on Iran since the Islamic Revolution, in 1979. In recent years, U.S. and international efforts have focussed on isolating Iran from the global financial system, in order to prevent it from funding terrorist groups and contributing to worldwide instability. In 2015, the U.N., spurred by the Obama Administration, reached an agreement with Iran, and lifted some sanctions in return for a slowdown of the country's nuclear program. However, according to the Congressional Research Service, many sanctions against Iran remain in effect, because of the country's “support for terrorism, its human-rights abuses, its interference in specified countries in the





## NAVESINK

Before he died, blind and emaciated,  
my grandfather, who loved the opera,  
told me sometimes  
among the tall trees he walked and  
listened to the sound  
of a river entering the sea  
by letting itself be swallowed.

—*Meghan O'Rourke*

region, and its missile and advanced-conventional-weapons programs." In December, 2015, the U.S. House of Representatives imposed additional sanctions on the Revolutionary Guard and its associated businesses.

American companies must insure that they are not receiving funds that originated with any sanctioned entity. Ignorance is not a defense, especially if there is ample warning that a foreign partner could have a link to such an entity. Most firms, upon hearing of even a slight chance of Iranian involvement, conduct due diligence that is much more extensive than what is typical for F.C.P.A. compliance. Erich Ferrari, an attorney who specializes in sanctions-related legal cases, said that before the Trump Organization cashed any checks it should have been certain of "the source of the funds"—"not only the bank it was remitted from but how the Mammadovs actually earned the money they paid." He said of the Baku deal, "It takes a lot to shock a lawyer, but I've had very few clients do so little due diligence."

THE NEXUS BETWEEN the Mammadovs and the Darvishis suggests both opportunism and desperation. Ziya Mammadov is sixty-four, and in recent years the family's position in Azerbaijan has begun to weaken. President Aliyev has systematically isolated, and then fired, longtime members of the regime in order to make way for his own cronies. From 2008 to 2014, Ziya Mammadov, perhaps fearing his ejection from political office, vastly increased his personal wealth.

During the same period, mounting international sanctions made it far more difficult for Iran to sell oil abroad, re-

ceive foreign funds, and import products. International banks became increasingly reluctant to accept funds from businesses owned by the Revolutionary Guard, severely limiting its ability to support allies such as Hezbollah and the Syrian government. At a moment when Iran was struggling to find ways to send money outside the country, Keyumars Darvishi joined Azarpassillo and began making one deal after another in Azerbaijan.

Ziya Mammadov apparently had complete discretion with regard to Azarpassillo's projects. On April 6, 2007, Anne Derse, then the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, wrote in a cable that Charles Redman, at the time a senior vice-president for the American construction firm Bechtel, had recently met with Ziya Mammadov. Redman was looking for business, and knew that Azerbaijan was planning several major new roads. Bechtel could build them, he said, at an average cost of six million dollars per kilometre. Mammadov complained to him that this was too expensive. Bechtel ended up building nothing. Instead, much of the roadwork was done by Azarpassillo—at a much higher cost. According to a 2012 report by Azerbaijan's Center for Economic and Social Development, an independent think tank, road construction during Mammadov's tenure was "the most expensive in the world," costing an average of eighteen million dollars per kilometre. (Derse declined to comment; Redman did not respond to e-mails.)

The available evidence strongly suggests that Ziya Mammadov conspired with an agent of the Revolutionary Guard to make overpriced deals that would enrich them both while allowing them to flout prohibitions against

money laundering and to circumvent sanctions against Iran. Based on Ziya Mammadov's past, it seems reasonable to assume that his main motive was profit. Like most Azerbaijanis, he is a secular Shiite Muslim, and he has no known ties to hard-line factions in Iran. Why did the Darvishis want to work with the Mammadovs? It might have caught their attention that the Mammadovs had their own private bank—one that had unfettered access to the global financial system.

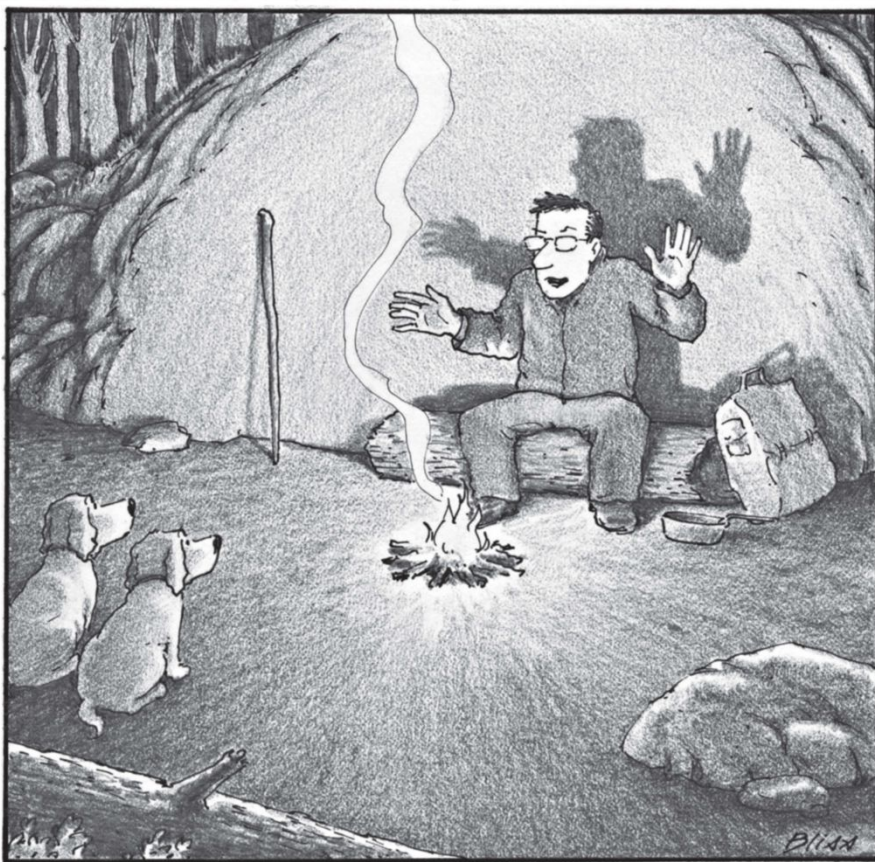
While Azarpassillo was making deals with the Transportation Ministry, the Mammadovs were investing heavily in a series of large construction projects. Money launderers love construction projects. They attract legitimate funds from governments and private investors, and they require frequent payouts to legitimate subcontractors: cement factories, lumberyards, glass manufacturers, craftsmen. In the Trump Tower Baku project, money was going in and out of the U.S., the United Kingdom, Turkey, Romania, the United Arab Emirates, and several other countries. With such projects, it can be exceedingly difficult to detect the spread of illicit funds.

At the same time, the Mammadovs' money was flowing through holding companies in offshore banking centers. According to leaked documents in the Panama Papers, companies controlled by the family have opened accounts in such places as the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, and Panama. The shell companies that list Mammadovs as beneficiaries or officers have bland names such as Trans-European Leasing Group and 1st Rate Investment, and many of them are owned by other shell companies.

In 2009, a year after Baku XXI Century began building the tower, the company opened the Baku International Bus Terminal, an enormous station that includes a shopping mall and a hotel. During this period, the Mammadov family also began building a hotel, a golf course, and a spa in the mountains north of Baku.

Meanwhile, the Mammadovs spent lavishly on themselves. Ziya built a mansion in one of the most expensive neighborhoods of Baku, and, on the beach, a villa whose walls are decorated to resemble ancient Egyptian bas-reliefs. Elton's son, Aynar, became famous for having a collection of expensive cars,





*"Turns out the sound of the squeaky toy was coming from inside the house."*

including a Ferrari, a Maserati, and a Lamborghini. Anar began using the Gulfstream G450, which typically costs forty-one million dollars, and bought a seven-bedroom home in London. He also spent millions of dollars on an effort to promote Azerbaijan in Washington, D.C., hosting galas for members of Congress and other powerful figures. A former associate of the Trump Organization told me that in 2012, on one of Anar's trips to America, he visited Trump Tower, in New York, to meet with Donald Trump and company executives. (The Trump Organization would not confirm the visit.) Around this time, the contracts for the Baku project were issued.

Between 2004 and 2014, Mammadov family businesses spent more than half a billion dollars on large construction projects. They also poured money into a major construction-materials company, an insurance firm, and a new headquarters. It's not clear how the Mammadovs funded such enormous invest-

ments while spending so much on themselves. They may have received loans, or secretly owned profitable businesses that supported the flurry of spending. Another explanation is that some of the investment money came from the Revolutionary Guard, through Azarpassillo.

Calls and e-mails to Azarpassillo, the Iranian Mission to the U.N., and the Azerbaijani government were not returned. Ziya and Anar Mammadov did not respond to requests for comment. Donald Trump has not addressed the Baku deal since becoming President. A Department of Justice spokesperson would not comment on the possibility of its investigating the Trump Tower Baku deal. The White House declined to comment.

**I**F, AS ALAN GARTEN told me, the Trump Organization learned in 2015 about "the possibility" that the Mammadovs had ties to the Revolutionary Guard, it is striking that the company did not end

the Baku deal until December, 2016. During this period, Garten told me, the Trump Organization never asked its Azerbaijani partners about the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, but it did send several default notices for late payments.

Throughout the Presidential campaign, Trump was in business with someone that his company knew was likely a partner with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. In a March, 2016, speech before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Trump said that his "No. 1 priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran." Calling Iran the "biggest sponsor of terrorism around the world," he promised, "We will work to dismantle that reach—believe me, believe me." In the speech, Trump lamented that Iran had been allowed to develop new long-range ballistic missiles. According to Iran Watch, an organization that monitors Iran's military capabilities, much of the technology to make the missiles was provided by Nasr, the company once run by Kamal Darvishi.

I asked Garten why the Trump Organization hadn't cancelled the Baku contract in 2015. He said that there was "no rush," because "the project had already stalled and was showing no signs of moving forward." The Azerbaijani lawyer who worked on the project has seen the hotel's interior, and told me that it is almost finished. In an interview with the magazine *Baku*, published in April, 2015, Ivanka Trump said that she was eager to enjoy the hotel's "huge spa area," and promised that the hotel would open "in June."

Moreover, Garten said, the Trump Organization had signed binding contracts with the Mammadovs and couldn't simply abandon its agreements. But Jessica Tillipman, the law-school assistant dean, told me, "You can't violate sanctions just because you have a contract with someone." According to Erich Ferrari, the lawyer who specializes in sanctions, companies that learn of a possible sanctions violation typically commission a "look-back" investigation that "reviews all payments you received, to make sure they didn't originate with a sanctioned entity." He added, "All the big four accounting companies do them routinely." The Trump Organization did not commission a look-back.

The Baku deal appears to be the second



time that the Trump Organization has turned a blind eye to U.S. efforts to sanction Iran. In 1998, when Donald Trump purchased the General Motors Building, in Manhattan, he inherited as a tenant Iran's Bank Melli. The following year, the Treasury Department listed Bank Melli as an institution that was "owned or controlled" by the government of Iran and that was covered by U.S. sanctions. (The department later labelled Bank Melli one of the primary financial institutions through which Iran was funnelling money to finance terrorism and to develop weapons of mass destruction.) The Trump Organization kept Bank Melli as a tenant for four more years before terminating the lease.

The Baku project is hardly the only instance in which the Trump Organization has been associated with a controversial deal. The Trump Taj Mahal casino, which opened in Atlantic City in 1990, was repeatedly fined for violating anti-money-laundering laws, up until its collapse, late last year. According to ProPublica, Trump projects in India, Uruguay, Georgia, Indonesia, and the Philippines have involved government officials or people with close ties to powerful political figures. A few years ago, the Trump Organization abandoned a project in Beijing after its Chinese partner became embroiled in a corruption scandal. In December, the Trump Organization withdrew from a hotel project in Rio de Janeiro after it was revealed to be part of a major bribery investigation. Ricardo Ayres, a Brazilian state legislator, told Bloomberg, "It's curious that the Trumps didn't seem to know that their biggest deal in Brazil was bankrolled by shady investors." But, given the Trump Organization's track record, it seems reasonable to ask whether one of the things it was selling to foreign partners was a willingness to ignore signs of corruption.

To this day, the Trump Organization has not provided satisfying answers to the most basic questions about the Baku deal: who owns Baku XXI Century, the company with which they signed the contracts; the origin of the funds with which Baku XXI Century paid the Trump Organization; whether the Mammadovs used their political power to benefit themselves and the Trump Organiza-

tion; and whether the Mammadovs used money obtained from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to fund the Trump Tower Baku.

At one point, Garten allowed me to review the Trump Organization's original contract with the Mammadovs. It authorizes the company to order an independent audit of Baku XXI Century's financial records at any time—a provision likely included to insure that the Mammadovs didn't hide profits that were supposed to be shared with the Trump Organization. Such an audit could well have exposed illicit activity. Garten refused to say if an audit had been conducted.

In dealing with the Mammadovs, the Trump Organization seems to have taken them entirely at their word. Garten pointed me to a provision in one contract in which Anar Mammadov represented himself as the sole owner of Baku XXI Century. Given that Elton Mammadov told me that he controlled the company, and that its ownership was a "commercial secret," what proof did the Trump Organization have that Anar's claim was true? Garten could not say.

Garten has been the company's chief legal officer only since January. His predecessor was Jason Greenblatt, whose name appeared on the contract I reviewed. Greenblatt was in charge of the Trump Organization's due diligence and contracting work. He is now employed at the White House, as the President's special representative for international negotiations. He did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

In recent months, American officials have expressed concern that Trump Administration figures might be blackmailed by foreign entities. U.S. law-enforcement investigators and congressional staffers have probed claims that Russian government officials possess compromising information about President Trump, which might be used to blackmail him. (The President maintains that there is no such information.) In January, the Department of Justice informed the White House that Michael Flynn—then the national-security adviser—was vulnerable to being blackmailed by the Russians because he

had lied about having spoken with the Russian Ambassador. Flynn subsequently resigned.

In Azerbaijan, the power and the influence of the Mammadovs has declined sharply. Elton lost his seat in parliament in 2015. In February, Ziya was abruptly removed from his ministry. Anar has settled in London, an associate of his told me, and is living on a fraction of his former wealth. Meanwhile, in Iran, government officials are likely facing additional sanctions on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. If the Mammadovs or powerful Iranians have evidence that the Trump Organization broke laws, they might be tempted to exploit it.

The best way to determine if a crime was committed in the Baku deal would be a federal investigation, which could use the power of subpoena and international legal tools to obtain access to the contracts, the due diligence, internal e-mails, and financial documents. The Department of Justice routinely sends investigators to other countries to pursue possible F.C.P.A. and sanctions violations.

Senator Sherrod Brown, of Ohio, who is the ranking Democratic member of the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, said, in an e-mail, that a federal investigation was warranted: "The Trump Organization's Baku project shows the lack of 'extreme vetting' Mr. Trump applied to his own business dealings in cor-

ruption-plagued regimes around the globe. . . . Congress—and the Trump Administration itself—has a duty to examine whether the President or his family is exposed to terrorist financing, sanctions, money laundering, and other imprudent associations through their business holdings and connections."

More than a dozen lawyers with experience in F.C.P.A. prosecution expressed surprise at the Trump Organization's seemingly lax approach to vetting its foreign partners. But, when I asked a former Trump Organization executive if the Baku deal had seemed unusual, he laughed. "No deal there seems unusual, as long as a check is attached," he said. ♦





# SECRET SELVES

*Catherine Opie's photographs expose hidden truths about people and places.*

BY ARIEL LEVY

IN THE COURSE of a thirty-year career, the photographer Catherine Opie has made a study of the free-ways of Los Angeles, lesbian families, surfers, Tea Party gatherings, America's national parks, the houses of Beverly Hills, teen-age football players, the personal effects of Elizabeth Taylor, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Boy Scouts, her friends, mini-malls, and tree stumps. But her most famous photographs are probably two that she took of herself, early in her working life. In "Self-Portrait/Cutting," which Opie made in 1993, when she was thirty-two years old, she stands shirtless with her back to the camera in front of an emerald-green tapestry, which offsets her pale skin and the rivulets of blood emerging from an image carved into her back with a scalpel: a childlike scene of a house, a cloud, and a pair of smiling, skirt-wearing stick figures. In "Self-Portrait/Pervert," made the following year, Opie is faceless and topless and bleeding again: she sits in front of a black-and-gold brocade with her hands folded in her lap, her head sealed in an ominous black leather hood, the word "pervert" carved in oozing, ornate letters across her chest.

They are unnerving images—"Pervert" is too intense for me now," Opie told me recently—and they had a particularly jarring effect at the time she made them. When the photographs were exhibited at the Whitney Biennial, in 1995, they were "like shock troops crashing a mannerly art-world party," the critic Holland Cotter wrote in the *Times*. Among other things, "Pervert" was a fierce response to Jesse Helms and his allies in Congress who campaigned against funding AIDS research. (The disease, Helms reasoned, was the consequence of "deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct.") It was also a statement to the gay commu-

nity, which Opie saw as chasing respectability at the expense of sexual radicals like her and her friends, who were avid practitioners of sadomasochism. "The leather community was really disowned," Opie said. "The homophobia in relation to AIDS was so deep. People who weren't in the leather community were, like, 'Well, *they're* perverts.'" But, above all, the two self-portraits were pictures of Opie's secret selves. It was as if her invisible desires were exposed by the camera, her most intimate means of communication since childhood.

Really, what Opie liked best about transgressive sex was the way it created a feeling of family. "S/M was all about community for me," she said one afternoon, sitting in her sunny kitchen in Los Angeles, with its gleaming stainless-steel stove and Heath-tile backsplash. On a bench by the window was a pillow with a needle-point inscription that read, "Grandmothers are a special part of all that's cherished in the heart." Opie, who is fifty-five, smiled wistfully when she recalled that era: "You dress up with your friends; you do things together in the dungeons." At the time, she was taking photographs of her cohort, with their tattoos and piercings, in formal compositions and vibrant colors that evoked the Renaissance paintings of Hans Holbein. Opie felt that she was creating a portrait gallery of her own "royal family." There was something not just regal but disarmingly heart-felt in those pictures. As the Los Angeles art critic David Pagel put it, in 1994, "The strangest and most telling quality that Opie manages to smuggle into her images of aggressive misfits is a sense of wholesomeness."

Opie grew up in the Midwest. She was going to be a kindergarten teacher before she became a photographer. She always wanted to be a mother.

"Self-Portrait/Cutting" was about longing," Shaun Caley Regen, Opie's gallerist since 1993, told me. "It was about an unattainable ideal—two women, a house, whatever it was she felt she couldn't have—cut into her back."

In the intervening decades, Opie has moved from marginal radical to establishment fixture. In 2008, the Guggenheim devoted four floors to "Catherine Opie: American Photographer," a major mid-career retrospective that attracted some three thousand people a day. Several luminous shots that Opie took of Lake Michigan hung in the Obama White House. Opie is a tenured professor at U.C.L.A., and sits on the boards of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and the Andy Warhol Foundation. She earns more than a million dollars in a good year. Recently, when the Smithsonian Archives of American Art gave Opie a medal at a gala on the Upper East Side, the host noted that it was his first opportunity to honor a pillar of the "Los Angeles leather-dyke community."

Opie is so prominent in the Southern California art world that friends call her "the mayor of Los Angeles," but her photographs have remained quietly subversive. "Often, in my work, I think about what's iconic—and what is the way to reimage something that's iconic," Opie said. Surfers don't surf in her photographs: they wait for waves, a motionless line of silhouettes in a smoky sea. Freeways are empty of cars, because Opie shoots them at dawn on Sundays, when they become something architectural and still, as elegiac as the Pyramids of Giza in the nineteenth-century photographs of Maxime Du Camp. For a portrait of Diana Nyad, who, at sixty-four, became the first person to swim from Cuba to Florida, Opie photographed her naked, from behind, showing the ghostly white flesh that had been

COURTESY REGEN PROJECTS, LOS ANGELES AND LEHMANN MAUPIN, NEW YORK & HONG KONG





*In Opie's "Self-Portrait/Nursing," her chest bears the scar of an inscription from her days as an S/M practitioner: "Pervert."*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CATHERINE OPIE





covered by her bathing suit, offset by the leathery brown of the rest of her body. Nyad's skin had become a kind of photogram, marked by her quest, and in Opie's portrait one sees both the heroine who managed an unfathomable feat and the vulnerable geriatric who nearly died in the process.

It is as if Opie were able to photograph aspects of people and mini-malls and Yosemite Falls that are invisible to the rest of the world. Her pictures ask how sure we are about what we know to be true. "There's a certain kind of equality I'm trying to create, which is what I believe American democracy is about," Opie said. "If I were to pass judgment on, say, football players—that they were the asshole kids who used to beat me up in high school—that's not really *looking*."

SEVERAL MONTHS before Elizabeth Taylor died, in 2011, Opie started going to her house in Bel Air to photograph her possessions and private spaces: her vanity table, set with Lu-

cite containers of carefully organized eyeshadow; her sitting room, with its blue velvet sofas. The two never met—they were connected through a mutual accountant—but Taylor was often home while Opie was shooting. "One time, she called her private assistant, and he ran up and told me, 'Elizabeth would really like those Christmas decorations photographed,'" Opie said. "Then she peeked at me through the curtains."

Opie told me this sitting on the floor of the archive room in a five-thousand-square-foot space in the Brewery Arts Complex, in downtown L.A., where she had recently moved her studio. She was wearing jeans, sneakers, and an olive-green polo shirt that left visible the tattoo on her substantial forearm as she paged through a binder marked "700 Nimes Road," Taylor's address and the title of Opie's show of the work last year at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. One image depicted a stack of worn red Cartier boxes in front of a

silver-framed photograph of Taylor and Richard Burton. Another showed the silky sleeves of Taylor's bathrobes, in lavender and pale gray. The pictures were so intimate that you could almost smell them. "Because she's such an iconic movie star, if you lost the personal—or the person!—then you'd just feel like you were flipping through *Architectural Digest*," Opie said.

William Eggleston's photographs of Graceland—a portrait of Elvis through his artifacts—were an inspiration for the Taylor portfolio, and the pictures share a feeling of haunted stillness. They add up to a life, however glamorous, that has evaporated. Taylor died unexpectedly during Opie's project. "It became this last document," Opie said, "so my editing had to carry a certain kind of reverence: This is it. This is the sum."

Scrolling through images on her computer, Opie said, "Same thing happened with 9/11." By chance, she had been photographing Wall Street a few weeks before the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Suddenly, the pictures—understated black-and-white images of the labyrinth of the financial district, without a human being or a moving vehicle in sight—had a different meaning. Opie pulled up a photograph in which the Twin Towers are visible in the background. "They look like ghost buildings," she said.

She flipped to an image of the Cocoa Exchange Building, with its Flatiron-like curve, flanked by parked vehicles on Pearl and Beaver Streets. "This could very easily be a Berenice Abbott photograph—except for the cars," Opie said, and smiled. "The history of photography is full of those signifiers. And I love that kind of shit." There is almost no sky in any of the pictures; Opie shot them all from the viewpoint of a pedestrian looking forward. "New York is often photographed vertically, so to create this kind of Western landscape of the city, through the horizontal panorama, is another way of debunking an icon."

Opie's drive to memorialize the past—or the present as it slips into history—is offset by a desire to explode convention: she is a nostalgic



renegade. (Even her speech is a mixture of the rebellious and the homey. She has the slightly lazy sound of a pot-smoking California beach dude, but with Midwestern vowels, as open and flat as cornfields.) For the past year, she has been making a film, composed of still photographs, that combines her impulses: a reimagining of the sixties-era French art film “*La Jetée*,” which tells the story of a post-nuclear future in Paris. Opie’s film, “*The Modernist*,” is about an arsonist who is obsessed with L.A.’s landmark mid-century houses, and, driven to madness by their unattainability, starts methodically burning them down.

Opie got the idea for the film in the nineties, but, as often happens with her projects, it took on a new significance for her as she made it, with the election of a President who’d promised to return America to the halcyon days before feminism, globalism, and multiculturalism. “‘*La Jetée*’ was about the future,” Opie said. “‘*The Modernist*’ is about nostalgia. The story is about a longing for the past that we can’t obtain.”

UNTIL OPIE WAS thirteen, her family lived in Sandusky, Ohio. She spent her childhood “having sleepovers in people’s back yards in tents,” she said, “like real Norman fucking Rockwell.” Her mother was a gym teacher who became a housewife after she had children; her father, who died four years ago, ran OP Craft, his family’s art-supply company. He was a Republican, and had one of the country’s preëminent collections of political memorabilia. (One of Opie’s favorite artifacts from her inheritance is a commemorative ribbon made after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, whose likeness is embroidered on it in tiny stitches below the American flag, with the quotation “I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and if it be the pleasure of almighty God, to die by.”) Opie’s most vivid memories are of time spent outdoors. “We would roam the woods and the creeks by ourselves,” she said. “All summer long, we’d be on our bikes, riding to the candy store.”

Opie’s parents bought her a starter

camera when she was in fourth grade, after she did a book report on Lewis Hine, who took startling portraits of child laborers across America and of immigrants coming in through Ellis Island. “He made the first photographs that actually created a change in laws and policies, and I just realized how important photography really is,” Opie said. “It was a real time of pictorialism in terms of magazines—you had *Life*, you had *Look*, you had *National Geographic*. So, in the same way you have kids looking at Instagram, there were always magazines around our house.” She took pictures of her parents, her block, her friends at the country club, her Barbie dolls. “I’ve pretty much been doing the same thing since I was nine,” she said. “I was making portraits of my friends. I was making self-portraits, I was making images of the neighborhood.” She was, as she likes to say, “mapping” her reality.

Or some of it. Her father was violent with her older brother—“brutalized him,” Opie said—and her brother, in turn, was violent with her. Her mother had an affair with a family friend, at her father’s behest. “Dad set it up because he wanted to be a swinger!” Opie told me. “But then she really fell in love. Mom was thinking of running away with him. *He* was probably just a dude having a good time.” Then her father told the family that he had cancer. “He went to the Cleveland Clinic—but always by himself, never with my mom—and the doctors told him to move to a warmer climate,” Opie said. “How much of that is true is a subject of debate in my family. I think what happened was my grandfather sold the company out from under him.”

Whatever the reason, when Opie was thirteen her family moved to California, to a suburb of San Diego called Poway. At the new house, Opie set up a darkroom in a spare bathroom, and, by babysitting for the family next door, saved enough to buy a 35-mm. camera. “I kind of made friends by taking pictures,” she said. “I went to the high-school plays and started taking photographs. I fell in love with this one woman—I had a *major* crush on her at a time when you didn’t tell anybody that—and I would print out the pic-

tures and give them to her and we became best friends.”

When Opie was sixteen, her parents divorced. “Dad drove my mom to a condo and said, ‘This is where you’re gonna live. I’m keeping the house and the kids,’” she told me. “Then my dad remarried immediately—he married this crazy woman, and my brother protected me from her in really nice ways. Like, he put a lock on my bedroom door when he realized she was crazy.” Her brother left to join the Air Force, and her father—less than a year into his second marriage—started having an affair with Opie’s mother, over at the condo. “It’s like a soap opera, I know,” she said. “The whole idea of the family unit was just totally chaotic and completely messed up for me.”

Yet Opie was reluctant to leave home. For two years after graduating from high school, she took classes at a community college, and worked at a camera store and as an outdoor-education counsellor. Eventually, she decided to become a teacher. “I knew I was really good with kids,” she said. “And I liked kids a lot.” At twenty, Opie left to study early-childhood education at Virginia Intermont College, a former women’s school that had recently gone coed. She began taking photography classes. “They were actually really dedicated artists, some of those professors,” she said. “For the first time in my entire life, I made it onto the dean’s list.” Opie believes that she might well have stayed in Virginia as a kindergarten teacher—“I think I would’ve ended up spending my whole life sitting on small chairs,” she said—if not for the intervention of a painter named Eleanor, who had been her father’s high-school girlfriend. “After my parents broke up the second time, she came out to California,” Opie said. “I’d broken my leg, and she painted this beautiful beach scene on my cast. Eleanor was an artist. She was from Sandusky, Ohio. She was just family right away—I knew what she was about.” During a college vacation, Opie visited Eleanor in New York City, and the two went out to photograph together. “She said, ‘You really are an artist. You’ve been doing



this your whole life. You need to go to a major city and find an art school.' And it just felt like the truth."

In 1982, Opie moved back to California to attend the San Francisco Art Institute, with help from her mother, who took out a loan on her car to pay the tuition. Suddenly, she found herself surrounded by artists and feminists and homosexuals: her people. "You're reading Kafka for the first time, you're understanding Engels—all of that besides the coming out." (Opie told her father that she was gay before she told her mother, knowing that he would be more open to it. "I think he kind of liked the idea of fantasizing about his daughter with women," she said. "He was a bit of a perv, my dad.") She began frequenting Amelia's, a lesbian bar in the Mission district. "There was a leather-dyke scene there, and I found them kind of hot—like, 'Whoa, they seem dangerous.'" She was attracted to those women, but, even more, she wanted to learn from them. To Opie, "They were the leading thinkers of this revolution around women's bodies. Like, the San Francisco Take Back the Night marches weren't a bunch of hand-holding women—they were radicals *taking* back the night."

Opie began contributing photographs to the lesbian sex magazine *On Our Backs*. (The title was a riposte to the anti-pornography feminist journal *Off Our Backs*.) She joined a women's S/M society called the Outcasts, co-founded by Gayle Rubin, an activist and academic. "She stood out," Rubin said. "She was a student then, and she had a kind of alertness that was evident—she seemed unusually observant." If her desires had been unspoken, now they were something to organize a social life around: the personal was not just political; it was communal. But, Opie said, "S/M was never sexual for me." It was something she did much more with friends than with lovers. The scariest and most violent secret impulses could be followed and validated, made almost cozy, in an atmosphere where you could always say no. "I just needed to push myself to get over an enormous amount of fear I had around my body," she said.

It was the era of the feminist movement's acrimonious "sex wars," during which the anti-porn faction—Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Robin Morgan, Gloria Steinem—battled with "pro-sex" feminists and S/M enthusiasts like Rubin, who believed they were broadening the boundaries of female power and eroticism. ("To our bewilderment, some women identified their sexuality with the S/M pictures we found degrading," the feminist Susan Brownmiller, a founder of the group Women Against Pornography, wrote. "They claimed we were condemning their minds and behavior, and I guess we were.") Opie and her friends discussed these issues passionately. "I was learning all this great shit from feminism," she said. "We talked in great detail about Dworkin. It wasn't just about going to a dungeon and playing. It was going to a dungeon and having philosophical conversations."

HERE ARE SOME things to expect the next time you attend a four-hour art-school crit: Unrestrained use of words like "ontological." Laconic murmuring. Androgyny. Dandruff. On the last day of Opie's fall "Americana" class for U.C.L.A. undergraduates, fifteen Studio Art majors consumed the cookies that Opie had brought from Whole Foods, and then inspected one another's work. Their photographs were mounted in several rooms in the Broad Art Center, which is surrounded by towering pines and sculptures by Richard Serra, Matisse, and Rodin. One student presented a moody, grainy image of sprinkler droplets whirling through the sky above blades of grass. "They look like they're disrupting the environment—even the paper itself," a young man in an orange sweatshirt said. "I think your images have a lot of phenomenological availability, and I am really in admiration."

The next picture—a shot of the sea with a landmass in the background, taken from the window of an airplane—was received with less enthusiasm. People accused the photographer, a young man with dirty, bleached hair wearing a sweatshirt that said "Violent Femme," of following the mores of Instagram.

Another student, defending him, asked, "Wait, does every square now mean Instagram?"

"It shouldn't, it shouldn't," Opie told them, shaking her head emphatically. "The square came before Instagram—it's called Hasselblad!" (In her own work, Opie eschewed the square for years, to avoid invoking Robert Mapplethorpe, her predecessor in exalting erotic deviance through photography.)

Opie had got up at three that morning—"I've never been a sleeper"—but she did not seem tired or impatient or bored. She seemed, as she almost always does, mellow, avuncular, benevolent, curious, and simultaneously earnest and amused. (She sometimes takes a cigarette break with her students. "I only do this when I'm here," she said, savoring an American Spirit. "You never really leave art school.") She told them, "I still get pleasure out of looking at an image like this—I like this image in terms of surface." There was perfect clarity on the rippling waves in the photograph.

A young woman dressed all in black, with an iPhone tucked into her waistband, wasn't having it. "I don't know," she said, agitated. "Desire, pleasure, *landscape* to someone like me signifies the backbone of colonialism."

The platinum-haired photographer sat on the floor against the wall, dejected. "Let's hear from you," Opie said to him.

"Damned if I do, damned if I don't," he mumbled.

"Stand up for your work!" Opie urged. Her tone was insistent but collegial. "Open it up! Don't shut it down, man."

The student shrugged and said, "I guess I was just interested in trying to take some pictures."

The class turned its attention to a young woman who looked like Audrey Hepburn, with a hoop piercing the cartilage between her nostrils. Her work depicted members of her family but looked like war photography, with children playing or crying around abandoned buildings that evoked bombed-out rubble. "I'm really over it," she said. "I'm at this point where I don't even know how to make photos. They're just falling apart."



“That’s when you dig deeper,” Opie said slowly, but with excitement. “It’s actually a good place to be in, having something fall apart.”

In her own development as a young artist, Opie felt her world dissolve a year after graduation, when she left San Francisco to pursue an M.F.A. at the California Institute of the Arts, in Valencia. The transition, she said, “sucked.” She was lonely, and felt that her nascent sexual powers had been rescinded. “It was, like, there is not gonna be one person who’s gonna go out with me down here,” she said. “It’s just never going to happen.” She had found a home and a chosen family in San Francisco, and in Valencia she felt displaced, turned around. “It was like some kind of time warp where I go back to the suburbs I came out of,” she continued. “And I didn’t have a car.” Stuck in place, she started photographing a planned community that was being built across the road from her apartment. Her thesis portfolio, “Master Plan,” featured photographs of matching model homes, plots of land, and billboards advertising an America where the children are apple-cheeked and towheaded and the parents are as straight as Ken and Barbie.

But the pictures don’t seem snide or dismissive. It was as if Opie had taken the feelings from her own suburban childhood—loneliness, tenderness, yearning, claustrophobia—and distributed them across the tract houses of Valencia. It was the first of many photographic investigations of the topic that probably fascinates Opie most: community.

IN THE ARCHIVE room, Opie showed me an image, from 1993, of an old friend of hers, who goes by Pig Pen: she is young and very thin and looks tough and a little tired sitting on a stool in a white tank top. Opie pointed to the tattoos of jack-o’-lanterns—one happy, one sad—on Pig Pen’s knees. “I love the pumpkins,” she said. “I hate to use the word ‘muse,’ but I have a certain obsession with Piggy. I love looking at Pig Pen—never get tired of looking at Pig Pen.”

Opie’s first solo show, in 1991, was mostly closeup photographs of Pig



*An image of domestic life expressed unresolved longing, Opie’s gallerist said.*

Pen and other friends of hers, wearing fake mustaches and beards, looking rebellious and confrontational, gleaming against golden backgrounds. They were portraits of her subjects’ macho alter egos: each was exhibited with a plaque engraved with the character’s nickname (“Papa Bear,” “Chief,” “Wolfe”). The title of that show, “Being and Having,” was a play on Jacques Lacan’s idea that men *have* the phallus, while women, as the embodiment of erotic desire in art, *are* the phallus. (Opie was dating an academic at the time.) Not long after the show, *Artforum* published an interview with the queer theorist Judith Butler, who argued that gender is always a performance, and used Opie’s photographs as a kind of illustration

of the idea. Like Butler’s thesis, these images have migrated toward the mainstream; two decades after they were taken, several of them were used to accompany the opening credits of the lesbian drama “The L Word.”

Opie met Pig Pen and the rest of the “Being and Having” crew soon after she finished graduate work at CalArts and moved to Los Angeles. “It was just like in high school—I started taking photos of this community and then we were sort of friends and then we became better friends,” Opie said. “It was like I was always there—*There’s Cathy and her camera.*” She laughed. “I was never as cool as they were. They were hotter. They definitely got more girls than I ever did. They rode a motorcycle better than I



did. I always felt like this suburban nerd in this groovy crowd that broke all the boundaries.”

Though Opie would come to feel deeply enmeshed in that rebellious group, she still had the longings that are purported to be the most conventionally female: she wanted a nuclear family, not just a royal family. “I’ve never really had a successful domestic relationship,” Opie told an interviewer in those years. “I’ve always wanted one.”

In 1998, Opie went on a road trip to photograph lesbian families—women who’d had children, who lived in groups, in couples, in North Carolina and Oklahoma and New York City—for a portfolio that she called “Domestic.” She ended up crisscrossing the country in an RV for three months. “I was travelling around trying to figure out what it was all about,” she said.

Opie was stumbling toward her own domestic future. In the fall of 1999, she was awarded a fellowship at Washington University, in St. Louis, Missouri. In the two months that she spent there, she became friends with a professor of painting named Julie Burleigh, a single mother from a prominent family in small-town Louisiana. They had just begun to grow close when Opie accepted a job offer from Yale, and moved to New York City. Her life was changing rapidly: she’d decided that she didn’t want to wait any longer to become a mother. “A number of my butch friends were shocked that I was going to get pregnant and have a baby—like, ‘How can you do that?’” Opie recalled. “I was, like, why can’t I be butch and have a baby? Why can’t I acknowledge the fact that I’m a biological woman and I have a vagina that can do shit?” She tried five times to get pregnant, using her friend Rodney’s sperm and a turkey baster. “Different dykes would come by the loft, and Rodney would come over and look at gay male porn magazines—then they’d take it in to me in a Russel Wright teacup.”

Meanwhile, through phone calls and visits, Opie was intensifying her relationship with Burleigh, who had never been involved with a woman before, and who had just finished

## BRANCA

Ralph Branca was the fifteenth of seventeen children.  
This poem is not the poem of “the speaker.”

His father was an immigrant from Calabria.  
These words are those of Robert Pinsky. Speaking.

Branca wore Dodger uniform number 13.  
“Speaking” is the punch line of a Jewish joke.

Some Romans call Calabrians “Africani.”  
Brooklyn had its own daily, the Brooklyn *Eagle*.

At eighty-five Branca learned about his mother.  
He was twenty-one when Robinson joined the Dodgers.

At eleven, I loved Robinson for his daring  
Running the bases. Stealing home. His fire.

Branca was one of the few who befriended him.  
I was too young to understand his mission,

The fuel of that dancing to taunt the pitcher.  
Robinson never forgot Branca’s kindness.

What the old man found out about his mother  
Is she was born a Jew in Hungary: Kati.

After he gave up the most famous home run ever,  
Back in the clubhouse Branca lay weeping, face down.

Kati gave birth to seventeen Catholic children.  
The Giants won the pennant. 1951.

Branca means “claw,” a fit name for a pitcher.  
His teammates thought it best that he cry alone,

But “Only my dear friend Jackie, who knew me so well,  
Came over and put his arm around my shoulder.”

bringing up a daughter, whom she’d had when she was eighteen. “She wasn’t planning on having another kid,” Opie said. “Julie had *just* gotten through it. But she fell in love with me—and she probably thought, Oh, she’s forty, she’ll never get pregnant.” Eventually, Opie realized that intrauterine insemination was covered by her health insurance at Yale: she got pregnant on the first try.

In the midst of her pregnancy, Opie was recruited to teach at U.C.L.A. She returned to Los Angeles in 2001, a month before she gave birth to her

son, Oliver, and settled in a house in West Adams. “Julie didn’t move in till Oliver was three months old, so I was there alone in this big house,” Opie said. “I had a nanny, and I would pump in my office. I’d teach, and then I’d go home to him.” About a year later, Opie made “Self-Portrait/Nursing,” which is now in the Guggenheim’s permanent collection. She is topless again in that picture, but for the first time she shows her face to the camera. Holding her son in her tattooed arms, she gazes down into his eyes as he nurses—a butch-dyke



The Nazis killed the aunts and uncles Branca  
Didn't know existed until he was old.

42: in itself, a nothing of a number.  
The Dodgers traded Branca to the Tigers.

Grief: with its countless different ways and strains.  
Glory: a greater thing than success, but slower.

Some of the Tigers who had been Giants explained  
To Branca how the Giants had stolen the signs

From opposition catchers: The telescope  
In center field. Wires, buzzers. Branca chose not

To talk about it. It's all in Prager's book:  
His research unearthed Kati, those aunts and uncles.

The Dodgers were taken from Brooklyn by their owner:  
I, Robert Pinsky, choose not to say his name.

I didn't live in Brooklyn, but I knew the score.  
I knew it was a kind of underdog place.

Nowadays once a year all Major Leaguers  
Wear Jackie Robinson's number, 42.

In the joke, the person who answers the telephone  
At Goldberg, Goldberg, and Goldberg keeps replying

That Goldberg is out of the office. And so is Goldberg.  
"Well, all right, let me talk to Goldberg." "Speaking."

Robinson spoke to Branca: "If not for you,"  
He said, "We never would have made it this far."

—Robert Pinsky

Madonna and Child. If you look closely, you can see the raised white scars across her chest, indelibly looping into the word "pervert."

THE NEW FEDERAL courthouse in downtown Los Angeles was designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to look like a floating glass cube: solid and clean—as the law ought to be—and suspended above the pedestrian flow of everyday life. Inside, sunlight pours down through a ten-story atrium of pale marble, flanked by dozens of courtrooms. Sky bridges cross

through the space, and from each one visitors are confronted with the sight of the massive piece that Opie made for the building, "Yosemite Falls."

Six tremendous panels—five hundred pounds apiece, installed with a crane—depict the highest waterfall in Yosemite National Park. Each photograph hangs on a separate floor, but from certain vantage points they all seem to cascade together. "You can traverse the whole building like you traverse the landscape," Opie said, as she moved from bridge to bridge one recent afternoon. She conceived "Yo-

semita Falls" while the building was still under construction. "They showed me the architectural plan, and it was all studs when I first visited," she said. "I designed it off of photographs from the Internet, and then I went to Yosemite and made the piece." She shot from a bridge, which allowed her to capture all the perspectives represented in the building. "It was, like, how do you take something like Yosemite Falls and de-cliché it?" The top three panels follow the rushing water as it seems to pour from the sky and toward the river basin, and the lower three present the falls' reflection in the water collected at the bottom. Opie thought of the piece as a metaphor for the scales of justice: an image and its mirror, hanging in balance.

We went down to the floor where the picture of the river hangs. "This is a really sweet view," Opie said, looking at the dark forest around the base of the falls. She motioned toward the shadows, where you could see river plants through the reflection on the surface, and smooth black and gray pebbles below. "This becomes magical, like a Monet, almost." Most people wouldn't think of the river as Yosemite Falls, she pointed out, but in her mind it always served as the midpoint, the fulcrum of the scales: "Below it, it's either the abyss or the reflection." Looking around at the courtrooms, she said, "This is when one's life is turned upside down—when gravity changes."

Opie liked the idea that people who might not go to museums could have an experience of art, at a moment in their lives when they might badly need an encounter with the sublime. "I want to do more buildings now!" she said. "I love architecture. I love working with architects and figuring out, What's something that could be iconic and live in the life of the building? This is gonna stay here forever." Even when the building was empty, Opie had given it an inner life.

THE DREAM OF lesbian domesticity that once seemed out of reach—that she once had cut into her back—is now Opie's reality. She lives with Burleigh in a handsome,





*Opie's work subverts expectations. In her photographs, surfers don't surf: they wait for waves.*



spacious house in Hancock Park, with chickens and rabbits in a coop in the back yard. Oliver, who recently turned fifteen, attends a progressive private school, where he has classmates named Aristotle and Theory; three years ago, Burleigh's daughter gave birth to a son, whom she brings to visit every Sunday.

Burleigh is wiry and lean where Opie is hefty and solid. Because Burleigh has longer hair and occasionally wears a dress—as she did at their wedding, in Mexico, three years ago—it is tempting to think of her as the more feminine of the two, but they don't see it that way. "Cathy calls me her husband, because I'm taller," Burleigh told me. "Or because she feels like I'm the final word on stuff."

"Indian or Thai?" Opie asked one recent evening, as they were getting ready to order dinner.

"Indian," Burleigh replied firmly, and ordered for Opie and their guests: Pig Pen, who had arrived that morning from Mill Valley, and their friend Steak, who was the subject of an early photograph that the Museum of Modern Art bought not long ago. In it, Steak faces away from the camera, her red hair buzzed short, with the word "dyke" tattooed across the back of her neck. "Ye Olde Dyke Tattoo," Steak said, turning around to show it off. She shrugged. "At the time, it was a bold statement."

Opie's photographs of her friends over the years are their own kind of historical record. The subjects age and transform, their piercings multiply or disappear, their flesh goes from taut and unmarked to weathered and increasingly crowded with tattoos. In her studio, Opie had shown me an image from 2009 of Pig Pen looking soulful and handsome, gazing away from the camera, shirtless, the scars of a double mastectomy faintly visible below each nipple, the word "ambiguous" in graffiti-like scrawl next to a large tattoo of a beating heart. "Piggy did chest surgery but didn't do hormones—that's a menopause mustache," Opie said reverently, and touched her own not insubstantial whiskers. "We've always had mustache contests. But Pig's right now is really fucking good."

Pig Pen was visiting to star in "The Modernist," but usually works as a scenic artist for Restoration Hardware, and does "durational performance art" with a partner, Julie Tolentino. "We do a six-hour piece where I feed her fifty pounds of honey from the top of a hunting tripod," Pig Pen said. "It's an interesting position, because it's pretty dangerous, and a lot of people see it as a male dominating a female."

After the food arrived, Oliver joined the group at the kitchen table, and listened to them talk about the old days, when Opie lived in a building that they called Casa de Estrogen and they frequented a place named Club Fuck. "All these West Hollywood people started coming," Pig Pen recalled, smiling. "And that's when everybody started getting gay bashed—because they were walking half nude through Latino family neighborhoods to go to the gay bar. I mean, have a little common sense! Just a *little*. Our crew would go to a club and *then* take off our trenchcoats and be in the gear."

A woman named Sweet Pea, who worked the door at the club, went on to become a fashion designer. "You watched Sweet Pea on 'Project Runway,' Oliver!" Opie said. "Remember?"

"Not her first season but her all-star season," Oliver, who is blond and tall and gentle, replied.

His mother returned to the topic of the friends' youthful clubbing: "Butch was really not something that was accepted in L.A., and we had each other and that was it."

"We'd go to the lesbian bars," Pig Pen said, "and we'd get turned away!" They all laughed at the memory.

"May I be excused?" Oliver asked. "I have homework."

Opie nodded and resumed the conversation. "There are members of the old crew that call me up and are, like, 'I messed up the pictures you took of me. Can you print me another one?' It's, like, no, that paper doesn't even exist anymore!" Replacing the portraits would be a substantial gift. "I get paid *fifty thousand dollars* to take someone's picture," Opie said, cackling and pounding the table with her fist. Her friends were laugh-

ing deliriously. "Isn't that hilarious?"

"I think I put thumbtacks through mine," Pig Pen said.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, Opie, her assistant, Heather Rasmussen, and Pig Pen wound through the Hollywood Hills in Opie's BMW hybrid, heading to the Chemosphere—"the most modern home built in the world," according to an Encyclopædia Britannica entry from 1961. The octagonal house, designed by John Lautner, an apprentice of Frank Lloyd Wright's, hovers like a flying saucer amid the treetops, perched on a thirty-foot concrete column that emerged from a sharp slope studded with jade plants and cacti. They ascended by funicular with the house's owner Lauren Taschen, an art consultant and collector who is married to the publisher Benedikt Taschen. "This view was in the movie 'Body Double,'" Taschen, who was wearing a cape of a sweater and a hulking diamond ring, said. Pig Pen and Opie were giddy.

Inside, the house was sparsely furnished with red Arne Jacobsen Egg chairs; on the wall hung a Martin Kippenberger painting of a black boot. From the front windows you could see the San Fernando Valley spread out, an ocean of rooftops. Opie told Taschen that they'd only need to work outside. "But let me check with you about your boundaries," Opie said. "I don't want to do anything to piss you off." She explained that she'd be shooting Pig Pen pouring water around the perimeter of the house from a gas can, and then lighting matches. (Later, she'd superimpose images of raging fires onto the pictures.) "It's weird," Opie said after she described the premise of her film. "It's kind of a piece that's gonna work better under a Trump Administration."

"Right," Taschen said. "Because the world is ending."

Pig Pen squatted outside with the gas can, by the edge of the front deck—and, seemingly, the world—as Opie clicked her camera and offered directions: bend down more, turn toward the house, look a little crazier.

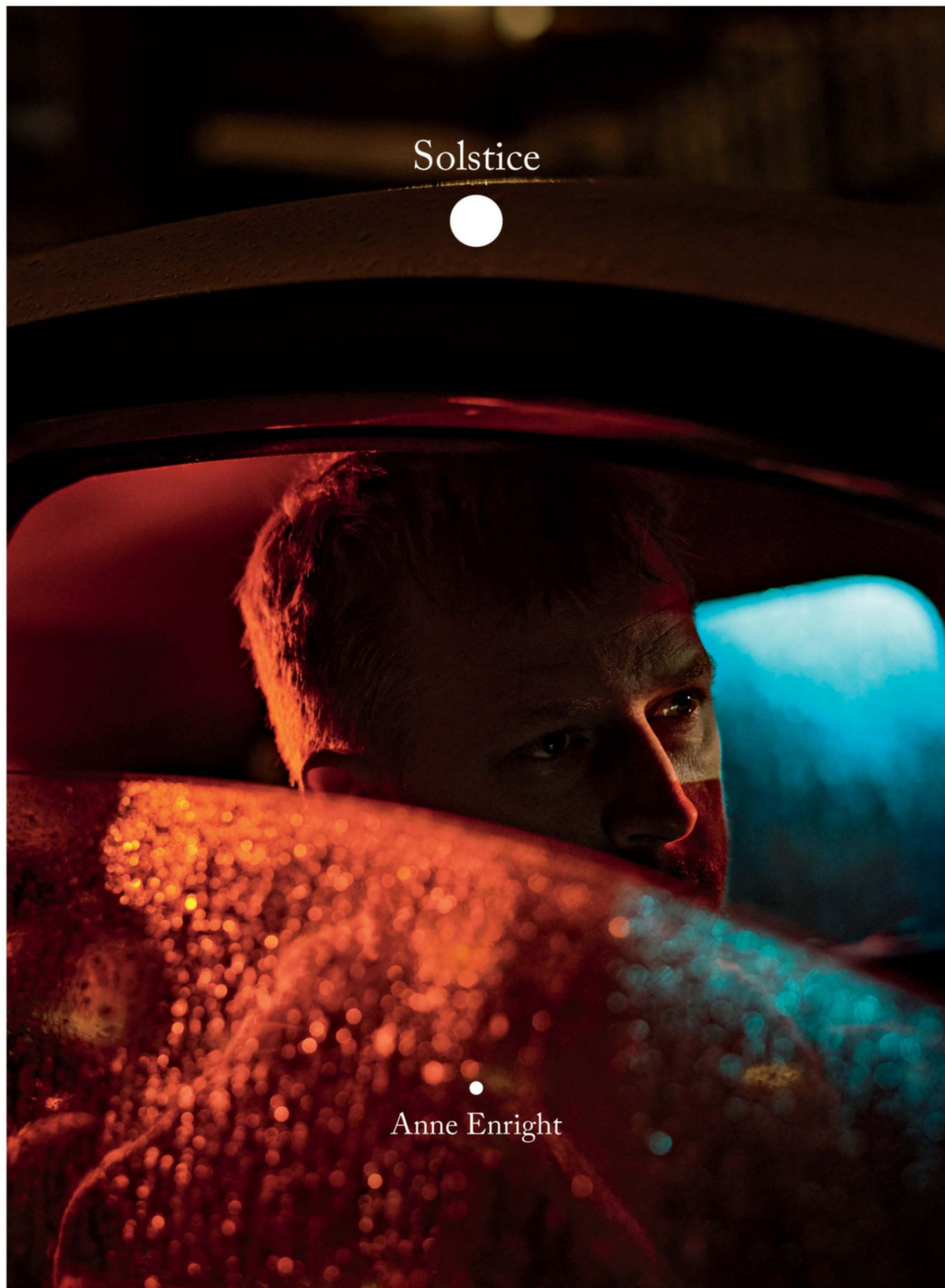
Opie got a shot that she loved: a reflection of Pig Pen in the windows of the Chemosphere, wearing a very intense expression and holding a lit match. She lifted up her camera to show Rasmussen. "It's just eye candy!" Opie said. "Isn't that ridiculous? It's so good it hurts my eyes!" ♦



Solstice



Anne Enright





IT WAS THE year's turning. These few hours like the blink of a great eye—just enough light to check that the world is still there, before shutting back down.

Sometime in the midafternoon, he had an impulse to go home, or go somewhere, and when he lifted his head, of course, it was dark outside. It just felt wrong. Two hours later, he was in the multi-story looking for his car and he couldn't find the thing. It was like a lost dog. He clicked the key fob over and over, but there were no answering lights flashing orange on Level 2, where he usually parked, or on Level 3. He went up the little stairs to Level 4, then along the tiny path on the side of the ramp to 4A, brushing against the live cars that were stuck on the slope, nose to tail. He glanced into the windows as he went past and there was a gone look to the drivers' faces; they'd already left for home.

Out there, it was Christmas, but he did not think it was Christmas inside the multi-story, the only place in Dublin that had no fairy lights. He walked the last ramp to Level 5. Above him, the black concrete angles of the car-park roof gave way to the night sky, and the car was right there, out in the weather. He took a moment to glance up and around him at the longest night of the year.

It felt like the end of things. Made you want your religion back. He looked out over the landscape of west Dublin, the square industrial units set among dark young trees, and he entertained the possibility that it would not work this time. This time, the world would spin deeper into shadow. And, because the exit ramps were still jammed, he stayed a minute to check the solstice on his phone. For some reason, it didn't always happen on the same day, but in 2016 it came just when you thought it should, on the twenty-first of December. Not at midnight, though—"the event," as the Web site called it, would happen at 10:44 A.M. Irish time. Somewhere in that moment, whether he believed it or not, the sun would pause in the sky above him, or seem to pause. It would stop in its descent and start

its slow journey back to summer and the middle of the sky.

Or this year, he thought, it might not bother.

THE M50 WAS at a crawl, and there was the usual nightmare getting off at the Tallaght exit. He could see the red tail-lights running in a sequence toward him until he pushed his own brake pedal down. It would be stop-start all the way to Manor Kilbride.

A full forty minutes later, the dual carriageway turned into the old Blessington Road, and oncoming traffic shot by so close he flinched in the glare of the lights. This was the part of the journey that he loved best: the street lamps gave way to the idea of countryside, and there was a song on the radio as the road opened up ahead. The music made him feel like he could keep driving forever. It was a love song, or a sad song. It reminded him of a time in his life, some town he was in, he could not say where. The loss of that place made him unsure of this one. Or indifferent—as though he could clip an oncoming car and it wouldn't matter. And he didn't know what he was thinking, until a truck bellied past, sucking the air from the side of the car.

It gave him a fright. He checked all the mirrors and shifted in his seat, set his hands more deliberately on the steering wheel. After the turnoff, he followed his own headlights down a country lane, and when he got to the house he sat in the parked car for quite a while.

The night was very big out here.

There were three texts on his phone; ten, fifteen minutes apart.

When home?

Will I put yr name in the pot?

Food anyway, half-seven.

WHEN HE COMES in the door, there is the smell of cooking, the sound of pans and of water pouring into the sink. His daughter is failing to set the table and complaining about the Dakota Access Pipeline. "It's, like, so unfair," she says, and her family neither agrees nor disagrees, because that's just asking for it. Ruth is fifteen. She is arguing with her own shadow, her mother, her teachers, none of whom care about the Dakota Access Pipeline, or not

enough for her. "We live in County Wicklow," her mother sometimes likes to remind her. But Ruth does not see what *location* has to do with anything, and he would admire this more, he might even take up the discussion, but she is back on her phone.

He glances over her shoulder and, for once, she lets him see.

"What's that?"

"Just," she says. A person called chickenpenis has sent a funny picture to do with Kanye's breakdown, a video clip that jerks and repeats, endlessly. It's hard to know what the joke is. And what kind of person spells "penis" right and "chicken" with two "k"s?

"Is that someone you know?"

Ruth just rolls her eyes, types with two thumbs. Cracks up laughing, saying, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God!"

He looks into the kitchen, where his wife is trying to serve up stir-fry out of a too-heavy pan. She is in her track pants. Upstairs all day, at a guess, translating some car manual for solid German euros. Her hair is in a scrunchie, which does not suit her. He tries to remember the song he heard on the radio as he goes over to help, but "Go, go. Out!" she says, and it is gone.

Halfway through dinner, he becomes aware that Ross, his son, is talking to him about something or someone called Stripey. His son says that Stripey knew about death because he always went to Tiger's grave. After a moment, he realizes that Stripey is a cat and so is Tiger. The ones at the childminder's, when Ross was little. Cats from many years ago.

"Animals believe in death," his son says.

"You think?" This is a big statement for a ten-year-old. "Maybe he was just waiting for the other cat to come back out of there. I mean, maybe he doesn't know what the ground is. Maybe he doesn't believe in the ground."

The boy's face goes still, and he looks at his plate.

Ruth goes, "*Kcchchhhh*," does a Carrie hand out of the grave. And there is an immediate fight. Shouting, pushing.

"Hey, hey, that's enough!" he says.

When they are settled, his wife casts a baleful look at him, and he



shoots one back. *What have I done now?*

"I think the cat was sad," she says to Ross. "I think Stripey missed Tiger, don't you?"

She has put her hand on the loose fist his own hand makes beside his plate. This is one of the things they fight about. *Stop undermining your own son.* Which irritates the hell out of him. Because the boy has to learn how to roll with the punches. "Could have been hungry," he says. "Yum yum. Dead cat."

Ruth starts to laugh. And Ross obliges him with a crooked smile.

His wife pushes back from the table, starts collecting the plates, though they are only just finished.

"Sorry that was so," she says. "It was just a rustle-up."

"Lovely," he says.

Oh, *great*, he thinks. On the longest night, his wife with that look in her eye that says, *Christmas is coming and it is all turning to shite.*

Correction. His wife with a look that says, *Christmas is coming and it is all your fault.*

HE POURS A glass of wine and almost spills it on himself falling asleep on the sofa after the news. He was dreaming about weather, or discussing the weather with his dreaming self: all autumn it had been so dry, high pressure, clear skies, the leaves drying to dust on the trees, falling like smoke, they'd hung on so long. It occurs to him that Tiger was Stripey's mother. The cat's mother, no less. He says as much to his wife, who is sitting across the room. She looks at him.

"Yes," she says. And he suddenly remembers that his own mother is dead—a fact he manages to forget for days at a time.

"You'd think they'd make a better go of the names," he says.

Later, he mutes the TV to check on a noise, and hears his daughter singing upstairs. She has her headphones on, her voice half in her head, half in the room.

"Goddam truck," he says. "Nearly had the wing mirror. You know the bend."

"Be careful," his wife says. "This time of year, they're all drinking."

"They're all wrecked," he says. "I was half asleep myself. No, not asleep."

She looks slightly shocked. "Just a bit."

*Unmoored.* That is the word he is looking for. Recently he feels—he has felt—unmoored.

He used to have a place in his mind where he could go. Hard to say where it was, but his mother has been dead since April, so maybe this was the place she used to occupy. Because he can't go there anymore. It was the song reminded him.

"I was listening to the radio," he says.

"The radio?"

It wasn't like an inner monologue or anything; he did not sit around talking to his mother all day. It was more like a silence. He had lost a great and wonderful silence. The traffic came against him, and he felt unprotected, bullied by the lights. Because he had no one on his side anymore. Not even his wife.

"Yes, the radio. In the car. You know, I wish, for once, you'd let me say something without repeating it back at me, like some kind of gom."

She lets this sink in for a moment and then gets up out of the big armchair and leaves the room. He can hear the sound of her starting to unload the dishwasher in the kitchen.

And "Mutual!" he wants to shout after her. "Fucking mutual!" He wants to tell her how he sat in the car, outside his own house, thinking, *Whatever happens when I walk in the door, that's the thing. When I walk in the door, I will find it. The answer or the question, one or the other. It will be there.*

And what did he find? These people. This.

EVEN IN HER sleep she is affronted, her body straight in the bed beside him, her head twisted to face the wall. The earth spins them toward morning, and he cannot close his eyes for the vertigo; he has to urge it on. He wakes without knowing he has slept, and the house is busy around him—the sound of the front door, finally, and silence. It is after nine o'clock, but when he comes into the kitchen Ross is still at the table, stuck on his phone.

"It's the Christmas concert," his son says, as if that explains something.

The office is closed but he still has a mad number of payments to process before the end of the year, so he takes a coffee back to bed and opens his laptop there.

He clicks on a spreadsheet, then he starts reading the news instead and wandering about online.

Ross comes in to show him something. He climbs across the duvet, bringing the phone screen so close that his father has to push the thing a distance away. It is a video of two tigers, play-fighting in the Siberian snow.

They are pretty impressive, the tigers.

"Fantastic," he says.

And Ross is so pleased his cheeks glow with it.

It is 10:38 and, outside, the sun has not cleared the tops of the winter trees.

"Look up 'solstice,'" he says, spelling it out for him and then typing it on his own keyboard, because he is running out of time now. He has six minutes to do this, to tell his child that the world will keep turning. No matter what happens, the sun will always rise in the morning, the planet's orbit will tilt them toward the light. He finds a video clip of a cartoon earth circling a harmless, small sun, but Ross says he already knows about the solstice. They covered it at school.

It is 10:42.

The boy is sitting cross-legged on the bed beside him. Ross shuts his eyes, and "Sh-h-h," he says. "Is it happening?"

"In a minute."

"Is it now?"

The seconds pass. The boy squeezes his eyelids tighter.

"Now?"

"Yes."

Ross keeps his eyes shut for another moment, then punches the air. He turns to his dad and they look at each other, full of mischief and amazement. Because it happened. Nothing happened, but they know it was there. The tiny stretch of daylight that will become summer.

His wife is home. She is standing in the doorway watching them. They look up and smile at her.

"What?" she says. ♦

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NEWYORKER.COM

Anne Enright on writing from life.



# THE CRITICS



## BOOKS

### METAMORPHOSES

*How Angela Carter became feminism's great mythologist.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

THE ENGLISH NOVELIST Angela Carter is best known for her 1979 book “The Bloody Chamber,” which is a kind of updating of the classic European fairy tales. This does not mean that Carter’s Little Red Riding Hood chews gum or rides a motorcycle but that the strange things in those tales—the werewolves and snow maidens, the cobwebbed caves and liquefying mir-

rors—are made to live again by means of a prose informed by psychoanalysis and cinema and Symbolist poetry. In Carter’s version of “Beauty and the Beast,” retitled “The Tiger’s Bride,” the beast doesn’t change into a beauty. The beauty is changed into a beast, a beautiful one, by means of one of the more memorable sex acts in twentieth-century fiction. At the end of the tale, the

heroine is ushered, naked, into the beast’s chamber. He paces back and forth:

I squatted on the wet straw and stretched out my hand. I was now within the field of force of his golden eyes. He growled at the back of his throat, lowered his head, sank on to his forepaws, snarled, showed me his red gullet, his yellow teeth. I never moved. He snuffed the air, as if to smell my fear; he could not.

Slowly, slowly he began to drag his heavy,

*Carter’s taste for folklore, psychoanalysis, and luridness enabled her to take the fairy tale in new and shocking directions.*





gleaming weight across the floor towards me.

A tremendous throbbing, as of the engine that makes the earth turn, filled the little room; he had begun to purr. . . .

He dragged himself closer and closer to me, until I felt the harsh velvet of his head against my hand, then a tongue, abrasive as sandpaper. "He will lick the skin off me!"

And each stroke of his tongue ripped off skin after successive skin, all the skins of a life in the world, and left behind a nascent patina of shiny hairs. My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur.

Imagine that: a great, warm, wet, abrasive tongue licking off skin after skin, down to the bottommost one, which starts to sprout shiny little animal hairs.

Because Carter took on fairy tales, she was sometimes pigeonholed as a "white witch," the sort of person who reads Tarot cards and believes that the earth speaks to her. It didn't help that she favored an outré look, with long, flowing skirts and, in her late years, a great, disorderly mane of white hair. (Andrew Motion said she looked like "someone who'd been left out in a hurricane.") So it's good to see that "The Invention of Angela Carter" (Oxford), by Edmund Gordon, a lecturer in English at King's College London, is a

notably levelheaded book. The first thorough account of Carter's life, it is an authorized biography—Gordon had the coöperation of Carter's intimates, and access to her letters and diaries. It shows the faults endemic to that genre: too much detail, together with a suspicious vagueness about family members who are still alive. But it reclaims Carter from the fairy kingdom and places her within what sounds like a real life. Unsurprisingly, we find out that the white witch cared about her reviews and sales.

CARTER WAS BORN in 1940 and grew up in a quiet, middle-class suburb of London, the second child of a strait-laced mother, Olive—she turned off the TV if a divorced actor came on the screen—and a father, Hugh, who was the night editor of London's Press Association. Both parents spoiled Angela outrageously. She was crammed with treats, bombarded with kittens and storybooks. Her mother never put her to bed until after midnight, when Hugh got back from work—she wanted her company—and, even then, often let her stay up. Hugh brought home long rolls of white paper from the office for her, and

as her parents chatted she wrote stories in crayon.

She grew to be a tall, pudgy child, with a stammer. Between those disadvantages and extreme shyness, which she covered with an aloof and frosty manner, she had few friends. Olive redoubled her attentions. Angela was not allowed to dress herself, or to go to the bathroom alone. Finally, she rebelled, went on a diet, and changed from a fat, obliging girl to a skinny, rude girl. She slouched around in short skirts and fishnet stockings, smoking and saying offensive things to her mother.

She was a good student, though, in a good school. The 1944 Butler Act, riding the same democratic wave as the American G.I. Bill, provided grants for gifted children from regular backgrounds to go to élite private schools. Carter, as an adult, had a theory that this created Britain's first real intelligentsia, a group of people who had no interest in using education to maintain the class system but who simply wanted to operate in a world of ideas. If so, she was one of them. Her teachers urged her to apply to Oxford. Olive, hearing this, pronounced it an excellent idea, and said that she and Hugh would take an apartment there, to be close to her. Angela thereupon dropped all thought of going to university. Marriage, she realized, would be the only way to escape her parents.

Through her father's connections, she got a job as a reporter. She started writing record reviews and liner notes and getting involved in London's music scene. In an independent record store, she met a serious-minded young man, Paul Carter, an industrial chemist who moonlighted as a producer and seller of English folk-song records. Gordon thinks that Paul was the first man to take a romantic interest in Angela. Or, as Angela put it, "I finally bumped into somebody who would . . . have sexual intercourse with me." But Paul insisted that they get engaged first, and so Angela found herself, at twenty, a married woman.

They seem to have been happy at the beginning. Paul taught Angela to love English folk music, thereby giving her a great gift. The folk iconography, in time, offered her an escape hatch from the rather gray realism dominant in



British fiction of the period. Folklore also presented her with a set of emotions that, while releasing her, eventually, from sixties truculence, nevertheless felt *true*, not genteel.

But soon the marriage was failing. Paul suffered engulfing depressions. Sometimes he and Angela barely spoke for days. She felt swollen with unexpressed emotion. "I want to touch him all the time, with my hands & my mouth," she wrote in her diary. "(Poor luv, it annoys him.)" The note of sarcasm here is interesting. Through some miracle, Angela, who had little sexual self-confidence—she once described herself as "a great, lumpy, butch cow . . . titless and broadbeamed"—did not allow Paul's withdrawal to demoralize her. She wanted to save herself. On her twenty-second birthday, her Uncle Cecil, knowing that she was unhappy, invited her to lunch at an Italian restaurant and told her to apply to university. As she recalled, he said to her, "If you've got a degree you can always get a job. You can leave your husband any time you want."

She took his advice. The couple had recently moved to Bristol for Paul's work, and she enrolled in the university there, studying English. Gordon, who is always good at contextualizing, says that Bristol's English department was not ideal for her; it was dominated by the principles of F. R. Leavis, who was intent on rescuing English fiction's "great tradition" from the showy, the sentimental, and the bizarre. Carter, who called this the "eat up your broccoli" school of criticism, managed to hide out in medieval studies, which she loved. She also encountered

Freud, gaining, she thought, a scientific support for the world of shock, dream, and eros that she now saw as the realm of art. A little later, she discovered the Surrealists, and learned from them that the goal of art was not truth (as the Leavisites would have it) but the marvellous—indeed, that the marvellous *was* the truth.

All of this fed into her developing feminism. She became an ardent feminist, but not an orthodox one. Her con-

cern was not with justice; she hated the idea of put-upon, suffering women, and implied that they had it coming, by being such weaklings. She wanted women to seize what they needed—power, freedom, sex—and she saw no fundamental difference between the sexes that could prevent that. As she wrote to a friend, Carole Roffe:

Somebody asked me who my favorite women writers were the other day, meaning, I guess, some kind of writers who expressed a specifically feminine sensibility—I said Emily Bronte, who's pure butch, and cursed myself afterwards because the greatest feminine writer who's ever lived is Dostoevsky, followed closely by Herman Melville, who has just the kind of relish of beautiful boys that emancipated ladies such as yourself express. And D. H. Lawrence is infinitely more feminine than Jane Austen, if one is talking about these qualities of sensitivity, vulnerability and perception traditionally ascribed by male critics to female novelists. . . . D. H. Lawrence's tragedy is that he thought he was a man.

I don't know what she means about Dostoyevsky, but her general statement should sound familiar in our day of loose gender definitions.

Energized by her discoveries, she became a bustling presence in her department and the co-editor of its literary magazine. Gordon has gone through the stapled-together pages of this publication, and reports that the best items were pseudonymous poems by Carter. He quotes one called "Unicorn." In the Middle Ages,

there was a belief that the only way to catch a unicorn was to send a virgin, alone, into the woods. The unicorn, spying the girl, would come and lay his head in her lap. Such a virgin is the speaker in Carter's poem, but she is not a tender little thing. She is naked, with breasts "like

carrier bags" and "curious plantations of pubic hair." The unicorn is drawn to her by "the fragrance of her moist / garden plot." He will be sorry. "I have sharp teeth inside my mouth," she says. "Inside my dark red lips."

At the same time, Carter was producing the first novels that she would be willing to publish. She wrote at a furious speed, turning out narratives of violence that were sometimes layered with comedy, sometimes not. In "Shadow



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Dance" (1966), her first novel, a man named Honeybuzzard carves up the face of an annoyingly virtuous girl, Ghislaine. (After she gets out of the hospital, he finishes the job, strangling her and leaving her naked corpse in an attic.) A year after that came "The Magic Toyshop," in which the orphaned heroine is sent to live with her uncle, a sadistic puppeteer. In one scene, he forces her to play Leda to a mechanical swan. Her next two efforts were in a similar vein. There are excellent things in all these books, but there is also a strong suggestion that Carter is still trying to drive her mother crazy. Even when the material is not shocking, the treatment is often self-indulgent. An editor once forwarded to her a reader's report describing a novel of hers as "a queer little book." Carter, always lovably forthright, replied that the person who wrote that "put her finger on my weakest spot, which is a tendency to a batty kind of whimsicality." She said she was sure she would work out some satisfactory solution.

She did. In 1969, Carter received a Somerset Maugham Award, worth five hundred pounds, to be used for foreign travel. She decided that she would grant herself an old wish, to go to Japan. She arrived in September of that year, without Paul.

"I arrived by air, in the dark," she wrote, two years later. "When night descended over the ocean, many unfamiliar stars sprang out in the sky; as we approached land, there began to blossom below me such an irregular confusion of small lights it was difficult to be certain if the starry sky lay above or below me. So the aeroplane ascended or descended into an electric city where nothing was what it seemed at first and I was absolutely confused." There she is—dizzy, suspended between two beds of light. It is like a painting of a conversion experience, and, by the time she wrote it, she surely knew that.

WITHIN A FEW weeks, at a Tokyo coffeehouse a Japanese man, Sozo Araki, twenty-four years old—six years her junior—stopped at her table. She described the scene in a later,

unpublished story: "'Where are you from?' he asked her. 'England,' she said. 'That must be terribly boring,' he said & gave her the great international seducer's smile." They ended up, that evening, in a "love hotel," the kind that rents rooms by the hour. The next morning, she went back to where she was staying, to take a shower, while he played *pachinko*, a Japanese version of pinball.



Then they met again, had breakfast, and went to another hotel. Gordon tries hard to determine what Carter and Araki talked about when they weren't having sex. Araki had recently dropped out of a university program in political science, intending to write a novel, and they apparently did discuss fiction. He liked Faulkner and Dostoevsky. It seems, though, that he liked Elvis Presley and *pachinko* better.

But literary companionship was not what she was looking for. Nor, it appears, were her interests merely, or even primarily, sexual. Carter seems to have been seeking a sort of rapture, a sensation of being carried to a new place, or to an old, ideal one. "His face did not, when I first met him, seem to me the face of a stranger," she wrote of Araki. "His image was already present somewhere in my head, & I was seeking to discover him in reality, searching every face for the right face." She later said that in Japan she had "taken certain ideas (like living for love) as far as they will go." Gordon feels that she doesn't seem to mean love, exactly, but something *like* love—an idea, a Platonic idea.

As for the husband who was waiting for her in England, "I can't live with him anymore," she wrote to a friend, "or I'll kill myself & that's that." Two weeks after she met Araki, she had to go to Hong Kong briefly. In the airport's departure lounge, she took off her wedding ring and left it in an ashtray. (She wrote to Paul soon after, asking for a divorce. He took it badly. More than forty years later, he refused to speak to Gordon.) That was one captor disposed of. The other did the job herself. While Angela was back in England that winter, renewing her visa,

Olive suffered a pulmonary embolism. Angela went to the hospital, but Olive, upon seeing her, turned her face to the wall. (She had always disliked Paul, but she disliked divorce more.) She died a few days later.

Carter returned to Tokyo, set up house with Araki, and soon found that she had to acquire an additional sort of freedom. Araki liked to go out with his friends at night, and Carter's joining them was not convenient. For one thing, she never learned to speak more than a few words of Japanese. Furthermore, as she soon realized, he was seeing other women—lots of them. (She came to describe him as an "ambulant penis.") One night, as they were undressing, Carter saw a smear of lipstick on Araki's underpants. She didn't wear lipstick. Describing the episode to a friend, she wrote that she burst out laughing.

Carter always said that the two years she spent in Japan were what radicalized her as a feminist. The young women of Tokyo, she wrote, acted as though they had "become their own dolls." Her rejection of that position, and of the enforced gender identity that lay behind it, meant, to her, that she could put up with Araki's infidelities. Gordon believes that she began to enjoy having the night to herself; she could write in quiet and then go to bed with Araki when he came home at five in the morning, once the trains started running again. But, if she could tolerate this routine, he couldn't. While he was out tomcatting, she was earning their daily bread, and, as he told Gordon, "I didn't want to be a gigolo anymore." He left her.

She was brokenhearted, and furious. She had panic attacks. She couldn't eat. Finally, she comforted herself with a young Korean, Mansu Kō. She relieved him of his virginity. In gratitude, he brought her a can of pineapple. He moved in with her almost immediately, and did all the cooking and cleaning. He was two inches shorter than her, and nineteen years old, though she wrote that he looked fourteen: "Every time I pull down his underpants I feel more and more like Humbert Humbert." (She was thirty-one.) He spoke less English than Araki had and didn't have much to say,



anyway. “Apart from the sheer delight, he *does* bore me,” she wrote. The boredom didn’t cancel out the delight: “the childlike delicacy and precision with which he stirs sugar into his coffee; his small sign of content . . . the way he carries his head, like a bird.” But, after five months with him, she went back to England.

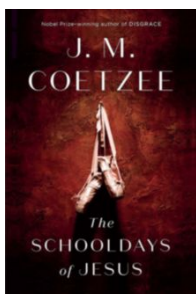
“A PART FROM THE sheer delight, he *does* bore me.” That was what Carter discovered in Japan: the mixed, middle states of the heart. Having thrown pretty much everything else away, she had time to pay attention to this, and, with the clarity she had gained, to present it in very stark imagery. In Japan, her best work went into short fiction—tales, she called them—which she later published in the collection “Fireworks” (1974). The finest of them, “Souvenir of Japan,” is a tribute to Araki. Here is the “pleasure hotel” they went to on their first night:

We were shown into a room like a paper box. It contained nothing but a mattress spread on the floor. We lay down immediately and began to kiss one another. Then a maid soundlessly opened the sliding door and, stepping out of her slippers, crept in on stockinged feet, breathing apologies. She carried a tray which contained two cups of tea and a plate of candies. She put a tray down on the matted floor beside us and backed, bowing and apologizing, from the room whilst our uninterrupted kiss continued. He started to unfasten my shirt and then she came back again. This time, she carried an armful of towels. I was stripped stark naked when she returned for a third time to bring the receipt for his money.

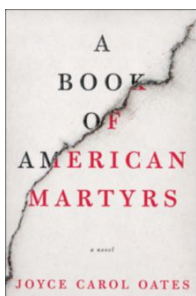
There love is mixed with comedy. Three paragraphs later, it is mixed with death, a beautiful death: “I should have liked to have had him embalmed and been able to keep him beside me in a glass coffin, so that I could watch him all the time and he would not have been able to get away from me.” A glass coffin: “Snow White.” And that’s where she was headed—to fairy tales.

In 1976, she accepted a commission to translate Charles Perrault’s fairy tales. She had been back in England for four years, but she was still living off the psychological tank dive of her Japanese period. After the Perrault volume was published, she embarked on “The Bloody Chamber,” with her own, reconceived versions of Perrault

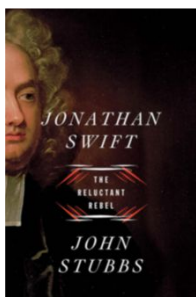
## BRIEFLY NOTED



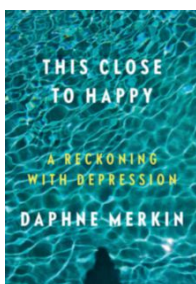
**The Schooldays of Jesus**, by J. M. Coetzee (Viking). Coetzee’s austere sequel to “The Childhood of Jesus” picks up in an indeterminate country populated by refugees who are “washed clean” of their memories on arrival. David, the central figure, is a disconcerting and precocious six-year-old, who attends an academy that teaches numerology through dance. A brutal murder triggers a crisis, but plot is not the point: in almost Socratic dialogue, the characters explore questions about memory, passion, and death. Full of allusions to Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Rafael Alberti, and the Bible, the book feels like an allegory without a key. If David is a Christ, he’s one who offers little guidance through “the maze of the moral life,” preferring the “unceasing *Why*.”



**A Book of American Martyrs**, by Joyce Carol Oates (Ecco). This novel tracks the aftermath of a shooting in a small Ohio town: the victim, an abortion provider, dies instantly; his killer, an evangelical fanatic, dies nearly seven years later, by lethal injection. Oates follows the daughters of these men toward their meeting as adult women whose fathers’ names, and whose complicated grief, are indelibly intertwined. Both women have difficulty with the physical act of speaking in the years after the murder; both live in neglected houses infested with flies; both have been abandoned by their mother and have a disdainful older brother. These parallels all stem from the most significant similarity: both fathers died for a cause—a realization that engenders the book’s catharsis.



**Jonathan Swift**, by John Stubbs (Norton). One of many challenges for biographers of the Dublin-born satirist and political writer is his “tendency to love and hate things simultaneously,” the author of this magisterial study writes. An “anarchic humorist,” stern authoritarian, Tory-government polemicist, enemy of partisan politics, and lifelong bachelor whose closest relationships were with two women, he exhibited many personae, which Stubbs deftly contextualizes in the English and Irish history of the time. Swift’s work enraged and mystified his contemporaries. But, despite his contradictions, he always believed that people should live free of tyranny, and though he disavowed his Irish heritage, he became known as the “Hibernian Patriot,” for inveighing against British policies that created poverty and mass starvation in Ireland.



**This Close to Happy**, by Daphne Merkin (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). This memoir of struggling with depression interweaves autobiography with literary and historical meditations on the nature of the condition. Merkin, who was first hospitalized for psychiatric issues at the age of eight, dissects her often inexplicable sadness clearly, with painfully intimate details about her medical regimen and her family. (“Your tears don’t move me,” her mother used to tell her.) For those who know this terrain personally, Merkin’s wry, self-aware account of the daily slog toward hope—or, at least, functionality—may be a validation; for those struggling to understand, it is a work of lacerating intelligence about a condition that intellect cannot heal.



and the Brothers Grimm. This is her great book, the one that only she could have written, the one in which everything that was good in her came to the fore and everything that had been bad became good. She was always best in the short form, as her friend Salman Rushdie noted. In her novels, he wrote, her voice, “that moonstone-and-rhinestone mix of opulence and flim-flam, can be exhausting. In her stories, she can dazzle and swoop, and quit while she’s ahead.”

The truth is that she never cared much about character development or plot, which are the meat of the novel. In a tale, she could dispense with them, and just go for emotion and image. We get Bluebeard smoking a cigar as “fat as a baby’s arm,” and the Erl-King gathering his dinner in the woods: “He knows which of the frilled, blotched, rotten fungi are fit to eat; he understands their eldritch ways, how they spring up overnight in lightless places and thrive on dead things.” In “The Company of Wolves,” Carter’s famous version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the heroine doesn’t struggle with the wolf. She goes to bed with him. Her grandmother’s bones rattle beneath the bed. She doesn’t hear them.

THAT WAS HER peak, “Fireworks” and “The Bloody Chamber.” Strange to say, she wrote most of those unsettling stories in a period of relative contentment. Maybe she needed that in order to get past the aggressive luridness of her early work. In any case, she told an interviewer that she had a rather nice time in her thirties: “I started doing things like foreign travel and having a house, and you know, watching television and things like that.” Soon she had someone steady to do those things with. One day, two years after her return from Japan, one of her water faucets burst. She had seen a construction worker in the house opposite, and she ran to get him. His name was Mark Pearce, another nineteen-year-old. (She was now thirty-four.) “He came in,” Carter said, “and never left.”

He was strikingly handsome. Friends said he looked like Jesus; tellingly, she claimed that he looked like a werewolf. He was silent most of the

time, but she didn’t mind, because she liked to do the talking, just as she liked being older. He went on doing construction work, she went on writing—and that was their life, except for one big change, in 1983: Carter, at the age of forty-three, gave birth to a son, Alexander. This made her very happy—repeatedly, she had had phantom pregnancies—but Mark was really the one who raised Alex. It was a bohemian household, with dirty dishes stacked in the sink, but they liked having people over. Carter was a good cook. Rushdie told Gordon that, when he was in hiding, after the Ayatollah Khomeini issued the fatwa against him, his bodyguards always enjoyed it when he went to visit Carter, because she invariably had a nice meal for them to eat, and they could watch TV.

A recurrent theme of Gordon’s book is Carter’s position as a woman in her profession. This is tiresome but unavoidable: in the nineteen-eighties, there was a much-trumpeted spurt of energy in English fiction, with the rise of a number of talented young men, notably Rushdie, Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, and Julian Barnes. In 1981, Rushdie’s second novel, “Midnight’s Children,” won the Booker Prize, and McEwan’s second, “The Comfort of Strangers,” was short-listed. Barnes was short-listed in 1984. Carter was never short-listed, let alone given the prize, and she did feel that this was, in part, because she was a woman. In 1984, she told an interviewer:

It would be whingeing to say that men who are no better than I are very much more famous and very much richer and also regarded as . . . the right stuff. It would ill become me. But it’s amazing what the Old Boys’ club does for itself. They list the “important British contemporary writers,” and they’ll list Malcolm Bradbury and Kingsley Amis, and they’ll leave out Doris Lessing, who’s the only one with a really huge international reputation.

There was a generational aspect, too. Carter was most of a decade older than the others, born a few months into the Second World War rather than after it, and her Freudian-influenced, “mythic” subject matter was out of step with their more postmodern concerns, their explorations of language, narrative, and representation. Still, there is no question that being

female was part of the reason that Carter received less attention. Rushdie says that though she did wish for greater recognition, “she was not ever envious of other people’s success.” That must have been a comfort to them.

Soon after her son was born, Carter started to age quickly, as she recorded in her diary: “I catch myself in the mirror looking like my father.” She resented this, and reacted defiantly, adopting, according to one friend, “a madwoman-in-the-attic look.” Yet Gordon seems to think that, on balance, she got happier as she got older. This is certainly suggested by her final novel, “Wise Children,” in which a seventy-five-year-old woman, Dora Chance, tells of the life that she and her identical-twin sister had as music-hall artists. In a sense, “Wise Children” is about what happens to women when they’re no longer salable, but it’s hard to locate a note of regret, because the book contains so much life and fun—nice dresses and memorable fornications and wild parties and theatre, theatre, theatre. (“We were *wet* for it,” Dora recalls.) The sisters now live in a basement apartment with an ex-wife of their father’s, drinking tea out of chipped mugs until six, when they switch to gin. The whole thing is as lovable and comfortable as an old shoe.

Early in 1991, just before “Wise Children” was published, Carter went to the doctor with a pain in her chest and was told that she had a cancerous tumor on her right lung which had spread to her lymph nodes, making it inoperable. Strong-minded woman that she was, she laid aside her plans for a new novel—“Adela,” about Jane Eyre’s pupil, Mr. Rochester’s daughter—and went to work, fast, with an assistant, on a collection of her nonfiction. (Over the years, needing the money, she had written many magazine articles.) She and Mark got married, as they had neglected to do previously, and, week after week, she got dressed and sat up straight to have goodbye teas with her friends. In February, 1992, she died at home, at the age of fifty-two. She was young, and she had had only a few years of absolutely first-rank work, but that is true of many writers, including some of the greatest. She had her time, and it was wonderful. ♦



A CRITIC AT LARGE

# LAST LAUGH

*Jane Austen's final, surprising, unfinished novel.*

BY ANTHONY LANE



ON MARCH 18, 1817, Jane Austen stopped writing a book. We know the date because she wrote it at the end of the manuscript, in her slanting hand. She had done the same at the beginning of the manuscript, on January 27th of that year. In the seven weeks in between, she had completed eleven chapters and slightly more than nine pages of a twelfth—some twenty-three thousand five hundred words. The final sentence in the manuscript runs as follows: “Poor Mr. Hollis!—It was impossible not to feel him hardly used; to be obliged to stand back in his own House and see the best place by the fire constantly occupied by Sir H. D.” This is a joke. Mr. Hollis and Sir Harry Denham are dead, and it is their respective portraits

that contend for social eminence in the sitting room of Lady Denham, the woman who married and buried them both. Exactly four months after writing that line, Jane Austen died, unmarried, at the age of forty-one. Her position, unlike theirs, remains secure.

Austen was the seventh child of a country rector. The family was well connected but not wealthy. Of her six mature novels, four were published in her lifetime, and none bore her name on the title page. The one she left dangling is known as “Sanditon,” although she assigned it no title. Nor did her beloved sister Cassandra, when she copied the manuscript, long after Jane’s demise. A nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, refers to it simply as “the last Work,” in

“A Memoir of Jane Austen” (1871)—still the first port of call for biographers, despite its erasure of anything that might evoke the impious, the unsavory, or the quarrelsome. “Her sweetness of temper never failed,” he writes. Never? A week after “Sanditon” came to a halt, Austen wrote, in a letter, “Pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked.” That note of exasperation is worth attending to, as we approach the bicentenary of Austen’s death, this summer. The hoopla will be fervent, among the faithful, and both the life and the works will doubtless be aired afresh on our behalf. In part, however, the shape of that life is defined by its winding down, and by the book—an unsweet and unlikely one, still too little known—that sprang from her final efforts.

Not until 1925 was “Sanditon” made available to the public. (It is still in print; try the Penguin edition, with a fine introduction by Margaret Drabble.) The response was mixed, with E. M. Forster posing the questions, in a review, that have dogged the book ever since. “Are there signs of new development in ‘Sanditon’? Or is everything overshadowed by the advance of death?” Forster, diagnosing “the effects of weakness,” leaned to the latter view: “We realize with pain that we are listening to a slightly tiresome spinster.” He should know. The truth is the opposite of what Forster proposes. Although—or precisely because—“Sanditon” was composed by a dying woman, the result is robust, unsparing, and alert to all the latest fashions in human foolishness. It brims with life.

SOMETHING NEW is afoot at the start of “Sanditon.” Austen is matchless in her openings, but none of them sound quite as eventful as this:

A gentleman and lady travelling from Tunbridge towards that part of the Sussex coast which lies between Hastings and East Bourne, being induced by business to quit the high road, and attempt a very rough lane, were overturned in toiling up its long ascent—half rock, half sand.

Overtaken! Not until Chapter 12 of “Persuasion,” the last novel that Austen completed, do we come upon any such impact—Louisa Musgrove, tumbling and hitting her head. Here we are, however, greeted at once by a toil and a smash. In the manuscript, the phrase

*“Sanditon” is robust, unsparing, and alert to all the latest fashions in human foolishness.*



“half rock, half sand” has been added as an afterthought, and, as we read on, that geological blend—the reliably hard and secure compounded with the dangerously shifting—takes on the texture of a premonition.

The couple in the carriage are Mr. and Mrs. Parker, who live in the seaside resort of Sanditon. They have come out of their way to find a doctor—not for themselves but as a useful addendum to Sanditon’s delights, upon which Parker likes to expostulate, to the exclusion of every other theme:

He could talk of it for ever.—It had indeed the highest claims;—not only those of birth place, property, and home,—it was his mine, his lottery, his speculation and his hobby horse; his occupation, his hope, and his futurity.

We are in the presence of a bore: one of those men whose minds have battened on an *idée fixe* and mislaid their sense of balance in the process. As a landowner, Parker wants to cash in on the ever-rising fad for a coastal existence and for the bodily benefits that it is rumored to bestow.

The carriage crash leaves him with a sprained ankle. The ideal treatment, of course, would be a dose of Sanditon, but, for now, he and his wife take refuge with an amiable family called the Heywoods. The plot begins to stir. It is agreed that, once the Parkers resume their journey, they will take with them the Heywoods’ eldest daughter, Charlotte. For her, it will be an improving adventure and a change of scene; for Austen, it will provide someone who can cast a cool eye on the varieties of witlessness that flutter, like a row of flags, beside the shore.

In common with other desirable locations in Austen’s world, Sanditon is populated by those who seem welcoming. What matters is the speed at which the seeming wears off. Lady Denham is the grande dame of the place, by virtue of “many thousands a year to bequeath, and three distinct sets of people to be courted by.” In other words, her relatives must grovel before her in the hope of an inheritance, and she relishes her power. Cordial at first blush, she contrives to be both high-handed and tightfisted—concerned about having too many guests, because that would mean extra labor for her housemaids, who might in turn demand higher wages. “Thus it is, when rich people are sordid,” Charlotte reflects, in silence.

One of the toadies is Sir Edward Denham, the nephew of Lady Denham’s second husband, and an idiot of a very particular brand. He says, “Most willingly, fair questioner,” when what he means is “Yes.” He reads a lot, which sounds promising, but he reads in order to be emotionally engulfed, and to arm himself for the engulfing of others—specifically, Clara Brereton, Lady Denham’s impoverished niece. What Sir Edward pores over is romantic verse—especially that of Robert Burns, of whom he remarks, “His soul was the altar in which lovely woman sat enshrined”—plus those novels which “exhibit the progress of strong passion from the first germ of incipient susceptibility to the utmost energies of reason half-dethroned.” Charlotte deems him “downright silly,” thereby reversing the situation of “*Northanger Abbey*” (published posthumously, in 1818, but written fifteen years earlier), in which it is the young maiden who falls prey to preposterous fiction.

Austen does not spare Sir Edward, who “had read more sentimental novels than agreed with him.” A dazzling line, enfolding two of the story’s consuming themes. Too many glutinous books, like too many oysters, are bad for the digestion; and digestive trouble is one of the complaints that bring the sick, or those who fancy themselves to be sickening, to Sanditon. Parker, for instance, hails from a clan of competing invalids. In a letter, one of his sisters, Diana, reports



on another, Susan, with a wretched brother bringing up the rear:

She has been suffering much from the headache and six leeches a day for ten days together relieved her so little that we thought it right to change our measures—and being convinced on examination that much of the evil lay in her gum, I persuaded her to attack the disorder there. She has accordingly had three teeth drawn, and is decidedly better, but her nerves are a good deal deranged. She can only speak in a whisper—and fainted away twice this morning on poor Arthur’s trying to suppress

a cough. He, I am happy to say, is tolerably well—though more languid than I like—and I fear for his liver.

This is “a good deal deranged,” indeed, and destined to grow madder with the arrival of Arthur, who turns out to be not the wavering reed that we expect but a doughy sluggard with “a sodden complexion.” He boasts that “the more wine I drink (in moderation) the better I am”—nonsense of the choicest vintage. What we soon realize is that this novel marks the climax of the author’s fascination with moaners, groaners, fusspots, and other oracles of self-pity. Think of Mr. Woodhouse, in “*Emma*,” whose faith in the opinions of his medical friend Perry is equalled only by his terror of sore throats, snow on the roads, and the sea—“very rarely of use to anybody. I am sure it almost killed me once.” Then, there is Mary Musgrove, in “*Persuasion*,” who claims, one morning, to be “so ill I can hardly speak.” Recovery, thank heaven, is swift:

She could soon sit upright on the sofa, and began to hope she might be able to leave it by dinner-time. Then, forgetting to think of it, she was at the other end of the room, beautifying a nosegay; then, she ate her cold meat; and then she was well enough to propose a little walk.

What links these hypochondriacs is restlessness. Even when staying put, they quiver with unease, incapable of finding peace and poise. We are told that Mary “had no resources for solitude”—a damning verdict—and that the Parkers of “Sanditon” are strangers to moderation, either “very busy for the good of others, or else extremely ill themselves.” Austen reveals the wellspring of their self-obsession: they have nothing better to do. “Disorders and recoveries so very much out of the common way, seemed more like the amusement of eager minds in want of employment than of actual afflictions and relief.”

Only the idle rich can afford the leisure in which to agonize over the state of their nerves; what are they to do, in a time of economic growth, but concoct fresh gimmicks for their idleness, or spend money on “all the useless things in the world that could not be done without”? Upon spying a pair of blue shoes in a local shop, Parker cries out, “Civilization, civilization indeed!”



One character we learn of but, regrettably, never meet is Miss Lambe—newly arrived in Sanditon, and described as “a young West Indian of large fortune, in delicate health,” who is “about seventeen, half mulatto, chilly and tender.” (In practice, a “mulatto” often referred to the child of a slave-owner and a female slave.) True to her name, she sounds like the perfect victim. “No people spend more freely, I believe, than West Indians,” Parker observes, and one can picture the leonine gleam in his eyes. The last we hear of Miss Lambe is that she is about to take “her first dip” in the chilly English sea. Six pages later, “Sanditon” reaches its last wave.

WHAT SHADOWS LIE across this bright and breezy book? Well, there are the mysterious events of 1801, when the Austens spent a summer on the Devon coast. The mystery is thickened by the lack of letters from that period; after the novelist’s death, Cassandra subjected the correspondence to a thorough culling. What can be gleaned from family gossip is that Austen, then twenty-five, fell in love with a clergyman, and that the match was widely approved but he perished before things could proceed. We are left wondering if the memory of that episode lingered, and to what extent, if any, the bracing seaside climate of “Sanditon” might have driven her characters into romance.

The book, as it stands, feels ominously loveless, more hospitable to dolts than to eligible beaux, yet at least seven writers have sought to flesh it out and, in so doing, to warm it up. Anne Austen Lefroy, the novelist’s niece, was an early contender, but her version, as if in tribute to her aunt, was left incomplete. She did, however, gesture toward a bond between Charlotte and Sidney, the only non-feeble one among the Parker siblings, and that hint is sustained as late as the year 2000, in “Jane Austen’s Charlotte,” by Julia Barrett. Looniest of all is “Somehow Lengthened” (1932), by Alice Cobbett, which finds room for shipwrecks and smugglers, and, on its final page, marries Charlotte off to a naval officer of whom we have never heard.

The longest shadow, unsurprisingly, is cast by the physical decline of the author. Nothing exercises an Austenite more than this conundrum: What did she die of, and when did she become aware that

the dying was under way? In a letter written five days after Austen laid “Sanditon” aside, she admits to a setback:

I certainly have not been very well for many weeks, & about a week ago I was very poorly, I have had a good deal of fever at times & indifferent nights, but am considerably better now, & recovering my Looks a little, which have been bad enough, black & white & every wrong colour. I must not depend upon being ever very blooming again. Sickness is a dangerous Indulgence at my time of Life.

The last sentence, applying a little irony to herself as if it were an embrocation, is what we should value most. Undaunted, posterity has latched onto everything, in every letter and every secondhand report of Austen’s later years, that smacks of a symptom. The upshot, published in the *British Medical Journal*, in 1964, was an article, by Sir Zachary Cope (the name would have amused her), decreeing that she had died from “Addison’s disease of the suprarenal capsules.” That, Cope argued, would account for all she complained of: gastric disturbance, fever, languor, and a dismaying discoloration of the skin. Cope’s diagnosis, regularly cited by Austen scholars, has not gone unchallenged. In 2005, in the same journal, Annette Upfal gave a name to the blotching of the face—idiopathic thrombocytopenia purpura—and proposed that Austen had died from Hodgkin’s disease.

No doubt this debate will rage, or splutter, for years to come. Behind it you sense a surge of wishful thinking: “We could have saved her, had we been there.” It might be more cheering, though, to turn the plea on its head: “If only she were here now, to scrutinize our ills.” What would astonish her more, the ways in which the palliative expertise of the medical trade has leaped ahead or the stubbornness with which the human talent for making a nuisance or a spectacle of ourselves has stayed exactly where it was? And what of our own Sanditons—our holistic spas, our Ayurvedic yurts, our pan-piped wellness retreats? Whether Austen would have the stomach for colonic irrigation is hard to decide, but, oh, the fun she would have with coconut water, oxygen shots, or the paleo diet—fragile young ladies munching away on flesh like country squires. As for the Parkers of today, they would be online, researching their next

twinge in the annals of digital quackery.

That is why you should read “Sanditon,” even in its sorry truncation. But there is a better reason. The book is an exercise in courage. Its author may not have known that her end was near, but she could scarcely have deluded herself that it was far away. Her brother Henry claimed that “the symptoms of a decay, deep and incurable, began to show themselves in the commencement of 1816.” That may account for the autumnal grace that generations of readers have detected in “Persuasion,” which she wrote that year, and whose plot, about a woman getting a second chance at love at the ripe age of twenty-seven, conjures a rare joy from twilight hopes.

“Sanditon,” however, is something else: a mortality tale. Austen knew as well as anybody that, in the long run, hypochondriacs aren’t wrong. They’re just early. We *will* all die, though probably not from the thing that we feared or foresaw. That certainty haunts the book, sharpens the pitch of its comedy, and sets it apart from her earlier works. It laughs against the dying of the light, and in that laughter there is not a coarseness but a semi-savage edge, as if the energy and the frivolity of a new epoch demanded no less. We may even sense a glint of vengeance; genuinely faced with death, a woman enjoys her right to plunge the dagger of lampoon into those who are healthy enough but find it socially stylish to be indisposed. Why should a fool, a snob, a fraud have life, and her no breath at all? In a formidable letter of May, 1813, she wrote to Cassandra, “If I *am* a wild Beast, I cannot help it. It is not my own fault.”

By the spring of 1817, the Beast was not at her best. Writing from Chawton, in Hampshire, where she had lived with her mother and Cassandra for the past eight years, Austen confessed, “I am a poor Honey at present.” In late April, she made her will. In May, she was moved to Winchester, where she died, on July 18th, and was buried a week later, in the cathedral. Only four people, all close relatives, attended the service; Jane Austen, though already in possession of devoted readers, was unknown to the general public. Her tombstone recalls her benevolence, her purity, and “a long illness supported with the patience and the hopes of a Christian.” Death, we are encouraged to believe, became her well. No mention is made of her books. ♦



POP MUSIC

# ALL IN

*Maggie Rogers's collection of influences.*

BY AMANDA PETRUSICH



*A chance encounter with Pharrell Williams helped launch Rogers's career.*

IN THE NINETEEN-EIGHTIES, before YouTube and streaming services made nearly the entire history of popular music instantly available, intrepid artists knew that fishing deeper waters tended to yield a better catch. Why stick to what the present culture was offering? Early hip-hop crews ransacked used-record bins, taking samples from old LPs without regard to genre or origin. For them, everything was compatible—context didn't matter, because context was too hard to come by.

In the Internet age, this is how almost everybody listens to music, minus the dust: songs arrive free of circumstance. For artists working today,

records from any time and place are easily juiced for inspiration. Maggie Rogers, a twenty-two-year-old singer and songwriter from Easton, Maryland, feels like the apotheosis of this sensibility. Recently, Rogers released “Now That the Light Is Fading,” her debut EP. She has already enjoyed an unlikely flash of celebrity. Shortly after she completed her undergraduate degree at New York University, in 2016, she returned to her childhood home to figure out a viable path toward adulthood, as recent graduates often do. Then a video went viral; it featured the producer and songwriter Pharrell Williams hosting a master class with Rogers and other students at N.Y.U. and

listening to a recording of one of her songs.

The clip is beguiling. Rogers wears her long blond hair loose. She is dressed in worn jeans, woollen socks, and a plain black shirt; elk vertebrae hang on a string around her neck. There is something elemental about her presence that feels at odds with the metallic studio equipment gleaming in the background. When Rogers's song starts to play, Williams is visibly affected. The beat is skeletal and twinkling. In the pulsing pre-chorus, Rogers's voice leaps an octave and thins out, like a candle flame stretching for more oxygen. As the chorus begins, Williams scrunches his face, as if someone had told him something ridiculous. Because the class is being filmed, there's an inevitable element of performance to their reactions, but his incredulousness and her nervousness—she appears deeply uncertain of where to direct her gaze—feel true. They sneak anxious looks at each other. Williams periodically shakes his head in disbelief. “I've never heard anyone like you before,” he says when it's over. “That's a drug for me.”

As half of the production duo the Neptunes, along with Chad Hugo, Williams has helped define the airy, jabbing aesthetic of contemporary pop. At the start of the new millennium, the Neptunes' signature sound—a sly, spare, slightly cockeyed beat, discernible on high-profile singles like Britney Spears's “I'm a Slave 4 U,” Nelly's “Hot in Herre,” and Justin Timberlake's “Rock Your Body”—was inescapable. The Neptunes' work was a fanciful synthesis of old modes (Queen, the Gap Band, Stevie Wonder, the Jackson 5, Earth, Wind & Fire) and new technologies, though it is sometimes difficult to tell where one ends and the next begins.

In recent years, Williams has had remarkable success both as a performer and as a collaborator. Robin Thicke's “Blurred Lines,” which Williams produced and sings on, is one of the best-selling digital singles of all time. In 2013, the family of Marvin Gaye sued Williams and Thicke, claiming that “Blurred Lines” copied Gaye's “Got to Give It Up,” a loose and loping funk song from 1977. The d.j.,



drummer, and producer Questlove discussed the case with *New York's* Vulture blog: "Because there's a cowbell in it and a Fender Rhodes as the main instrumentation—that still doesn't make it plagiarized. We all know it's derivative. That's how Pharrell works. Everything that Pharrell produces is derivative of another song—but it's an homage."

What Questlove is suggesting—that we should perhaps reconsider how we think about and use the word "derivative"—seems to be a necessary paradigm shift. When an immense library of songs can be tucked into your pants pocket, the spirit of the past is always close. It is how that influence manifests that is changing.

"Alaska," the song that Rogers played for Williams, is difficult to reverse-engineer. Rogers deploys several original samples, drawn from recordings of a mourning dove, found conversations from a marketplace in Morocco, finger snaps, and the patting of her own thighs through her jeans. "Alaska" owes an obvious musical debt to the Neptunes—you can hear it in the space between the beats—but most of its borrowing is less explicit. Hip-hop, folk, dance, rhythm and blues, gospel: they're all here. Some of these traditions have been crossbred before. In the early two-thousands, Four Tet, Beth Orton, Imogen Heap, and other artists helped pioneer ethereal folk-electronic hybrids. But "Now That the Light Is Fading" is being released into a culture that no longer thinks the organic and the synthesized are in opposition. All our musical planes are lateral; all our inspiration is ambient.

LYRICALLY, "ALASKA" IS concerned with navigating change. For many people, self-transformation is a terrifying exercise, so we look everywhere for capable guides. Rogers is a good one. "And I walked off you," she sings. Her voice is high, scratchy, and plaintive. Something pings ominously, like radar detecting enemy aircraft. "And I walked off an old me," she adds. This might seem a straightforward victory—the narrator has unburdened herself—but Rogers's plainspoken acknowledgment of the self-destruction that accompanies true metamorphosis is el-

loquent. The process, she suggests, is twofold: first you relinquish the thing you loved, then you relinquish the part of yourself that loved it.

Last month, Rogers appeared on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon." ("Remember this name," Fallon said as he introduced her.) Rogers is an unguarded and idiosyncratic performer, and watching her move—she seems to favor jarring, convulsive gestures, which are odd but unmistakably beautiful—it becomes harder still to situate her work on a continuum. Her voice contains bits of Joni Mitchell—a kind of gasping delicacy—though it can also recall the wounded falsetto of Smokey Robinson.

Rogers has four previous releases available online, mostly folk recordings in which, over banjo and light percussion, she sings quietly of heartbreak and of changes in the weather. Her vocal tone is deeper and rounder on these recordings; it is as if she had not yet had occasion to access the sharper parts of herself. "Now That the Light Is Fading" is a more sophisticated work. Instead of being about the tension between the past and the future, about what was done to her and what she might do in response, her new songs are focussed on reconciliation. "Two things made a third," Williams told Rogers and her peers in the songwriting class. "That's what happens when you allow different worlds to collide, and find the most beautiful angle in it."

"Of all that is shifting and shaking my system, I know your rhythm, and I know, I know, I know, I know, I know that I'm the one that loves you," Rogers sings on "Dog Years." Her voice is easy and sanguine over a flurry of pastoral sounds. "There's some spoons and some jars for a main rhythmic sample, there's a lot of birds, there's a woodpecker," she explained in a recent interview. "I hide a lot of them in the production. A lot of times I'll use more rattlesnakes when I need more high-end on a snare. I have a song where I have a tree falling to accent a bass line." It's this belief—in the simple interconnectedness of all things, from creatures to synthesizers and beyond—that most makes Rogers an artist of her time. ♦

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THE THEATRE

# PARTNERS

*Power and poverty in "Sweeney Todd."*

BY HILTON ALS



ONSTAGE, AS IN life, cynicism can be hard to take. In Stephen Sondheim's 1979 mid-career masterpiece, "Sweeney Todd" (a Tooting Arts Club production, at the Barrow Street, under the direction of Bill Buckhurst), the title character's misanthropy drives some of the plot, but it is not a cynical work. Despite the bitterness and grief that infuse and guide the story, "Sweeney Todd" is filled with so much wonder—about the magic of words and of music, of character and of plot—that, especially when you have a cast and a director as talented as those involved in this London import, it can temporarily erase the memory of the cynicism or knowingness that informs

so many other current productions.

Buckhurst brings to his re-creation of nineteenth-century Fleet Street an Englishman's knowledge of how the fog and filth and soot of the great Industrial Age filled the lungs and wore bodies down. But Sweeney Todd (Jeremy Secomb) can withstand all that and probably more. He has broad shoulders, a tight midsection, and big, wild eyes that can stare down any threat that life may care to throw at him. He's been through a lot. Fifteen years ago, he was Benjamin Barker, a barber in love with his gentle wife and their little girl. But another man, with far more power, a certain Judge Turpin (Duncan Smith), coveted Barker's wife, and con-

trived to send him off to prison in Australia. Eventually, he escaped and, adrift on a raft in the middle of the ocean, was rescued by Anthony Hope (Matt Doyle), a sweet-natured young seaman, who has now delivered him back to London—where his wife, after being raped by Judge Turpin, is thought to have killed herself, and his daughter, Johanna (Alex Finke), is the judge's ward and the object of his growing lust.

When Anthony offers Sweeney some money to help him through, the older man draws back. How can he extend his hand in vulnerable gratitude again? What has vulnerability ever brought him but loss? Better to focus on bloody revenge—to take from life what it has taken from him. Still, there's a problem: Sweeney wants to undo time, or the devastation that time has wreaked on his heart, but no one can go back, not really. On some level, Anthony represents the optimism that Sweeney wants not to reclaim but to soil. Doesn't Anthony know how power works? In his deep, round baritone, Sweeney spits these words at his openhearted companion:

There's a hole in the world  
Like a great black pit  
And the vermin of the world  
Inhabit it  
And its mortals aren't worth  
What a pig could spit,  
And it goes by the name of London.

At the top of the hole  
Sit the privileged few,  
Making mock of the vermin  
In the lower zoo.

Buckhurst and his set designer, the original and perfect Simon Kenny, have reinforced the show's depiction of English class distinctions—the many lives spent in service to the few—by creating a pinched, claustrophobic, dimly lit environment. The stage is no more than a runway that surrounds, on all four sides, rows of benches and tables—a dining room in the pie shop of Mrs. Lovett (Siobhán McCarthy). Sweeney and his little family used to live in the flat above the shop, but he has no fond memories of Mrs. Lovett's pies. Taking a bite of one now, he looks as if he'd just tasted moldy flesh, or joy. Mrs. Lovett knows that her product is bad, but it's born of the times, of her poverty. Her take on the situation is like a page from Henry Mayhew's 1851

*Buckhurst mines Sondheim's script for subtexts that wouldn't play on Broadway.*



classic “London Labour and the London Poor.” She sings:

Is that just disgusting?  
You have to concede it.  
It's nothing but crusting—  
Here drink this, you'll need it—  
The worst pies in London—  
And no wonder, with the price of  
Meat what it is  
When you get it.  
Never  
Thought I'd live to see the day men'd think  
it was a  
Treat finding poor  
Animals  
Wot are dying in the street.

Mrs. Lovett herself looks like something that died and came back not as a ghost but as ectoplasm with a voice. Wild-haired and hollow-eyed, slightly crouched in a conspiratorial stance, she knows what the world is made of: haves and have-nots, those wot got theirs and those wot haven't. She'd do a brisk business, like Mrs. Mooney, a rival pie-shop owner, if only she were fast enough to catch the stray cats that Mrs. Mooney kills, seasons, and cooks up. Anyway, Mrs. Lovett is grateful to have Sweeney as a fellow-voyager on this vast, dirty, class-obsessed ship called London. She confides in him about her old friend Barker—and his stupid, weak wife—and she takes out some of Barker's razors, which she's been hanging on to all this time. She could have sold them, sure, but she's sentimentally attached to the tools of her lost friend's trade. Or perhaps she just likes the potential violence they imply. As Sweeney grabs them from her, a thrill ripples through her body: what could be more exciting than a man reclaiming his power, his will to destruction? Her erotic frisson has an idea attached to it as well: is it possible that the world could be her (edible) oyster if she and Sweeney went into business together? He could off the humanity he so loathes, and she could fill her pies with all that prematurely snuffed-out life.

**B**UCKHURST TREATS THE show as a storybook tale, a kind of “Struwwelpeter,” full of sudden shocks of pain, visual surprise, and devilish laughter: a child's vision of right and wrong, but with adult consequences. It's a “poor theatre” rendition, in the Grotowski sense; actors, rather than an outsized set or a thumping orchestra, make the show. (There are only three musicians, and they sit stage left,

away from where the actors make most of their entrances and exits.) Free of the cravenness that infects many American musicals—all those productions out to score—the actors perform without mugging. Their characterizations are organic, and they open Sondheim's brilliant lyrics up to a new freshness: their interpretations are those of actors, not stars. I've seen two Broadway productions of “Sweeney Todd”: of course, I loved Angela Lansbury as the first Mrs. Lovett, in 1979, and I greatly admired the director John Doyle's 2005 staging, in which the actors were also the musicians. But Buckhurst mines the script for subtexts that wouldn't play on Broadway, because they're not that broad, such as the economics that shape the world in which Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett live—along with Anthony and Johanna, who fall in love at first glance but are kept apart by the judge.

Like Pamela MacKinnon, who brought something unique and unexpected to Edward Albee's “Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf,” in the memorable 2012 Broadway revival—she played up George and Martha's sexual attraction—Buckhurst, an actor himself, lets us see how deeply necessary Sweeney is to Mrs. Lovett. She carried a torch for him for all the years that he was gone, and now she resents the love he still has for his wife. That resentment makes Mrs. Lovett even more calculating: why should she have to compete with a ghost for her man? Still, in the end it doesn't matter that Sweeney can't reciprocate her feelings; their collaboration is the closest thing to love she's ever known.

Mrs. Lovett is an incredible comic creation, a dirty Cockney doll, always looking for the main chance. And she finds it in Sweeney: once he starts supplying succulent meat—the remains of those humans who made the mistake of sitting down in his barber chair—her pie business achieves a success she could never have dreamed of. An honest and first-rate artist, McCarthy, like all the actors, does exceptional work. She approaches Mrs. Lovett not knowingly but searchingly, wondering how the character feels instead of “performing” her. McCarthy makes us understand that, ultimately, Mrs. Lovett is just doing her best in a world where belief is not the first consideration and trust is, more often than not, as unfamiliar as a happy death. ♦



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THE  
NEW YORKER



## ANIMAL KINGDOMS

*"Kong: Skull Island" and "Raw."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

THE BIG NEW film from Warner Bros., Legendary Pictures, and Tencent Pictures, "Kong: Skull Island," is not to be confused with "Skull Island: Reign of Kong," a trackless ride at Universal Orlando Resort, in Florida. But why not? The two of them beg to be confused. Both are designed to thrash your prefrontal cortex into sub-

Jump ahead to Washington, D.C., in 1973, and to a fellow named Bill Randa (John Goodman), whose job description I never quite caught. His area of interest, however, is exact: a Pacific island (guess which one) that he depicts as "a place where myth and science meet." It has never been mapped, and now is the time. And so to an air-



Jordan Vogt-Roberts's *Kong* movie is set against a backdrop of the Vietnam War.

mission. Both may be enhanced, for your viewing pleasure, with 3-D spectacles. Both entail—not to give the game away—a large primate who has made absolutely no effort to meet with his therapist. And neither the ride nor the film will be content until you go, in the richest sense of the phrase, ape shit.

That brief is fulfilled, pretty well, by the first forty minutes of the movie. We start with a prologue set in 1944, "somewhere over the South Pacific," in which two pilots, a Japanese and an American, land by parachute on a deserted island—presumably after a dogfight—and duke it out with pistols and a sword before being rudely interrupted by the film's title character. From now on, any duking will be handled by Kong.

base, in Vietnam, where Lieutenant Colonel Packard (Samuel L. Jackson) and his men, including Major Chapman (Toby Kebbell), are preparing to ship out and head home. Instead, they are given the chance to explore the island—one last mission, which Packard accepts with suspicious alacrity. Squaring up to Mason Weaver (Brie Larson), an "antiwar photographer" who's been cleared to come along, he declares that the Vietnam War was not lost but abandoned. You can tell he's still spoiling for a fight.

As Packard's helicopters near their target, punch through a "perpetual storm system" that girdles the island, and discover a paradise of unravished greenery, the movie lays out its credentials.

There's a tracker named Conrad (Tom Hiddleston) on board, who possesses "unique expertise in uncharted jungle terrain," and, soon enough, we even encounter a Marlow (John C. Reilly). Plus, for good measure, a blaze of burning napalm. Got it? I'm frankly amazed that nobody brings along a bulldog named Kurtz. In short, what this movie yearns to be is a pop-culture "Apocalypse Now," with the human foe removed, the political parable toned down, and the gonzo elements jacked up. The excellent news is that, for a while, that goal is met. The U.S. choppers are now in Kong's domain, and he treats them in the way that a ravenous but slightly messy diner would approach a lobster special—wrenching them apart and cracking open the shells to get at the meat inside. The seafood motif returns a little later, as Kong grapples with a giant octopus (or, rather, by my count, a dodecapus) and slurps one of the legs down like a noodle. Yum. Heaps of fun, and you don't have to go to Florida.

The director of "Kong: Skull Island" is Jordan Vogt-Roberts, whose calling card for the task was "The Kings of Summer" (2013), a wistful teen-age pastoral, wittily handled and, if memory serves, entirely gorilla-free. It probably cost about as much as Kong's right paw—even less, in fact, since at one point the paw gets a crucial scene, in which a drowning Weaver is plucked from the water and laid, as gently as an infant, on the leathery palm. We are meant to recall "King Kong," from 1933, when Fay Wray was similarly cradled, and other flickers of that film emerge: the finding of a lost tribe, and the hearty disagreements between Kong and his next-door neighbors—prehistoric monsters, which in this case pop up from underground. Nothing can supplant the charm of the original Kong, who, thanks to the film's stop-motion process, bore a touch of the tremulous and the hesitant to go along with his chest-thumping might, and Vogt-Roberts is smart enough not to try. Instead, he turns the trip to Skull Island into precisely that: a trip.

Thus, in no particular order, we are offered the following attractions: balls of fire reflected in a soldier's mirrored shades; another soldier transforming the bleached skull of a triceratops into a machine-gun emplacement; Conrad



using a curved sword to swipe at pterodactylic assailants, releasing gouts of purple gore; and Kong, in all his majesty, proudly framed against the setting sun. Then, there are the visual rhymes: an early clip of President Nixon, announcing the cessation of the conflict on TV, is echoed by a closeup of a Nixon figurine on a pilot's dashboard, nodding madly as the helicopter dives to its doom. Note also the use of "just as" moments: one guy, trapped on the ground, is stamped on by a foot the size of an R.V. just as he is about to be yanked free; and a tail bats a prospective hero sideways into a cliff just as he is about to pull the pin on a pair of grenades and save the day. The over-all effect is to compound the comedy of peril, and to suggest that our mortal initiatives, however brave, will usually be humbled and outwitted by the less subtle devices of the brutes. Sounds about right to me.

The thing that breaks the back of this movie, and makes the second half so much less prodigious than the first, is a simple matter of geography. Once the combatants are split up and scattered around the island (Packard here, Chapman there, Conrad and Marlow stuck in their own heart of darkness), the story loses focus and even starts to drag. As occurred with last year's "Star Trek Beyond," you soon get bored with one party and itch to get back to the others. The same goes for the dinosaurs and the other humongous throwbacks—creepy enough, in their skeletal fashion, but no match for Kong. To be honest, his only rival in the film is Samuel L. Jackson, who has a high old time. When it's suggested that the remaining troops should get out and call

the cavalry, Packard solemnly replies, "I am the cavalry." More than once, the screen is completely filled with the glaring eyes of Kong, and Packard, granted the same treatment, glares right back. The sad truth is that the place ain't big enough for the both of them, and so an opportunity is lost. If they joined forces, they could rule the world.

WHAT KIND OF parents, dropping their child off at college for the first time, stop to point out the hospital and the morgue? Answer: the parents of Justine (Garance Marillier), who is starting veterinary school. Her older sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf) is already studying there, and she looks on with affectionate unconcern as Justine and the other novices are ground through a mill of hazing rites. They are rudely awoken and forced to crawl on their hands and knees to an orgiastic party. And that's just opening night. Still to come, in "Raw," by the French director Julia Ducournau, is the obligation to eat a rabbit's kidney and the tipping of blood, from on high, onto the massed ranks of freshmen.

The drenching is an update of "Carrie," and the response, from Justine, is no less extreme. It makes telekinesis look like a party trick. She is a vegetarian, but this harsh initiation turns her, against her will, into a compulsive carnivore, addicted to the sins—and the savor—of the flesh. She begins by sliding a bunless hamburger into the pocket of her lab coat, moves on to uncooked chicken, straight from the fridge, and, before long, on the principle that it's not what you eat but whom, finds herself tucking into a severed

finger, nibbling away as if on a buffalo wing. Even Kong would shut his eyes.

"Raw" is preceded by its reputation. Murky reports from the film festivals where it has shown tell of swoonings, walkouts, and throwing up, and you can see why. The nominees for Justine's ickiest scene include her waxing, her hair-chewing, and her rash-scratching, and there's a sigh of relief when she and her gay roommate, Adrien (Rabah Nait Oufella), in the course of their studies, settle down to an ordinary dissection of a dog. The curious thing is that, as with many big-budget horror flicks, this small French-Belgian movie feels too pleased with its own outrage; the grosser it grows, the less interesting it becomes. When the carnage was over, I went out and had a steak.

On the other hand, what's impressive about the lead actresses—Marillier is shy and industrious, Rumpf more aggressive and shrugging—is not the valor with which they tackle the gruesome stuff as much as their portrait of sisterly love. Whether they're drunk or sober, hanging out or lashing out, the loyalty is palpable, and Ducournau finds space in her movie for interactions that most male directors would barely notice. The highlight of the whole saga is a casual chat between Justine and the school nurse (Marion Vernoux), an older woman with a tattoo and a cigarette, who talks about the trials of not fitting in. Her advice is "Find yourself a quiet corner." Vampires and cannibals are stale news among moviegoers, but the quest for identity is ever fresh. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mick Stevens, must be received by Sunday, March 12th. The finalists in the February 27th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 27th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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### THE FINALISTS

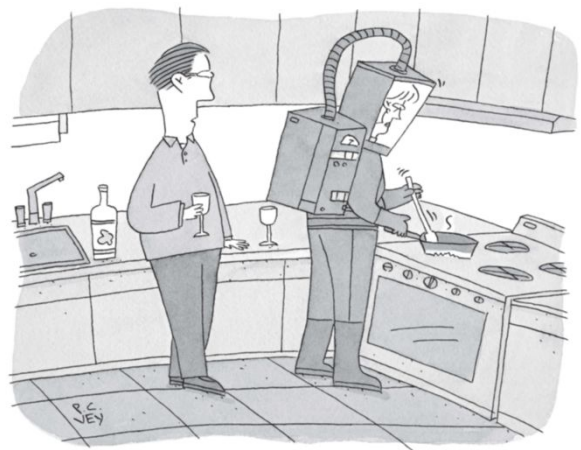


*“Honey? The baby's outsmarted me again.”*  
Susanne Ruder, Toronto, Ont.

*“No, you grow up.”*  
Eric Behrens, Austin, Texas

*“There's got to be an easier way to keep me insured.”*  
Aaron R. Welch, Lakewood, Colo.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*“We had meth on Tuesday.”*  
Colin Michel, Los Angeles, Calif.



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