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How history ignores the bad refugees

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OPINION

I had forgotten that memory of my mother, sitting by herself, reading aloud from a church newsletter. It was the only way she could read, having had only a grade school education. As an American teenager fluent in English, I felt pity for her, and perhaps a bit of shame.

The memory came back to me on learning of the White House chief of staff John Kelly's words about undocumented immigrants coming from south of the border, whom he described as people who would not "easily assimilate into the United States, into our modern society."

"They're overwhelmingly rural people. In the countries they come from, fourth-, fifth-, sixth-grade educa-

Convenient amnesia about one's origins is an all-American trait.

pathize with the reason. But the laws are the laws."

Mr. Kelly feels sympathy for these people, some of whom are like my mother, born into a rural background. But Mr. Kelly — like President Trump, who last week called certain undocumented immigrants "animals" — cannot empathize with them. His inability to see or feel the world as they do is shared by many Americans.

That includes some of my fellow Vietnamese-Americans, who, though they came to this country as refugees fleeing war, are saying that the United States should not take in any more refugees, especially those from places like Syria. Some, like the Vietnamese-American mayor of Westminster, Calif., home to the largest population of Vietnamese outside of Vietnam, even say the United States should not accept any undocumented immigrants, since they include "criminals."

We were the good refugees, the reasoning goes. These new ones are the bad refugees.

Having grown up in the Vietnamese refugee community in San Jose, Calif., in the 1970s and 1980s, I can testify that there were plenty of bad refugees among us. Welfare cheating. Insurance scams. Cash under the table. Gang violence, with home invasions being a Vietnamese specialty.

All that has been forgotten. Vietnamese-Americans are now part of the NGUYEN, PAGE 11

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.

Ireland confronts its taboos

CARRIGTWOHILL, IRELAND

Vote on legalizing abortion splits nation that otherwise has opened up culturally

BY KIMIKO DE FREYTAGS-TAMURA

When it comes to the Roman Catholic Church, Judy Donnelly has been something of a rebel over the years. Like much of Ireland, she supported contraception, voted in a referendum to legalize divorce and, three years ago, backed same-sex marriage.

That last vote was joyously celebrated around the country and the world, placing Ireland, which elected its first gay prime minister last year, at the vanguard of what many called a social revolution.

But when it comes to the historic decision on legalizing abortion, which will be put to the nation on Friday, Ms. Donnelly says she will vote no, and enough of her countrymen and women, including lawmakers across the political divide, are expected to vote the same way that the result of the referendum has been thrown into doubt. Opinion polls ahead of the vote have narrowed so tightly in recent weeks that "yes" and "no" campaigners are not able to confidently predict a victory.

Ms. Donnelly, 46, who works in a pub in Carrigtwohill, found no contradiction in giving gay men and lesbians their marital rights, a triumphant affirmation of their social inclusion — Ireland decriminalized homosexuality only in 1993 — while denying what many say is a woman's right to decide what to do with her body.

"It's just not the same," she said, pausing as she struggled to articulate what exactly was the difference between the two. "It's about values and morals. It's just not the same," she repeated, before lapsing into silence.

The curious dynamic underscores the complex reality that even if Ireland is becoming more culturally liberal in many respects, opposition to abortion is deeply ingrained. The reasons are complicated and nuanced: a history of female oppression; the church's continuing grip over sexual education; a malaise over discussions about sex and sexual health; and very private experiences around miscarriages, fetal deformities, adoption difficulties and spousal disagreements over whether to keep a baby.

A big part of the problem, many Irish say, is that there is a legacy of sex being a taboo subject and that the negative consequences of sexual activity, including infections or unplanned pregnancies, are seen through a moral lens rather than as health issues. Even though 40 percent of children in the country are born to unmarried mothers and fathers (about the same as in the United States), many say there is still stigma around unmarried mothers.

It took a gay prime minister, Leo Varadkar, to call for this referendum. It will essentially ask voters whether they want to repeal a 1983 amendment to the Constitution that gives a fetus the same right to life as the mother and allow un-



CHARLES MCQUILLAN/GETTY IMAGES



CLODAGH KILCOYNE/REUTERS

A mural in Dublin supporting the "yes" vote, top, in Ireland's referendum on repealing the constitutional amendment that bans abortion. Opponents of the measure, above, at a rally. The Roman Catholic Church's grip over sexual education is a factor in the vote.

restricted terminations of pregnancies for up to 12 weeks.

"I know I come across as a hypocrite," said Darren Haddock, 48, a cabdriver who initially planned to vote in favor of abortion because he saw it as a woman's right. But now, he said, "we're talking about hurting a life."

The referendum on gay marriage was different, he said. "The time was right

for Ireland to come out of the Dark Ages, to break the shackles from the church, and it was a victory for people to stand up to it," he said.

Ms. Donnelly, who recently divorced, voted in favor of same-sex marriage because her sister-in-law was part of the first gay couple to get married in England. Another cousin is gay, and recently got married, too.

When it came to abortion, she reflected on some of her other relatives who had miscarriages, having wanted children badly. "And then you have people who cross over to England to get an abortion," she said.

There were some exceptions, she said, as in the cases of rape or incest, "but just because you made a boo-boo IRELAND, PAGE 4

A firebrand in Iraq turns himself into a populist

BAGHDAD

Anticorruption stance of Moktada al-Sadr finds appeal across divides

BY MARGARET COKER

Iraqis are still haunted by memories of black-clad death squads roaming Baghdad neighborhoods a decade ago, cleansing them of Sunni Muslims as the country was convulsed by sectarian violence.

Many of the mass killings in the capital were done in the name of Moktada al-Sadr, a cleric best remembered by Americans for fiery sermons declaring it a holy duty among his Shiite faithful to attack United States forces.

The militia he led was armed with weapons supplied by Iran, and Mr. Sadr cultivated a strong alliance with leaders in Tehran, who were eager to supplant the American presence in Iraq and play the dominant role in shaping the country's future.

Now, the man once demonized by the United States as one of the greatest threats to peace in Iraq has come out as the surprise winner of this month's closely contested parliamentary elections, after a startling reinvention into a populist, anticorruption campaigner whose "Iraq First" message appealed to voters across sectarian divides.

The results have Washington and Tehran on edge, as officials in both countries seek to influence what is expected to be a complex and drawn-out battle behind the scenes to build a coalition government. Mr. Sadr's bloc won 54 seats — the most of any group, but still far short of a majority in Iraq's 329-seat Parliament.

Even before the final results were announced Saturday, Mr. Sadr — who did not run as a candidate and has ruled himself out as prime minister — had made clear whom he considers natural political allies. At the top of his list is Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, the moderate Shiite leader who has been America's partner in the fight against the Islamic State and whose political bloc finished third in the vote.

Pointedly absent from Mr. Sadr's list of potential partners: pro-Iranian blocs, as he has distanced himself from his former patrons in Iran, whose meddling he has come to see as a destabilizing force in Iraq's politics.

On Sunday, Mr. Abadi met with Mr. Sadr in Baghdad. They discussed forming a government, and aides from both sides said the men saw eye to eye on prioritizing the fight against corruption.

While Mr. Sadr has all the momentum going into negotiations over the governing coalition, there is no guarantee his bloc will be in power. And it is too early to tell what the election may mean for Iraqi stability or American national security IRAQ, PAGE 4



Alanis Morissette, left, and the director Diane Paulus. "When you're dealing with an album that has such meaning for people, you have to respect that," Ms. Paulus said.

Trailblazing '90s album brings jolt to a new arena

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

A new stage adaptation of 'Jagged Little Pill' stays true to original's rawness

BY JOSHUA BARONE

Everyone seems to have a story about hearing Alanis Morissette's "Jagged Little Pill" for the first time. The writer Diablo Cody was listening to the radio when a D.J. said, "This is going to be huge." The composer Tom Kitt was in college, feeling as if the whole world had stopped. I was a kid who got grounded for accidentally saying the F-word while singing along to "You Oughta Know."

The album's parade of fearlessly raw hits was as integral to '90s pop culture as AOL promo disks and Doc Martens. Its success vindicated Ms. Morissette,

who had previously been rejected by radio stations that said they didn't need another woman after Sinead O'Connor and Tori Amos. "For those in the patriarchy who thought women were not bankable," she recalled in a recent interview, "that went out the window."

Now Ms. Morissette's trailblazing 1995 album is taking on new life: as theater. And don't expect a fun, nostalgic jukebox musical about the '90s. "Jagged Little Pill," which opens at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Mass., on Thursday, is very much of the present and may just be the most woke musical since "Hair."

The show tackles hot-button issues like opiate addiction, gender identity and sexual assault, as well as more quietly urgent ones like transracial adoption, sexless marriage and image-consciousness. It also contains imagery from the Women's March and the #NeverAgain gun-control movement. Picture JAGGED, PAGE 2

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WORLD

A firebrand in Iraq turns into a populist

IRAQ, FROM PAGE 1
goals. But the upset has clearly weakened the sectarian foundation of Iraq's political system and helped transform Mr. Sadr's image from the paragon of a militant Shiite into an unexpected symbol of reform and Iraqi nationalism.

As the head of the Sairoon Alliance for Reform, Mr. Sadr presides over an unlikely alliance that pairs his pious, largely working-class Shiite base with Sunni business leaders, liberals and Iraqis looking for relief from the country's long-simmering economic crisis.

For those joining the alliance, it was important to be convinced that Mr. Sadr's shift from Shiite firebrand to Iraqi patriot was sincere and likely to last.

Late last year, Mr. Sadr began reaching out to groups outside his base with an offer to form a political movement, and the country's embattled leftists and secularists — once his staunch enemies — faced a moment of reckoning.

They remembered how a rogue Shariah court he had established passed sentences on fellow Shiites deemed too submissive toward the American occupation of Iraq. And they recalled the countless Iraqis killed in battles between the country's security forces and Mr. Sadr's militia.

But a ragtag group of communists, social democrats and anarchists have come to embrace Mr. Sadr as a symbol of the reform they have championed for years — an image that the cleric has burnished, seeing it as the best path to political power.

"Let me be honest: We had a lot of apprehensions, a lot of suspicions," said Raad Fahmi, a leader of Iraq's Communist Party, which is part of Mr. Sadr's alliance. "But actions speak louder than words. He's not the same Moktada al-Sadr."

ISIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

The change in Mr. Sadr was prompted by the political and security crisis set off by the Islamic State's takeover of large parts of northern and western Iraq in 2014, according to Sheikh Saleh al-Obeidi, Mr. Sadr's spokesman. The ensuing violence led to an overwhelming shift in the public mood: a feeling that sectarianism was at the root of much of the country's suffering.

Mr. Sadr, the scion of an eminent clerical family, has portrayed his changed political philosophy in starkly pragmatic terms.

In his only extensive interview before the elections, given to his own television channel, Mr. Sadr put forth a manifesto largely adopted from his new secularist allies. He said his goals were to put professionals — not partisan loyalists — into positions of power as a way to build national institutions that serve the people instead of political insiders.

"We have tried the Islamists and they failed terribly," Mr. Sadr said, a rebuke that his aides said included his own movement. "So let us try another way in which the independent technocrat or independent Islamist or secular technocrat, whoever is best for the job, takes over a ministry and makes it productive. We should try that."

Whether Mr. Sadr can succeed with his reform agenda is an open question, said Joost Hiltermann, the director of the International Crisis Group's Middle East program, as building a majority coalition will mean partnering with some of the established faces that voters expressed dissatisfaction with at the polls. Those other politicians "have much to lose from an effort to curb corruption," Mr. Hiltermann said.



IVOR PRICKEFF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



ALAA AL-MARIANI/REUTERS



SAURABH DAS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Clockwise from top: Supporters of the Sairoon Alliance for Reform, led by the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, at a rally before the election in which the bloc came out as the surprise winner; thousands of Mr. Sadr's supporters marched in the holy city of Najaf, Iraq, in 2003, demanding that American forces leave; Mr. Sadr on his way to vote in Najaf this month.

In addition to this new domestic philosophy, Mr. Sadr, 45, has honed an "Iraq First" foreign policy. He has expanded his once singular anti-American focus to include diatribes against Iran. He also has built bridges with close American allies in the Arab world, like Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. The Mr. Sadr of today, his aides say, is remarkably different from the one President George W. Bush called America's greatest enemy in Iraq, on a par with Al Qaeda. Diplomats from several Western countries, including ones whose coalitions

were killed by Mr. Sadr's militia, have met with him and say they are looking for ways to work with the newly influential leader. They are ready to draw the curtain on past events, they said, in hopes of finding common ground over containing Iran's influence in Iraq. But many Iraqis are not convinced his that new stance is here to stay. Among them are several senior commanders in the Iraqi security forces who are trying to build a centralized chain of command at the expense of sectarian militias. Those militias have enhanced their standing because of their role in helping defeat the Islamic State, but

continue to have a reputation for lawlessness. In the week since the election, several senior political rivals of Sairoon have privately criticized Mr. Sadr, citing his militia's long record of violence. None would speak publicly, however, given the delicate political jockeying underway to build a coalition government. The broader Sunni population remains wary of Mr. Sadr. But many Sunnis did give their vote to the bloc of Mr. Abadi, the prime minister, so a governing coalition that includes both sides would represent a significant bridging of the country's sectarian divide.

SHIFTING ROLES

The first time many Iraqis heard the name Moktada al-Sadr was soon after the Americans seized control of Baghdad in 2003. In the post-occupation chaos, Mr. Sadr emerged as a type of Robin Hood, deploying his recently formed militia to distribute food to the poor and defend Shiites against what many came to view as acts of American aggression. Amid this ferment, a leading Iraqi cleric, Abdel Majid al-Khoi, was killed in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, shocking millions of followers. Many Shiite clerics believed Mr. Sadr had ordered the killing to settle an old family feud.

Over time, respect for Mr. Sadr's militia among many Iraqis turned to revulsion. Units became known for Mafia-style protection rackets, kidnappings and extortion, even in Shiite neighborhoods. A growing backlash prompted Mr. Sadr to leave for Iran in 2007. In 2008, while Mr. Sadr was still in Iran, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki took decisive action. He ordered the Iraqi army to Basra to stem militia violence there. An intense urban battle killed 215 militia members and wounded 600. The blow sidelined Mr. Sadr for a time. He ordered his militia into hibernation, but never had his men disarm. By 2012, Mr. Sadr, who had returned from Iran, had regained enough influence to spearhead a vote of no-confidence against Mr. Maliki, a maneuver that spun Iraq into a new crisis.

ODD BEDFELLOWS

Then in 2014, another national crisis erupted: a security collapse as the Islamic State took over one-third of the country. Mr. Sadr called his militia back to the front lines, but this time as a partner of the diverse Iraqi security forces and the American-led coalition fighting the extremists. He also turned his attention to a small protest movement organized by leftists and secularists in the capital. The demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Baghdad were on behalf of civil servants and pensioners, and against growing economic inequality and the lack of essentials like electricity and health care. The protesters were mostly ignored by Iraq's political establishment, but Mr. Sadr viewed their demands as an echo of the plaintive calls of his own base for better jobs and government services. So

"Let me be honest: We had a lot of apprehensions, a lot of suspicions. But actions speak louder than words. He's not the same Moktada al-Sadr."

he looked to build relationships with these groups, despite their diametrically different worldviews. Mr. Sadr's closest aide, Dhia'a Assadi, called the overtures sincere. "His eminence has always been a voice for the poor," Mr. Assadi said. "He saw that it was to the benefit for all Iraqis for those who share principles to come together." For the past two years, supporters of Mr. Sadr have banded together with communists, intellectuals and community activists in protest rallies, efforts that have built mutual respect. Last fall, the Communist Party leadership visited Mr. Sadr at his headquarters in Najaf, the home of Iraq's clerical establishment. Mr. Fahmi, one of the Communist leaders, said several of his comrades were initially cool to the idea of joining forces with someone perceived to have so much blood on his hands. In the end, most members accepted that if radical political change was going to work in Iraq, it needed a popular leader to bring the masses on board. "So what if Moktada al-Sadr is now the face of reform?" Mr. Fahmi said. "What should I care as long as the reforms happen? He's a man who can motivate millions." "If our society improves because of him," he added, "I'll be the first one to congratulate him."

Falih Hassan contributed reporting.

With abortion vote, Ireland confronts its taboos

IRELAND, FROM PAGE 1
doesn't mean you get an abortion."

Still, she voted in three previous referendums allowing women to have abortions if their lives were in danger, to travel abroad for the procedure and to have access to information about it. The legalization of abortion, she said, would "make it easier for people to say, 'Oh, I'll just go and rid of it.'"

For Una Mullally, who edited the book "Repeat the 8th," a reference to the Eighth Amendment that essentially bans abortion in Ireland, the answer to the dichotomy over gay and women's rights is control.

"Misogyny is much more embedded in Irish life than homophobia," she said. "Ireland has a terrible history of oppressing women, and the legacy of the Catholic Church is control," she added, referring to the thousands of unmarried women who became pregnant and were placed into servitude or mental asylums since the 18th century until as recently as the mid-1990s.

Even when the country in 1985 legalized condoms to be sold without prescription, Ms. Mullally said, it was to deal with the AIDS epidemic, rather than to give women their reproductive rights. "Women's autonomy has always been viewed with suspicion or through a lens that is very bizarre," she said.

In Cork, Ireland's second-biggest city, placards for opposing campaigns were attached to almost every street lamp, but the mood was subdued. Most people interviewed for this article didn't want their names published; many of them hadn't spoken about the subject even with friends, let alone their families.

"Oh God, no," exclaimed a 24-year-old barista named Maedhbh who wore a nose ring and a bright yellow sweatshirt



Judy Donnelly, left, a bartender in Carrigtwohill, Ireland, is opposed to an easing of abortion law. Right, the offices in Cork of an organization that backs access to the procedure.

with the words "Bitter Lemon" on it. "My grandparents don't want to engage in it," she said, just as her grandfather Paddy walked in to the coffee shop. When asked about the referendum, he stopped in his tracks and pretended to be hard of hearing. "You could be shot for giving an answer," a customer standing nearby said, smiling, before rushing out the door. "There's a saying in Irish: 'Whatever you say, say nothing.'"

While the church's influence has fallen drastically in most spheres of Irish life, its hold on sexual education remains strong — the institution still controls most schools in the country. Even internet-savvy Irish in their early 20s spoke about receiving more of a lesson in biology, and a cursory one at that, than instructions about sexual health and safety. "When we were 16 we had two lads, monks, come in to talk about abstinence, and that one in 10 people get pregnant and that you can still get STDs from wearing condoms," said Ben Collins, a 22-year-old college student who plans to vote to legalize abortion. "It was basically fear. The Catholic influence is so big here, but you don't even realize it."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELENA HERMOSA SANTOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

lum is still hidden in our brains. It took me a long time to shake it off." As a result, Ireland has never had a conversation about sex being a positive thing, said Will St Leger, an artist and an H.I.V. activist who is on a crusade to reform sex education in schools. "A lot of these issues around sexual health and reproductive rights all stem from a lack of information and shame," he said. "That's the biggest element — what we do with our bodies and with other people carries shame."

"We see ourselves as global, checking in at airports, L.G.B.T., Eurovision," Mr. St Leger said, and Ireland as a mecca for tech giants like Google, Facebook and Apple. "But this crushing theocratic doctrine put on Irish society has permeated right to the core," he added, "even to the person who doesn't go to church: that sex is seen as a sin. It's in our DNA."

pointed out, the government has since 2009 cut the budget in half for the Gay Men's Health Service, which provides H.I.V. testing, screenings and treatments for sexually-transmitted infections, and outreach. The same-sex marriage vote was "all about love and relationships," he said. "But we don't talk about sexual health." Still, sexual education has improved from Ms. Donnelly's time, when nuns taught her class: "If a lad sat on your lap, you'd put a newspaper on your lap. That was the contraception of the day." In recent years, Ireland has seen some of the biggest turnarounds in public opinion in the Western world. In 1992, for example, when homosexuality was still a crime in the country, participants in a gay pride parade in Cork wore masks so as not to embarrass relatives. In 2018, Ireland has a gay prime minister, same-sex marriage is allowed and some of the world's most progressive bills concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are being put forward in Parliament. Similarly, attitudes toward abortion shifted drastically after Savita Halappanavar died in 2012 of complications from a septic miscarriage. She had asked for a termination, but the hospital refused her request, initially judging that her life was not in danger. The baby was stillborn, and Ms. Halappanavar died a few days later. For many Irish voters, the referendum over abortion is, ultimately, a deeply private choice. In 2015, after the same-sex marriage vote, "it was like Glastonbury; it was party central," recalled Mr. Haddock, the cabdriver. But after the vote, he said, "no matter who wins or loses, there's not going to be a party."

TECH

How to test scripts for gender balance

A screenwriter devises a tool to analyze bias before the casting call

BY MELENA RYZIK

The statistics are familiar to anyone who cares about the place of women on screen: Year after year, they appear less often, say fewer words and generally don't do as much in front of the camera. Numerous studies have corroborated the disparity between male and female characters in films, TV shows and ads.

But what if there was a way to analyze the gap before a movie hits the multiplex, when there is still time to address that persistent imbalance?

Now, a few Hollywood players have developed technology that aims to do that: new screenplay software that can discern whether a script is equitable for men and women.

The idea came from Christina Hodson, a screenwriter who is involved with Time's Up, the activist Hollywood organization addressing inequities in the industry.

If everything starts with the scripts, said Ms. Hodson, who specializes in female-driven action movies like the coming "Bumblebee" and a spinoff of Harley Quinn, starring Margot Robbie, "it made sense to me that we can do a lot ourselves, before they even leave our desk."

She wondered if screenwriting software — which writers almost universally use to format scripts — could easily tabulate the number of male and female roles, for example, and how much each character spoke. That way, writers could see and tackle the problem even before casting directors or producers had their say.

Ms. Hodson approached John August, a creator of the script software Highland, to see if he could make something of her brainstorm. In a word, yes. It was a snap: On Thursday, just weeks after that initial conversation, Highland 2, with the gender analysis tool that Ms. Hodson had dreamed up, became available in the Apple app store as a free download.

"I was immediately on board," said Mr. August, a screenwriter himself whose credits include Tim Burton's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" and the forthcoming live-action "Aladdin."

"During the writing process, you're not always aware of how little your female characters are interacting or speaking," he said, "because you're only looking at a scene at a time, a page at a time. It's not a good overview."

Highland 2 provides a real-time snapshot of the overall gender balance. The results are sometimes surprising. With her heroine-centered movies, "I expected all of my scripts would be over 50 percent" female, Ms. Hodson said, "and they weren't."

That knowledge provides an opportunity to rethink some of the storytelling. "It's a tool for people to self-police and look at unconscious bias in their own work," she said.



"I expected all of my scripts would be over 50 percent" female, Christina Hodson said, "and they weren't."

GRAHAM WALZER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In conceiving the interface, Mr. August was careful about how the data was presented. "In no way did I want this to feel like scolding," he said. "I wanted this to feel approachable, and invite you to make changes."

Madeline Di Nonno, chief executive of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media at Mount Saint Mary's University, which has done extensive research into representation on screen, wel-

comed any innovation to push Hollywood in a more balanced direction.

"It's about systemic change," she said, "and it's about what are the touchpoints along the way where critical decisions are being made, and how can we provide an intervention at the very beginning."

In 2016, the institute, along with its partners at the University of Southern California and Google, announced a

software tool that used video and audio recognition and algorithms to decode gender and other details of characters on screen. Late last year, the group also developed a script-level gender assessment — what Ms. Di Nonno called "a spell-check for gender bias" — which has been quietly used by some studios and ad agencies in the last few months, she said. (It's not available commercially.)

The big hurdle in the industry will be buy-in. In response to questions from The New York Times about its products, Final Draft, maker of a leading screenplay software, said in a statement that its next iteration, Final Draft 11, due out within the year, will offer "enhancements" that allow writers "to analyze many different aspects of the script, including gender representation." (The company has long offered a free add-on called Tagger that lets writers tag attributes, including gender and race, for characters. The new version will make this a bigger standard feature.)

Even before Highland 2 hit the marketplace, it was making waves. In April, Ms. Hodson and Mr. August released a podcast about their collaboration and their hopes for it. Guy Goldstein, the founder of WriterDuet Inc., another screenplay software product, was listening, and inspired. His team immediately got to work.

"During the writing process, you're not always aware of how little your female characters are interacting or speaking."

The podcast "made us know that it was something that we really needed to do," Mr. Goldstein said. "We didn't realize the impact we could have until then. I think it's our responsibility as software developers to offer tools that help build awareness."

The WriterDuet tool, available online now, also includes an automated Bechdel test — which measures how many female characters there are and whether they discuss something other than a man — and even a reverse Bechdel test, which looks at men the same way. The tool also noted how many times the test was passed, using a minimum of seven lines of dialogue to qualify.

An examination of the last 10 Oscar winners for original screenplay offered dismal, if not surprising, results: Only one screenplay, Spike Jonze's "Her," passed WriterDuet's Bechdel test, Mr. Goldstein said in an email, when the unseen digital assistant, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, has one conversation with a little girl. "In contrast, every single script passes our reverse Bechdel test multiple times (as many as 40 times, in 'Spotlight')," he said.

Ms. Hodson and the software makers say they expect their tools will be expanded to address other issues of representation, like race and ethnicity, although that is more complicated, because those details are not always mentioned in scripts.

But in general, "this is all pretty easy," Mr. Goldstein said. "Technology can do this, and technology should be doing this."

Ms. Hodson envisioned these analytics being applied to projects already in development. "We can't enforce anything, but my hope is that people will be more invested in doing this as this conversation becomes more important," she said. "Why wouldn't you?"

Q+a

Paying to renew Microsoft Office

Microsoft keeps threatening to disable Word and Excel in a few days unless I pay \$70 for the Office 365 yearly renewal. I don't care about the latest features since not much has changed in the past year. How do I get around this and get rid of the pop-up box every time I open Word or Excel?

Microsoft has a few different versions of its Office suite available and the Office 365 edition is subscription-based — so think of it more as a rental and less of an outright purchase. To get rid of the pop-up boxes and be assured of functioning desktop software when you need it, you must renew the subscription for the \$69.99 annual fee for Office Home & Student 2016 with the one-time purchase price of \$149.99.

The Office Home & Student 2016 version includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote. Once you install it on your computer, you get 60 days of telephone support and security updates through extended support until 2025. However, you will not automatically get upgraded to Microsoft's next major release of its Office suite. If you just need basic word-processing and spreadsheet software, this version should fill your needs for the next few years and you will not get annually nagged to renew a subscription.

There are some advantages to the Office 365 subscription. These include updated features each month, plus a terabyte of online storage for your files on Microsoft's OneDrive servers, 60 minutes of Skype calls to landlines and mobile phones (instead of computer-to-computer or device-to-device communications). Technical support by phone or online chat is available as long as you subscribe.

For those who have very simple word-processing and spreadsheet needs for things like letters, reports and simple budgets, the free, web-based Office Online is another option, although you need an internet connection to use it. Apple's iWork for iCloud, Dropbox Paper and Google Docs and Zoho Workplace are similar web-based offerings and LibreOffice is a free alternative you can download and install on your computer.

Finding privacy for your email

After reading recently updated privacy policies, are there any web-based mail providers out there that do not scan your mail, mine your data or stick ads on your messages? If I wanted to leave Yahoo for a more secure mail provider, how can I move my mail and address book?

Free email services are generally free because those companies make money by selling advertising based on the data you generate. That is the trade-off.

Using encryption tools like OpenPGP is an option for more secure mail, but web-based mail services that build in privacy are another.

Most charge a fee, but some secure mail providers have free accounts that offer limited features and storage capacity.

Many of the more popular secure mail providers are based overseas and subject to the privacy laws in their particular country of incorporation, so read up before signing up. Some services include Countermail (Sweden), FastMail (Australia), Hushmail (Canada), ProtonMail (Switzerland), Run-Box (Norway) and Tutanota (Germany).

Compared with several other countries or regions, the United States has looser legal restrictions about what companies can do with customer data. For example, the United States government overturned certain consumer privacy protection laws last year, making it easier for broadband internet providers to track and sell customer data without first getting permission from those being tracked.

As for moving your existing mailbox and contacts to a new service, Yahoo Mail does not have an export function, but you might be able to download your messages to a third-party desktop mail program like Mozilla Thunderbird to get local copies. Yahoo's help site does have instructions for exporting your contacts list as a file that you can import elsewhere. J.D. BIERSDORFER



At left, ancient Alexandria as seen in the Discovery Tour mode of Assassin's Creed Origins. Right, the Assassin's Creed representation of Khafre's funerary complex in Egypt.



IMAGES FROM UBISOFT

Assassin's Creed in the classroom

Game franchise abandons violence to take players on tours of the ancient world

BY JUSTIN PORTER

History has long served as a backdrop in the Assassin's Creed video games, whose story lines center on pivotal times in history — from the Third Crusade to Imperial China and beyond. But when players of this Ubisoft series rush from mission to mission, as agents of events both great and small, their purpose is rarely to take the time to appreciate history itself. Duty always calls.

Until now. Following last year's release of Assassin's Creed Origins, set in Ptolemaic Egypt, the team behind it decided that allowing players to learn more about life in ancient Egypt might make for a pretty cool teaching aid. So they traded in the quests and violence for antiquities and history lessons and created a mode with a series of Discovery Tours.

Edyeli Marku, a middle-school teacher at Intermediate School 230 in Jackson Heights, Queens, said there

could be "tremendous value in it," for both students and educators — particularly for students who might test as primarily visual, auditory or kinesthetic learners. For those students, she added, "exposing them to a different learning vehicle is always beneficial."

Ms. Marku said she understands the importance of games to her students and has even used Oregon Trail as a teaching tool.

"They go on the phone like it's nothing," she said. "They go on an iPad, and they can spend hours in front of it."

Maxim Durand, who has been the lead researcher and history consultant for the Assassin's Creed franchise since 2010, and Jean Guesdon, the creative director on Origins, said they had often heard from educators who saw the potential of using the games. Some had even used small portions in their lessons. But so much of Assassin's Creed, given its violence and fictional narrative, is problematic in a school setting.

Even Ms. Marku said the violent content could hamper the franchise's acceptance for education purposes, especially for parents reacting to the name of the series or those familiar with its sub-

ject matter. In this version of the game, though, players guide their chosen avatar. It can be the sheriff-like character Bayek, the original protagonist of Assassin's Creed Origins, or one of 25 possible others including Bayek's wife, Aya; their son, Khemu; Cleopatra; Julius Caesar; Roman legionnaires; and even ordinary Egyptian, Greek and Roman adults and children.

A voice-over details the objects on view, including artifacts like pottery, scrolls, farm tools and baking ovens. The 75 available tours cover daily life, monuments, agriculture, the lives of Greek and Roman settlers, and other topics. At some locations, non-playable characters are seen performing tasks like baking bread, tilling a field or inscribing scrolls. Here players can elect to have their chosen avatar perform the activity. Maybe Cleopatra and Caesar never knelt before a bread oven to remove a hot loaf from the coals, but here players can have that experience.

The Library of Alexandria is another stop. In recreating it, Mr. Durand said, his team looked to the remnants of the Library of Celsus, which is still standing amid the ancient ruins in Ephesus, Turkey.

Of course, a lot of history's secrets are lost to time. That's where a Behind the Scenes feature comes in. The makers use it to explain how and why they chose to represent certain objects. Mr. Durand said he hoped this would also prompt students to think critically about how games are created and the way stories are told.

Marc-André Éthier, a professor at the University of Montreal who studies materials that are being used to teach high school history, noticed that traditional tools like textbooks were being used less.

When he heard about the Discovery Tour, he said, "I was intrigued, and I prepared a study to test if Discovery Tour could teach someone as much as a lecture."

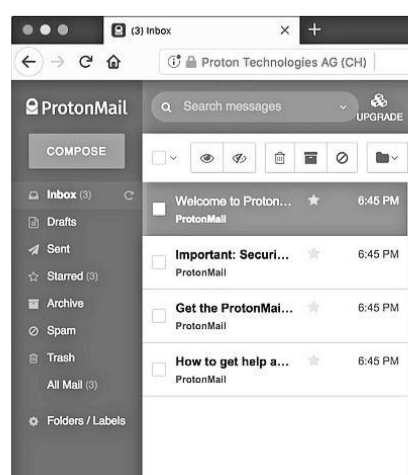
Mr. Éthier said he approached Ubisoft with an idea for what eventually became a study of some 330 students, 12 to 16 years old, in nine schools in Montreal. Students were divided into groups of 40. First, all the students were given a test. Then half of each group took the Library of Alexandria tour, and the other had a lesson with a teacher. Afterward, they took a second quiz. Mr. Éthier said the students working with a teacher did bet-

ter on the test than the ones who had only taken the tour. Though the test scores of the students who took the tour still showed improvement, of 22 percent to 44 percent.

To make the games accessible to a broader range of schools, which typically have computers or tablets rather than game consoles, Ubisoft released a standalone version of the Discovery Tour for computers, even those with aging hardware.

Evelyne Ferron, who specializes in Egyptian history and worked on the project, said she wanted players to "realize the colors of Egypt." Today the Sphinx, the pyramids and temples are bleached white, but they were once vividly colored. Players can see the gold and blue of the sphinx, and the rich browns, blues and greens of the hieroglyphics and murals on the temple walls.

Still, she said, full realism is not always possible and is sometimes less important when entertainment is the goal. "When you create a game," Ms. Ferron said, "you need to create immersion." A historian taking a strict view of history would not sacrifice realism, she said. "Sometimes you have to trick history!"



ProtonMail is one web-based provider offering private email services.

Business



Holywell, a small Welsh town, was hit hard when many shoppers switched to buying goods online, or in bigger stores in neighboring cities. The town's High Street, below left, struggled to keep its stores from closing. Below right, Ted Palmer, owner of Sweeney Ted's barber shop in Holywell, awaiting his next customer.



A step back from the brink

HOLYWELL, WALES
Small Welsh town gutted by e-commerce turns to technology to stay afloat

Officials in this Welsh town will soon install free WiFi along their lone shopping street. They are erecting the first electric car chargers in the town. And in the past winter, small businesses began partnerships with an American mobile payments system in the hope of getting more people in their stores.

This is smart-town tech — the scatter-shot response as communities try in any way possible to draw shoppers back to their High Streets and Main Streets.

Many places like Holywell are experimenting with new technologies and digital services, in a defensive crouch against the dominance of e-commerce and the lure of bigger cities. Along with the car chargers and free WiFi, officials here have added digital "beacons" that describe local attractions to aid smartphone-toting tourists.

Although such efforts will hardly insulate their economies, the alternative amounts to giving up. Shop owners hope the moves will help them survive and improve the mood of an area that has been declining for decades.

"At the end of the day, we're a little town in the middle of nowhere," said Ted Palmer, whose barbershop lies just off Holywell's main shopping area, the High Street. "Unless you're open to change, you will drown."

Holywell lies close to a Christian religious site popular with tourists and is a short drive from the Welsh coast, but it has always relied on its shops to fuel the local economy. In recent years, though, many have closed, including a stationery store, a drugstore and an appliance retailer. Then, in a matter of months, three of the town's four bank branches closed.

Its High Street is a shell of its former self. Shopping is increasingly being done over the internet, and major retailers are able to drive down prices while offering premium services like next-day delivery on hard-to-find items.

Customers in Holywell can have their groceries brought straight to their front doors from online supermarkets like Ocado, and much else from the shopping behemoth Amazon. Instead of local grocery stores, residents can drive up to a mammoth Tesco supermarket a short distance from the High Street, or take the short walk to Home Bargains, a na-



Business was not brisk for William Bailey, a fishmonger, and Tony Kyle, a butcher.

tionwide discount retailer. Indeed, in much of Britain and the world, people can use smartphones and the internet to get restaurants to dispatch food to their homes, arrange an appointment with a repair person or cleaner, and have their laundry picked up.

The bank branch closings here hit particularly hard. The buildings that once housed them stand unoccupied, one of them still bearing a silhouette of the lender that departed, HSBC.

The closings have forced stores to keep large amounts of cash on site, leaving some shop owners fearful of burglaries or thefts. People who would have gone into the town to do their banking are going elsewhere. And foot traffic into the center of Holywell, a town with a population of 9,000, has dropped off drastically.

When Helen Ryles-Owen opened her stationery store in the middle of Holywell, her only local competitor had recently shut down, and her sister promised to help run the new business. But their timing — opening just weeks before the bank closings began — was bad.

"Would I have opened here" knowing the branches were closing, Ms. Ryles-Owen asked. "I would have thought twice."

The efforts by Holywell to transform itself and its town center belie its long history. In the British vernacular, Holywell is a market town. Edward I granted monks a charter to establish a weekly market here in the 13th century, and they used it to sell ale and collect taxes from farmers and traders who came to hawk their wares. By the beginning of the 19th century, there were dozens of shops, inns and beer houses.

While the weekly market still continues, it now varies between around 25 stalls during the Christmas period, down to half a dozen during the cold and wet days of winter. Offices of the local council, which is responsible for issues like garbage collection as well as services like libraries, moved to another town long ago, taking jobs with them. Workers at a nearby quarry and asphalt plant rarely venture into Holywell, staying instead at a hotel on the town's outskirts.

Shop owners hope the moves will help them survive and improve the mood of an area that has declined for decades.

The High Street, which runs less than 300 yards, is today an assortment of cafes, barber shops and stores selling items ranging from e-cigarettes to shoes. The lone surviving bank branch, of the Spanish lender Santander, has a single ATM. Holywell residents complain there is always a queue, and the machine frequently runs out of cash.

The town's embrace of tech was haphazard.

In recent years, the monthly meetings of a local government committee featured regular discussion of the difficulties faced by the town's High Street and potential solutions. The High Street, which was fully pedestrianized decades ago, would be reopened to vehicle traffic. Electric vehicle chargers would be installed to lure wealthier car owners. Free WiFi would be added to help ensure those customers stuck around.

Then at the Labour Party's annual

conference in September, David Hanson, Holywell's member of Parliament, ran into Sarah Harvey, who heads the British operations of Square, the American mobile payments company. A trial was hatched.

Square would offer its card readers — small white boxes that connect to a smartphone — free to businesses in Holywell.

And the Silicon Valley company would use the experience to learn about companies in Britain, a market it had entered only months earlier.

For small businesses, Square and others like it can be a cheaper alternative to the companies that currently dominate card processing. Square typically sells its card readers for a one-off charge, and charges a flat 1.75 percent fee on all card transactions carried out in-store. Traditional services that are usually found in stores usually charge a monthly rental for readers, and often require longer-term contracts.

Retailers in Holywell say another benefit is the portability of Square's readers, which connect easily to smartphones and can be carried to trade fairs and shows.

Business owners here are clear-eyed about the impact so far. The service has not suddenly driven a significant increase in trade, nor do they expect it to. But many say it has stanchied a fall, and allowed them to appeal to a wider array of customers, particularly younger ones, who use cash less than previous generations.

At a recent reception held near Parliament in London, Mr. Hanson, representatives from Square and Holywell business owners related their experience to more than a dozen lawmakers. Questions ranged from how the system worked (trial units were on hand) to how fast entrepreneurs received payments (the next working day).

Russ Warburton, 56, was one of more than 60 business owners in Holywell who signed up for Square. Revenue for his lighting business had fallen by almost 30 percent after the branch closings. Using Square helped flatten that out. He acknowledged that was a small victory, but one that nevertheless encouraged him — and other fellow business owners — to consider new investments. Mr. Warburton is now expanding from lighting to antiques and refurbishing furniture.

"It doesn't solve the problem," Mr. Warburton, the chairman of the town's business council, said. "You're never going to get the High Street back to what it was 30, 40 years ago, because people's shopping habits have changed."

"We're just trying everything we can to bring people back into the town."

How easy is it to get your personal data?

BY NATASHA SINGER AND PRASHANT S. RAO

The European Union will put in place one of the toughest data privacy laws in the world this week. The law, among other things, gives people in Europe the right to obtain the personal data companies have on them.

That is a sweeping right to data access that Americans don't have.

So we decided to conduct a privacy experiment: Request our data in both Britain and the United States, to get a sense of how easily people in Europe will gain access to their personal information, compared with people in the United States.

We conducted our experiment using a 20-year-old law in Britain that already entitles individuals to see the personal data held about them by companies in that country. We thought the test could serve as a trial run to see how the new European law, known as the General Data Protection Regulation, or G.D.P.R., might play out.

Natasha, a technology reporter in New York, and Prashant, an editor in London, requested their records in their respective countries from Amazon, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Twitter, their mobile providers and marketing analytics companies that profile users.

The results were not what we expected.

EXPANSIVE ANALYTICS
Prashant's marketing analytics service that categorizes and targets online users for marketing purposes, sent me a spreadsheet with about 200 entries tracking my activities. They contained an astonishing degree of detail about my life.

It showed that I had used OpenTable to make a dinner reservation in March at a "casual" Indian restaurant in London, that I had read a CNN article on President Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs, that I was looking to buy a new cellphone and was considering a trip to Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Then there were the 343 marketing classifications Prashant's analytics service had obtained for me from data brokers, companies that sell consumers' details for marketing purposes.

The categorizations had me pegged as "a heavy spender" (my pet food I have a cat), an owner of a flat-screen TV and part of a "likely nonsmoking household." My colleagues in London will be unsurprised to learn that among my "interests" are biscuits and chocolate.

But the report also suggested there was a 3 percent likelihood that I am a woman above the age of 65 and that I own a car. (I am, to be clear, a man in my 30s. I got my first driver's license a few months ago and do not own a car.)

Natasha: My spreadsheet from Quantcast contained just one single line of data: It showed that on Jan. 19 at 7:01 p.m., I read an article on Forbes.com about Google's new eliminating certain features for parents to control their children's web-browsing. The spreadsheet even listed the author of the article: Kevin Murraan.

As with all these companies, Prashant and I acted as much as possible like regular consumers when we initially requested our information. But after our requests, we followed up with the companies as reporters. When I contacted Quantcast to ask why it had received only one line of data, a spokesman said users' privacy settings could influence what details Quantcast collected. (I distrust online surveillance and use various software tools to monitor tracking.)

The Quantcast spokesman added that the company responded to data access requests under European law. So sending me any data at all had been an error — because consumers in the United States do not have a comprehensive right to obtain copies of the data held by American companies.

AMAZON HISTORY
Prashant: A Kindle reader, a square cake pan, a carbon monoxide alarm.

Amazon sent lists of the items my wife and I had bought through the site, the credit cards we used to buy them, the addresses the items were shipped to and the devices we had used to gain access to Amazon services.

But we had expected to receive a more substantial data trove from Amazon. So I wrote back to Amazon asking again for all of the details the company had on me, including our household's video-viewing data.

The company said it was "investigating" and would send the missing data when it was ready. There is still sign of it. An Amazon spokesman added that the company was committed to complying with the new European privacy law.

Natasha: I used Amazon's self-service tool to download a copy of my purchase orders — including batteries for the outmoded BlackBerry phone that I was having trouble giving up in 2015. (I now own two iPhones.)

But I wanted the complete history of my account, such as my Amazon searches.

Amazon responded to my email request by telling me to call the company — because it was "too safe to get account details via email due to security reasons." Then I called Amazon

customer service and was put on hold for 15 minutes while an agent scrambled to figure out my response.

Finally, the agent came back on the line only to tell me that Amazon was keeping records on me for business purposes — but would not share them with me.

"It's all private," the agent said. "I don't have access to that information to provide you unfortunately."

LIMITED DATA
Prashant and Natasha: LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook provide self-service tools for users to download certain information — such as their posts and messages. Google offers a tool that lets us download files of the Google searches they have made, as well as the sites Google has tracked them to, their YouTube histories and Calendar data. We used these systems and obtained some of our information.

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook's chief executive, recently told United States lawmakers that his company's download tool contains "all of the information" that users have "put into Facebook or that Facebook knows about them."

But Facebook actually collects much more data about its users. In addition to the updates and photos you submit to the site, for instance, Facebook collects data about users' activities on millions of non-Facebook sites that use tools like the service's Like button. And those tools allow the company to amass detailed information about users' web-browsing.

We were unable to obtain that kind of information, however.

We each asked Facebook for copies of our web-browsing data, as well as any data the company acquired about us from data brokers or other services. We made similar requests of Twitter and LinkedIn, which can also collect details about users' activities on other sites as well as personal details from third parties like employers or advertisers.

None provided us with copies of that raw information.

Instead, from LinkedIn, we each received emails directing us to use the company's self-service tool. Among other things, our LinkedIn downloads included the email addresses of our connections.

From Twitter, we received emails saying the company required copies of our government-issued ID cards before it would provide user details beyond those available from the company's self-service tool. Natasha, who regularly covers privacy issues, decided to entrust Twitter with a copy of her ID card. Prashant sent his ID to Twitter and received data about a week later, soon after we contacted Twitter's press department. The press department included IP address logs, direct messages and every GIF he has ever posted (there were a lot).

Facebook told Natasha that its self-service data download tool "has been reviewed by our data protection regulator" and would allow her "to access all of your Facebook data." The company told Prashant that the self-service tool would give him access only to the Facebook information available to you and that the company "isn't able to provide additional information."

Matt Steinfeld, a Facebook spokesman, said the social network's ad preferences tool, which is available to the Facebook information available to you and that the company "isn't able to provide additional information."

Matt Steinfeld, a Facebook spokesman, said the social network's ad preferences tool, which is available to the Facebook information available to you and that the company "isn't able to provide additional information."

After we contacted LinkedIn's press department, we received emails the next day saying that the company was working on our requests. A LinkedIn spokesman said that users could automatically download "the most commonly requested data" and that the company did not currently plan to change its data request process.

INCOMPLETE RESPONSES
Prashant and Natasha: We were not just seeking our data for data's sake.

As we all become more aware of fraud and identity theft, researchers, journalists and consumers have been seeking all of their personal details from companies to try to understand how we might be manipulated. The incomplete responses from tech companies do not bode well for such research efforts.

Nor does it seem to bode well for the companies, which will soon be facing the new European privacy regulations.

After we wrote to our cellphone carriers to ask for our records, for instance, Natasha at least heard back from T-Mobile, who told her that it would release her phone records only if the carrier received a subpoena compelling it to do so.

Prashant did not hear back at all from Three, his mobile phone service. When he contacted the company as a reporter, Three said it could not give the carrier the particular case for privacy reasons, but added that it would typically send a letter asking for proof of identity before proceeding with a data request.

It's unclear how many people name the phone contract is in, never received such a letter.

Opinion

Under the warm concern of the party

For decades, China has tapped Chinese people overseas to spread its influence and harvest intelligence on its behalf.

Yi-Zheng Lian

Amid all the hoopla about Russia's covert attempts to manipulate the 2016 American presidential election, one state has been conspicuously quiet: China. Yet its leaders may well be sneering at the Russians' heavy hand. Since the project masterminded from Moscow largely relied on social media in the United States, American techies were bound to find out about it soon enough. Likewise with the bald-faced poisoning of an ex-Russian spy and his daughter in Britain, which has also been pegged to Moscow. Too crude, too traceable, these operations could only generate a backlash.

China, too, can be a bully, especially with Asian governments in its immediate sphere of influence — imposing economic sanctions on South Korea for deploying defensive missiles or orchestrating the kidnapping of book publishers from Hong Kong and Thailand. But it doesn't usually set out to openly hurt or antagonize stronger opponents like the United States; instead, it tries to quietly gain an edge for the long haul.

Rather than coercing, China manipulates, preferring to act in moral and legal gray areas. It masks its political motives behind

China has a well-oiled network. Its ploys are difficult to discern, and its plants hard to dislodge.

laudable human-interest or cultural projects, blurring the battle line with its adversaries. When the job is done, the other side may not realize it was gamed, or that a strategic game was even going on.

If this sounds like the stuff of conspiracy theories, it's because there is a conspiracy afoot, and it isn't theoretical. The Confucius Institutes and Chinese Communist Party (C.C.P.) cells being established on campuses outside China are but a few dots in this picture — when the whole lot are properly connected they outline a vast, smooth-running machine that taps Chinese people throughout the world to spread its influence and harvest intelligence in the service of the Chinese state.

Take the story of Chen Ning Yang, a Nobel laureate in physics. Mr. Yang left China in the mid-1940s and then studied under Edward Teller, the father of the hydrogen bomb. After he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957, the Chinese authorities sent emissaries, including his father, to secretly meet him in Geneva and entreat him to return home. Mr. Yang repeatedly refused, and became an American citizen in 1964.

But when China began opening up in the 1970s, he returned to help modernize Chinese physics research. Beijing, well aware of the importance of physics for China's development — as well as the possible demonstration effect of Mr. Yang's newfound patriotism on other Chinese scientists overseas — practically made him a national hero. And more.

In late 2004, just over a year after



his wife had died, Mr. Yang married the young Chinese graduate student whom the authorities had assigned to be his personal assistant at a major conference; in February 2017, when he was 94, it was announced that he — as well as another returnee, the Turing Award-winner Andrew Chi-Chih Yao —

had renounced his American citizenship. Prudish media scorned the marriage because of the couple's vast age difference, but serious critics pointed out that pairing a high-value target with a young wife was an established practice of the C.C.P.; there is even a stock phrase for receiving such atten-

tions from the state: coming under "the warm concern of the Party" (or the premier). A young spouse was also the reward for Li Zongren, a former top general and acting president of the Republican government that the Communists overthrew in 1949, after he returned to China in the mid-1960s.

Zhou Enlai, then China's premier, is said to have personally overseen Mr. Li's case. I know of no official record showing that the Chinese leadership masterminded Mr. Yang's remarriage, but there is ample circumstantial evidence, including statements by the LIAN, PAGE 11

The Mississippi man tried six times for the same crime

A prosecutor seems to have a vendetta against Curtis Flowers, as a new podcast documents.



David Leonhardt

One morning nearly 22 years ago, four employees of a furniture store in a small Mississippi town were shot to death. For months afterward, local law-enforcement seemed stumped by the crime. Eventually, the top prosecutor — Doug Evans — charged a former store employee, Curtis Flowers, a black man who had no criminal record.

The case since then has been unlike any other I've ever heard of. Evans has put Flowers on trial six separate times — even though no gun, fingerprints or other physical evidence ties Flowers to the crime and no witness even puts him at the store that day.

At each of the first three trials, Flowers was convicted, but the Mississippi Supreme Court threw out all three convictions. The first two times, it cited misconduct by Evans during the trial, and the third time it found that Evans had kept African-Americans off the jury. The justices called it as bad a case of such racial discrimination "as we have ever seen."

The fourth trial was the first to have more than one black juror, and it ended with a hung jury. The fifth also had multiple black jurors and likewise ended in a mistrial. The sixth trial had only one black juror, and Flowers was convicted, thanks largely to dubious

circumstantial testimony that Evans had coached witnesses to give. I see no good reason to believe that Curtis Flowers is guilty.

Yet today he sits in solitary confinement, on death row, in Mississippi's Parchman Prison. He is serving his 22nd straight year behind bars, having never been released between convictions. He will turn 48 years old next week. His parents continue to visit him as often as possible.

His heartbreaking, enraging story is the subject of a new podcast — the second season of "In the Dark," led by Madeleine Barran of American Public Media — that's already been downloaded more than two million times. The reporting and storytelling are fantastic, and I can't capture all of it here. If you aren't already listening to the podcast, I recommend it.

While the Flowers case is shocking in its details, it is all too typical in its broad strokes: The United States suffers from a crisis of unjust imprisonment. The crisis has been caused partly by powerful, unaccountable prosecutors, like Doug Evans. And the costs are borne overwhelmingly by black men, like Flowers.

We now know that dozens of innocent people have been executed in recent decades. Many others languish behind bars. My colleague Nicholas Kristof, in his latest column, told the story of Kevin Cooper, who's on death row in California because of highly questionable evidence. Cases like these are the most extreme part of our mass-incarceration problem. As the legal scholar Michelle Alexander has noted, a larger share of black Americans are imprisoned than black South Africans were during apartheid. "A human

rights nightmare is occurring on our watch," she has written.

When Americans today look back on the past, many of us wonder how our ancestors could have tolerated blatant injustices — like child labor, Jim Crow or male-only voting — for so long. When future generations look back on our era, I expect they will ask a similar question. They will be outraged that we forcibly confine a couple million of our fellow human beings to cages, often for no good reason.

President Trump and his attorney general, Jeff Sessions, are trying to

make the problem even worse, by locking up ever more people. But Trump and Sessions can't squelch the burgeoning, bipartisan movement for criminal-justice reform. They can't, because as the recent Pulitzer-winning author James Forman Jr. points out, criminal justice happens mostly at the local and state levels. "We should always remember that the fight is going to be at the local level," Forman told NPR's Terry Gross, "and, there, we continue to win."

To take one example, manufactured jailhouse confessions are a common

part of wrongful prosecutions (and are central to the Flowers case). With a shocking frequency, prosecutors and police coax so-called snitches to lie outright about what other prisoners say. In response, Texas enacted a law last year requiring the tracking of snitches and the disclosure of any plea deals to defense attorneys, who can then call the testimony into question in front of a jury. Rebecca Brown of the Innocence Project told me that the Texas law was "excellent" — and that the Illinois legislature had passed an even better version, awaiting the governor's signature.

Elsewhere, some district attorneys are trying to make the system fairer on their own. It's happening in Brooklyn, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities. Most prosecutors, after all, are decent, ethical public servants. One change involves "open-file" policies, which give the defense attorney access to all of the evidence in a case. That may seem like an obvious step, and it's the norm in civil trials. Yet it remains rare in criminal trials.

I don't want to exaggerate the recent progress. As you read this column, thousands upon thousands of American citizens sit behind bars, unjustly denied their freedom. "Ooooh, I miss Curtis," his devastated father, Archie Flowers, says on the podcast. "Yes, it is rough. Rough, rough, rough, rough."

But the Flowers family refuses to give up hoping for justice. Curtis Flowers's sixth conviction is still being appealed, and new evidence — uncovered by the podcast — seems likely to help that appeal.

If the Flowers family won't give in to despair, nobody else should, either.



Curtis Flowers, left, in Winona, Miss., in 2004, after an unsuccessful motion for a retrial. His story is the subject of a new podcast — the second season of "In the Dark."

OPINION

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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The news isn't fake. But it's flawed.



Frank Bruni

On the last Saturday of April, Donald Trump, who doesn't exactly like working on weekends, made a trip to Michigan for a rally. He touted what he saw as the many accomplishments of his administration so far. He railed against all of the injustices that he must endure. And of course he bashed the media.

"These are very dishonest people — many of them," he said, and I must admit: The "many of them" qualifier surprised and gratified me. It was atypically generous of the president. "Fake news," he muttered. "Very dishonest," he grouched. "They don't have sources," he insisted. "The sources don't exist."

While he was painting this portrait of us as frivolous and sour, what image were we putting out? That night, at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner, journalists swanned into a ballroom as thick with self-regard as any Academy Awards auditorium. They listened to the comedian Michelle Wolf do what she was hired to: savage Trump and his aides in vicious and occasionally vulgar terms that predictably caused the media's enemies to trumpet that journalists are no more dignified than the president whose indecency they lament.

Then? Many of the journalists who attended the dinner and many who merely observed it from afar freaked out. In the toxic ecosystem of Twitter, they debated whether Wolf had shamed Sarah Huckabee Sanders for her appearance; whether reporters

rising to Sanders's defense were trying to make nice with a source; and on and on. In addition to tweets, there were think pieces, then more think pieces. This rococo deconstruction exemplified the very self-absorption that got us into this mess in the first place.

Tim Alberta, who writes for Politico, correctly noted that "every caricature thrust upon the national press — that we are culturally elitist, professionally incestuous, socioeconomically detached and ideologically biased — is confirmed by this train wreck of an event." Kyle Pope, the editor of Columbia Journalism Review, pointed out the inevitability of that train wreck, observing that the event itself is "destined to be either sycophantic, on one extreme, or meanspirited, on the other. Neither is a good look at a time when trust in media is tenuous."

I want to repeat that: "Neither is a good look at a time when trust in media is tenuous." We were held in low regard by many Americans before Trump came down that escalator. He has been trying with all his might to yank that regard lower ever since.

We're under sustained attack by a shameless president whose contempt for a free press is profound. And regardless of the merits of that attack, our response is pivotal to surviving it and preserving the public's trust.

In many ways, that response — from excavations of links between Trump and Russia to exposés of the workings of Facebook — has been excellent, a perfect illustration of why journalists are so vital. But other aspects of our reaction trouble me. Because Trump is so hyperbolic — and so dishonest — about our vices, we're prone to focusing excessively and even exclusively on our virtues. We sing an immodest aria about them.

In the face of Trump, this newspaper began its "The Truth Is" campaign: "The truth is hard," "The truth is hidden," and so on. The Washington Post put, on the top of its front page, the

legend "Democracy Dies in Darkness." Such approaches are part of what prompted the media critic Jack Shafer to complain that when reporters are maligned, "They go all whiny and preachy."

"I won't dispute that journalists are crucial to a free society," he wrote. But "the chords that aggrieved journalists strike make them sound as entitled as tenured professors."

Pushed up against the ropes, we're so busy self-justifying that we sometimes forget to self-examine. And there are aspects of how we work — and how we come across — that definitely warrant adjustment. We indulge too often in snark for snark's sake, using it not in the service of an essential point but because it's fun and gets attention.

I worry, for example, about a 2016 column about Trump that I had an especially good time with. It posited that his trademark tresses were a

Trump's attacks on us are shameless. Let's not abet them.

Trump's Hair?"

I was trying to cast his coiffure as a metaphor for his inconstancy and obsession with surfaces. But still, I played into a caricature of journalists as smart alecks taking cheap shots from the cheap seats. We have to watch our tone. We really do.

It's impossible to talk about tone without talking about Twitter, so let's. Are we right to spend so much of our time there? Twitter is a powerful tool, a handy delivery system for bulletins, fact checks, links. But too often, we use it as a vanity fair and an ego fortification system. Driven by the dopamine of "likes" and retweets, we jockey to be bitchiest or most blistering, snidest or

most sarcastic. These gibes are then used against us. I also believe that the sniping nurtured on Twitter seeps into our interactions elsewhere.

As Damon Linker, a columnist for The Week, put it, "This makes Twitter horrible for our politics and equally bad for journalism."

Meanwhile, more and more of us are yoking ourselves to increasingly narrow ideological and oratorical identities. A particular perspective of ours draws notice. We get bookings — on television, for speeches — based on it. It becomes a brand with financial rewards. Press this button and get this argument. We're economically welded to it. And as it grows more fixed, we appear less genuine.

We're also served poorly by an occasionally reflexive pessimism bereft of adequate nuance or a sufficient sense of triage. Don't hear me wrong: If Trump's press is overwhelmingly negative, that's because he has earned it. But we sometimes go too hard on lesser actors and episodes, potentially sacrificing the credibility and authority that we need for more galling moments.

One bit of recent press coverage raked Mick Mulvaney, a former congressman who is now the White House budget director, over the coals for saying: "We had a hierarchy in my office in Congress. If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you."

But some of these accounts omitted or played down what he said next: "If you came from back home and sat in my lobby, I talked to you without exception, regardless of the financial contributions." And few forthrightly acknowledged that this is common behavior among Democrats, too. What Mulvaney copped to didn't put him in a league with, say, Scott Pruitt. Let's reserve our maximum outrage for him.

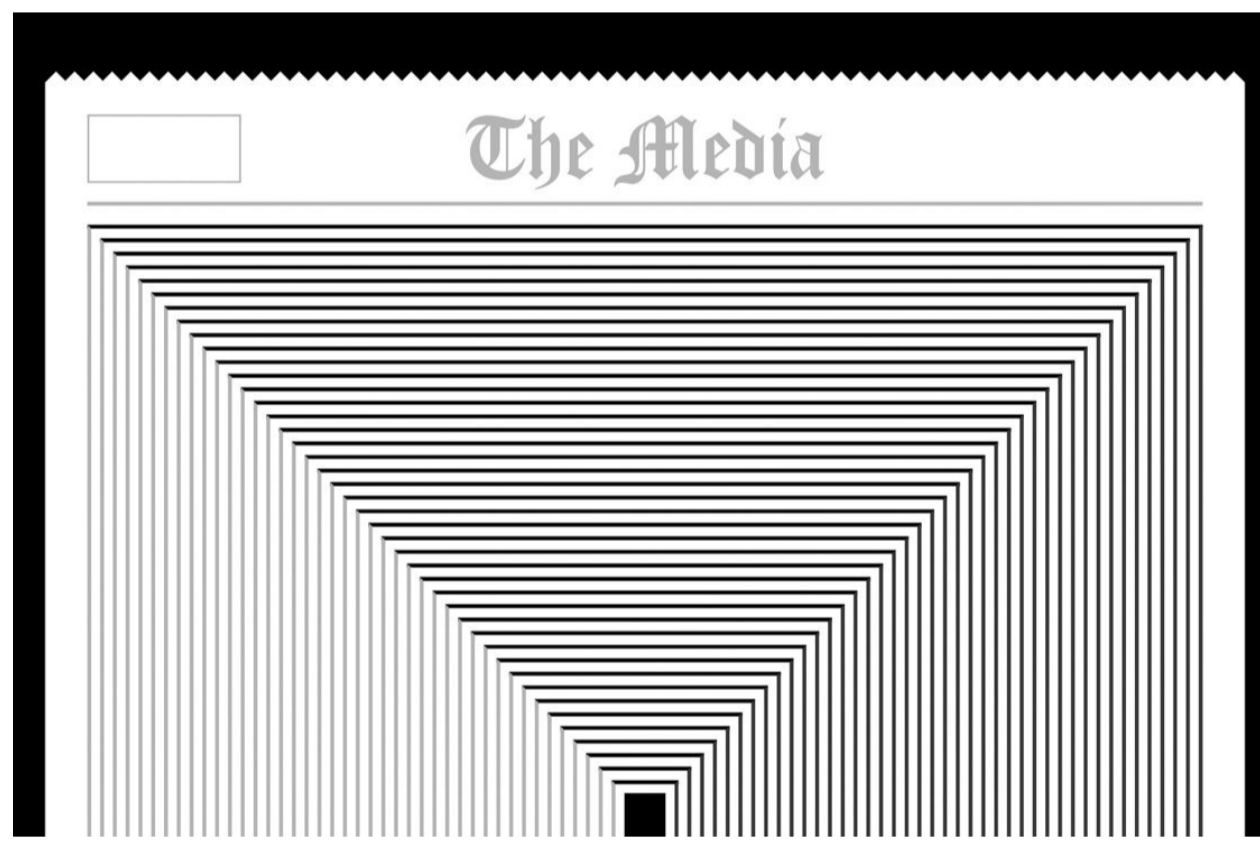
There's plenty in the Trump administration to excoriate without any gratuitous huffing and puffing. Overreach and exaggeration are his stocks in trade; let's not make them ours.

One of my overarching fears about the Trump era is that he'll drag the rest of the country, including the media, down to his level. There's little he'd love more than to invalidate us, because then he could sell whatever alternative facts and ornate fantasies that he chose to. That's a chilling prospect, and that's why we can't inadvertently abet his cause.

It's easy to be lulled into a false security by the "Trump bump" in business for many newspapers and networks, whose fans are more passionately engaged than before. But that bump may not last forever, and it doesn't do away with the misgivings that a majority of Americans have about us.

It's also easy to be so fixated on the ludicrousness of some of the charges that the president hurls at us that we fail to improve in ways that he's not discussing. The news that we report is real. But so is the need to be even better at reporting it.

This is a condensed version of the 2018 Hays Press-Enterprise Lecture, delivered at the University of California, Riverside, on Friday.



BY BEN WISEMAN

Monarchs in my garden, at last

Margaret Renkl, Contributing Writer

NASHVILLE I was pretty proud of myself the spring I planted my first organic garden. It was the mid-1980s, and I was a first-year graduate student in creative writing, a program unrelated to horticultural mastery. But I had taken a college course in environmental biology, and I knew the basics: The more chemicals you use in a garden, the more chemicals you'll need in the garden. It's a self-perpetuating cycle, more reliable than the seasons.

At my house, companion planting — marigolds in between the broccoli, tomato vines encircling the spinach — would repel bugs the natural way. Any lingering pests would be dispatched by beneficial insects like ladybugs and praying mantises. I watched happily as cabbage white butterflies flitted over silvery broccoli leaves. Those little white butterflies pausing in the gloaming on the water-beaded broccoli made for a tableau of bucolic harmony.

It didn't dawn on me that a) all the flitting cabbage white butterflies were carrying out the usual biological imperative of springtime, b) broccoli belongs to the cabbage family, and c) the butterfly's name references not only its color but also its host plant. I was raising cabbage white butterflies, it turns out, not broccoli.

In time, I gave up trying to sort the damaging insects from the beneficial ones and started planting enough vege-

tables for both of us. Nearly three decades later, I gave up raising vegetables altogether. I was always rooting for the butterflies anyway, even before I read about the plight of the pollinators.

So four years ago, I pulled out the vestiges of my vegetable plants and put a pollinator garden in their place. It's still an organic garden, even though my family isn't eating what it produces, because chemicals are deadly to pollinators. Now my raised beds are full of native perennials that provide nectar for bees, wasps, skippers and butterflies, or serve as their nurseries: yarrow for painted lady butterflies, dill and parsley for black swallowtails, false indigo for southern dogface butterflies, loads and loads of white clover for the honeybees. The wasps and native bumblebees are gloriously busy in all of them.

Most of all, I planted as many varieties of native milkweed as my garden could hold — common milkweed and butterfly weed and swamp milkweed and purple milkweed — because milkweed is the host plant of the monarch butterfly, and in this age of Roundup-ready crops, the monarch butterfly is in danger of extinction. In a contest for garden space, the head of broccoli I can buy at the grocery store for \$1.99 a pound carries no weight against the mass extinction of an irreplaceable butterfly that can fly for thousands of miles and was once so numerous it filled the skies with gold. This year the monarch's numbers were 30 percent lower than last year's, and last year's numbers were disastrous.

But no matter how many milkweed

seedlings I set out from one year to the next, no gravid monarch female ever arrived to lay eggs on them. Last year I decided to jump-start the whole process with mail-order caterpillars, but I had no better luck with them than with the mail-order ladybugs and praying mantises of decades ago, though for different reasons. The alien praying mantises thrived even if they didn't save my broccoli plants, and all my mail-order caterpillars died before they became butterflies. Maybe I hadn't planted nearly enough milkweed to make a wild monarch take note of my little way station?

Planting specifically to attract pollinators — bees, skippers and butterflies — has finally paid off.

"How would you feel about cutting down that sugar maple tree in the side yard?" I said to my husband. "I might need to plant a whole field of milkweed."

"You want to cut down a 70-year-old tree so you can plant a field of weeds?" he said. Finally, I decided to take the same approach to my pollinator garden I had once adopted for my vegetables: I watered and I weeded, after a fashion, but mostly I let it go its own way. Any number of things might have killed those caterpillars. The beneficial tachinid flies that keep the larvae of cabbage white butterflies under control on broccoli plants are deadly to monarch larvae too.

The beneficial lacewings that eat the aphids that eat squash and cucumbers

are just as voracious for monarch caterpillars. Everything you touch in nature touches everything else. Even when you're determined to do things right, there's only so much you can control, and it's not very much at all.

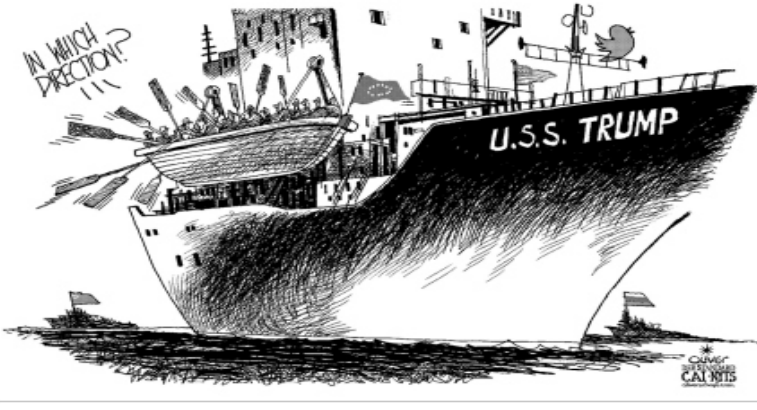
This year, the perennial milkweed came up right on schedule. I was reading a book on the back deck Sunday afternoon two weeks ago when a flash of orange in the pollinator garden caught my eye. From a distance it could be mistaken for a monarch.

But of course it wasn't a monarch. No way. Four years of roundly rejected milkweed had taught me my lesson.

Still, could it be? I walked over to take a look. And there, lifting herself barely above the green leaves of the milkweed, was a female monarch, pale and tattered, looking as though she had come a great distance. She was fluttering from plant to plant, completely ignoring the nectar-filled flowers and pausing, just lightly, on one milkweed leaf after another. When I looked closely, I could see she was laying eggs.

Five days later, the eggs hatched. It took a magnifying glass to be sure, but there they were: on each leaf an infinitesimal creature with tiny black-and-yellow stripes and tiny black faces and tiny black waving antennae. By the time I found them, they were already eating, leaving behind pinpoint-size holes in the leaves. The milkweed leaves I had planted just for them.

MARGARET RENKL writes about flora, fauna, politics and culture in the American South.



How history ignores the bad refugees

NGUYEN, FROM PAGE 1 “model minority” who believe they earned their success, relying on little or no government assistance. They are not so different from Mr. Kelly, the descendant of Irish and Italian immigrants who included unskilled laborers speaking little English. Convenient amnesia about one's origins is an all-American trait, since we believe ourselves to be the country in which everyone gets a new beginning.

What some of us also forget is that at nearly every stage of our country's history, the people who were already established as American citizens found convenient targets to designate as unable to assimilate: the indigenous peoples; conquered Mexicans; slaves; or the newest immigrants, who were usually classified as nonwhite.

In 1751, even before the country was founded, Benjamin Franklin wrote that “perhaps I am partial to the complexion of my country, for such kind of partiality is natural to mankind.” He favored “the English” and “white people,” and did not want Pennsylvania to become a “colony of aliens,” who “will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion.” He was speaking of the Germans.

German-Americans are now “white,” which is partly a color, partly a state of mind and partly a matter of perception. The eventual whiteness of German-Americans saved them from being thrown en masse into internment camps during World War II, unlike Japanese-Americans. With historical lessons like that, it's no sur-

prise that some Vietnamese-Americans desire to put their refugee past behind them, including the memory of how only 36 percent of Americans wanted to accept Vietnamese refugees in 1975.

A choice, then, exists for every immigrant and refugee, and their descendants. Mr. Kelly and some Vietnamese-Americans have chosen to forget their past or to recast it with themselves and their families as heroic, self-reliant Americans who are better than the newest and most threatening immigrant or refugee. By forgetting the past, these Americans repeat what has been there since our country's beginning — the perpetually renewing fear of someone darker, someone different.

I prefer to remember my mother's heroism and how it began before she ever became an American citizen and changed her name to Linda. She was born Bay, or Seven, at a time when Vietnamese people sometimes had so many children that it was easier to give them numbers instead of names. Along with my father, who had a high school education, she lifted herself from rural poverty and became a successful businesswoman by taking significant risks, the first one being when they left North Vietnam for South Vietnam in 1954. They lost nearly everything when they took the biggest risk of all and fled as refugees

to the United States in 1975.

By the time I observed her reading aloud to herself, a dozen years after her American beginning, my mother was once again a successful businesswoman. She had already been shot once at her store, which I did not witness, and had a thief point a gun in her face in her own home, which I did witness.

She did not speak fluent English, but she did well enough to contribute more in taxes than many Americans. She was and is heroic, but many Americans would see her only as an outsider, including the one who put a sign in a shop window near my parents' grocery store in San Jose: “Another American driven out of business by the Vietnamese.”

Because of what she made possible by giving me an education and a home, I could have become a forgetful American, eager to be accepted by other Americans, ready to show my Americanness by keeping people like my parents out of the country. But I felt cynical, like one of those Vietnamese-Americans — and there are many of us — who never wanted to forget that we should stand with immigrants and refugees, with the poor and the unwealthy, with people very much like my mother.

My mother needed neither my pity nor my shame. Just my compassion and respect.

VIET THANH NGUYEN is the author, most recently, of “The Refugees,” and the editor of “The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives.”

Under the warm concern of the party

LIAM, FROM PAGE 5 father of Mr. Yang's young wife, who said that his daughter's “sacrifice” had been “a virtue and a glory.”

News of Mr. Yang's reversion to Chinese citizenship reverberated across the Chinese-American community, especially among scientists and engineers. The C.P.P.C.C. gained much-needed respectability, having just poached a major human-capital asset of the United States, and one who had received most of his training there.

In fact, ever since the California Institute of Technology aerodynamics and missile expert Tsien Hsue-shen returned to China in 1955 — an event that became instrumental in building China's missile industry — the F.B.I. has been well aware of the danger this peculiar kind of reverse brain drain poses for the United States. “I'd rather see him shot than let him go,” Dan A. Kimball, the secretary of the Navy in 1951-53, reportedly once said of Mr. Tsien. “He's worth three to five divisions anyplace.” Hundreds of Chinese scientists overseas went back to China in the 1950s.

Mr. Yang's renunciation of his American citizenship may have had an even greater effect, if only because there are many more Chinese-Americans in the United States today than there were some six decades ago. Certainly, his return to China in the 1970s was a great source of patriotic inspiration among my generation of Chinese studying and working in high-tech in the United States then. Again and again, such homesickness stories have helped repair the C.C.P.'s tarnished image after it lost the support of intellectuals — with its disastrous Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957, the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 or again after the brutal Tiananmen crackdown in 1989.

Longtime China observers readily recognize in Mr. Yang's trajectory the handiwork of the C.C.P., specifically the painstaking orchestrations of its well-masked machine of influence. Foreign academic and intelligence circles, however, are only just beginning to appreciate China's method — and how it differs from, say, Russia's — and to take the full measure of its effectiveness. China's ploys are difficult to discern, and its plants are difficult to dislodge, especially when they take root in unsuspecting open societies, like the United States, New Zealand or Australia.

The Chinese influence machine has nebulous outer layers, partly because connections between its members, be they individuals or organizations, are often imperceptible. But at its core is a



The physicist Chen Ning Yang in 1963.

well-defined, battle-tested structure first deployed by Mao in the 1930s. Mao famously identified it as one of his Three Magic Weapons against the Republican government of Chiang Kai-shek, alongside a Leninist party and the Red Army, and he gave it a respectable name: the United Front. The organization assumed its current form in 1946. Three years later, Mao's Communists won the civil war, and credited the United Front in part for their victory.

The United Front comprises two organs, which are often poorly understood outside China because there are no equivalents for them in the West. One is the enigmatic United Front Work Department; the other is the high-profile Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (C.P.P.C.C.). The United Front Work Department is a nimble and tightly led party organ, headed by the chief of the secretariat of the C.C.P.'s central committee. It oversees a dozen organizations that do political networking, through both persuasion and infiltration. One of those is the European and American Alumni Association, which keeps close tabs over the ever-larger number of Chinese students and academics training or residing in the West, and enjoins them to conduct “people diplomacy” — in effect turning all those scholars into foot soldiers for the United Front.

The C.P.P.C.C., on the other hand, is a sort of vast invitation-only club — led by a member of the standing committee of the party's Politburo, working primarily through personal networks.

During its annual meeting, it is one harmonious gabfest of 2,150-odd participants. About 40 percent of them are C.C.P. members; the rest are people of renown from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau carefully selected for their wealth, popularity and political pliability — like movie stars, religious leaders, business tycoons and university presidents. (At least that goes for the C.P.P.C.C. at the national level; lesser patriots start by joining provincial or lower-level offshoots and work their way up.)

C.P.P.C.C. members nominally are political consultants to the C.C.P.; in fact, they must toe the party line. And their real job begins when the show talk ends: It mainly consists of influencing other important people in their respective walks of life and eventually drawing them into Beijing's orbit — with money, women, the promise of fame or simply by tapping their patriotism. Any recruits are given good opportunities in China: to perform, proselytize, invest or make a lot of money.

In some ways, the C.P.P.C.C. operates like a mafia: It is secretive, relies on close personal ties and stands ready to break the law. It is also something of a political Ponzi scheme: Its members are rewarded when they entice others to become initiates — only then to come under more pressure to do even more. Patrick Ho Chi-ping, a former home affairs secretary of Hong Kong and the head of an energy nonprofit, now finds himself embroiled in a criminal case in the United States, accused of bribing African heads of states to secure oil contracts for Chinese energy interests controlled by the state. A veteran of the C.P.P.C.C., he appears to have been done in by those connections.

Yet China's influence machine purred on. Earlier this year the Chinese authorities in Beijing allocated to Hong Kong a record 200-plus seats in the current C.P.P.C.C., about 10 percent of the entire membership even though the city's population is the equivalent of only about 0.5 percent of China's total.

Seven decades ago, Mao's United Front was instrumental in catapulting the Chinese Communists to power. Since then, China's influence machine has become infinitely more resourceful — and far more global.

VI-ZHENG LIAM, a commentator on Hong Kong and Asian affairs, is a professor of economics at Yamaguchi Gakuin University, in Kofu, Japan.

A.I. is harder than you think

Gary Marcus Ernest Davis

The field of artificial intelligence doesn't lack for ambition. In January, Google's chief executive, Sundar Pichai, claimed in an interview that A.I. “is more profound than, I dunno, electricity or fire.”

Day-to-day developments, though, are more mundane. Last week, Mr. Pichai stood onstage in front of a cheering audience and proudly showed a video in which a new Google program, Google Duplex, made a phone call and scheduled a hair salon appointment.

The program performed those tasks well enough that a human at the other end of the call didn't suspect she was talking to a computer.

Assuming the demonstration is legitimate, that's an impressive (if somewhat creepy) accomplishment. But Google Duplex is not the advance toward meaningful A.I. that many people seem to think.

If you read Google's public statement about Google Duplex, you'll discover that the initial scope of the project is surprisingly limited. It encompasses just three tasks: helping users “make restaurant reservations, schedule hair salon appointments, and get holiday hours.”

Schedule hair salon appointments? The dream of artificial intelligence was supposed to be grander than this — to help revolutionize medicine, say, or to produce trustworthy robot helpers for the home.

The reason Google Duplex is so narrow in scope isn't that it represents a small but important first step toward such goals. The reason is that the field of A.I. doesn't yet have a clue how to do any better.

As Google concedes, the trick to making Google Duplex work was to limit it to “closed domains,” or highly constrained types of data (like conversations about making hair salon appointments), “which are narrow enough to explore extensively.” Google Duplex can have a human-sounding conversation only “after being deeply trained in such domains.” Open-ended conversation on a wide range of topics

is nowhere in sight.

The limitations of Google Duplex are not just a result of its being announced prematurely and with too much fanfare; they are also a vivid reminder that genuine A.I. is far beyond the field's current capabilities, even at a company with perhaps the largest collection of A.I. researchers in the world, vast amounts of computing power and enormous quantities of data.

The crux of the problem is that the field of artificial intelligence has not come to grips with the infinite complexity of language. Just as you can make infinitely many arithmetic equations by combining a few mathematical symbols and following a small set of rules, you can make infinitely many sentences by combining a modest set of words and a modest set of rules. A genuine, human-level A.I. will need to be able to cope with all of those possible sentences, not just a small fragment of them.

The narrower the scope of a conversation, the easier it is to have. If your interlocutor is more or less following a script, it is not hard to build a computer program that, with the help of simple phrase-book-like templates, can recognize a few variations on a theme. (“What time does your establishment close?” “I would like a reservation for four people at 7 p.m.”)

But mastering a Berlitz phrase book doesn't make you a fluent speaker of a foreign language. Sooner or later the non-sequiturs start flowing.

Even in a closed domain like restaurant reservations, unusual circumstances are bound to come up. (“Unfortunately, we are redecorating the restaurant that week.”) A good computer programmer can dodge many of these bullets by inducing an interlocutor to rephrase. (“I'm sorry, did you say you were closed that week?”) In short stylized conversations, that may suffice. But in open-ended conversations about complex issues, such hedges will eventually get irritating, if not outright baffling.

To be fair, Google Duplex doesn't

literally use phrase-book-like templates. It uses “machine learning” techniques to extract a range of possible phrases drawn from an enormous data set of recordings of human conversations. But the basic problem remains the same: No matter how much data you have and how many patterns you discern, your data will never match the creativity of human beings or the fluidity of the real world. The universe of possible sentences is too complex. There is no end to the variety of life — or to the ways in which we can talk about that variety.

So what should the field of artificial intelligence do instead? Once upon a time, before the fashionable rise of machine learning and “big data,” A.I. researchers tried to understand how complex knowledge could be encoded and processed in computers.

This project, known as knowledge engineering, aimed not to create programs that would detect statistical patterns in huge data sets but to formalize, in a system of rules, the fundamental elements of human understanding, so that those rules could be applied in computer programs. Rather than merely imitating the results of our thinking, machines would actually share some of our core cognitive abilities.

That job proved difficult and was never finished. But “difficult and unfinished” doesn't mean misguided. A.I. researchers need to return to that project sooner rather than later, ideally enlisting the help of cognitive psychologists who study the question of how human cognition manages to be endlessly flexible.

Today's dominant approach to A.I. has not worked out. Yes, some remarkable applications have been built from it, including Google Translate and Google Duplex.

But the limitations of these applications as a form of intelligence should be a wake-up call. If machine learning and big data can't get us any further than a restaurant reservation, even in the hands of the world's most capable A.I. company, it is time to reconsider that strategy.

GARY MARCUS is a professor of psychology and neural science and ERNEST DAVIS is a professor of computer science, both at New York University.

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Sports

Saudis emerge as key power player in soccer

With major FIFA decisions on horizon, nation is trying to exert greater influence

BY TARIQ PANJA

In soccer, all roads suddenly lead to Saudi Arabia.

FIFA, the world governing body, is facing three major decisions in the coming weeks and months, and Saudi Arabia, long a bit player among soccer's ruling classes, is positioning itself as one of the most powerful influencers in each of them.

Foremost is the vote on the 2026 World Cup hosts. There is also a proposal to expand the 2022 World Cup in Qatar to 48 teams. Finally, FIFA has to decide how to proceed in ongoing negotiations with investors who are offering as much as \$25 billion for two new soccer tournaments that could reshape both club and international competition. Saudi Arabia is among the biggest investors in the consortium that has offered the potential windfall to FIFA.

Leaders of the North American bid for the 2026 World Cup, including Carlos Cordeiro, the president of U.S. Soccer, traveled to Saudi Arabia recently to make a pitch to leaders of a dozen national federations after Saudi Arabia created a new regional bloc — the South West Asian Football Federation. If the group continues with Saudi Arabia at its helm, the Saudis could potentially control more than simply their own vote on the important matters facing FIFA.

Officials from 10 mainly South Asian and Arab countries posed for a picture to announce the formation of the group, which will be based in Jeddah and led by Adel Ezzat, the head of soccer in Saudi Arabia. Its honorary president is Turki al-Sheikh, the kingdom's top sports official and a close associate of the 32-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Experts say Saudi Arabia's moves in soccer dovetail with its long-term goals of modernizing its society and economy and becoming less oil dependent.

The country has also considered starting a major regional sports network, and Saudi executives have signed long-term deals with the wrestling franchise W.W.E. and the Formula E motor



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Masayoshi Son, chief executive of SoftBank, at the Future Investment Initiative conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, last year.

racing series. "It's a new leadership with profoundly different ideas," said David B. Roberts, a Gulf expert at King's College in London.

Saudi Arabia's General Sports Authority didn't respond to requests for comment.

Saudi Arabia this year qualified for the World Cup for the first time since 2006. Only once has it played beyond the group stages. Politically, it has largely avoided interfering with how the sport is governed, and it has rarely had a member on FIFA's top board.

Late last year, FIFA's president, Gianni Infantino, visited the al-Yamamah Palace in Riyadh. He met with key Saudi figures, including King Salman and his

son, the crown prince. Since then, representatives from the country traveled to FIFA to discuss several ventures, according to officials with knowledge of the meetings.

After deciding to organize the South West Asian Football Federation, Saudi Arabia hosted delegates from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and several other countries, who were given watches and told that the country planned to create new regional tournaments and fund soccer development, according to people who attended the event. The gift and the funding pledge may breach ethics regulations, according to a senior official connected to Asian soccer.

The Bangladesh soccer president, Kazi Salahuddin, who attended the meeting, said the Saudi Arabian hosts also took care of all flight and accommodation arrangements. He said his deputy collected the gift that was set aside for him.

"I don't wear a watch so I had no interest in looking at it," insisted Salahuddin, who also heads a separate South Asian regional group.

"They said, 'We want to help each other in football.' As a president that sounds good to me," Salahuddin said.

Setting up the new federation without the approval of FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation violates existing guidelines. The A.F.C. has given partici-

pants in the meeting until May 21 to provide an explanation for their presence there. FIFA declined to comment.

Until the recent developments, Saudi Arabia's influence in soccer has been largely marginal compared to that of its regional neighbors, notably Qatar. Qatar has spent the past year isolated by much of the region because of a blockade Saudi Arabia set up after it accused Qatar of not doing its part to confront terrorism.

The Gulf state controversially secured rights to the 2022 World Cup amid bribery accusations that the tiny, gas-rich emirate denies. Al-Sheikh, the top Saudi sports official, said recently in an online posting that should Qatar be

found to have violated regulations, it should be stripped of the tournament and replaced by England or the United States.

Saudi Arabia has since emerged as one of the most enthusiastic backers of the North American bid to stage the 2026 World Cup, which would take place mostly in the United States. Morocco, the only challenger, has secured the backing of Qatar. Earlier this week, a second group of North American officials traveled to the Middle East on behalf of the World Cup bid. Their destination: Saudi Arabia — just days after Cordeiro had visited the country.

"We value Saudi Arabia the same as all the other 207. Every vote counts," the North American group said in a statement.

The potential deal with FIFA may attract the most attention for Saudi Arabia. If FIFA signs on, it would lead some of the most significant changes in the history of the sport, while also providing Infantino with a major financial trampoline from which to launch his bid for reelection next year. The possibility of FIFA selling out to an investor group has led to stormy meetings between its leadership and key soccer stakeholders.

A gathering of clubs, leagues and players brought together to form UEFA's Professional Football Strategy Committee discussed the issue at a meeting in Lyon, France, last week before issuing a statement decrying the haste with which Infantino is attempting to push through an agreement for a 24-team World Cup for clubs and a league for nations that would be bankrolled by the fund whose identity has been kept secret.

Infantino, citing a nondisclosure agreement, said he was limited in what he could reveal. Still, the sums of money on offer have turned heads. Barcelona and Real Madrid, two of soccer's richest clubs, among a group of seven major teams to have received a private pitch from Infantino, have in recent days spoken out in favor of the process. Manchester United's chief executive, Ed Woodward, appeared to talk up the idea during a conference call with investors last Thursday.

The fund is guaranteeing FIFA \$3 billion for each edition of the quadrennial Club World Cup, three times more than FIFA's best-case valuation.

NON SEQUITUR



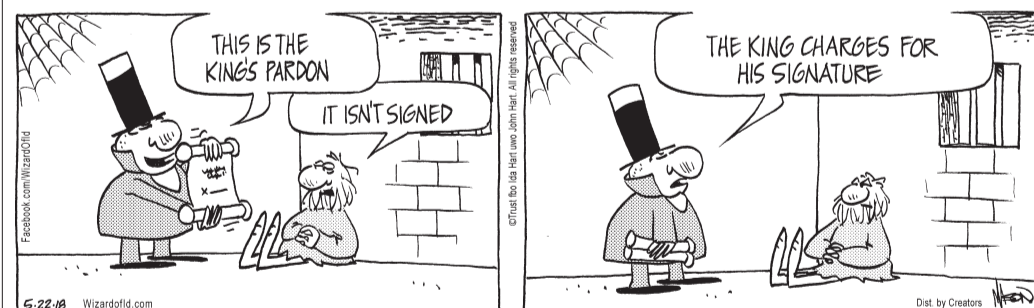
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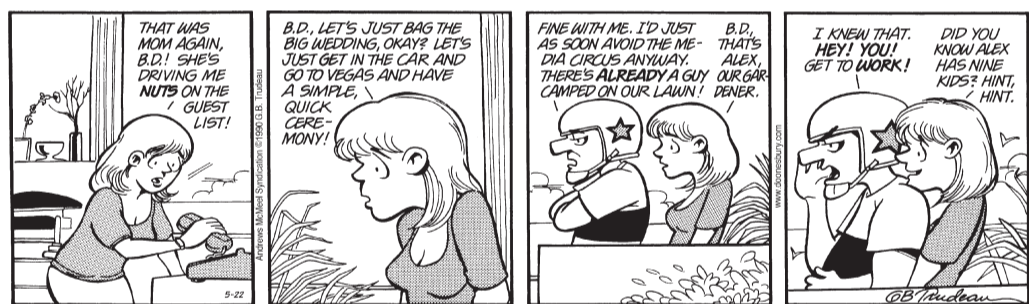
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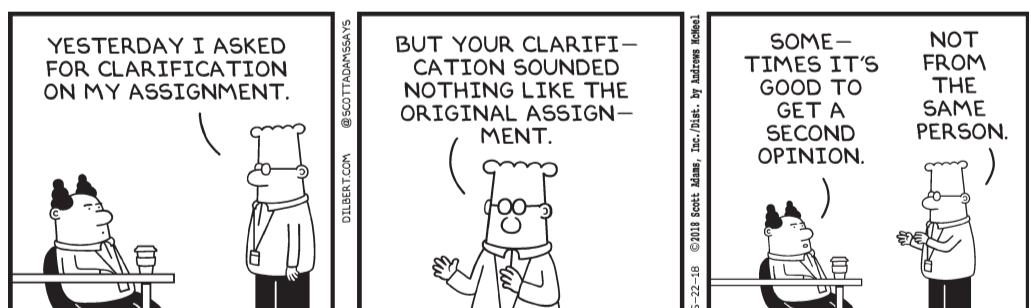
DOONESBURY CLASSIC 1990



CALVIN AND HOBBES



DILBERT



SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid No. 2205. The grid is partially filled with numbers. The solution is provided below the grid.

SUDOKU

Sudoku puzzle grid No. 2105. The grid is partially filled with numbers. The solution is provided below the grid.

JUMBLE

A Jumble word game section with a cartoon illustration and a list of words to be unscrambled. The words are SMOTP, IRREV, UDONEF, and PUNTEA. The solution is provided at the bottom.

KENKEN

Kenken puzzles consisting of grids with numbers and mathematical symbols. The solution is provided below the grids.

Fill the grids with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For solving tips and more KenKen puzzles: www.nytimes.com/kenken. For Feedback: nytimes@kenken.com

Answers to Previous Puzzles

A table listing the answers to previous puzzles, including crossword clues and solutions.

CROSSWORD | Edited by Will Shortz

- A list of crossword clues and their corresponding answers. Examples include 'Sonata finale' (Adagio), 'Fateful day' (Friday), and 'Language that becomes the name of where it's spoken if you add an "s"' (Esperanto).

A crossword puzzle grid with the solution filled in. The puzzle is titled 'PUZZLE BY JEFF STILLMAN'.

Culture

How Han Solo came to be

MOVIE REVIEW

The latest installment of the 'Star Wars' saga goes into many questions

BY A.O. SCOTT

"This was never about you," someone says to Han Solo, which is odd since the movie is called "Solo." I don't want to make this about me, but there are a lot of questions that, in the 41 years since I saw the first "Star Wars" movie — fine! the fourth one; "A New Hope"; jeez! — it has never occurred to me to ask. Where did Han Solo get his last name? How did he and Chewbacca meet? What was the winning hand in the game of Sabacc that gave him possession of the Millennium Falcon? How exactly did he make the Kessel run in less than 12 parsecs?

"Solo: A Star Wars Story" answers all of these questions and more. This isn't a bad thing, but it makes this episode, directed by Ron Howard from a screenplay by Jonathan Kasdan and Lawrence Kasdan, a curiously low-stakes blockbuster, in effect a filmed Wikipedia page. (The film played at the Cannes Film Festival last week; it opens worldwide this week.)

Before he returned as an avenging patriarch in "The Force Awakens," Han Solo was the cool uncle of the "Star Wars" saga. You knew the guy had a lot of crazy stories to tell about gamblers, smugglers and other wild char-



JONATHAN OLLEY/LUCASFILM, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS



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Clockwise from top: Alden Ehrenreich, foreground, as Han Solo and Joonas Suotamo as Chewbacca in "Solo: A Star Wars Story"; Mr. Ehrenreich with Emilia Clarke as his love interest, Qi'ra; and Donald Glover as Lando Calrissian.

acters he hung around with before he joined the Rebellion, but somehow you never got around to hearing them all. Maybe that was for the best, but on the other hand, why not set him up with a ghostwriter and a vanity press and let the yarns rip?

Because then you might discover

that he wasn't quite as interesting as you had thought. Young Han, played by a hard-working, slightly lost-looking Alden Ehrenreich, is introduced as a juvenile delinquent on a dark, rough planet called Corellia, hot-wiring cars and making out with his girlfriend, Qi'ra (Emilia Clarke). The opening

scenes carry a faint whiff of the burning rubber, gasoline and adolescent hormones of "American Graffiti," the 1973 car-crazy coming-of-age picture directed by George Lucas and starring Mr. Howard (with a young Harrison Ford as well).

Han is fresh-faced and earnest, a

long way from the grizzled, Humphrey Bogart-ish cynicism of "A New Hope." He and Qi'ra, indentured to a giant centipede with Linda Hunt's voice, start running like figures in a Springsteen song — we gotta get out while we're young! — only to find their dreams of escape dashed by the Em-

pire and a criminal syndicate called Crimson Dawn. Han signs up for military service and then deserts. Qi'ra takes a job with a nasty gangster named Dryden Vos (Paul Bettany), and the erstwhile lovebirds meet again in his penthouse, where Han, now part of a band of freelance thieves (led by

Charlie Puth got famous — and then good

BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF.

After some early missteps, the singer-songwriter has an exceptional new album

BY JON CARAMANICA

In the modernist home here where Charlie Puth has lived since December, an Aston Martin sits in the garage, the ceilings are tropical-forest tall, the living room is sunken, with leather couches, and the toilets raise their lids to greet you.

On a Sunday earlier this month, it was midafternoon and Mr. Puth hadn't eaten yet, but he was in his modest home studio, with its racks of vintage synthesizers, working out some new ideas with the songwriter Johan Carlsson. He hopped on a keyboard with a distinct early-1990s vibe, gooeey and a little cold, and began playing snippets of older songs: Toto's "Africa," Ol' Dirty Bastard's "Got Your Money," SWV's "Weak." He hit upon a sound that made him happy — "like mixing Jodeci with Tears for Fears," he said.

It was a few days before the release of "Voicenotes," his second album, and the first one not quickly microwaved to completion in the immediate aftermath of an out-of-nowhere megahit. In 2015, Mr. Puth was an up-and-coming songwriter when he rocketed into the pop troposphere with the Wiz Khalifa collaboration "See You Again," a moist lump of treacle from the "Furious 7" soundtrack. Other big hits followed, but none felt quite right to him.

"I was trying to figure out who I was musically in front of millions of people," he said, seated by the pool in the back of his house. He wore a Puff Daddy T-shirt tattered with attitude, yellow Adidas sweatpants and chunky Alexander Mc-

Queen sneakers. His hair was flamboyantly shaggy, as if a clean swoop had hit a wind tunnel.

"Voicenotes" is a confident, impressive pop album, with ironclad melodies and frisky takes on 1980s funk and 1990s soul. It turns out that Mr. Puth is not the maudlin crooner who entered the spotlight, but rather a sophisticated pop marksman with a gift for spare, pointed arrangements — he produced almost the whole album himself — and detailed, vulnerable lyrics. He gets wronged by an older woman on "Boy," and "LA Girls" is about how a whole city, and everyone in it, can break your heart. On "If You Leave Me Now," he duets with Boyz II Men, and on "Change," with James Taylor. His falsetto, on "How Long," "Somebody Told Me" and more, is appealingly supple. All in all, it makes for one of the boldest pop albums of the year.

Getting there was not easy, though. For Mr. Puth, 26, the couple of years following "See You Again" were a juxtaposition of intense public success and equally intense private struggle. "A little bit of success, you think that I would be over the moon," he said, "but quietly, it was really hard for me."

He had several smash singles, including the treacle 2.0 of "One Call Away" and the sensuous Selena Gomez duet "We Don't Talk Anymore," and his debut album, "Nine Track Mind," went platinum. But it was rushed: "For the most part, it was just filler," he said. Decisions were happening rapidly. In a particularly cruel example of record label alchemy, a version of his song "One Call Away" was released featuring the Mexican starlet Sofia Reyes, the ur-country gentleman Brett Eldredge and the salacious R&B crooner Ty Dolla Sign. (Yes, that is a real song.)

And for someone who grapples with anxiety issues, being suddenly thrust into the spotlight was disorienting. "I'm already a very in-my-head anxious per-



JAKE MICHAELS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Charlie Puth, 26, shot to fame with a 2015 Wiz Khalifa collaboration, "See You Again."

son," he said. "I don't really do well when I'm alone a lot because I'm alone with my thoughts, which is not good. It gets very freaky. The big misconception is when you get more famous, you have more friends. I find that I'm alone more than ever now."

He cried on Norwegian television. At a concert in Dallas, while singing "We Don't Talk Anymore," he cursed out Justin Bieber (Ms. Gomez's ex) in absentia, prompting love triangle speculation. He flirted with two married "Access Hollywood" hosts. ("The Puthinator

came out to play," quipped the Australian gossip site Dolly). He was captured by paparazzi with the Hollywood wild-child Bella Thorne on a Miami beach, and then, after she posted a picture with her ex, melted down on Twitter just a few days later.

"He was put into a very difficult position 'cause the song ['See You Again'] was bigger than he was," said Kara DioGuardi, the hit songwriter and onetime "American Idol" judge who taught Mr. Puth songwriting at Berklee College of Music in Boston. "I don't think he was

prepared for that."

Usually it takes pop stars decades to recant their ways and lament the falsity of fame; for Mr. Puth, it took about 18 months. "I can't pretend that I can go on being that guy when I truly, truly wasn't," he said. "I'm the nerdy musician who likes to make mixtapes for girls in seventh grade. Now I'm just older, and I'm still doing that."

By the time of the Jingle Ball at Madison Square Garden in New York at the end of 2016, he'd begun to unravel a bit. At the show, he was beating his piano like a drum kit and jerking his body theatrically like the Incredible Hulk breaking out of Bruce Banner's square slacks. A few months later came "Attention," the slick, lithe, panting funk vamp that announced Mr. Puth's rebirth. It snarled, full of resentment about a woman attaching herself to Mr. Puth for the wrong reasons.

He now wonders if, during his brief flirtation with public life, his high-profile romances were more transactional than they felt in the moment. "I think I got — I'm trying to say this in the right way so I don't get in trouble — it was more about the idea of me than actually wanting to be with me," he said, "and I got that confused with actual love and romanticism."

For all his success, there is something still tender about Mr. Puth. He carries himself softly, behaves considerately. In school, he was an eager student. "Driven, driven, driven," Ms. DioGuardi said. "Always ready to answer a question, expound on why he thought something was good or bad. He stood out. He was quirky and funny." When he talks about the work Babyface did on TLC's "CrazySexyCool," he notes how the intro is in B minor and then the next song, "Creep," shifts to C minor. During the interview, when he heard a bird chirping in his backyard, he squawked back, "B flat!"

He learned piano from his mother and commuted from New Jersey to the Man-

hattan School of Music before heading to college at Berklee. During high school, he wrote jingles for YouTube stars, and later, in college, was briefly signed to Ellen DeGeneres's record label after a YouTube cover he did — a duet version of Adele's "Someone Like You" — took off in 2011. When "See You Again" became a smash, he was making his way as a behind-the-scenes force: Lil Wayne's "Nothing But Trouble" began as Mr. Puth's song lamenting Instagram models; he wrote Trey Songz's "Slow Motion"; and he produced "Broke," a madcap collaboration by Keith Urban, Jason Derulo and Stevie Wonder. (Again, yes, a real song.)

But even though he's been working at becoming famous for so long, he's still growing into his pop star presence.

There was a brief flicker of the 2015-16 Puth around the release of "Attention." He went on "The Voice" to perform the song, in a tight red shirt, surrounded by flexible female dancers. The "Voice" judge and Puth's new friend Adam Levine texted him afterward that he felt the performance wasn't a true reflection of his artistry.

Mr. Levine was right. "It was fake," Mr. Puth said. "It was an invention in my mind, a hypothetical that would work." The next time he performed the song on television, he stripped it down with the Roots on "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon."

"You can have a career like Bruno Mars and not be seen everywhere," Mr. Puth said. "I'm getting back my tortoise shell."

And doing so is maybe allowing him to put his heart on the line again. In the studio with Mr. Carlsson, instead of getting mired in the skepticism and frustration that define "Voicenotes," he was writing about how a new crush tingles:

*I lose the way
Those letters feel
When I write your name in my phone
Write your name in my phone, babe*

Unlike "Solo," which ambles from one set piece to the next in a spirit of genial in-betweenness. It doesn't take itself too seriously, but it also holds whatever irreverent, anarchic impulses it might possess in careful check. Some fans may blame Mr. Howard for this, and fantasize about what might have been if Christopher Miller and Phil Lord, the "Lego Movie" auteurs, originally hired to direct, had been allowed to see the project through. But this galaxy has always been a rule-bound place, and too much divergence from franchise traditions would probably have stirred up its own kind of fan outrage.

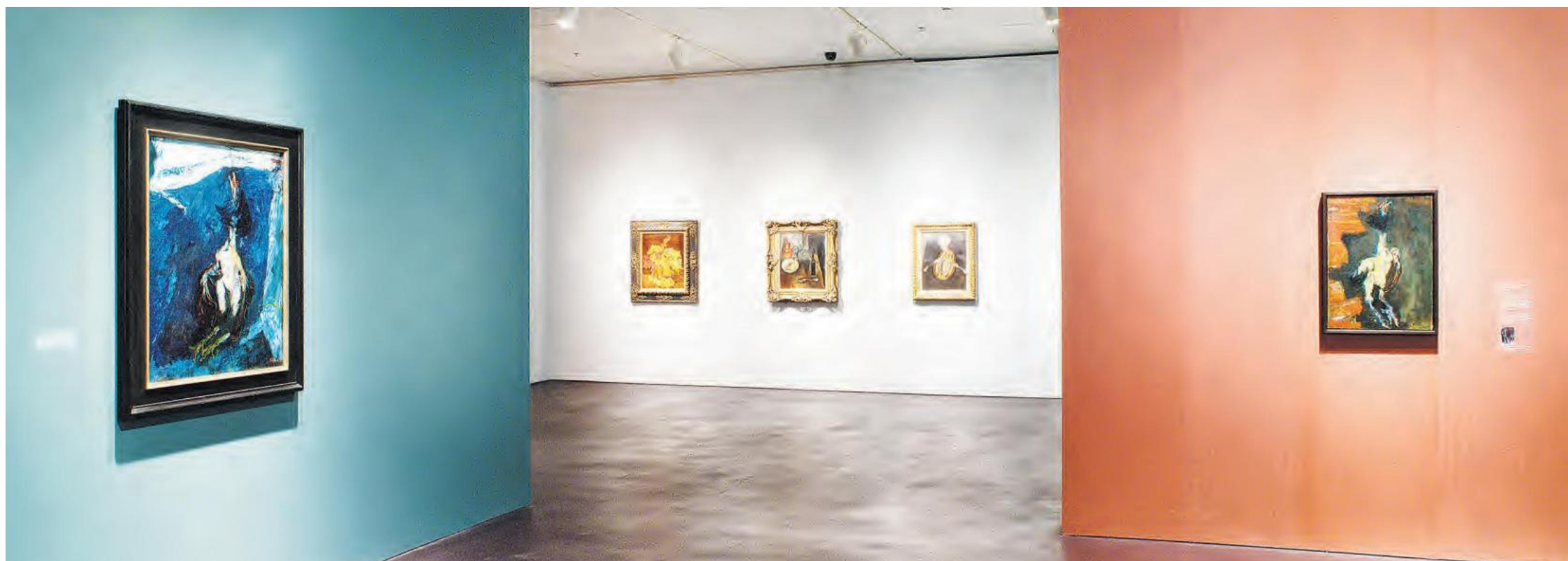
There's no reason to be mad. There are some fine action sequences, and some that don't make much sense at all. There are a handful of secondary characters who come close to upstaging the hero, including Beckett's companion, Val (Thandie Newton); a radical droid called L3-37 (Phoebe Waller-Bridge); and Lando Calrissian (Donald Glover), the original owner of the Millennium Falcon, Han's sometime rival and secret ego ideal. And of course Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo).

He meets Han in a mud pit, by the way. For the other answers, you'll have to see for yourself. But one thing that remains curiously unexplored is how Han became the wary, cynical guy Princess Leia (and everyone else) fell for back during the Carter administration. It's not really Mr. Ehrenreich's fault that he doesn't evoke Mr. Ford. (Though the idea of Mr. Glover aging into Billy Dee Williams creates a magical loop in the pop-cultural spacetime continuum.) It's more that the time line can't quite adjust. Guys like the old Han Solo belong to the past. We're all supposed to be much nicer now.

Journalism can be an intense business.

It doesn't take itself too seriously, but it also holds whatever irreverent, anarchic impulses it might possess in careful check.

CULTURE



An installation view of "Chaim Soutine: Flesh," an exhibition of more than 30 paintings at New York's Jewish Museum through Sept. 16, that demonstrates the peculiarities of the artist's style.

Steeped in blood, but reveling in life

ART REVIEW

Ecstatic, gory still lifes by Chaim Soutine find the spiritual in the physical

BY WILL HEINRICH

The most well-known story about Chaim Soutine has him alarming his Montparnasse neighbors by bringing in fresh sides of beef to paint, and dousing the carcasses, as he turned out one gory, ecstatic still life after another, with blood to keep them fresh.

Born outside Minsk, in what is now Belarus, Soutine (1893-1943) arrived in Paris in 1913. There he endured almost a decade of struggle before finding a few patrons, most notably Albert C. Barnes, the great Philadelphia collector, who catapulted Soutine to fame and fortune when he bought every canvas in the painter's studio in 1922.

The blood story, dating to the mid-1920s, may or may not be true. Hardworking but unworldly, Soutine made things difficult for historians by destroying his own paintings when he didn't like them, leaving others unsigned and never keeping a diary. But the anecdote captures an essential truth about Soutine's interest in his most famous subject matter: It wasn't about accuracy of colors, or whatever stories he himself told about the kosher butchers of his childhood, or a fixation on death. It was about using his brush as a scalpel to reveal the immaterial force of the material world.

The centerpiece of "Chaim Soutine: Flesh," an exhibition of more than 30 paintings at New York's Jewish Museum through Sept. 16, is a stupendous example, his "Carcass of Beef" (circa 1925), from the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y. But to lead to it, the curator Stephen Brown, in consultation with the Soutine scholars Esti Dunow and Maurice Tuchman, has assembled a well-paced procession of other still lifes that demonstrate the peculiarities of Soutine's style: naked fowl; silver herring; a giant ray fish, inspired by Chardin; and explosive bursts of popeyed sardines.

"Still Life With Artichoke" (circa 1916) shows a simple, if oddly asymmetrical, place setting in which all the objects seem alive. The fork bends gently, like a wrist; two lemons press impatiently against the lip of a plate;



CHAIM SOUTINE, ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/ADAGP PARIS; PRIVATE COLLECTION; ALBRIGHT-KNOX ART GALLERY, BUFFALO, VIA THE JEWISH MUSEUM

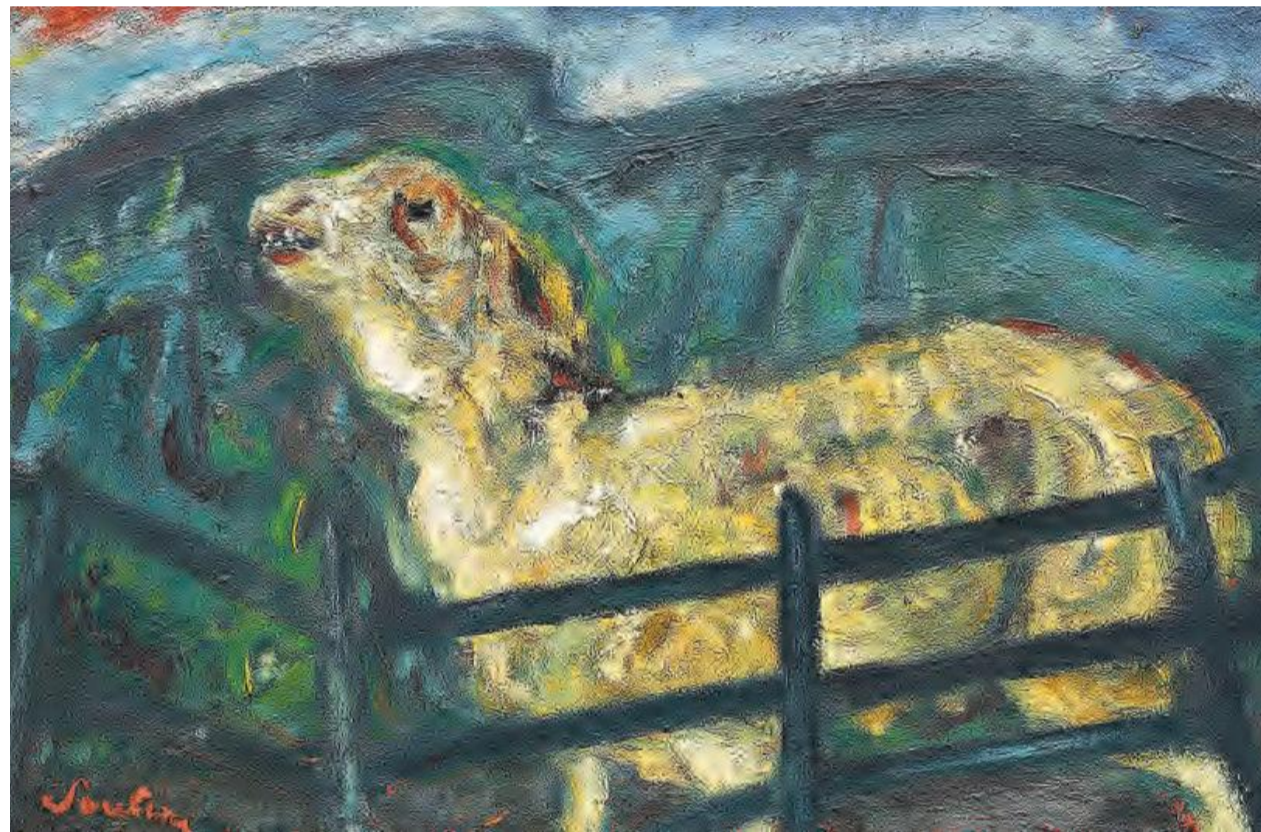
the long-stemmed artichoke lies like an exhausted lover.

The painting is also an unusually easy-to-read example of Soutine's distinctive perspectival wobble. In later paintings, lines seem so far askew that if you stand too close, you may think you're looking at a world deranged. But here, the distortion is gentler. Even from inches away, you can see how it ties the whole scene into a single, expressive gesture, giving it almost as much motion and continuity as a glimpse of real life.

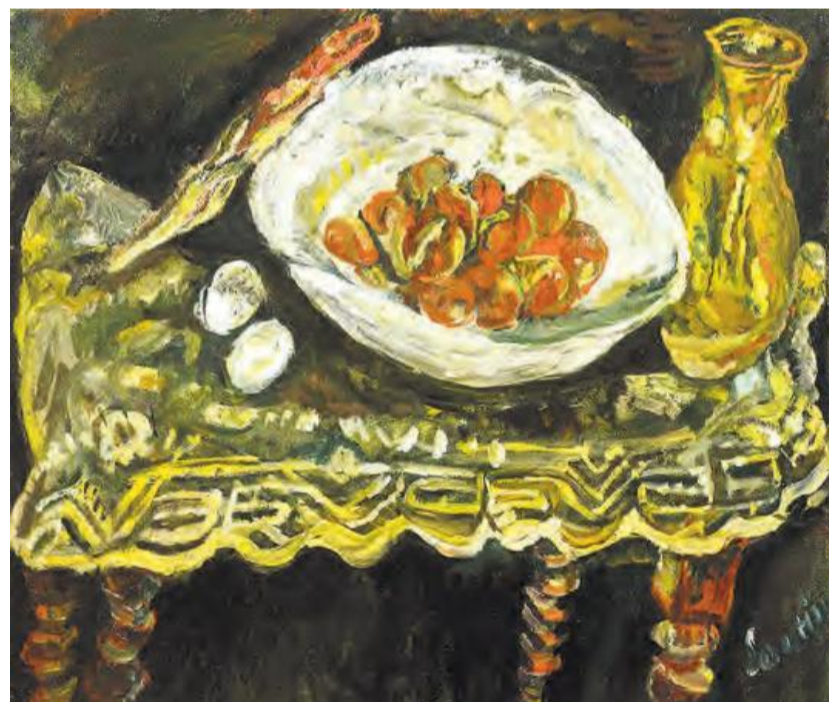
In other paintings, a few partially plucked, not necessarily dead chickens exemplify Soutine's talent for finding action in stillness and wringing spiritual meaning out of physical facts: Ruffs of black feathers, swinging side-

ways on their yellow necks, stand in for the annihilating strokes of a butcher's ax. Two turkeys, one a stormy froth of yellow and orange, the other a feathery spattering of dashes and drips, anticipate Abstract Expressionism. And in "Side of Beef With a Calf's Head" (circa 1923), broad, patchwork strokes of red, white and green give an abstracted but vivid sense of the complicated harmony of a living body.

Then you get to the mountaintop and meet "Carcass of Beef." Here, a glistening scarlet carcass, streaked with orange fat and sliced open to reveal a skeletal Jacob's ladder of parallel lines, seems to tumble out of the canvas, one thigh cocked as if it were kicking itself up into a headstand. An abstract blue background, speckled with white and



CHAIM SOUTINE, ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/ADAGP PARIS; PRIVATE COLLECTION, VIA THE JEWISH MUSEUM



CHAIM SOUTINE, ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK/ADAGP PARIS; REGINART COLLECTIONS, VIA THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Clockwise from upper right: "Sheep Behind a Fence," circa 1940, painted while Soutine was in hiding from the Nazis in France; "Still Life With Fruit," 1919; and "Carcass of Beef," circa 1925.

marked, on the right side, by a framework of thick strokes that echoes the body's exposed rib cage, does more than throw the figure forward by contrast. By evoking a starry sky, it makes the tumbling body — sacrificed, you might say, to art — look as if it were straddling the cosmos.

Along with an oil-on-panel fish, modeled on a Courbet, and a plucked goose whose broken neck allows its head to lie gracefully beside it, the exhibition's final room contains pictures of barnyard animals Soutine made while in hiding in the French countryside after the Nazi invasion of Paris in 1940.

The standout is "Sheep Behind a Fence." A patchwork of creamy off-whites and off-browns, it also contains scattered daubs of maroon, the color of dried blood, as if the artist could see right through the animal's body to the action within. The sheep leans into a fence that angles out with its body, and pulls back its lips to expose a few sad teeth. Behind it the emerald-green pasture rises to two dramatic crests that look like waves, but they're rolling with streaky, bluish-white sky instead of ocean foam. It's not clear if the creature is singing or trying to escape.

Infinity and the infinitesimal

BOOK REVIEW

When Einstein Walked With Gödel: Excursions to the Edge of Thought
By Jim Holt. 368 pp. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$28.

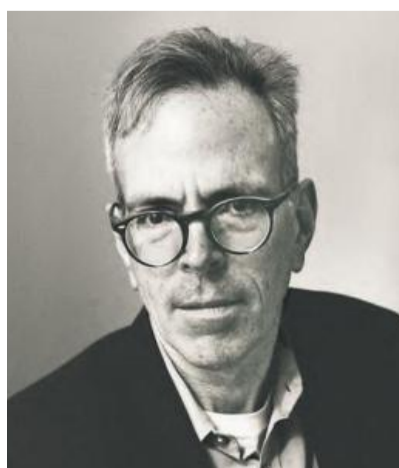
BY PARUL SEHGAL

In his 2012 book, "Why Does the World Exist?," Jim Holt invited a noisy swarm of physicists, theologians and novelists to stare into the abyss with him. He wanted their take on the question that had nagged at him since high school and shaken his faith, the question William James once called the darkest in all of philosophy: Why should there be something rather than nothing?

That book is a bouquet of defiantly loose strands. "There is nothing I dislike more than premature intellectual closure," Holt writes. But his conversations with his interlocutors — searching, spiraling, lubricated with wine — answer a separate question decisively. Given that there is something rather than nothing, well, what next? What do we do while we're here?

Holt's example is plain: Think well, eat well, and seek out those who will nourish and challenge you. It's this conviviality, and a crispness of style, that distinguish him as a popularizer of some very redoubtable mathematics and science. "My ideal is the cocktail-party chat," he writes in the preface to his new essay collection, "When Einstein Walked With Gödel," "getting across a profound idea in a brisk and amusing way to an interested friend by stripping it down to its essence (perhaps with a few swift pencil strokes on a napkin). The goal is to enlighten the newcomer while providing a novel twist that will please the expert. And never to bore."

In these pieces, plucked from the last 20 years, Holt takes on infinity and the infinitesimal, the illusion of time, the birth of eugenics, the so-called new atheism, smartphones and distraction. It is an elegant history of recent ideas. There are a few historical correctives — he dismantles the notion that Ada Lovelace, the daughter of Lord Byron, was the first computer programmer. But he generally prefers to perch in the middle of a muddle — say, the string theory wars — and hear evidence from



Jim Holt.

DOMINIQUE NABOKOV

both sides without rushing to adjudication.

The essays orbit around three chief concerns: How do we conceive of the world (metaphysics), how do we know what we know (epistemology), and how do we conduct ourselves (ethics).

But I prefer another organizing principle, my own, based not on the

theories but the thinkers: Let us name these three types "incorrigible eccentrics," "delusional hermits" and "oh, no." As Holt writes, "All these ideas come with flesh-and-blood progenitors who led highly dramatic lives. Often these lives contain an element of absurdity."

This is putting it very mildly. Almost every essay features awe-inspiring intellectual achievement and incomprehensible human suffering or folly. These facts do not seem unrelated. The men (with the exception of Lovelace, Holt writes only about men) died in asylums. They ended their lives in duels and suicide. They died of voluntary starvation.

In this #MeToo moment, when there is renewed interest in (read: confusion about) how to separate the life from the work, there is a welcome matter-of-factness in Holt's approach, a refreshing acknowledgment of how the two seep into each other, an awareness of our propensity for self-deception.

Holt is an amphibious kind of writer, so capably slipping from theology to cosmology to poetry that you're reminded that specialization is a modern invention.

The word "scientist" was coined only in 1833, by the philosopher William Whewell, who sought to professionalize science and separate it from philosophy. It was a brilliantly successful move. "Science grew to a dominant position in public life, and philosophy shrank," Freeman Dyson has written. "Philosophy shrank even further when it became detached from religion and from literature."

Part of what makes Holt so exciting is his ability to gather these disciplines under his shingle, to make their knottiest questions not only intelligible but enticing, without sacrificing rigor. "People who are otherwise cultivated will proudly confess their philistinism when it comes to mathematics," Holt writes. "The problem is that they have never been introduced to its masterpieces." Proofs can resemble "narratives, with plots and subplots, twists and resolutions. It is this kind of mathematics that most people never see. True, it can be daunting. But great works of art, even when difficult, often allow the untutored a glimpse into their beauty. You don't have to know the theory of counterpoint to be moved by a Bach fugue."

Thomas Jefferson, Holt reminds us, said that thinking about mathematics helped "beguile the wearisomeness of declining life." Bertrand Russell claimed that it was the only thing that kept him from suicide.

The title essay of this collection is a diffuse piece about the radical shifts in our notions of time, told through the friendship between Albert Einstein and Kurt Gödel. Having toppled the foundations of the physical world and mathematics, respectively, they found themselves in Princeton in the 1930s. They could not have been more different. Holt points out — Gödel so fastidious in his white linen suit, Einstein with his "pillow-combed hair" and enormous trousers (Holt is wonderful on the self-presentation of scientists). But they were becoming museum pieces of a sort and found harbor in each other, taking daily walks to campus. Holt, in a neat encapsulation of his project, elbows his way in and speculates on what they might have discussed. Even if the paces of a few decades (and too many I.Q. points to count) separate us from these giants, we're lucky to have Jim Holt help us eavesdrop.

TRAVEL

Drenched in beauty, enveloped in solitude

Chile's Route of Parks is sometimes lonely, often rainy and always gorgeous

BY JADA YUAN

Ten minutes into my drive down the dirt highway that transects Chile's Parque Pumalín in northern Patagonia, I had to pull over. Not for any mechanical reason, just to stand and stare in awe. Dense forest had suddenly given way to a lake flanked by mountains — a Chilean landscape of undulating meadows beneath a vivid blue sky streaked with cirrus clouds.

Minutes later, I came to another screaming stop. This time at a rocky stream overrun with gunnera plants, otherwise known as Chilean rhubarb or dinosaur food, for having leaves so enormous they could wrap my 5-foot-6 frame like a burrito. I'd seen one or two gunnera earlier in my Chile stay, in the rain forest of Alerce Andino, the northernmost entry on the Route of Parks (named after the towering, ancient alerce, or larch, trees that are like Chile's redwoods). But to walk among the gunnera in abundance, amid mountains untouched by human hands, felt like stepping into a time machine. "This is just like Jurassic Park," I whispered, to no one.

My 50-mile trip south through Pumalín should have clocked in at around an hour. It took me four. That meandering was spiked with so much joy. But it was also the first time, in two and a half months of solo travel, that I have felt truly lonely. There's nothing like shouting out, "This is so beautiful!" to an empty car to make you wish for company.

THE SOUTHERN HIGHWAY

Ever since I saw the list of destinations for my yearlong 52 Places trip, the Route of Parks had been emblazoned in my mind: "Road trip!" Technically, the "route" is a rebranding of a portion of Chile's epic Southern Highway, or Carretera Austral, which stretches from the industrial city of Puerto Montt in the north to the skinny tip of the country in the south. As part of that, this January, the Chilean government signed an accord with the nonprofit Tompkins Conservation to place an additional 10 million acres of combined public and private parkland under its protection. The goal is to create a 1,500-mile adventure-tourism trail that would be unmatched in the world.

Right now, though, it's a road with a hodgepodge of opportunities to fend for oneself in all kinds of wilderness. And that, of course, is the appeal. Large swaths of it were unpaved and under construction and full of potholes from intense, constant dumps of rain. Gas, cell signal and fellow humans are sparse as it snakes between beaches and the Andes, across fjords and through rain forests.

Most international backpackers I met had started in the far south at the route's famed, glacier-filled Torres del Paine. With the help of the travel writer Stephanie Dyson, I chose to head the opposite way (as do many Chileans traveling from Santiago) and maximize my time in Pumalín — a former private park that the government recently took over as part of the Tompkins accord. It's also relatively accessible from Puerto Montt via the Carretera Austral. Which is to say it took me nine hours just to get to the entrance, four driving along stunning coastline and five more on three fjord-crossing ferries. I'd do it all again, except for the part where the dirt highway disappeared and all that was left was a ditch filled with mud and boulders that made horrifying sounds as they scraped the bottom of my rental car.

DEALING WITH THE DELUGE

Chaitén, the quaint seaside town that served as my base in the park, is a backpacker's depot for Pumalín and destinations south, hosting arrivals by bus and



Scenes from Chile. Clockwise from top right: Alerce Andino, the northernmost entry on the Route of Parks; Volcán Osorno; ferns in Alerce Andino; the ferry to Parque Pumalín.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JADA YUAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

worker. By the time we'd gotten down the mountain, we had plans for dinner (at Chaitén's surprisingly good Pizzeria Recorquinta) and to travel together for the rest of the time I had in Chile. I'll spoil the ending now: nothing romantic happened, and we still WhatsApp across separate continents. "I was a journalist, he was a German punk rock drummer. We met in a hailstorm on a volcano in Chile," is a pretty good start to a rom com, though.

THE WAY STATION THAT WAS HOME

My jaunts through the rain-soaked parks were stunning but wore me down. Puerto Varas, a small city north of Puerto Montt, was the antidote. Located on Lago Llanquihue, Chile's second largest lake, and filled with charming Germanic architecture, it reminded me of an Alpine ski village magically transported waterside. Shops for outdoor gear (I bought hiking boots) and delicious restaurants abound. (Try Casavaldés, La Marca, Casa Mawen and Mesa Tropera.)

Some find the city bougie, and it is. It's also pleasant and cosmopolitan and easy in a way that made me feel like I could relax. And I'm not alone. I met a woman from San Francisco who'd gone there for a year and stayed for several more. Her father liked being there so much that he bought a dairy farm he's converting to a nut farm. I had taken a full-day guided hike to Alerce Andino from there before Pumalín and convinced Mr. Knoche to come back with me so we could check out the rest of the Los Lagos Region.

Our travel styles were certainly different, but I admired his ability to wake up every morning with a sunny attitude and an openness to what the day might bring him. One day, he went for a walk and brought back a friend, Lukas Lencaik from Slovakia, whom Mr. Knoche had met earlier when they were both backpacking in Argentina. Mr. Lencaik was a 31-year-old service engineer who'd quit his job to travel.

infrequent ferry. Hostels abound, but my lodging, Hotel Mi Casa, seemed like an outlier, a Germanic chalet up a forest road I only found through quizzing children playing soccer on unmarked streets. If there is a single stoplight, I don't remember seeing it.

Ten years ago, the entire settlement had to be evacuated when the adjacent Volcán Chaitén erupted unexpectedly for the first time in over 9,000 years. Stalwarts moved back and rebuilt, but there's still a ghostly row of collapsed houses on the street closest to the mountains.

There's nothing like shouting out, "This is so beautiful!" to an empty car to make you wish for company.

It wasn't lava that caused the destruction, though, but a mudslide of volcanic ash triggered by rain, which I experienced as a biblical deluge four of my five days in Pumalín. The name of Chaitén means "basket of water" in the native language of Huilliche.

"What do you do when it rains like this?" I asked Federico Lynam, the owner of Hotel Mi Casa.

"The same thing we always do," he said. "We work hard, we eat our meals. If we stopped doing anything because it rained, nothing would ever get done."

One day, exploring Chaitén's cemetery of houses during a rare moment of sunshine, I found myself in a field, where a brown horse munched on grass next to a brown leather La-Z-Boy. Just beyond them was a building that looked exactly like where I'd go if I wanted to

get killed in the post-apocalypse. The gunnera plants in the front lawn were so overgrown that they reached the roof, a colony of Audrey Hepburn from "Little Shop of Horrors." Graffiti covered every wall, and the blue bars on the doors and broken windows, plus many tiny rooms with many tiny toilets, seem to confirm that I'd wandered into an abandoned prison.

Then the rain returned, flowing through holes in the roof as if from a sprinkler. I wasn't scared, yet, just cold. I posted a tweet, mainly to create a record of where I was. Half an hour passed, then an hour. The rain wouldn't let up and now my phone was dead and the day's light was beginning to fade.

I could see my car in the far distance. The wind was gusting with such force that the rainfall rose off the pavement in waves. I took a deep breath and ran. Water flew up my nose and soaked my socks, which wouldn't dry for days — and I was laughing. Laughing and running. And there was my car but I didn't open the door. I wanted to stand there, getting wet, taking it in.

FRIENDS YOU MEET ON VOLCANOES

Determined to get in one hike in the window of what looked like a rain-free day, I set off on the three-hour round trip trail up Volcán Chaitén. I hadn't counted on quite how remote and steep it would be. My pace was so slow that people who'd passed me on their way down were lapping me on their way up. I realized I hadn't told anyone where I was, and hadn't had a cell signal for days. All I had in my backpack was photo equipment, two liters of water and a packet of salami.

Then the rain began again, coming down so hard it flowed off every plant in mini-waterfalls. I wondered who would notice. I was missing (probably my mom) and how long it would take to find my body.

By the time I crested the top of the volcano, a moonscape of ash and the charred remains of what must have once been grand alerces, three hours had passed. All of my photographic equipment failed at once. Chilly cloud cover had made my fingers numb. And I still had to hike down.

A lone figure in a black hoodie emerged from the clouds, and we circled each other silently before I finally asked him if he spoke Spanish or English. He broke into a huge grin: English. His name was Manuel Knoche, a 33-year-old Berliner who had been traveling for six months. He, too, was a little lonely and ill-prepared: he had hitchhiked to the wrong volcano, had walked two hours on the highway to get to this one, and had no idea how he was going to get back. I had a car, I told him. If he was willing to walk at my slow pace, I'd be happy to give him a lift. He said sure.

The clouds cleared for a minute, revealing a barren red-dirt mountaintop. Then they came back, bringing hail.

On the way down, Mr. Knoche and I had plenty of time to talk. He had spent his 20s playing drums in and managing punk rock bands. He was on a yearlong sabbatical from his job as a social

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A restaurant in Chaitén, a quaint seaside town that is a backpacker's depot for Pumalín.



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