The AMERICAN SCHOLAR
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EST. 1776

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Encounters

I ALMOST ALWAYS USE this space to bloviate about the cover story in the new issue. Permit me, please, to bloviate about something else this time, even though Sandra Gilbert's cover story, a look at the #MeToo revolution, is an important essay that you really should read. In its initial phase, which shows no sign of coming to an end, #MeToo has deserved the full-throated support of all of us. But Gilbert, an esteemed literary critic with unassailable second-wave feminist credentials, is helping to open a new phase, it seems to me, in which women talk to women about where their revolution should go. A good time for men to keep quiet and listen. And so I will.

A second piece in this issue looks back half a century at one of the worst seasons in our country's history, but does so with a surprisingly winning nostalgia, given its grim central events. Between the assassination in April 1968 of Martin Luther King Jr. and that in June of Robert F. Kennedy, Steven Isenberg, then 28, went to work for RFK's presidential campaign, inspired by his hero, President Kennedy. What makes Isenberg's memories of this terrible time so winning is his idealism and his youthful energy and naïveté. With no experience working on a campaign, he immediately finds himself managing RFK's primary bid in one small county in Oregon. Although he is given few resources and even less advice, he manages to set up a headquarters and a plan of attack, persuade the candidate to appear at what becomes an enthusiastic and well-attended event, and gets out the vote. Kennedy loses the Oregon presidential primary, but Isenberg's is one of four counties he wins in the state. In a late-night phone call, RFK thanks him and promises that he has a memory like an elephant. Then, in the short time before the shooting at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, Isenberg happens to be assigned to campaign in California with the civil rights legend John Lewis. Later that summer, he attends the tumultuous Democratic convention in Chicago and finds himself hanging out in a bar with Norman Mailer.

We've seen this Zelig-like quality in Isenberg before. In 2009 we published a charming piece by him in which he described how, again as a young man, he managed to lunch with four British literary icons, among them W. H. Auden and E. M. Forster. Without ever saying *Hey, look at me,* he manages in both pieces to convey some quality in himself that others are drawn to. What he presents as chance encounters feels to us to be an inevitable pattern. I've had a few encounters with Isenberg myself in recent years. Even with the blow to his idealism of his candidate's murder and all the blows the decades administer to us all, his youthful and magnetic enthusiasm for life, I can report, remains.

—ROBERT WILSON

LETTERS

Call Me Cleon

Your instructive, riveting, often hilarious, and terrifying Spring 2018 cover story ("A Vacuum at the Center," W. Robert Connor) proves that the humanities—by providing context—offer critical insights in these chaotic and dangerous times. Published in the midst of the shocking revelations of Cambridge Analytica's role in Donald Trump's 2016 campaign, Connor's analysis illuminates that particular news cycle. In those news reports we've seen clips of the president gleefully telling donors that, during his campaign, he'd used phrases he neither understood nor liked—collections of words guaranteed by Cambridge Analytica's manipulators to fire up his base. In the context of Connor's article, Trump might as well have tweeted, "... but you can call me Cleon." This article should be required reading for all thoughtful Americans. I've shared it widely and been gratified to learn that most of those to whom I sent it are sharing it with many others.

CATHERINE L. O'SHEA
Flemington, New Jersey

The distinction between a populist and a democratically elected leader is very much in the mind of the beholder, and often as not reflects class snobbery. Democratically elected leaders are decried as populists when elite critics don't like them, although they aren't when favored by elites. But the distinction between *populist* and *demagogue* made in Connor's article adds a whole new wrinkle. I understand the distinction being made, and understand the application of the term *demagogue* to Trump, and it makes sense. But I also consider the celebrity as a type, since the absent center of the demagogue strikes me as very celebrity-like. As Daniel J. Boorstin famously defined them, celebrities are known because they are known. Many are actors whose occupation requires playing different characters. The absent center is almost an occupational prerequisite. Yet not everybody has the makings of a celebrity. There's something about a celebrity's manner that enables others to impute what they want to see in them. It all remains a puzzle, although I appreciate the light this article sheds on it.

KEN MORRIS
from our website

Accentuate the Privilege

I worked in the STEM fields and still recall the professor of the course that provided me with my first graduate school teaching assistantship back in 1980. After we met and I spoke

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with him for a while, he gave me a lesson similar to that given to Robert Boyers by Professor Stone ("The Privilege Predicament"). He made similar identifications (assuming correctly, for example, that I was the first child of my working-class parents to go to university). Then he pointed out that I would do better all around if I learned some proper pronunciation. Being eager to do well in my field, I quickly began to replace "gonna" and "wanna" with "going to" and "want to," and I stopped raising the inflection at the end of my sentences, so that my statements no longer became questions. Like Boyers, I never questioned the professor's motives (we maintained a decades-long friendship) and was grateful to have heard what he told me that day. In my mind, I was simply learning how to get people to listen to what I had to say by sounding as if I was in their "group." Over the years, I would convey this in a speech I gave to graduate students. If they resented me for it, they did a great job of hiding their resentment.

I enjoyed Boyers's essay very much. Thanks for publishing it.

GLENN WARD
from our website

The current climate of "privilege warfare" has eliminated the good that those privileges can allow. No professor today would call in a student to offer the wisdom that Professor Stone shared with Robert Boyers. "Speaking truth to weakness" is not something one hears of, yet it should be. Giving young minds the direction they need, in matters academic and otherwise, is crucial to the development and improvement of society.

BRUCE JORDAN
from our website

Articles in the Scholar are frequently thoughtful and informative. "The Privilege Predicament" is no exception. I admire Robert Boyers's patience and objectivity in describing his predicament and in framing the subject in a comprehensible way. I wonder about the motives of partisans (as Boyers calls them) who charge millions of people on purely racial grounds. This "movement" appears to be organized and relentless. Two questions arise from his essay: Who in America doesn't get it that racism is morally wrong and illegal if acted out? And why does no one challenge such obviously wrongful behavior when it occurs? We don't allow bullying in grade school. Why is cultural bullying allowed in universities?

CHRISTOPHER WALSH
Arlington, Virginia

What a pleasure to read such nuanced and precise thought on a topic as burdened with abuse as this one! Thank you, Robert Boyers—my hat is off.

"SAKSIN"
from our website

As a heavily accented Chinese-Malaysian medical student at an Australian medical school, I took it upon myself to studiously adopt the plummy educated English accent I'd learned from Merchant Ivory films. I'd hoped this would help me fit in with my peers from elite private schools once I graduated into medical practice. One day, a senior surgeon mistook me for a graduate from hallowed Cambridge University. He then noted my surname and proceeded to heap praise upon a cousin of mine, the first Asian Australian to lead the First XV rugby union team and win the school captaincy of his grammar school. This surreal episode made me feel like a complex amalgam of a deliberately fabricated identity that I have long since chosen to abandon. My career advancement hasn't suffered since.

JOSEPH TING
Brisbane, Australia

McClatchy's Last Words

Wow. J. D. McClatchy's poem "Radiation Days" would be nearly too intimate and graphic to read but for its sheer power of detailed imagery and barely cloaked sadness and fear. We hope for the best outcome even when we know the situation

is already lost. To die with poetry still on our lips, still drifting through our minds, is the best any poet can hope for. Thanks.

"MICHAEL R"
from our website

"Radiation Days" is incredibly intimate, arousing the sadness and the curiosity of the reader. Peace to Mr. McClatchy, his family, and friends.

"BEV"
from our website

Unnatural Resources?

Toward the end of her review of Edward O. Wilson's latest book ("Why We Need Art," Winter 2018), Natalie Angier dismisses the conceptualizing of women as a resource over which men compete as one of the "off-putting adumbrations of the field" (evolutionary psychology). Regardless of my own reaction to the idea of women—or any human—as commodities, I found her response deeply "off-putting." She cannot wave off the data from multiple disciplines because it insults her view of herself, of women, of what's fair or polite or respectful. Her dismissal seems part of a dangerous trend of skittish, timid, and politically correct avoidance of history: like it or not, we humans, from our earliest days, have indeed viewed and treated each other as "resources." And if, via biology or culture, we modern men—and women, let's be honest—still tend to view each other in this deeply unattractive way, that is something we must acknowledge and process in order to outgrow. No one ever got over a phobia, a prejudice, a handicap, a weakness, or a pet peeve by pretending it didn't exist.

BENNETT POLOGE
New York City

For the Love of Animals

Chloe Shaw's beautiful, well-written essay ("What Is a Dog?" Spring 2018) makes me feel that I am not alone in understanding the depth of nonhuman love, the only love that is not judgmental, that allows us to be accepted for who we are and to be ourselves. I have recently lost the companionship of a feline "sister" who was over 15. Her love was complete. It kept me going—she buoyed me when I needed it, she made me smile, and she loved me beyond words. This incredible friend often stayed at home on her own for as long as two months, with someone checking in on her, and yet, when I would return from my work abroad, sometimes after four to five months, she would welcome me in such a way that it was overwhelming. She would never leave my side. All she asked was love back. I was blessed with this deep love, and now I grieve.

"CAPITANISSA"
from our website

Wonderful essay! I'm crying over all the animal-friend losses I've experienced. Shaw's words brought back the bittersweet taste of grief. Thank you.

"WILDLANDLOVER"
from our website

CORRECTION

Having lived in Boston and worked in a number of Boston hospitals, I was happy to see that the city's hospitals are ahead of the curve when it comes to carbon neutrality ("Enviably Green," Works in Progress, Spring 2018). Cheers to Boston Medical for leading the way. Unfortunately, the photo you published showed the Massachusetts General Hospital, another great Boston institution, but not the one you highlighted.

ROBERT H. GILMAN, MD, DMD
University of Michigan Medical Center
Ann Arbor

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Under the Passaic Falls

After living abroad for 13 years, **TODD R. DARLING** returned to his hometown of Paterson, New Jersey, and discovered a network of homeless people living in abandoned 19th-century mills. Darling set out to document those lives in a series of photographs that he calls *Home of the Brave.* One homeless veteran, Bob (seated far left, smoking), has become the center of Darling's project, which the photographer describes here. The images address the familiar problems of addiction, mental illness, and poverty in a city that was once an industrial powerhouse. **—NOELANI KIRSCHNER**

"Paterson was the first planned industrial city in America—it was founded in 1792 by Alexander Hamilton with the support of George Washington. Like other American cities, it has gone through de-industrialization, and over the past several decades, it's been a struggle to keep the city above water; in some neighborhoods, the poverty rate is 60 percent or more. Paterson also has a major opioid challenge. There are people coming from all over the Northeast to do drugs in this city.

Mental illness and drug addiction are factors for why people here become homeless. In Bob's case, he was in the army and then worked different jobs, but each place went out of business. He couldn't pay his bills, and found it hard to ask for help. He's a proud guy and struggles with taking charity. It was around 2014 when he actually lost his home. He knew one of the old abandoned mills well, so he went down to live in one of the building's insulation pipes. He eventually found a furnace within the building and lived there until recently. Now Bob is in the Y and has housing, for the moment. But these grand mills are providing refuge for people who have nowhere else to go. There are probably about 12 to 15 people living in the mill that Bob was in, and there are several of those mills with approximately the same number of people living in each.

TODD R. DARLIING/REDUX

Bob is a dependable person and has a big heart. He really values community, so he takes on the role of helping people when they become homeless. There's such a strong sense of community and friendship with the others who live in the mills that some of them return to visit after securing housing.

After living in Hong Kong for many years, I was able to come back to America with a critical set of eyes. My documentary work is about the American promise: Is it still being fulfilled, and if not, what went wrong? The American dream is possible but is a hard reality and constantly changes. One day people are up, and the next they're down, and it's not necessarily a result of anything they did."

The Traveler in a Shrinking World

In this issue of the SCHOLAR, **JEFFREY TAYLER**, now a resident of Moscow, reflects on his career as a freelance writer traveling throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America (see page 56). During that time, the world has undergone profound changes in geopolitics, technology, and climate. To supplement his essay, we asked Tayler, who is the author of seven books, to pose four questions on the future of world travel.

1. As Francis Bacon writes, "Travel, in the younger sort, is a part of education; in the elder, a part of experience." Technology has made the world a smaller place, true. But Bacon's ideas remain valid. For instance, he counsels that a traveler "must have some entrance into the language before he goeth" abroad. True education means interacting with others—for which you need a common language—so as to understand and get along with them. Personal development stems from actual interaction and experience, which bring risks, pitfalls, and pleasures. Travel, in short, is a physical undertaking that stimulates the senses. We may be beholden to our online devices, but no screen can offer you, say, the tactile onslaught of a crowd in Varanasi, or the olfactory potpourri of Istanbul's Spice Bazaar. With the possibilities of virtual travel sure to tantalize all the more in the future, will we engage in less physical travel? Or will we realize that we need travel as much as we ever did, for the reasons for which we've always needed it?

2. Around the world, the death toll from terrorist attacks has prompted the U.S. State Department last May to take the unprecedented step of issuing a travel alert "throughout Europe" in regard to dangers lurking in "tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities ... hotels, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, parks, high-profile events, educational institutions, [and] airports"—the "priority locations for possible attacks." Yet, given that the odds of any one of us perishing in a terrorist attack anywhere are vanishingly minimal, will people simply be sensible about their travel to Paris and London, exercising caution, or will other parts of the world begin to take hold of the imagination and replace those august cities in popularity?

3. The end of the Cold War has allowed peripatetics in search of "unexplored" lands to sate their wanderlust in parts of the former Soviet Union that relatively few tourists had visited or even heard of before. At least a couple of the "Stans" have encouraged, if not always successfully, sojourns by foreigners eager for a novel travel experience. Kazakhstan, unfairly stigmatized as a satrapy of misogyny, anti-Semitism, and corruption by the 2006 comedy *Borat,* has been busy implementing its "Tourism Industry Development Plan 2020" and now earns $3 billion a year from tourism, though it still draws relatively few visitors. Uzbekistan's Samarkand and Bukhara get their share of tourists. Tajikistan, meanwhile, lags far behind Kazakhstan as a globetrotter's destination, given poor roads

ABOVE: JEFFREY TAYLER; BELOW: ISTOCK

and lack of infrastructure, though it is no longer a "forbidden" land. But what about Russia itself? Yes, the country welcomes tens of millions of tourists a year. They tend to stick to Moscow and Saint Petersburg. But beyond those cities lies a vast, relatively unknown land, visited by few. Could outback Russia prove to be one of the last frontiers on earth?

4. In the years after 9/11, great swaths of the planet have been convulsed by strife, drought, and famine—and sometimes all three. The upshot is that for the casual traveler, our planet is shrinking. Immense expanses of the earth's surface have become a terrestrial Hades teeming with beleaguered locals and visited by few foreigners other than journalists, aid workers, and missionaries. Population growth, climate change, and desertification will worsen the turmoil, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. The roster of countries one can visit safely—or, more to the point, would want to visit—has shortened considerably and will continue to do so. Travelers may cease to go to such places. Yet in a world largely dominated by one country, the United States, shouldn't a personal, *direct* experience of life abroad grant American travelers an emotional stake in the fates of people whom they might otherwise know little about—people whose lives are increasingly affected by American foreign and military policy?

MONKEY GOD/FLICKR

The Times They Are a-Changin'

When Richard James Burgess was growing up in 1950s England, both of his parents worked in factories, though the job was easier on his father than on his mother. "She was furious that some guy was being paid double what she was getting for the same work," he says. "And sexual harassment, of course, was rife." Burgess grew up to become a successful musician, producer, and author, as well as the CEO of the American Association of Independent Music. Although laws have evolved and working conditions have improved since his childhood, both here and in England, Burgess looks at the music industry and says, "We still have a long, long way to go."

To that end, his organization recently announced its pledge to achieve, by 2022, gender equality among the panelists at its annual conference, Indie Week—part of an international movement striving for a 50-50 gender balance in music festival lineups worldwide. Eighty-five organizations have signed the pledge so far, including 38 from the United Kingdom, nine from Canada, and six from Norway. The announcement of the PRS Foundation's Keychange initiative was met with tremendous enthusiasm online. Still, we're unlikely to see Coachella, say, boasting about a balanced lineup anytime soon. In 2015, the women's media site Refinery29 bestowed the nickname "Brochella" upon the annual festival in California's Colorado Desert because of its male-heavy roster. The most recent lineup did include a smashing performance by Beyoncé but was still largely skewed toward male-lead acts by a little more than two to one.

"The idea that having more women in your lineup isn't commercially viable is something I just don't understand," says Jess Partridge, the project manager of Keychange. The target date of 2022, Partridge says, was set precisely because biases are so deeply ingrained in music culture.

So when does bias in the music business start to set in? According to Brice Rosenbloom, producer of New York City's Winter Jazzfest, "If you look at a lot of high school bands, there is full gender equality. We think it changes when you step to the college level." His goal is to provide a platform so that young women can see female role models onstage, playing alongside men and leading their own bands. "Look, this should have happened long ago," he says. "It's 2018. We're late in the game." **—KATY KELLEHER**

The Song Spectrum

Our established understanding of how animals learn to vocalize divides all the species of the world into two groups: those that can imitate sounds and independently create their own vocalizations (such as humans), and those that can't (such as monkeys). There is no in between. Vocal learning is strictly binary. Or so we've always thought.

According to neuroscientists Gustavo Arriaga, Christopher Petkov, and Erich D. Jarvis, however, we shouldn't be thinking in terms of either/or. Species with the highest degree of vocal learning abilities, they have discovered, can generate a complete range of sounds effortlessly—in real time and without any external prompting. Other species do not have this degree of vocal fluency but can imitate sounds that they hear in their environments. In nature, vocal fluency is a matter of degree, not of kind. Arriaga and Jarvis term this observation "the continuum hypothesis of vocal learning."

Jarvis, a professor at New York's Rockefeller University, has already written about the continuum hypothesis in songbirds, which are not able to form words and sentences the way humans do, but can—because of the development of spoken-language pathways in their brains—create complex and spontaneous vocalizations that form a complete language in its own right. Jarvis and his team are currently studying vocal abilities in mice. The sounds mice make are not as complex as those of other species, though male mice do make unique and discernible sounds during courtship. Compared

DICK VOS/FLICKR

NONFICTION EXCERPT

Into the Quaking Mirror

LARRY WOIWODE, the author of *Beyond the Bedroom Wall* and four other novels and two books of stories, is working on a series of brief essays for the SCHOLAR website called "How to Write a Novel." What follows is an excerpt from his essay "Metaphor and Metamorphosis." Watch for his series to begin in June at theamericanscholar.org/woiwode.

Time is the element linking art to metaphor. Time is the primary element that writing, the compilation of metaphor, is measured against. The rhythms of language move through time, and timing, including the arrival of a detail at the moment that detail is needed, is a mark of enduring fiction.

Hearts tick and thud in iambic endlessness until time deals the final shutdown, as it also deals limits on the body—the four-minute mile, the number of Gs one can endure—up to the identical ultimate, death. A shapely body of metaphor can age well or sag at its seams or develop a ring of fat around its belt with the passage of years. It may die in a decade or endure for centuries—time the ultimate measure of its depiction of truth.

A novel is merely an extended metaphor, at times terribly extended, as with Tolstoy's *War and Peace.* It's as surely that as it is Randall Jarrell's jaunty definition that casts its network of words in the brain: "A novel is a prose narrative of some length that has something wrong with it."

Imagine a swimming pool and on its surface reflections of leaves of a nearby tree, a chain-link fence, quivering bricks of the apartment building it serves, telephone wires above all that. Dive in, take the plunge, paddle or stroke the length of the pool, and when you step out on the other side, the reflections remain wavering over its surface, unaffected by you, although your senses record the immersion and you're dripping. You register a metaphor by its ability to engage you in the quaking mirror that pictures the reality of an outside world.

That's what metaphor is, your swim immersion in a novel.

with songbirds, they are at a more rudimentary point along the continuum. But is that point fixed, or can mice attain new vocal learning abilities and move ahead?

Jarvis is investigating whether the vocal abilities of mice can be altered by introducing into their vocal-learning circuitry certain genes known to affect speech in humans. The team hopes to train mice to change the sounds, pitch, and sequence of their vocalizations as they identify mates and seek food. If mice could expand their vocal repertoire, they could presumably imitate the sounds of another species, among other things. Depending on funding, Jarvis hopes to complete the first stages of these experiments within the next five years.

But is such genetic engineering appropriate or necessary? There is some risk of building a Frankenmouse with vocal abilities not seen in the wild. Jarvis notes, however, that because mice have genomic and physiological traits similar to humans, we already infect them with strains of debilitating ailments, such as Huntington's disease, that they would not encounter in nature. We do that only to improve the health of humans. At least in his case, Jarvis says, he is "enhancing a trait" in mice. In addition, some species such as parrots already have vocal learning, and we do not call them Frankenparrots. Vocal learning, he might say, is a gift to be shared, not a talent to be hoarded. **—MARCUS BANKS**

Talking It Out

People recovering from mental illnesses have been helping heal each other for a long time—at least since the Alleged Lunatics' Friend Society formed in London in 1845—but not until recently have psychiatrists emphasized peer counseling in their treatment plans, recognizing the benefits of using survivors as coaches. Consider the first large randomized trial study of a peer-led intervention program—the Health and Recovery Peer (HARP) program in Atlanta, where participants and their peers talk about the best ways to manage chronic illness. The study included 400 participants, mostly female, African American, and poor. All had a psychiatric diagnosis, such as major depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia, and also at least one chronic medical condition, such as hypertension, asthma, or diabetes.

"People with mental illness have high rates of adverse behavior—particularly smoking, but also poor diet, limited exercise, and obesity," says Benjamin Druss, a professor of public health at Emory University who helped organize the HARP program in 2006 and ran the trial study from 2011 to 2016. The findings, released in February, showed that after peer intervention, roughly half the participants reported a "modest but significant" boost in their health, along with a more significant improvement in "recovery," or their self-assessment of confidence and hope, willingness to ask for help, personal goals, reliance on others, and easing of symptoms. "Recovery is a long process," says Chacku Mathei, the CEO of the Mental Health Association in Rochester, New York, and a beneficiary of peer counseling when he was addicted to drugs at the age of 15 and attempting suicide. "It isn't enough to get us out of the hospital. We also have to get the hospital out of us."

Until the 1960s, American doctors usually treated mentally ill people by institutionalizing them. Early psychiatric drugs and treatments were somewhat effective but had brutal side effects, and ex-patients organized self-help groups to offer a more humane alternative. Judi Chamberlin's 1978 book, *On Our Own,* became the manual for a movement that was as much about civil rights as recovery. Today's peer support groups often trace their roots to that movement. The barriers really started to fall when health administrators redefined peer support as preventive care, thus making their Medicaid payments go further. (Georgia was the first state to allow Medicaid to reimburse peer counselors. Now many states do.)

Druss says that several other large, randomized trial studies of peer programs are in the works. This ongoing work is even more urgent, given the current health crisis and the enduring stigma of mental illness. A 2006 survey of eight states showed that the life expectancy of Americans with a major mental illness ranges from 49 to 60 years. The national average is 78. **—BRAD EDMONDSON**

One April Day

A death, a book, an art show, and a promise of magnolia blossoms

RACHEL HADAS

THE CATALOG OF THE EXHIBIT "Vestiges and Verse: Notes from the Newfangled Epic," at the American Folk Art Museum in New York, fails to note that the complex and ambitious architectural drawings of Achilles G. Rizzoli (1896–1981) incorporate numerous sonnets. True, we're told that in "the late 1920's until 1934, [Rizzoli's] attention was primarily centered on writing literature and poetry." (Literature and poetry? Two separate species?) Then, when Rizzoli's literary efforts found no publishers, he focused on drawing and worked as an architectural draftsman. But a close look at Rizzoli's large and meticulous black-and-white drawings—they look more like blueprints—reveals sonnets lettered in almost every one: poetic form unobtrusively deployed, rhyme and meter flawless, the boxy sonnet shape punctuating the pages like a window letting light into a wall, into the box of a room, organizing space. Not that Rizzoli's art accommodates many empty spaces. All its surfaces are embellished in crisp black and white: images, prayers, aphorisms, words collaborating with images. Not an inch of paper is wasted. Still, there's a sense throughout Rizzoli's work of a spaciousness notably absent from some of the work of the other self-taught artists in this remarkable show, with its collages and constructs and schemata, eloquent, idiosyncratic, and private.

An unremittingly cold spring is beginning, in this second week of April in New York, to relent and soften into sunshine. Snowdrops, daffodils, forsythia, a promise of magnolia blossoms. In Richard Tucker Park by Lincoln Center, balloons festoon a statue. In Straus Park in Morningside Heights, the annual commemoration of the sinking of the *Titanic* is about to be observed. The lavishness and tenderness and cruelty and absurdity of the world are especially on display every spring, a contrast captured precisely by Robert Lowell's phrase "Our magnolia ignite ... their murderous five days' white." The sky opens to warmth and light even as it closes for someone, even as it constantly closes and opens. "Right behind / my limousine is someone else's hearse / unnoticed," writes Deborah Warren in her poem "About Suffering." A year ahead of me at Radcliffe, Deborah was one of the English majors in Whitman Hall who used to wear rubber gloves when they were reading novels in Signet Classics editions, since the ink tended to come off on their hands. I was a classics major who bit my fingernails; no rubber gloves for me. For the past 20 years, Deborah has taken the gloves off, or repurposed them;

The lavishness and tenderness and cruelty and absurdity of the world are especially on display every spring.

Rachel Hadas's verse translations of Euripides's two Iphigenia plays are just being published, as is her new collection, *Poems for Camilla.*

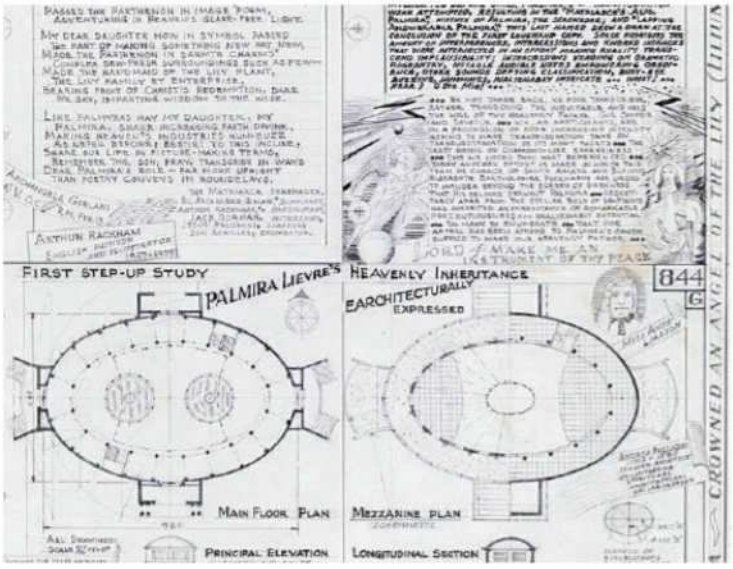
she has been writing—sculpting?—exquisitely chiseled poems.

Not every hearse, of course, is unnoticed. Today's hearse has attracted plenty of notice in many circles: the death of J. D. McClatchy, word of which reached me earlier this morning. This particular someone was a poet, editor, librettist, critic, teacher, a man of great generosity and seemingly inexhaustible energy, a man many people knew. Indefatigable; mortal. Sandy McClatchy's illness didn't prevent him from working on poems and a libretto right up until the end.

Every spring, the world shrinks and expands, seeming smaller because someone we know left it, larger because the good news, the very generously good news, of this particular life flings brightly colored streamers back over the years, over the trail of memories, the encounters and conversations. Death always gives something back to the living.

Is it possible to braid them together: the spring, slow to arrive but now advancing fast; the terrifying state of our country and the world; our granddaughter, 15 months old, toddling with her bottle in one fist, her new teeth, her smiles of discovery and trust; this death? To honor the poetry, the blossoms, and the blight? The unlikely lavishness and extravagance of the season, of the art in the American Folk Art Museum, its manic mimicry, artists busy at their work of organizing loneliness in space, of representing some version of the world—it all feels like cause for celebration.

The gift of art keeps giving. Later in the day that began with news of Sandy's death and moved on to the sunny stroll to Lincoln Square, the flowering parks, and the art exhibit, a book arrives: Stephen Yenser's annotated edition of James Merrill's *The Book of Ephraim*. The endpapers reproduce a few of Merrill's notes and doodles, which at first glance look like smaller, sketchier versions of some of the art on display in "Vestiges and Verse." But they turn out to be reproductions of Merrill's jottings toward, rough blueprints for, the astonishing poetic edifice that *Ephraim* became. In the book I find a card: "Compliments of the Author." I'm reminded that in March of 1995, a month after Merrill's death, his last book of poems, *A Scattering of Salts,* arrived one afternoon in the mail. The book contained a card: "Compliments of the Author." Who says that poets die?



Rizzoli's "symbolization" drawings, the catalog tells us, "represent metamorphoses of friends, neighbors, and family members ... personalized depictions function as memorials and vestiges." "Well," as Merrill almost wrote at the end of his poem "An Urban Convalescence," "that is what art does." (What he actually wrote is "that is what life does.")

A poet dead, streams of memories, an exhibit that exhumes and elegantly displays obscure private art, the spring advancing, an unexpected and welcome book arriving out of the blue. Blossoms and balloons. Hearses and strollers. Embedded sonnets everywhere you look. ●

DETAIL OF *A.C.E.—AMTE'S CELESTIAL EXTAVAG(R)ANZA*, ACHILLES G. RIZZOLI/STEPHEN SMITH

In the Labyrinth of #MeToo

ADDRESSING SEXUAL AGGRESSION AND POWER IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY ALSO MEANS QUESTIONING WHAT THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT HAS REALLY BEEN ABOUT

SANDRA M. GILBERT

A BIG FAT HAIRY MAN. A Boss-Beast. An Animal-God. Bluebeard? King Kong? No, more like the Minotaur at the center of the labyrinth of Hollywood. Or perhaps, as the #MeToo movement implies, the Male Beast at the center of the labyrinth of patriarchal culture.

The tale—not a myth!—is ancient. One lovely girl after another must sacrifice herself to a repellent, all-powerful Ruler, although a few among the bevy of beauties find ways to evade his advances, standing up to him with righteous passion or threatening him with the wrath of real or fictive knights-errant.

From the beginning, the stories of #MeToo were horrific—and riveting. Riveting because they weren't just *now,* they were *always*. One of the first and most resonant tales was told by Gwyneth Paltrow, who, at 22, won our hearts starring in *Emma,* the adaptation of the Jane Austen novel beautifully produced by Harvey Weinstein's company, Miramax. Blond, slim, willful Emma conquered and was conquered by the noble Mr. Knightley onscreen, but in real life, Paltrow went to a hotel-suite business meeting, at which the ignoble Weinstein allegedly suggested they move to the bedroom for massages. Then, in episode after episode recounted in *The New York Times, The New Yorker,*

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ISTOCK; PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID HERBICK

online, and on TV, victims alleged that he did more, much more, to others, demanding or forcing oral sex, raping them, exhibitionistically walking around naked while masturbating, and threatening them with career catastrophe if they were uncooperative.

We devoured these stories of assault and revenge like the audiences of Greek plays fixating on Olympian turmoil. When one celebrity (Weinstein) terrified another (Paltrow), the deific victim invoked vengeance upon him from yet another celebrity (her then boyfriend, Brad Pitt). But for a long time, as a range of famous women have attested, the fat hairy beast went unpunished, ruling the hills and dales of Miramax—and indeed Hollywood and Manhattan and sometimes even London—with an iron fist and a perpetual erection.

"I have nightmares about him to this day," said Lucia Evans, an aspiring actress whom he allegedly forced to perform oral sex.

"A big fat man wanting to eat you. It's a scary fairy tale," according to Asia Argento, an Italian actress on whom, she said, *he* forcibly performed oral sex.

On October 10, 2017, the *Times* published a chronicle of Weinstein's misdeeds, with portraits of some of the angry beauties who had come forward—Paltrow, Angelina Jolie, Rosanna Arquette, Katherine Kendall, and others—all righteously severe, all gorgeously costumed. (Paltrow led the list in an entrepreneurial charcoal gray suit, as if she had metamorphosed from, say, Ariadne to Athena.) And *The New Yorker* too joined the jury, led by Ronan Farrow, the resentful son of Woody Allen, who was enraged by his father's alleged assault on his sister Dylan when she was seven and was now investigating the perverted appetites of the Minotaur of Miramax. Both he and the *Times* writers covering the Weinstein case received the Pulitzer Prize for their work.

Of course, news outlets featured photos of Weinstein himself, with a particularly grotesque one appearing in *The New Yorker,* accompanying bits of a tape recording of his come-on to a Filipina-Italian model who just happened to be wearing a wire. Here he is bloated and unshaven, gazing at someone—perhaps the unwilling model—with a kind of lip-smacking eagerness. If he doesn't have the head of a bull, how can he be the Minotaur? But wait, reread that myth. In some accounts, such as Edith Hamilton's *Mythology,* the Minotaur has the *head* of a man and the *body* of a bull. Can this *renversement* of the usual tale explain the producer's obsessive desire to disrobe in front of his victims, his incessant pleas that they watch him shower—before, presumably, "massaging" him? Did he long to reveal and revel in his bullish beastliness? If so, his revels now are ended. As are the revels of many others, or so we've been told.

The mythically resonant case of Harvey Weinstein, the Bull-Boss at the heart of the labyrinth of Hollywood/Manhattan/London, triggered the #MeToo movement—although the groundwork for that upwelling of women's wrath had been laid by countless other trigger warnings.

JUST ABOUT EVERYWHERE, THE BULL-BOSS LOOMS AT THE CENTER OF THE LABYRINTHINE SWIRL OF PATRIARCHAL CULTURE.

YES, HERE WAS THE OLD MYTH in modern dress, and it was so real that within months, a horde of powerful abusers around the world had been felled by the testimony of female *and* male victims. It would be impossible to list all the famous names—from Kevin Spacey and John Conyers to Louis C. K., Bill Cosby, Matt Lauer, Roger Ailes, Bill O'Reilly, Garrison Keillor, Charlie Rose, Al Franken, Leon Wieseltier, Alex Kozinski, John Searle, James Levine, Richard Meier, and so many more that it's breathtaking, not to say nauseating. Some—O'Reilly and Ailes and Cosby—had been outed earlier, and their fates may have encouraged female rebellion. But the Weinstein case definitively dramatized a brutal truth: at the center of the labyrinthine swirl of patriarchal culture, in the courts, in the academy, in music, in business, in publishing, in architecture, just about everywhere, the Bull-Boss looms.

And then, at the *center* of the center, there are the Ultimate Minotaurs—Bill Clinton, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Silvio Berlusconi, and now, most terrifyingly, Donald J. Trump. His, surely, is the ontological story, his claim *the* claim against which the millions of #MeToo witnesses are struggling: "You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. ... Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything."

You can do anything. Yes, if you're the star, the Minotaur at the center of the maze.

And what can they do to *you?* So far, nothing. No one can dislodge you. *They let you do it.*

Porn stars, *Playboy* playgirls, *Apprentice* alums all lodge complaints and peddle salacious stories, but for the longest time, not a speck of dirt settled in the Oval Office at the center of the political labyrinth.

But what about the other male celebrities falling like bowling pins? Arguably, each case is different. As quite a few columnists protested, Al Franken is no Harvey Weinstein; neither is he a Donald Trump. But when the #MeToo movement crested,

a onetime nude model for *Playboy* who was also a TV personality on Fox News and a "birther" accused Franken of kissing her lubriciously in a rehearsal for a USO show and then of posing for a photograph with his hands above her breasts as she slept on an airplane. Then a woman accused Franken of groping her at the Minnesota State Fair. And there were the off-color jokes—and worse, rape fantasies—he'd come up with as a comedian on *Saturday Night Live*.

Franken insisted on his innocence. "I, of all people," he declared in his resignation speech, "am aware that there is some irony in the fact that I am leaving while a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault sits in the Oval Office."

And all over the country, really all over the world, the Bull-Boss still squats at the center of the labyrinth. Little girls are "married" to older men in India and Africa and even Appalachia. Their genitalia are mutilated in some cultures—clitoridectomies designed to mute or entirely suppress female desire. Desperate girls and women are trafficked to brothels almost everywhere. And as a recent story in the *Times* documented, women trying to make a scant living from tips in diners, taverns, and restaurants around our country struggle to smile while fending off passes from horny male customers who feel perfectly entitled to "stiff" them—interesting word!—if they aren't responsive to flirtatious gestures.

If there was a problem about the #MeToo movement, at least until quite recently, it was its focus on celebrities harassing celebrities. Because—as the rapid acceleration of the movement suggests—the main victims aren't models, actresses, and other glamour types (though they too are victims) who have always had to cope with the casting couch. Thousands and thousands of victims are cafeteria workers, file clerks, undergraduate and graduate students, ambitious young paralegals and overworked line cooks, electricians and rookie cops, junior high school students, and even, God help us, younger girls, sometimes even kindergartners. The labyrinth is the quotidian workplace—the winding corridors of the school or the office, where sexual aggression all too often accompanies power.

ME TOO. When I first heard the magic words and saw that countless women were signing on to this new movement, I wasn't sure whether I belonged in it. I have been fortunate in academia. No matter how I wrack my brains, I can't remember any of my male colleagues coming on to me in an offensively sexual way. But oh yes, I know about vulnerability. I can remember being "felt up" by a total stranger on the subway when I was 13 years old.

It was rush hour in a closely packed car. I was a high school freshman taking the F train home. A hand, a preternatural hand, came out of nowhere and landed on the lower part of my body, what my mother would call my "private parts," and began eerily

AS THE HAND DESCENDED TOWARD HER PRIVATE PARTS, SHE MANAGED TO GRASP IT AND RAISE IT, SHOUTING, "DOES THIS BELONG TO *YOU?*"

moving around down there. I looked up and found myself staring at an utterly bland face, blank eyes—you would think he didn't know what his hand was doing. Yet though I tried to squirm away, I was being uncannily moved closer and closer to the train door, as the blank-faced man—a rather little man, I remember—moved closer and closer to me, so there was no escape.

I went home and wrote a story about it, didn't tell my parents or my friends, had bad dreams for weeks. As though it had been my fault. Me with my heavy dark red winter coat, my school bag, my knee socks, my eyeglasses, my wool beret! How was I responsible? Me too?

I had a schoolmate who told a similar story, but she was ever so much bolder than I—and maybe she had been in a less jam-packed subway car. As the hand descended toward her private parts, she managed to grasp it and raise it high over her head, shouting at her assailant, "Does this belong to *you?*"

This friend—I'll call her Marguerite—must have been the sort of person who helped the #MeToo and Time's Up movements spread around the world. We were in our early teens, but she (who planned to study nursing) used to carry a condom in her purse, planning to offer it to any rapist she couldn't fight off: "At least, here, use this!"

When I talk about Marguerite and me, I'm talking about the '50s, the decade of my high school and college years, which shaped me into a person who does and doesn't understand #MeToo.

Yes, of course I understand #MeToo, not just because of my freaky experience on the F train but also because, growing up in Jackson Heights, Queens, I was warned of endless dangers by my Sicilian-born mother. She was so persuasive that when my friend Claudia and I went out for milkshakes at the local soda shop—a block away from where I lived—we carried *forks* in our pockets so we could defend ourselves against any nasty would-be Weinstein who leaped out of the shadows with evil intentions. And my own real-life efforts to ward off the advances of horny dates in my apartment

PLEASE, I'M NOT A VICTORIAN MORALIST. I'M A 21ST-CENTURY FEMINIST (BASICALLY A 1970S FEMINIST) WHO WANTS WOMEN TO MAKE CHOICES.

house's elevator also convince me that the movement is necessary.

At the same time, I'm a bit alienated from #MeToo because parts of it seem to be rooted in a sometimes problematic culture of date rape that coexists with an equally problematic hookup culture. When I was an undergraduate at Cornell, a "coed" had to sign out of her dorm when she went on a date, then sign in by 10:30 P.M. on weekdays, 12:30 or one A.M. on weekends. Plenty of time for date rape, I suppose, but I more vividly recall trying to find time and space for romance, including whatever sexual experiences we allowed ourselves. I remember wanting to fight for the erotic, tiptoeing up the stairs of a boyfriend's rooming house (being caught there would mean instant expulsion!) and sneaking banned copies of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* into the country. Yes, I wanted to be able to just say No, but I also wanted to be able to just say Yes, on terms that the campus authorities definitely forbade. Not to a rapist, not to a Harvey Weinstein, but to a man I had fallen in love with. Not to the Minotaur but to Theseus (with all his faults).

No doubt the sexual revolution of the '60s, with its promise of easy access to birth control and, in the next decade, abortion, both instigated a liberated hookup culture on college campuses (and even in high schools) and prefigured the anxieties of the date-rape pamphlets now available in so many academic crisis centers. Quite early, now, young women are warned that they must learn to say no, that no means NO, and yes can only be defined as enthusiastic consent. Not simply passive availability, but enthusiastic consent. It would appear, in other words, that words must be exchanged—"Do you ...?" "I do ..."—or otherwise the erotic contract is somehow invalid. All of which is perfectly reasonable as long as both parties involved clearly understand the assumptions of the exchange in which they're involved. If one doesn't (and that's usually a young man who hasn't read the date-rape pamphlets), any misguided advance can catapult him into the toils of punitive censors.

Two recent stories that went viral confirm my queasiness about what such commentators as Masha Gessen, Katie Roiphe, and Daphne Merkin have basically

defined as a new puritanism. In the first, which takes place on the Stanford campus, a male freshman gets drunk and flirtatious with a woman at a party and is found on top of her unconscious body next to a Dumpster. It will be later ascertained that she had been penetrated by a foreign object—his fingers. She has imbibed three times the legal limit of alcohol. He has had twice the legal limit. When passersby rebuke him, he tries to run away, claiming he needs to vomit. The victim remembers nothing, not even a drunken phone call to her boyfriend. The young man is convicted of sexual assault with the intent to commit rape, sent to jail for six months, and released after three (a scandalously light punishment, claim some), and is forever listed as a sex offender. A movement is still afoot to defrock the judge for handing down too light a sentence.

In the second, a woman known only as Grace tells babe.net the story of her dinner date with the comedian Aziz Ansari. They dine, drink, retire to his apartment. She allows him to undress her, and he seats her, naked, on his kitchen counter, then undresses himself. Each performs oral sex on the other. Then, not surprisingly, he wants to go further. But she is disturbed, and though they get dressed, sit on the sofa, and watch an episode of *Seinfeld,* he allegedly "kissed her again ... and moved to undo her pants." She goes home in a huff—no, in an Uber—and tells her tale online.

Because of when I came of age, I may be too old to understand either of these stories. The Stanford victim, I forgot to mention, had downed four whiskies before she went to the frat party where she met the young man; her mother drove her to the party, perhaps because she was too sloshed to drive herself? She was older than the guy (she was 22, he 19), had a boyfriend in Philadelphia, and had chosen to drink herself into oblivion.

Grace, in the babe.net story, was perfectly willing to take off her clothes and sit on the kitchen counter of a strange man (it was their first date) *and* to engage in mutual oral sex. Was that not, too, a choice to make herself available?

Please, I'm not a Victorian moralist. I'm a 21st-century feminist (well, basically, a 1970s feminist) who wants women to make choices and who has fought to make choices myself. Perhaps I'm not with-it enough to understand a culture in which you can drink too much and suppose that other equally drunken strangers will just take care of you—a hookup culture in which even if you take off your clothes and hang out on someone's kitchen counter, you shouldn't expect him to expect something more from you.

To the extent that stories like this get entangled in #MeToo, we might expect young men to say *#Who, me?*

BUT ARE THESE AMBIGUOUS traumas what feminism has actually been about?

Even #MeToo, with its powerful and righteous emphasis on sexual assault—is this what feminism is about? Clearly Ansari and the 19-year-old Stanford freshman

(who was, after all, jailed for his sozzled sexual efforts) aren't even near cousins of the Bull-Boss Harvey Weinstein and his White House cousin Donald J. Trump. Distant cousins? Yes, maybe: like all the famous, infamous, and anonymous wielders of male sexual power, they are products of a culture of male entitlement that leads them, too, into a labyrinth of confusion.

Yet even lacking the imperial powers of the Bull-Boss, they have become targets of a feminism that has gotten derailed from its most serious goals—namely, addressing the severe injustices inherent in our sex-gender system. Abortion clinics close, countless women suffer from domestic abuse, women workers endure a significant gender pay gap (earning, on average, 80 percent of what men make), female CEOs fail to break through that glittery glass ceiling (making up just five percent of the Fortune 500 list). And let's not forget that when Hillary Clinton ran for president, hordes of red-capped Trump supporters enthusiastically chanted *Lock Her Up!* at all those raucous rallies.

To be sure, the day after Trump's inauguration, millions of women, in the United States and around the world, many of them sporting sardonic pink pussyhats, marched for feminism and for an insurgent anti-Trump resistance movement. But has #MeToo eclipsed all that? I've been worried—worried that what I consider relatively minor complaints about shoulder massages or pats on the butt might supplant tales of jobs lost, reputations ruined because women complained about employment inequality. George W. Bush gave Angela Merkel a shoulder massage. She looked back at him quizzically. She is still the most powerful woman in Europe. As for me, if someone pats me on the butt, I do spank him back, unless he's a heavyweight boxer. Yet what about the culture in which we've been repeatedly admonished to be decorous, even silent—not to bother anyone with our sense of injustice?

Fortunately, #MeToo is broadening its scope to tell tales of people's livelihoods, self-definitions, hopes, and dreams that expand our understanding of what sexual harassment means. One #MeToo witness complained that an important male boss told her he couldn't hire her because she was married and might have children. Even if she didn't have children, he said, being married meant she couldn't devote all her time to her work. He wasn't fondling her, but nonetheless he was fucking her up, wasn't he? Would he have made such a remark to her brother?

Ah, nostalgia. I can tell the opposite side of that story. I was 25 and pregnant with my third child when I applied to a New York City campus for a job teaching remedial English. "Wonderful!" exclaimed the department head when I explained my situation. "We love mommies! They're willing to work so much harder for so much less money!"

At least, in those days, they were honest. Things changed little in later days. When my husband and I and our three kids moved to California in the mid-'60s (the age of hippiedom, flower children, and civil rights marches), I wanted to apply for a job in

PERHAPS AS #METOO INCREASINGLY TAKES ON THE GREAT FEMINIST ISSUES, ANOTHER WAVE OF FEMINISM WILL RISE LIKE A TSUNAMI.

the English department where he taught but was told that nepotism rules would make that impossible. Even when, after the passage of Title IX in 1972, I was ultimately appointed to a position in his department, colleagues would jokingly hound me in the halls: "How do you like your two salaries in one family?" And when I observed to an old "friend" that a man with credentials comparable to mine had been appointed at a higher rank, he chided me: "Why should you complain? Don't you have a job in the same department as your husband?" As for my work in feminism, my husband summarized the critiques he heard from colleagues after appraisal meetings about me (which of course he didn't attend) with two brief sentences: "My wife doesn't feel that way" and "Men suffer too." Do these little anecdotes qualify me as a member of #MeToo?

I hope so, for perhaps now, as #MeToo increasingly takes on the great issues of feminism—besides the sexual objectification of women and the profound links between professional power and male sexual entitlement, the gender inequities that build glass ceilings over girls and women—perhaps now another wave of feminism will rise like a tsunami.

BUT AFTER THIS TIDAL WAVE of feminism has swept away the bosses and bullies, what will happen to their works? Certainly Roger Ailes and his ilk, along with Weinstein and his cohort—and maybe on some happy day, Trump and his trumpery—will disappear into the Inferno of history. But what about all those movies Weinstein produced? And what about Woody Allen's films and James Levine's recordings? How does the morality of #MeToo intersect with the aesthetic triumphs produced by accused sexual predators?

The intersection of aesthetics and morality goes back to Plato, who banned poets from the Republic because poetry "lets [the passions] rule, although they ought to be controlled."

The notorious *Index librorum prohibitorum* of 1559 forbade a range of serious

writings by the likes of Newton, Descartes, Kepler, and Kant. Other religious institutions and governments busied themselves in similar ways. In 1656, the young Spinoza was excommunicated by the Talmud Torah congregation of Amsterdam for "wrong opinions." *The Scarlet Letter* and *Leaves of Grass* were attacked as indecent in 19th-century America, with works by Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Swift—and (surprisingly) the Bible—bowdlerized, too. By the 20th century, the writings of such great modernists as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Henry Miller were banned as if by fiat, in some cases until the 1960s. To be sure, there's no evidence that any of these writers were sexual predators, even if their writings violated contemporary moral standards. Nonetheless, all three had written books that could not be published in Great Britain or in the United States until lengthy court cases in a sense absolved them of guilt.

What is odd, by comparison, is the current response to—for just two examples—the movies of Woody Allen and the recordings of James Levine. In a pained meditation on Allen, A. O. Scott, a film critic at *The New York Times,* brooded on the connection between Allen's alleged sexual abuse of his seven-year-old daughter and the preoccupation with younger women that is dramatized in many of his movies, especially *Manhattan*. "What I find most ethically troubling about Mr. Allen's work at present," Scott wrote, "is the extent to which I and so many of my colleagues have ignored or minimized its uglier aspects." Noting that Allen's preoccupation with—even fetishization of—adolescent girls is recorded throughout the archive of his manuscripts held by the Princeton University Library, Scott wondered whether he'd want to keep on seeing even the greatest of the filmmaker's works. Musing on Allen's defenders, he noted that the "old defenses are being trotted out again. Like much else that used to sound like common sense, they have a tinny, clueless ring in present circumstances. The separation of art and artist is proclaimed—rather desperately, it seems to me—as if it were a philosophical principle, rather than a cultural habit buttressed by shopworn academic dogma."

But are the "old defenses" really so tinny and clueless? It seems tiresome to have to go through that debate again. If films like *Annie Hall, The Purple Rose of Cairo,* and *Radio Days* don't have an autonomous existence as works of art—if we must send them to the prison in which we'd like to put their auteur—what must be done with other creations of the sometimes perverse human mind? If the Met can fire James Levine for his sexual misconduct, should we also incinerate his recordings of the *Ring, Parsifal, Lohengrin,* and *Die Meistersinger?* And what about Wagner, anyway? Because he was an anti-Semite, should his operas too be banned? Just as there's a strain of sexual predation in Allen's movies, after all, there are at least hints—really more than hints—of anti-Semitism in, say, *Die Meistersinger,* where the foolishly ambitious Beckmesser is given Semitic-sounding music to sing, and the great Hans Sachs proclaims the great-

ness of "holy German art" in the opera's final scene. And need I point to the representation of the dwarf Alberich and his henchmen, especially in *Das Rheingold?* Moreover, speaking of #MeToo, what about the situation of poor Eva in *Meistersinger?* A living, breathing young woman with passions of her own, she is destined to be a prize—a trophy wife, really, for the winner of the Meistersingers' competition!

What do I reveal about myself if I confess that I still give my enthusiastic consent to Wagner's problematically great operas, just as I do to Allen's problematically interesting films? Perhaps, indeed, I find some of these works compelling precisely because they're problematic: like Lawrence's novels, and Miller's works, they tell us more than even their creators perhaps intended to tell about the dynamics of human desire, and more specifically the dynamics of gender. They tell us, too, sometimes rather more than we'd like to know about the culture from which they arose. But we need to know those deeply unpleasant things: anti-Semitism, misogyny, sexual predation, and anxiety; we need to know all that if only to save ourselves from them.

For a famous definition of enthusiastic consent, it might be best to turn to Joyce, whose allegedly pornographic *Ulysses* instigated one of the earliest and most important censorship trials. One wonders what the most severe acolytes of #MeToo would think of the adulterous Molly Bloom, who never leaves her bed from the beginning of the novel to the end, as if she herself were an abject form of the "Plumtree's potted meat" that is advertised throughout Dublin. Merely a sex object whom her slavish husband adores? Yet as everyone knows, she has the last word in the novel. Remembering her early lovemaking with Bloom, she replays her enthusiastic consent in her head:

> and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes.

Her lyrical interior monologue may be a male fantasy, but it models an affirmation that ought to be instructive to men and women today. Yet between Molly Bloom's yes and the thunderous *no* we sometimes need to learn to say, we continue to wander through the ancient labyrinth. The Bull-Boss, the Minotaur, is still enthroned at the center, but more and more of his sacrificial victims are learning to defy him, to turn their backs and grope their way out of the hellish space he rules. After all, in the old myth it was a woman, Ariadne, whose thread led the way out of the maze and into the future. Everything didn't go well for her—there was a problem when Theseus, willingly or not, abandoned her on Naxos—but she recovered, enthusiastically consented to a relationship with Dionysus, and her crown became a constellation. ●

Working for Bobby

FIFTY YEARS AGO, I CAMPAIGNED FOR RFK FOR PRESIDENT, AND WAS NEARBY WHEN THE DREAM DIED WITH HIM

STEVEN L. ISENBERG

During this 50th anniversary year, many people will be remembering 1968, its assassination shocks and the Vietnam War setting the national mood. The shooting of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. brought anguish and destruction, flames and troops to the streets. New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay said of the night of the assassination that he saw in the people of Harlem "great grief, emotion, very deep emotion, with people weeping, and frustrated and lonely. And terribly lost and let down." Senator Robert F. Kennedy's death only months later, less than five years after President John F. Kennedy's assassination, made heavier the burden of grief and civic despair. The once-unimaginable momentum to challenge a seated president, Lyndon Johnson, in the Democratic primary was halted by his decision not to seek reelection and then was further unsettled by the loss of the likely successor. Meanwhile, opposition to the war was growing. The national debate was bitter. Alistair Cooke reported home on his weekly BBC radio broadcast, "They are spitting across the dinner tables of America."

Amid large events and forces, we live our own lives. This is what I remember of that time.

Twice in 1967, I had joined protests against the war, first a march to the United Nations in New York, and then a march in Washington to the Pentagon. Norman Mailer's fierce nonfiction classic, *The Armies of the Night,* wound him into that moment, in contrasting style to the march's other leading literary figure, the patrician poet Robert Lowell. For all its juiced-up journalism and self-centered focus, *Armies* can still put a reader in the day's zeitgeist. Not long afterward, a senator from Minnesota, Eugene McCarthy, reserved and intelligent, with little history promising such an act, decided to enter the Democratic presidential primary. His reason: the war.

Robert F. Kennedy campaigning in St. Helens, Oregon, at an event the author set up: "The crowd was warm, welcoming, and Bobby was buoyed."

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Steven L. Isenberg is a former chief of staff to New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay and a former publisher of *New York Newsday.*


COLUMB
COUNTY

Everywhere I turned, I met other people in their 20s who were going to New Hampshire to join McCarthy, even if only for a weekend. But I remained clothed in sentiment that came from having heard President Kennedy speak on campus during my senior year at Berkeley in 1962, summoning my generation to public service. Above all was the appeal of his manner and idiom, the way he carried himself, which was so sharply different from President Eisenhower and, more pointedly, Richard Nixon. The voting age in 1960 was 21, and I was 20, too young to vote for JFK. My admiration had grown after the Cuban Missile Crisis. His assassination marked for me, as it did for the nation, the leaving behind of innocence.

I had been against the Vietnam War since 1965, not out of any deep knowledge but rather because of a gut reaction against the war's premises: the domino theory and the monolith of the international communist conspiracy. It seemed to me a civil war. Now I wanted Bobby Kennedy to run for president and was impatient with what I saw as his dithering. Having done my six months' active military duty in 1963, I was lucky enough in that age of the draft to have only a year left in the reserves. I was working for Lindsay's director of the budget, Frederick O'Reilly Hayes.

I went to Hayes's office one morning and said I wanted leave to go into the campaign during the Democratic primaries. I was a Democrat, and so was Fred. We worked for a liberal Republican, a breed no longer on this earth. Fred said, "This is too important to discuss in the middle of the workday. I'll get back to you."

A week later he took me out to dinner. Treating me as an adult, he asked if I thought McCarthy should be president. I was stopped in my tracks. I hadn't really thought about him in quite that way. I was thinking of one issue so important to the fate of the country that it was imperative to dislodge LBJ. But then we began to talk about it, or rather he did, in a way that summoned history and perspective. After a while, I said no, I did not think McCarthy would be a good president, despite his bravery in running, his ardent and telling voice against the war. Something wasn't there in what I felt presidents ought to have and be. Then I said I was really for Robert Kennedy and spouted off about his laying back, not taking the jump. Fred said, "Kennedy has more to lose than McCarthy," another bit of worldliness for me to reckon with. At the end of dinner, he told me to be patient, to stick to our business of working on the next budget, and then we'd come back to the matter.

Later in the spring of 1968, Kennedy was running, and I went again to Fred and said I wanted to go into the campaign now. He told me he needed to make a call to Mayor Lindsay: "I am a political appointment, and you are my appointment, and he has to bless this." Later he told me Lindsay had said, "Let the kid go; we can save his job for his return." After Fred told me that, I said I had another question. "How do I get into the Kennedy campaign?" He laughed. He said he'd have to think about it.

A day or so later he called William vanden Heuvel, whom he had known from their

Washington days when Fred worked for Sargent Shriver, then the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Vanden Heuvel, who was running the Oregon statewide campaign for Kennedy, told Fred I should get on a plane right away. They would pay me $20 a day to keep me afloat and cover my expenses. I called home and told my wife, Barbara, I was going to Oregon.

On the flight to Portland, a man was walking up and down the aisle, restless but purposeful. He was wearing a PT-109 tie clasp. When we got off the plane, I asked if he was part of the campaign. He was suspicious. Yes, he said. I told him I was coming to join up. He asked me about several names that I either recognized from the newspaper or didn't know at all. I knew no one personally, not even vanden Heuvel, to whom I was to report.

What did I do for work?

I told him, and he grumbled, "Lindsay's a Republican. What are you, a whore at the garden party?" (He had a thick Massachusetts accent, or maybe it was Irish, or both.)

"Hey," I said, "I'm a Democrat, my parents are Democrats, and my boss at work is a Democrat."

What hotel are you staying in? I said I had a few names. He looked at my list. You can't stay here or there; McCarthy people there. Okay, get in the cab with me, and I'll take you to a hotel.

"By the way, did you go to college?"

"Yes," I said. "Berkeley and Oxford."

"Did you really go to Oxford?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, after I drop you off at your hotel, check in and come meet me in the lobby of the Benson Hotel."

"Okay, thanks."

"Are you sure you went to Oxford?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

The man from the plane never told me his name, or if he did, he mumbled it so badly, I didn't get it. When I arrived at the Benson, he introduced me to John Douglas, a distinguished presence, who had been Kennedy's assistant attorney general for the Civil Division. Douglas, who I later learned was the son of Illinois senator Paul Douglas, had been to Oxford and, lucky for me, was at Yale Law School with John Lindsay, whom he liked and admired. Douglas said to me, "Come see me at headquarters tomorrow, first thing. They will try to make you an advance man. I've got something else in mind. See me before you talk to anyone else."

At that moment, into the lobby came Senator Kennedy with a tall man, who turned out to be vanden Heuvel, at his side. Douglas told me to wait, and he went over to speak to them. After a few moments, he waved me over.

"Bob, this is Steve Isenberg. He's come from New York to help us. Bill knows about him."

Kennedy shook my hand and stared with tired but alert blue eyes.

"Thanks, Steve. Glad to have you here."

Vanden Heuvel and Douglas said that they'd see me tomorrow. They all walked off. The man from the plane had been watching all this from a distance, and then he walked off without a word. It was days before I was told he was the "family's bag man"—he carried the cash.

The next morning at headquarters, I found Douglas sitting with Herb Schmertz, who was in charge of operations. He looked up and said to Douglas, "We can put this guy to work as an advance man."

Douglas told him he had something else in mind. "Do you have any counties uncovered?"

Herb looked at his battle map of Oregon and said they had no one in Columbia County. It's small and not far from Portland. They looked at each other, and 10 seconds later I was the county coordinator. No one had asked if I had ever worked in a campaign. They asked what I needed. I asked if there was a college there or did we have someone who knows the county I could get to help. "Do you have the rolls of Democratic voters? Oh, I need a car."

They had no voter information, no contacts, but they found a college kid who would spend a couple of days with me. They told me to go see the guy from the plane about everything else. That was it.

I found him in a small room with only a desk, a telephone, and a chair. He told me where to rent a car and asked how much money I needed. I said a few hundred dollars. He laughed. He gave me $500 and wrote down his phone number. "Call me when you get set up."

I got a map at the car rental place and drove toward St. Helens, the county seat. On the way, I stopped at the high school in Scappoose, a tiny town, and spoke to a vice principal. I asked him questions about who lived in the county, what they worked at, what was in the air politically. He was amused and very informative. When I got to St. Helens, my first order of business was to open a headquarters. Through a few inquiries, I found a small, empty building on the edge of town. The owner wasn't sure he wanted to rent it, but I said it would only be through the primary, so it wouldn't affect his plans. When I learned he was a retired fireman, I told him I worked with the NYC Fire Department in my job in the Budget Bureau. That must have counted for something. The rent was $60 a week, payable in advance. He gave me a few old tables and chairs.

For the next few days, it was all basics: get phones installed (the telephone company rep had grown up in West Virginia and was a big JFK fan), go meet the town's police and fire chiefs, the editor at the newspaper, and the owner of the local radio

station. Then to the school principals (there wasn't even a junior college in the county), encouraging them to have their students drop by to volunteer. Somehow a few boys about 12 years old came on their bikes and got a kick out of being asked to cut up the roll sheets of registered Democrats, tape one name to an index card, and look up the home phone number. I told them that we would use these cards to call people and invite them to headquarters to visit.

The idea was to find out who was a supporter or undecided. From this, we could get volunteers and know where to turn out our vote. I told the boys that every day we'd have coffee and doughnuts and soft drinks, but to work here they needed to bring their parents or grandparents or neighbors by at least once so that I could meet them and get some adult help for telephone calls. I got the local paper and radio station to do stories on the headquarters' opening. In a week or so, we had a motley crew of enthusiastic telephone callers. I gave them a notion of what to say, but everyone just did what came to mind. One night a teenager happened to reach someone he knew. "What is a kid doing there?" the person asked. Our young guy responded, "I belong here."

I started to drive around the county, meeting people, getting a picture of how RFK stood against McCarthy and the crowd supporting a nascent candidacy of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey. I listened to old resentments from union members about Kennedy having testified for the prosecution at the trial of the former mayor of Portland, felt the tension between the antiwar sentiments and the high patriotic participation of Oregonians in the armed forces and in Vietnam. I detected a certain pride that for a moment the nation's political attention would turn to Oregon, so far from the nation's capital. Even being 30 miles from Portland shaped their outlook of where they stood.

Every night I went back to my hotel in Portland and talked to people in the campaign about what was going on in the big town and in the race elsewhere. I had the feeling that we were losing here, that McCarthy had a better grip and that Humphrey supporters would vote for him to stop a Kennedy victory. I also thought Kennedy needed to get out of Portland more to give people in the rest of the state a real sense of him.

I bumped into John Douglas, and he asked me how it was going. He heard about my big phone operation (the money man couldn't believe it was all volunteers) and the newspaper and radio stories. I told him my sense of where we stood, and because I believed getting out of Portland was important, I hoped "the candidate" (that's what they often said, in addition to calling him Bobby) might come to St. Helens. I promised a big crowd. I also mentioned someone had told me that President Kennedy had been driving through Scappoose when he was asked what he would have done about the U-2.

About a week later Douglas asked me if anyone had contacted me about Bobby coming to St. Helens. I said no. He said come to the Benson Hotel today at four. Go to this room number. Be ready.

The halls around the hotel room were busy with people carrying memos and going to and fro. I was taken into the room where Bobby was half-lying on his bed, no coat, tie, or shoes. Others were seated, John Glenn and his wife, Annie, and Arthur Schlesinger. Aides came and went. Bobby looked at me and said, "You're the guy who wants to take away my nap time tomorrow." I knew that was the signal to say why. I began disastrously by saying I was apprehensive we were losing (I didn't know that you were never to say that) and that he needed to get out of Portland, mentioning the not-so-silent Humphrey forces. I said I was sorry he'd have to go by bus (nowhere to fly), but I felt that even to go that far was symbolic in getting out of the city and would send a message to the rest of the state. I told him he'd pass through Scappoose, alluding to President Kennedy's having spoken about the U-2 from there. Above all, I promised him a great crowd. He looked up and said, "I'll see you tomorrow afternoon." I was out of the room in a second.

Immediately, I was asked what I needed. Nothing, I said. I was driving to St. Helens right away and would pick a site. I would call the head of the radio station and announce the senator's arrival time, and get to the local paper. Someone said there would be an advance man sent to you tomorrow morning. I said I don't need one. I was told that an advance man came for every appearance.

That night and throughout the next day, I was on the radio, calling on our volunteers to be at headquarters immediately after school. I said the nation's press corps would be coming, so people who were at the event would see themselves on television or in magazine photos. I went overboard when, needing something new to say in my hourly phone-ins, I made the announcement that *Le Monde,* the French newspaper, would be there. I was on the air so often that day, I never needed to buy a radio ad. The owner was a Republican who admired Lindsay, and there wasn't much other news going on. He said to keep calling in or stopping by the station.

A Washington lawyer, Lee Fentress, arrived as the advance man. He was cool and calm. We set up a route to town hall and a stage for RFK to speak from. He said you have to get the town's mayor to ride in the car with you. I said he's part time, really old, and sort of feeble. Lee said, "That doesn't matter." He said to tell the police no sirens at all. Bobby never wants them. Lee was easy to work with and just let me be the jumping bean. I called the nun who headed the Catholic schools in the area and said Senator Kennedy was very hopeful her students and their families could gather after school on the route. I went into three factories and said I would pay the wages of a representative group of the men who had to miss a shift so they could be on the route. They were goodhearted and said no need to do that, some would find a way to go and bring their wives. Two or three took me up on the deal.

After school ended, our headquarters filled with kids. I told them to ride their bikes to one corner along the route and once Kennedy's car passed to jump on their bikes and ride two blocks and appear again. And to do their best to get a parent or a neighbor there.

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

The author with RFK as he campaigned in Oregon 50 years ago. Kennedy lost the primary but went on to win California on the night he was shot.

Lee took me out to the rendezvous point on the highway outside St. Helens. He said the mayor would sit next to the driver in the front seat and I would ride next to him. Jim Whittaker would be with the senator. Whittaker was the first American to climb Mount Everest. That became another of my radio pitches.

A little after four P.M., a convertible followed by two buses pulled to the side of the road. Lee whispered to Bill Barry, Bobby's bodyguard, and introduced me. We put the mayor in the car, and he turned to Bobby and said, "Welcome to St. Helens, Mr. President." We all winced.

And then we drove slowly toward the center of town. Outside a supermarket, the workers appeared carrying a sheet cake. Homemade signs turned up everywhere, some from my kids, but most just appeared. As we drove down the main street, I spotted some men from the factory. They walked toward the car. I told Bobby who they were. Handshakes took place, testing ones. One guy said, "Bobby, my wife just got her hair done, and she won't come out of our pickup." Bobby got out of the car and walked over

and shook her hand. The buses spilled open with reporters and cameras.

We got down to the town hall. The crowds were thick, and we had to work our way through them to the podium. Bill Barry said to me, "I walk in front of him, you stay close in back." It was jostling, friendly but jammed. I joined hands with Barry to form a circle like a fender. Bobby came to the podium, did that signature tugging of a lock of hair, and began by saying, "I've always wanted to come to St. Helens." I don't remember just what he said next, but it was familiar in all the best ways, straightforward and pointedly asking for their support. His voice was earnest, conversational; his manner made him approachable. His sentences were chopped, the accent unmistakably from the other end of the country. The mayor, one knew, wasn't the only one that day who had President Kennedy in mind. The crowd was warm, welcoming, and Bobby was buoyed—you could see that.

Barry and I got him back to the car, and I stood outside it. Barry then said, "Jump in. He wants to talk to you." We drove to the outskirts of town, and then we pulled over. Bobby had half a sandwich and something to drink. He said to me, "Are you going back to Portland now?" I said yes.

"Can you do me a favor and go to my hotel room in the Benson and tell Mrs. Kennedy what a terrific stop this was? It'll make her very happy. And by the way, are you going to California?"

I said yes. I grew up in Los Angeles. "Good," he said. "I hope you're with us the whole way." I said I would have to ask my boss for more leave. He said, "That's fine. I appreciate loyalty." Then I got out of the car, and they took off.

I went back to Portland and did go see Ethel Kennedy. She was with Joan Kennedy, then Teddy's wife. They were charming and kind, and wanted to hear all the details.

I don't know if I slept at all that night, but early in the morning, Barbara called and said that the dateline for that day's campaign story in *The New York Times* was St. Helens.

A few days later, I was told to set things up so that the St. Helens headquarters could run without me, except for one visit by me to get them ready for Election Day. I was to be working in Portland, where the turnout would be heaviest. I also wound up going out to a couple of campaign appearances with Bill Barry, helping him with the crowds. One night he and Bobby and I had to exit from the back of a school auditorium into a hallway, on the spur of the moment and without a plan. The crowd was too exuberant, and once we took off, some were intently and boisterously in pursuit.

On another night in Portland, I was walking past the room in my hotel where staffers would hang around, and I overheard them discussing a problem in Los Angeles involving Temple Isaiah. I said what's up, that's where I went as a kid and my dad had been president of the temple. They said Kennedy and the campaign wanted to speak there, but the membership was so divided over McCarthy and RFK that they didn't

want to host an event. I said I'd call my dad, if they wished. I did, and he said he'd talk to the rabbi. They agreed there was no good reason both Kennedy and McCarthy, separately, of course, shouldn't make appearances. It worked out, and Temple Isaiah was full the night RFK spoke; the crowd waited a very long time as he came after a large, spirited campaign caravan in East Los Angeles.

On the night of the Oregon primary, we learned that Bobby lost. I was told it was the first election a Kennedy had lost. We went to bed because our flight to Los Angeles was early in the morning. Not too long after I fell asleep, the phone rang. "Steve, this is Bobby Kennedy. Tonight was hard. Four counties won and one was yours. Thank you. I have a memory like an elephant."

In Los Angeles, I stayed at the Ambassador Hotel and worked with the legendary civil rights leader John Lewis, now a congressman from Georgia, whom I had met in Oregon. We campaigned together on the West Side of Los Angeles, he taking Bobby's part on civil rights, I on opposition to the Vietnam War. On Memorial Day, John came to my home for brunch with my parents. It is as clear to me in memory as if it were yesterday. My father asked him to say grace. Later he gently whispered to John that if he were to take the corned beef off the lox, they'd taste better eaten separately. John talked about the South and a new impatience in young blacks whom he had seen in a church service that morning, a sign that the movement for civil rights might embrace new tactics and temperaments different from his. Later, my father said to me that the men who had jailed and beaten John Lewis had not seen the look in his eyes that spoke of unshakable faith and strength.

A WEEK LATER, we stood in the ballroom of the Ambassador Hotel on the night of the California primary, a close victory in sight. I stood to the left of the podium about 20 feet away from where Bobby spoke. The crowd was thick. I have seen television replays of his speech so many times that I can't remember afresh what he said. It was a victory speech. Oregon's loss was behind us. He finished with the rallying cry, "Now it's on to Chicago, and let's win there."

I heard someone say Bobby might be going downstairs to a rally for Mexican Americans. I thought about trying to find my way down there. Did I hear the shots? I don't remember now. They have sounded so many times in my mind from watching TV and looking at photographs. I remember standing near U.S. Representative Tom Rees of California. There was a commotion coming from somewhere, and suddenly the word was spread that Bobby had been shot. Although we did not know yet whether he was dead, Rees pounded the table in grief. I went up to my room and called my wife and then my parents. They were watching television and knew what had happened. I can't recall my words or theirs. They felt my sorrow and shock, as I did theirs—for

Kennedy, for his family, for me, for a country once again torn apart by a bullet. My flight home to New York was scheduled for early in the morning, but I watched television late into the night, like millions of Americans. Except that I was watching it in the Ambassador Hotel.

Only days after that *New York Times* story about our stop in St. Helens, a friend called at about five A.M. from WOR, a New York radio station, to speak to me on air about the shooting. I was living in a bad dream. Flying is always dislocating, but never more than on that flight home. A man into whose eyes I had looked, whose hand I had shaken, whose voice I had heard speak to me was near death. I had the same thoughts over and over again for hours—not of disbelief, because there was no escaping what had happened. The wrenching truth was that I lived in a country where the president of the United States and his brother, a senator seeking the White House, had both been shot within five years of each other. I remembered everything from Oregon and went over it again and again. That late-night phone call from him was the last time I had spoken to him. When I learned the next day that Bobby had died, I recalled Mayor Lindsay's words from the night Dr. King had been killed. Once again, we were "frustrated, lonely, lost, let down."

The funeral drew us to Washington. I remember walking with John Lewis through the muddy encampment of the Poor People's March, which had begun in the city a few weeks before. Everything seemed to ask, Where would we find our footing?

A few days later, Mayor Lindsay invited me to coffee at his home in Gracie Mansion. He was very sympathetic and wanted to know how others of my generation, so many of whom he had hired, were feeling. Where were we all going? Indeed, where would we find our footing?

Not long afterward, the Republican National Convention got underway in Miami. Some people in the Budget Bureau had sent thoughts about various policy positions that Mayor Lindsay could use at the convention, yet we all knew full well that he did not have much drag there. We sensed that he increasingly had little stomach for where his party was going. Spiro Agnew, Nixon's pick for vice president, asked Lindsay to second his nomination, and he had no choice but to do it. After the convention, Fred Hayes wrote him a lighthearted note about the speech, and Lindsay sent it back, having scrawled at the bottom, "Nixon and Agnew. God save the American people."

The Democratic National Convention followed in Chicago in August. Before that, Barbara and I went to a cocktail party in New York, where Senator George McGovern spoke. Uneasiness with the prospect of Humphrey as the nominee had intensified. Vanden Heuvel was there, and he said, "Why don't you come to the convention? We may get a fishing license for Teddy."

I had made a decision earlier that year, because of my interest in government, that I wanted to go to law school. Barbara and I decided to visit her family in Chicago before law school started, so I could then go to the convention.

Once again, Mailer has an enduring claim. His reported pieces on the two conventions, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago,* have not lost their hold. Even though so many names are long gone, Mailer preserved the tone and pulse, the manner and mood of the two parties. Suburban, prosperous, smug Republicans set against the brittle, contentious Democrats, bitterly divided over the war. Television clips carry the emotional atmosphere of the protests—the police fury and the National Guard in the streets of Chicago and Mayor Daley's defensive anger. Mailer showed a national chasm whose fault lines remain.

Mayor Lindsay was very sympathetic and wanted to know how others of my generation were feeling. Where were we all going? Indeed, where would we find our footing?

In a chance meeting after the close of the convention, I wound up walking with Mailer toward Lincoln Park, the site of the largest protest gathering. He said he wanted a drink, and we stopped in the hotel across the street from the park. The bar was jammed with reporters, television cameramen, and delegates. As soon as we sat down, the bartender announced that the police had shut down the serving of liquor. Mailer frowned. I asked what he drank. He either said bourbon or scotch; whichever, I got it wrong. He asked how I was going to get a drink. I went up to the bartender and showed him my honorary deputy fire chief badge. The bartender said that I must be one of the youngest chiefs in New York. I asked for two whatevers after telling him who Mailer was and promising I'd make it look as if we had the drinks before the ban.

Mailer drank both. We sat there for about half an hour, talking about that year, what each of us had done, and about New York. He got up and said it was time for him to go speak. Walk with me to the park, he said. I did and, after parting, went far back in the crowd to hear his speech. In *Siege,* you can find me as Mailer's "new found friend from California."

In 1992, I was working at the *Los Angeles Times* and went home to New York during the Democratic convention. I attended a reception that Mayor David Dinkins had at Gracie Mansion honoring the Kennedy family. I went with Barbara and our son, Christopher. When I saw Ethel Kennedy standing alone, I went up and introduced the three of us. I said to her that I had campaigned for Senator Kennedy in Oregon. She smiled and laughed, "I am so glad there's somebody who will still admit to being there." I said I understood, but my county had won. She laughed again and called over one of her daughters. "Come meet the Isenberg family," she said. "Mr. Isenberg worked with Daddy in Oregon." ●

The End of Liberalism

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PUBLIC OPINION IS DIMINISHED AND POPULAR SENTIMENT IS AROUSED

JOHN LUKACS

We are now beyond the end of the great age of the past 500 years, what has often been called the "modern age." Its main feature was the rise of democracy—the rule of majorities and not of minorities—for perhaps the first time in the history of mankind. Consider that. Will what has begun last long? We cannot know. We live forward, but whatever we know comes from the past. That includes words and their origins. The word *democracy* existed in ancient Greece, but in the past 2,000 years it has been put into practice only here and there, during short episodes. More frequent and longer lasting was *republic,* a word of Roman origin: *res publica,* public matter, public rule, public business, public concern, a "common weal" in English.

Five centuries ago, most states in the world were ruled by monarchs and by many of their subservient aristocracies. Erasmus wrote in 1517 that a new, brighter age was arriving. (Now this kind of optimism hardly exists.) Four centuries ago, in some states of Europe, the function of some monarchs was changing. This was so in England, where after a civil war its king, Charles I, was tried and beheaded. His successor, Oliver Cromwell, was called Lord Protector, somewhat like the president of a republic, but soon after his death the monarchy in England was restored. In 1689 most of the aristocracy, members of Parliament, and the people themselves welcomed a new king who, and whose successors, ruled alongside a parliament, a house of commons. England and Scotland became a constitutional monarchy that has lasted even until now.

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Jacques-Louis David's Oath of the Tennis Court *depicts a seminal moment in the French Revolution, the vow that the people would rule themselves.*

The American colonies seceded from England less than a century later. Neither in the American Constitution nor in their pronouncements did most of the founders of the United States describe their new country as a democracy; indeed, some of them said that it was not a democracy but a republic. The standard categorization of the United States as a democracy came later. Meanwhile, in much of Europe, the remaining monarchies and the retiring aristocracies accepted their limitations.

The 19th century was a time of constitutional monarchies, a balance between ruler and ruled that marked the height of the bourgeois age with all its widespread achievements. This relative order was fatefully wounded by the First World War. Yet even during the Second World War, almost all the remaining monarchs of Europe resisted Hitler, many of them (those from Holland, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Greece) repairing to England. Mussolini was deposed and arrested by the king. In Japan the emperor established the end of the war.

By that time, the United States had become the greatest power in the world. Its democracy suffered relatively little from the First World War; indeed, its intervention on the side of Britain and France helped to decide the outcome while sacrificing comparatively few American lives and costing nothing to American prosperity.

That extraordinary observer, thinker, and visionary Alexis de Tocqueville was preoccupied with democracy, not republicanism. In both volumes of *Democracy in America,* which appeared about six years apart, it was his consuming subject. As a result, he was a more acute and profound thinker than Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and others of their kind. Tocqueville saw during his nine months in the United States that what was happening here was more important even than the French Revolution, perhaps even more important than the whole so-called Enlightenment. The great movement of history, he realized, was the transformation from an aristocratic to a democratic age. This change was monumental and irreversible, involving more than politics, the lives of entire peoples. That was also the theme of the two books Tocqueville wrote during the last 10 years of his life. (He died relatively young, alas, at 53.) Both volumes had to do with French history, the first with the year 1848 and the second, unfinished, with the French Revolution of 1789. These books bear the marks of genius that only great thinkers and historians have—an understanding of human nature itself. Tocqueville's view of the French Revolution, for example—sustained by his deep research in French provincial and other archives—led to his conclusion that even spectacular events were less the result of popular sentiments than of public opinion. My belief is that the history of public opinions is inseparable from the history of liberal democracy during the age now passing.

Public opinions and popular sentiments have existed throughout recorded history, but they are hard to define. They have overlapped and sometimes been indistinguishable, but opinions and sentiments are often not the same. A standard definition of public opinion is that it represents the desires and thinking of the majority of people. But this is wrong for many reasons, one of them being that public opinions have often been the opinions of minorities. Besides, popular sentiment is not necessarily sentimental and public opinion is not always rational. The evidence of what public opinion has been throughout recorded history exists in a variety of written sources; popular sentiment is less easy to ascertain, less often recorded, and thus less knowable. During the passing age of the last five centuries, public opinion gradually became more and more influential. The rise and decline of its influence seems to have occurred together with the rise and decline of liberalism, and also with the rise and decline of printed reading matter.

The term *liberal* became current in English during the 17th century, used with

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE WROTE THAT DEMOCRACY HAD ITS PERILS, THAT IT MIGHT BECOME A DESPOTISM OR A TYRANNY OF ITS OWN.

approval to describe people who were free, broad-minded, generous—a humanistic attribute. Its political meaning began to form about a century later, and by the 19th century the dialogue between conservative and liberal would describe the politics of the day. In the United States, *conservative* was a designation political leaders shunned for a long time, but after the Second World War, *liberal* also became less and less popular.

Liberalism had a long and respectable run for more than two centuries, and its achievements were many. But more telling even than the rise and fall of liberalism in the 20th century had been the appeal of populism. Whereas liberalism was largely a matter of public opinion, populism has mostly been a result of popular sentiments, and a consequence of democracy. The cult of "the people" was always important to Americans, a central aspect of labor and socialist movements after the First World War. But over the past half century, it has become a rightist, not a leftist, factor. Thinkers such as Karl Marx wrote that the greatest and deepest concerns for people were economic and social, but they were wrong. As Hitler, Mussolini, and many others realized after the First World War, people's identities were and are more national than economic or social. *Popular* was a favorite word of Hitler's. For him, popular was national and national was popular. "I was a nationalist," he said, "but I was not a patriot."

Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America* that democracy had its perils, that it might become a despotism or a tyranny of its own. A counterbalance to such a prospect would be the influence of serious Americans dedicated to the cause of protecting the liberties described in the American Constitution. For him, these people would come from the legal and judicial communities. (Jefferson, Adams, and Madison spoke of the necessity of "educated classes.") Tocqueville seldom used *liberal* as a political adjective. He spoke of the "mentalities" of aristocracies and the *manières* or habits of the lower classes. The 19th-century liberal-conservative dialogue in America seldom applied, in part because of the American dislike of the word

conservative. But after about 1950 there came a change. The last American presidents who called themselves liberal were Franklin D. Roosevelt and occasionally Harry Truman. The use of the word declined. In 1951, the Republican leader Robert Taft still called himself an "old-fashioned liberal," but by 1960, the Republican president Dwight D. Eisenhower called himself a conservative. In 1956, the official platform of the Republican Party, which had not been internationalist before this, called for "the establishment of American air and naval bases all around the world." It had become the principal nationalist party.

Something else was coming about: the declining influence of American public opinion. In the 1920s, for example, Americans elected three Republican presidents at a time when American public opinion was more or less liberal, as represented among other things in the press. This function of public opinion continued until the Republican Party became populist in outlook, and also anti-liberal. Thereafter the importance of public opinion began to diminish, alongside the declining importance of newspapers.

In 2017, the Republican President Trump, stunned by the opposition he faced from the remnant big newspapers and the remnant intelligentsia and from other commentators, declared that he did not care about public opinion because the American people themselves stood behind him.

Five hundred years ago both the term and the importance of public opinion did not yet exist. Then, after about 200 years, they arose. The golden age of public opinion lasted about two centuries. Then began its decline, as also that of liberalism. In 2014 the prime minister of Hungary declared that his country was an illiberal (meaning anti-liberal) democracy. That was telling: democracy has survived liberalism.

These observations have limits. One is that, especially in Western Europe, the legacy and heritage of liberal democracy are still strong. Moreover, as Edmund Burke, one of the greatest conservative thinkers of the past (and a Whig), put it: "The public must never be regarded as incurable."

One deep and enduring result of the past five centuries has been historical consciousness. It was not until the 17th century that some people began to comprehend the great divisions of history as the ancient, medieval, and modern ages. One or two centuries later, history began to be taught in schools and universities as a kind of science, at least until it was recognized by some that science is part of history and not the other way around.

But beyond the end of the modern age we face an ominous and threatening condition. The past 500 years was, among other things, an age of books. Of course, books have been preserved and revered throughout the ages. But the widespread availability of printed matter and the attendant increase in readers made for a great

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Disenchantment with government spending led to this Tea Party demonstration at the California Capitol in Sacramento, on April 15, 2010.

age of books. Then, beginning in the late 20th century, the minds of hundreds of millions of people became the recipients of images rather than of printed words. Viewing overtook the old habit of reading.

Books will never disappear, but the results of this tremendous transformation are incalculable. Among them is the weakening of attention. Words and scriptures were the elements of human knowledge for thousands of years. What will happen to human knowledge after this decline in the importance of words? We cannot know. What we ought to know is that objective and subjective are incomplete categories, that our knowledge is participant, that we cannot separate the knower from the known, that what we know of the universe is and has been a product of our own making. ●

POETRY

Starbursts

LANGDON HAMMER

Philip Larkin's poem "High Windows" ends with one of modern poetry's indelible images. Brooding on how familiar "Bonds and gestures" have been "pushed to one side" by postwar society, leaving nothing to hold people together except a vague promise of happiness, Larkin points to the flash of light on "sun-comprehending glass, / And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows / Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless." The sun on those high windows (do they belong to corporate offices or to a 1960s tower block?) is an image of perfect emptiness. This is what heaven looks like without God in it.

Think of Christian Wiman's poem "Joy" as a reply to Larkin's image and the sublime desolation it evokes. His deep blue air is crossed by a contrail and rocked by a boom box. The sunlight, momentarily concentrated on "the roofer's tool," is suddenly "more itself" as it flashes back, like a coded message, into the "everywhere" around it. Larkin's poem is concerned with absence, Wiman's with presence. The sun here is an image of perfect fullness, a spiritual whole glimpsed by way of the brief, bright particular. The roofer's tool is to the sun what the little poem is to joy.

Wiman recently edited an anthology called *Joy: 100 Poems*. In his introduction to the book, he notes that joy is not a prime theme of modern literature, which foregrounds irony, absence, lack, suffering, and protest. And no wonder, when Joy is a brand name, and bumper stickers tell us not to "postpone" it. Wiman wants to reclaim joy and the affirmation of life it expresses. Joy, he says, has "revolutionary force." With joy, there is "always an element of having been *seized*" and a liberating "loss of self."

Wiman keeps coming back to images of people locked inside themselves. In "Land's End" he studies a tanker at anchor on the horizon, wondering what awful contents might be inside "that iron integument / mute and immured as any one man's heart." In "A McDonald's in Middle America," he sees a boy with a grotesque nose (he is "all proboscis"). His ugliness sets the boy apart even as he orders and eats like everyone else. Feeling for him, and sensing that the other customers feel for him too, Wiman sees the encounter as a lesson in "the many ways of grace / for which we've been, till now, remiss." It's a consoling conclusion. Then Wiman asks, "Or am I alone in this?" The rhyme (*remiss/this*) makes the self-critical question seem like its own answer.

But the mood in these poems is far from despairing. Wiman's comic touch with the people he depicts seems to suggest that, if nothing else, we have separateness in common. As the father in "Spirits" slides deeper into himself with dementia, he reaches a randy hand out for his nurse and orders "buttered cunt" for breakfast. Is he losing his mind or revealing it? Does the spirit survive the body? Who's to say? Clinking glasses, his son and the poet savor their own spirits ("whiskey, neat"), experiencing—"each in his own way," Wiman is careful to specify—"the tiny, divine starburst in the brain / by the gray, gray lake."

Spirits

My friend's father is forgetting the world
but he remembers sex.
He will reach right out and caress the breast of a nurse.
And one day instead of toast he demands cunt
and forever after, that is what he smacks for breakfast.

I for whom God is not entirely gone am moved to wonder once more
at the relation between chemistry and consciousness.
This belated tomcat candor, this crazed venereal rage,
was it, I wonder, during all those decades as a happy Catholic,
Little League baseball coach, hedge-clipping citizen, loving husband,
repressed? Or was there a short as in a storm the fuse box flashes sharply
and all the windows but one go dark?
Is my friend's father's mind divided like a cocktail,
one part grace and two parts loss, with a splash of wrath?
God the tears as his granddaughter toddles happily toward his bed
and Beelzebub the buttered cunt?

My friend doesn't worry about this aspect of things.
He was close to his father and is trying to find some way
of being close to the hole his father has become.
To the days that are, my friend says,
as we clink our drinks—whiskey, neat—and feel,
each in his own way, the tiny, divine starburst in the brain
by the gray, gray lake.

The Priest at the Pool Party

Bound with vows
like Ulysses strapped to the mast,
he drifts past
the white sirens of their thighs,

the scooped fruits and toothpicked meats
displayed on the table,
and is almost able
to taste the love a lack completes.

A McDonald's in Middle America

Never again a nose like this
will I among the living witness;
nor the bulldog's little orchid anus
as he goes among the Winnebagos
and Harleys sniffing piss
like a vintner; nor the chalk
shocks and plaid slabs
of all the topological atrocities
slathered in booths;
nor erstwhile, puerile truths
rising off the highway mind
like roadkill becoming its smell:
Absolutely unmixed attention
is prayer; Hell
is the inability to love;
Never is composed of nows.
Never again.
Fifteen, sixteen maybe, and ensouled,
no doubt, as any of us,
but to all of us all proboscis,
he orders, pays, and stands
among us with the same
unseeing acuity of great beauty, or fame,
while we gobble our awe,
and feel for him,
and ponder the many ways of grace
for which we've been, till now, remiss.
Or am I alone in this?

Joy

A jet's white track,
a radio's blare—

sunlight suddenly more itself
on the roofer's tool,

flashed back
into its everywhere.

Land's End

for Nate Klug

I must have seen it seems a life of times
the same gray tanker like a nickel brick
stalled on the stark immaculate and thought
what chromosomal quicksands and cosmic squander,
what slime desire and shanty violence,
what filthy infant fist of original zilch,
and the cacti dialects, rum-sludge gazes landward,
dream seeps, night shouts, happiness hardy as a louse!
must lie behind and in that iron integument
mute and immured as any one man's heart.

Drink

Where from this feeling of being alone?
This intoxication?

The Canterbury hops' attempts
to detach themselves

from what the world is,
appears to be?

Everyone is crazy about
being alone, with their favourite drink.

You ask, why this selfish craving
for aloneness, this feeling of
not being watched, ignored?

It seems this is the only thing
one needs in order to be happy.

The only other being by
putting oneself beside

the well-known mad-man-of-the-town
pissing in the street.

Bibhu Padhi is the author of 11 books of poetry. His poems have appeared in magazines and anthologies throughout the English-speaking world. He lives in Bhubaneswar, India.

Diamonds

THE STONES, SHIMMERING AND PRECIOUS, CONNECT A WRITER TO HER GENEROUS, ENIGMATIC MOTHER

SHEILA KOHLER

When my mother died of a heart attack in 1984, she did not leave me, her only remaining daughter, her considerable fortune—money that my hard-working father, a timber merchant in Johannesburg, had left her. The inheritance amounted to 12 million rand, which in those days was worth about $12 million. (Since then, the enormous decline of the rand has seemed inevitable to me, without my mother there to prop it up.) The money went to her two sisters, her brother, and their children. There may have been a provision made for a love child of her youth.

At the time, I accepted the loss without acrimony. I supposed that after the death of my sister, four years before, my mother had been unable to feel the same about the daughter who remained. Also, her own family, which had always clustered around her, aiding and abetting her luxurious, hard-drinking, pill-taking ways, had taken care of her, particularly before she died, and naturally expected to be remunerated.

We had always been different in every way, my mother and I: my mother so small, dark-haired, dark-eyed, and olive-skinned, with tiny hands and feet. She loved fine clothes, fine food, jewelry. She wanted to dance, to drink, to sleep through the hot afternoons. She loved to travel. Her highest compliment was to say someone was "full of beans." I took after my father, whose family came from Germany. I was taller, blonder, with light gray-blue eyes, and more interested in matters of the mind. From a young age, what I wanted to do was to write and to read. I was conscientious, diligent, and concerned for the world around me—Mother always feared that I might end up marrying a missionary.

She did, however, leave me her jewelry. It was sent to me some months after her death. I remember driving to the New York docks on my own to find this treasure,

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though other details remain hazy. Did I borrow my husband's car? Why did I not take someone with me? Why was the jewelry not sent by air? Or by courier? Why by cargo ship? Was this the cheapest way?

Though my mother had died in March, on my youngest daughter's 16th birthday, it was now midsummer, a hot, humid, airless day in New York. After driving around for a while down narrow streets, lost, as I so often am in a car, stopping to ask various people where to go, I parked in a sliver of shade and, upon entering a dusty barracks-like building, was met by a sudden blast of gloom and cold air. How could my mother's precious jewelry have ended up in such a place? I wondered as I handed over my driver's license to a customs official. Would the diamonds all be there? I presumed that the accountant, a Mr. Perks, had gone to the bank and packed everything up and

sent it to me. I imagined him with his prim little mustache and his prudish air, carefully counting out the contents of the Craven "A" cigarette tin in which Mother kept her jewelry. It was he who had suggested, when I became pregnant at 19, that I go to England with one of my aunts and give up the baby for adoption.

My mother once said, "Come quickly when I die. Come before they rip the rings from my fingers." But I had not been there when she died. When I called from New York, toward the end of her life, none of the relatives who clustered so eagerly around her in Johannesburg had suggested she was dying. When I asked one of my aunts if I should come, she said that my mother was perfectly comfortable and there was no need to rush. I had not held her in my arms. No one had held her in their arms. When my middle daughter, Cybele, and I flew out for the funeral, I learned to my eternal regret that my mother had died in a hospital attended only by an unknown hospital employee.

Eventually, the customs official casually handed me a small parcel wrapped in brown paper, as though it were nothing more than a packet of cheap sweets. I stood there gazing down at the thing in my hands, amazed that those South African stones within, which had been found so long ago in the Big Hole mine in Kimberley, had somehow managed to make their way safely to New York City aboard a big ship filled with great quantities of cargo. I drove home with the packet on the seat beside me, glancing at it from time to time to make sure it was still there.

When I opened the package, I found a neat list of the items, and the jewelry itself, still in that familiar home—the Craven "A" cigarette case. My mother had always kept the tin in her darkened bedroom, hidden in a drawer at the back of her kidney-shaped dressing table, with its frilled skirt and three-way mirror. There they now shimmered, Mother's jewels, which she would thread through our hair, or slip onto our fingers and toes, while still in her nylon negligee, when my sister and I climbed into bed with her on bright Johannesburg mornings. These were the same stones we would see when our parents came into the nursery to say goodnight to us, in the blue evening shadows, my mother sparkling in her sequins, the pendant with its three large diamonds glimmering between her alabaster breasts.

Some of the best pieces of the jewelry came from my mother's father, who had been a diamond evaluator at De Beers in the early days. I always wondered how a man in so modest a position had access to such fine stones. Were the employees given diamonds as bonuses? Was he a particularly skilled evaluator? Were they all acquired legitimately? Had he slipped a precious few into his pocket?

I remembered a story Mother told of one of the largest of the stones, the Cullinan, I believe, the Star of Africa, the uncut stone being, she said, well over 3,000 carats. The evaluators supposedly threw it around the office like a ball. It was a diamond that was

given to Edward VII for his birthday and later cut into several smaller stones.

For a while, I kept all of the diamonds in the bank, including that pendant, a particularly rare blue diamond said to bring bad luck, and a large blue-white diamond pin. Eventually, I decided to sell the most precious stones at one of the large auction houses: the pendant, the blue diamond, the diamond pin, and a large fine yellow diamond. I asked Cybele to go with me to Christie's. The offices were not far from the bank, and my tall, long-legged daughter, always energetic, suggested we walk the few blocks.

"Do you think that's wise?" I asked.

"No one will suspect we are carrying jewelry!" she said, grinning and patting her many pockets. Looking at her in her worn blue jeans, old sneakers, and grubby orange anorak, I could only agree. None of my three daughters values appearances as much as their grandmother did—she who never emerged onto the street without her pearls, her high heels, her flowered hat, and her kid gloves. So we strode down the sidewalk side by side, my daughter carrying the precious stones in the pockets of her anorak, passing through the dangerous streets of New York.

Cybele pulled the stones out one by one, like a magician producing rabbits from a series of small hats. The employee stared with his mouth agape as the scintillate diamonds emerged.

At Christie's, a neat, dark-haired man dressed in black greeted us. Shyly, apologetically, stumbling over my words, I dared to whisper, "We have some, well ..."

"Yes, some?" he asked impatiently.

"Some stones we would like to sell," I confessed. (I had been taught very young that it was bad form to ever mention money or anything associated with it.) The young man looked us up and down, sighed, waved us away to a bench, and told us to wait. He kept us waiting there for a long time. We sat quite happily, the diamonds forgotten, chatting. Cybele, who had recently married and had a baby, is profoundly deaf but an expert reader of faces and lips and an excellent listener.

Finally, the employee ushered us into a small cubicle. He stood staring, thin lips pursed, frowning with something approaching disdain, as my daughter fumbled around her pockets for the diamonds. "Well?" he said.

Cybele pulled the stones out one by one, like a magician producing rabbits from a series of small hats, and set them on the table before us. The skeptical employee now stood staring with his mouth agape as the scintillate, many-colored diamonds emerged. He looked at the stones and then at us in wonder.

He must have asked for some sort of papers or attestation of the stones' provenance, but all I remember is the way his pale face seemed lit up by the light of the diamonds, the radical change in his demeanor (he was smiling now), and his sudden haste as he

plucked up the stones with enthusiasm, and then ushered us quickly out of the premises. Not long afterward, they were sold at auction. I was not present, but Cybele was there, holding her own little girl on her lap, and watching the numbers light up on the board. The jewelry was sold for a sum that enabled each of my three daughters to buy or make a considerable down payment on a home.

I did not miss these stones initially. After all, I did have other jewelry that my mother had given me when she was alive. She would easily part with her belongings and was always happy to take us along on her extensive and expensive travels around the world. Besides, I had no occasion in my life as a writer and teacher of fiction to wear such extravagant jewelry. When I once wore one of the rings, an irate student in a writing class said something snide about the professor looking rather like a jewelry shop. After that, I never wore it to class again.

One summer evening in 1978, we had been sitting on a terrace in Sardinia—my husband, my three daughters, my mother, and I—the adults drinking gin and tonics and chatting amicably, listening to the cicadas sing. It was a place my mother would take the whole family to stay every August, escaping the South African winter, a beautiful whitewashed hotel with spacious rooms and brightly tiled bathrooms, sprawling over acres of rolling green grounds going down to the sparkling turquoise sea. Mornings we were all able to take the hotel boat to a long white beach and swim out safely in the warm Mediterranean, to eat grilled fish in the restaurant overlooking the gardens. During the warm nights, we would walk through the low hills with the scent of rare herbs in the air. I remember trying to teach my deaf daughter to sing "Doe, a deer, a female deer, ray, a drop of golden sun," as we walked in the gloaming through the hills, with me waving my arms around wildly to convey the different tones.

While the shadows of the gum trees lengthened, we all talked and sipped happily. I have a photo of us there, my tall, blond American husband, my three little girls, one blonder than the next, and myself as a slim woman in a white dress, my hair with its dark blond streaks catching the sun. My long legs are visible as I sit in a wicker chair beside my mother in her mauve frock, her diamonds sparkling on her hands.

Staring at the yellow and white diamonds on her ring finger, my husband, always sensitive to beautiful things, said, "Moses,"—he always called my mother Moses because of the way she laid down the law—"that is such a beautiful ring."

I had always loved that unusual ring. I still have never seen one quite like it. My mother's father had given it to her, his pet, whom he called Kitty for her soft hazel eyes. It had two particularly fine stones, which he had discovered and decided to have placed side by side, the white diamond setting off the brilliance of the yellow.

"You take it, darling," my mother said, her dark eyes shining, and took the ring off

her tiny finger and put it on mine, giving me a kiss on the cheek.

I wore it for many years. It was almost a part of my body; I would wear it all day, only reluctantly taking it off at night. I received many compliments on it, the most common one being, "He must love you very much"—this comment always accompanied by a suggestive glance and a complicit smile. I would shake my head and say it was actually my mother who had given it to me.

From time to time, I would have my hands manicured at a spa not far from our Manhattan home. The manicurist, usually a young Korean woman, would always ask before she massaged my hands with cream if I would like to take off my ring. "No, thank you," I said every time, afraid of losing touch with this precious part of my past.

I kept them at the bank for many years, not trusting any jeweler to fix the ring, always afraid to lose the precious stones. They lay there in the dark unseen, unworn, unknown.

One afternoon, as the young woman was rubbing energetically at my hand, she looked down and asked, "What's that yellow thing?"

The yellow diamond had come lose from its setting and had landed on the table, where her sharp eyes had spotted it. "My diamond!" I said, aghast, plucking it up quickly. Later, I would use this moment in my fiction, imagining various outcomes of the scenario. In reality, I thanked her profusely and gave her a large tip for her honesty, or her ignorance, and put the ring and the dislodged stone, wrapped in tissue paper, in a safe at the bank. I kept them there for many years, not trusting any jeweler to fix the ring, always afraid to lose the precious stones. They lay there in the dark unseen, unworn, unknown.

Recently, needing the money for a granddaughter's college tuition, I took some of my remaining jewelry to a jeweler who had been recommended to me. He looked over the rings I'd brought, then unwrapped the yellow diamond and the white one still in its setting, and said, "These two are probably worth more than all the others put together." So I sold him those two diamonds for what seemed a good price. When he handed me the check, I must have looked sad, because he asked me, "Are you not happy with the price?"

"It is always sad to part with the past," I said, thinking of all those beautiful stones that my mother had once worn and given me with such generosity over the years, now gone forever. "But I am sure my mother would have been glad to pay a year of college for a great-grandchild." And I remembered Mother handing me the white and yellow ring, with a kiss on the cheek, as we sat side by side, so different and yet ultimately so similar, both enjoying the sunshine of a summer's afternoon in a whitewashed hotel by the sparkling Sardinian sea. ●

In Search of Lost Travels

HOW REMEMBRANCES FROM FAR AWAY STEEL THE SOUL

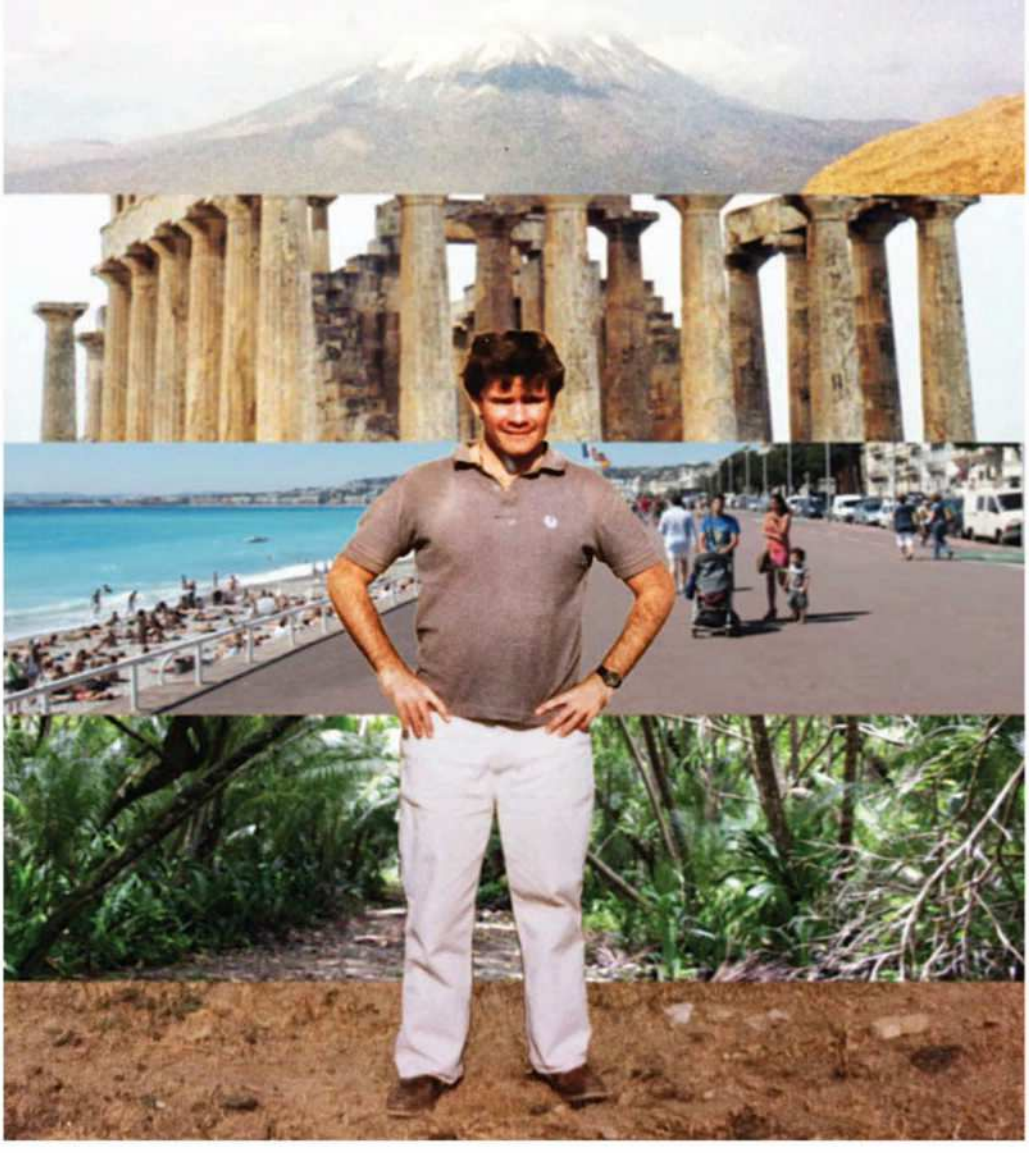
JEFFREY TAYLER

FOR THE LONGEST TIME, especially when traveling, I kept a journal, filling in the pages of spiral-bound notebooks covered in blue-and-white or green-and-white cardboard. These proved a bounty when I began to write for a living. I could glean from them long-forgotten but useful (for writing purposes) details from trips I made 10, 20, and now I can say, with some bafflement, even more than 30 years ago. As time passed, I would occasionally pore over them in search of my former self—a naïve, romantic young man determined to set out abroad, script his own life, never submit to convention, and savor the now. A young man whose appetite for wonder would be difficult to sate. Could the world have once seemed so grand and surprising to me?

I've now reached middle age, and I've managed to live my dream, living abroad and traveling to dozens of countries, mostly funded by magazines for which I've written or in the course of researching my books. But my journals have lost their hold on me. I discovered this quite recently, when I mislaid the first one I ever kept as a *voyageur*. I shrugged. Why would I need it now? I don't require any supporting texts to conjure memories from my travels. In my mind, I can re-create vivid vignettes from times spent all over the world. This mental magic lantern is my private treasure, the most valuable thing I possess. As an atheist who believes in no divinely ordained purpose to life, I see the point of existence as the accumulation (without causing harm to others) of experiences, of both the natural and the human world. No "bucket list" for me. I've lived it.

These wayfaring remembrances are nothing less than who I am; I would not be me

Jeffrey Tayler is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic* and the author of seven books, including *Facing the Congo, Angry Wind,* and *River of No Reprieve: Descending Siberia's Waterway of Exile, Death, and Destiny.*



THE AUTHOR IN 1987; COURTESY OF JEFFREY TAYLER

without them. One of my earliest recollections from childhood is of a road trip. I see myself as a scared little boy, huddled in the back seat of his parents' boxy 1960s Oldsmobile, en route to Ocean City, Maryland, looking out into the autumnal night sky. AM radio signals crackle in and out, bringing news of what then seemed to me impossibly faraway lands—Ohio, Michigan, Arkansas. I was often afraid of car travel, and distracted myself by imagining, in the dark, the exotic neighborhoods of Cleveland, the bizarre byways of Detroit, the alluringly alien precincts of Indianapolis. From then on, I've been drawn to the melancholy—to the moon silvering the stony, sweeping steppes of eastern Anatolia, to the nocturnal winds soughing through the palms on Curaçao's westernmost cape, to the waves of the Indian Ocean breaking in the night over the white sands of Oman's southern coast. Visiting these places has changed me.

But just as often, I have been entranced by light. I open my eyes, awakening to salty Aegean breezes wafting in through my open window, to the glow cast on the wall by the rising sun. I'm on the island of Paros, in the Cyclades, sometime in the mid-1980s. My room is a Spartan whitewashed chamber atop a grocery store, with a sand-speckled

floor and a single starched sheet on a mattress as bedding. (Summer temperatures rarely drop enough there to require more.) I rise and look out onto the azure-domed churches, the thatched-roof windmills, the pale blue wash of the sea with dark islands looming on the horizon. The mists gradually lift to reveal a brilliant vista. It is no cliché to speak of the glory of Grecian light, the radiance of the sun that once warmed agoras and temples and stoas, the sources of Western civilization.

Elsewhere, light has been a burden, even an enemy. I see myself one evening in 2000, lying inside my tent in Morocco's Anti-Atlas Mountains, marveling at the pattering of rain on the yellow nylon walls. Outside are argan trees, three braying Arabian camels, and my two exhausted Bedouin guides. The cool, the clouds, even the foliage in the grove give succor to us all. The scorching trials of the desert have receded, and only windswept passes, mesas, and the ocean lie ahead. For three grueling months, while gathering material for my third book, *Glory in a Camel's Eye,* I have been trekking down the Draa Valley in the Saharan badlands of southernmost Morocco—months that have almost undone me with dehydration, nausea, and dizziness. But in the mountains, the climate has shifted unexpectedly from desert to moderate. I step outside to luxuriate in the cool, to hold my face to the rain—a *podarok sud'by* ("gift of fate"), as Russians would say. Within a week we will reach our terminus, the Atlantic coast, just north of Tan-Tan, and stare out into the ocean, mesmerized by the waves, the screaming gulls. The agony has passed, deliverance is near.

This memory melds into another, primal one. I'm staring again out into empty maritime expanses, into a gray sea and a limpid sky, but it's 30 years earlier. I'm on the beach at Ocean City, overcome with wonder, and asking my father what country is across the water. "Portugal," he replies. "Or maybe Morocco." Morocco! How exotic it sounds!

THE ALIEN HAS ALWAYS stirred me. It is November 1983. I huddle under my overcoat, a heavy scarf around my neck, as my train chugs south through the Carpathians, with moonlight glinting in frozen puddles beside the tracks, and coarse-knuckled peasant men and women, bundled up and sullen, eyeing me suspiciously from seats opposite mine. I see the belfries and steeples of Sighişoara's churches, and the unlit streets below blanketed in snow. I see the long lines in front of food stores, I smell the alcohol on the breaths of passersby, I wipe the coal soot off my cheeks. Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania, brutal, impoverished, and isolated.

A month later, I see a rickety Bulgarian train from sooty, still-socialist Plovdiv weaving its way out of the snowy Rhodope Mountains, crossing the bare plains of Turkish Thrace, and pulling, in the evening, into Istanbul, a mélange of color and light, of hawking vendors and begging children and honking taxis, with the *Allahu akbar!* of the call to prayer—something I have never heard before—rising over the din of the traffic. Soon,

I stand marveling at the play of the street lamp light on the Golden Horn's black currents. But as I stroll through the city that night, I cannot relax. A military coup has taken place a few years before, tanks are stationed on Taksim Square, and helmeted soldiers in armored personnel carriers rumble down the almost deserted streets. One stops, and an officer jumps out to ask for my papers. Fierce-browed, but smiling and polite, he tells me to return to my hotel, seeming more concerned for my safety than anything else. It never occurs to me that I could have been shot or arrested, if only by mistake.

A year earlier, I hear the steam hiss in the night as brakes are released, the metallic creaking of the couplers, and the dull roar of wheels rolling over rails as my train crosses the Greek border near Florina into socialist Yugoslavia's Macedonia; the next morning, I see the waters of Lake Ohrid, still and green, beneath the peaks of Albania—in 1982, a country still completely closed off from the world, suffering under the vicious Enver Hoxha communist dictatorship. I listen to myself talking to a young Yugoslav of Albanian origin who has accosted me by the waterside: in addition to his mother tongue, he says, he speaks Serbian, Macedonian, Turkish, and English. Later, in Kosovo, I see donkey-drawn carts in the mud, veiled women, skull-capped men, and minarets. Curious children and angry adults, both Serbs and Albanians, are what I remember most. I am at once in Europe and decidedly not. Something bad will happen here, I think.

An officer asks for my papers. Fierce-browed, but smiling and polite, he tells me to return to my hotel. It never occurs to me that I could have been shot or arrested, if only by mistake.

Fear seizes me more than once during my peregrinations, especially after I move to Russia. It is 1993. I watch the scraggly trees shrink as the truck on which I've hitched a ride grinds up stony passes along the Kolyma Route, heading toward Yakutsk, into the tableau of death and desolation that was, during the Stalin decades, gulag land. I see chasms beneath us, frozen rivers, and I hear the wheels slipping on the ice, my driver grunting as he struggles to keep control.

Months later, with an 8,325-mile trip across Russia and Ukraine behind me, I settle into an apartment in Moscow to write my first book, *Siberian Dawn,* while the city undergoes a harrowing transformation from a Soviet state to something new and unknown. On a sunny October morning, I am standing on the banks of the Moscow River. I have just seen Yeltsin's tanks thundering down the Arbat, soldiers sitting atop them, their rifles at the ready. I feel the concussive shock waves as the tanks open fire on the Supreme Soviet; I cringe, duck, and run with the crowd from gunfire raining down from rooftops. I see the paint-chipped walls of my one-room apartment, the zebra-trunked birches outside my picture window and the blazing orange leaves behind them. At night, I hear automatic

weapons firing from near the police checkpoint a few blocks away, where officers are attempting to impose a curfew in support of Yeltsin's efforts to suppress the rebellion. Fear, gunshots, screaming, fear, sleepless nights, and more fear.

But three years later, in environs that could not be more different from those of Russia, fear loses its hold on me. For my second book, *Facing the Congo,* I take a cargo barge from Kinshasa 1,100 miles up the Congo River, deep into the heart of tribal Zaire. The barge's owner, a boisterous, gimlet-eyed colonel from Mobutu's secret services, graciously allows me to pitch my mosquito net atop his cabin on the pusher-boat, where I could be alone, separated from the hundreds of impoverished passengers huddled fully exposed to the elements on the craft's main deck. But I'm nonetheless paralyzed, even nauseated, with anxiety, dreading arrival in Kisangani, where I plan to start canoeing back downriver, alone, to Kinshasa. Relief comes at nightfall, when at the height of my despair, I gaze out into the heavens, where a meteor shower streaks across the night sky against a backdrop of brilliant stars. Never have I seen such a clear sky—typical of the Equator, I soon discover. Contemplating its splendor, night after night, alone on the rooftop, I come to truly comprehend a consoling truth: the Earth is a speck of dust floating in a cavernous universe; and I, on that speck, merely a tiny fleck, with an equally tiny fate. With that realization, my troubles, my fears about the dangers ahead begin to abate. They soon return full-force once I begin paddling down the huge river with my guide from the Lokele people. (The colonel has persuaded me that going it alone would be tantamount to suicide.) But I emerge from those months transformed. Nothing I do later will ever frighten me as much again.

Alone on the rooftop, I come to comprehend a consoling truth: the Earth is a speck of dust floating in a cavernous universe; and I, on that speck, a tiny fleck, with an equally tiny fate.

When I arrive back in Moscow, I fight the urge to drop down and kiss the soil. I am beginning to feel at home here, a city that carries an outsize reputation as a dark, shady, and dangerous place. But compared to Zaire, it has, at least for me, become a haven.

More than a decade later, and a few years after my mother's sudden death, I am flying to Bogotá, the city in which she spent the happiest years of her life. She had always wanted me to go there, but during her lifetime I never did. Now, researching a biography, I am following the life-route of Simón Bolívar. The fate of this tireless, romantic 19th-century revolutionary and statesman, who freed five countries from Spanish rule and covered more miles on horseback than Alexander the Great, moves me to re-create the wanderings of his two-decade campaign of liberation.

Before my plane begins its descent into Bogotá, in my mind's eye I see the Colombian oil painting hanging on my mother's living-room wall: verdant mountains lathered in fog, crisscrossed in their lower reaches by an ascending dirt road; the rain-soaked stone churches and belfries of the historic center. This is exactly the vision before me as I drive into town. The soft manners and sympathetic eyes of the Colombians bespeak the Latin kindness my mother always missed back in the States. Her loneliness in the States, her wistful talk of Bogotá, first set my imagination wandering abroad, as if I were destined to discover my home somewhere else.

From Caracas and Bogotá, Bolívar led his army south, so that's where I go. I see black Ecuadoran volcanoes, their summits lost in thunderclouds. I see myself gasping for breath in Puno, at an altitude of almost 13,000 feet, on the Peruvian flank of Lake Titicaca. All night, barrages of rain batter my window. I see myself in my frigid hotel room, sleeping fitfully beneath insufficient blankets, my breath puffing white in the pale light from the street lamps outside.

I see myself the next morning, aboard a minibus to the Bolivian border, as I trundle down the grassy Altiplano plateau in the company of Aymara-speaking indigenes. As the road rises ever higher, the grass yellows, here and there dotted with clumps of ichu and tola shrub. Cloud shadows trail across the plain and over the treeless hills beyond. Indian cowherds and men in black fedoras, their shoulders draped with red-brown ruanas, lean on canes outside their mud huts. Their wizened faces and shrunken builds tell of a wretched life in tough terrain, where, during the winters of June through August, nighttime temperatures drop to minus 12 degrees Fahrenheit. Few places are more alien, and alienating, than the Altiplano.

I needed to experience the Altiplano, and Zaire, and everywhere else I've traveled; I needed to live through them. Reminiscences from these trips make me realize that I'm comfortable living in many places, but not in every place. In Moscow, I have indeed found my home. It's not only where my wife is, but also where I do my best writing. It's the capital of the land that, in fact, made me a writer.

Shortly after my return from the Altiplano, I see myself with Tatyana, my wife, huddling on a winter night beneath blankets at a table outside at a café, on the Promenade des Anglais, Nice's historic waterfront. (The same waterfront saw a horrific terrorist attack on Bastille Day, two summers ago. I happened to be in Nice that night, in a hotel nearby, but luckily had decided to stay in.) We're the only ones not to take seats inside. The storm coming off the Mediterranean thrashes the palms, batters the sea, drives away strollers. The beach ahead is empty, the streets deserted.

Above I see no stars, of course. But the lessons the stars taught me on the Congo remain with me still, and the storm-churned sea, in its own way, howls of the beyond. My memories, the ones unpublished, in any case, will last as long as I do. And then, one day, they, with me, will vanish into the void. ●

Home, Home On the Road

HIS FATHER'S LONG-TIME OBSESSION WITH RECREATIONAL VEHICLES LEADS A WRITER TO HIT THE HIGHWAY

DAVID OWEN

My parents' friends became increasingly concerned. Late in the afternoon, they called the Colorado State Patrol and asked whether anyone had reported a large recreational vehicle lying at the bottom of a ravine. It was the summer of 1967. The day before, my parents, my sister, and my brother had picked me up at camp, near Florissant, and we'd swapped our Buick station wagon for a rented Dodge Travco, a stogy-shaped, 26-foot-long motor home. (Johnny Cash toured in Travcos; William Shatner bought one in 1979.) The next morning, we set out for Crested Butte, where my parents' friends had built a vacation house. My father had trouble getting up Monarch Pass, then worse trouble getting down. The grade was steep, and the Travco's molded fiberglass body caught the wind like a kite. My mother told me recently that my father wiped his hands on his thighs so many times, trying to keep his grip on the steering wheel, that he ruined his khakis. Something in the Travco's engine broke during our descent, and we spent that night parked at the curb across from a garage in Gunnison. After we'd gone to bed, blue liquid from the sewage tank crept across the floor. My sister, my brother, and I sat quietly on the folded-down bunk bed while our parents mopped up the mess and spoke to each other in harsh tones. The next day, after a mechanic had repaired the engine, we stopped at a campground to refill the freshwater tank. As my father was topping it off, I pointed out to him a small sign that said the water was unsafe for drinking.

David Owen is a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and a contributing editor of *Golf Digest* and *Popular Mechanics*. His most recent book is *Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River*.

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID HERBICK

Vacation disasters make enduring memories. A few years before, in a tourist cabin near the Lake of the Ozarks, my sister and I had whined until our parents put a quarter in the Magic Fingers mattress-vibrator in one of the beds. We got tired of the shaking and the high-pitched metallic grating almost immediately, but the control box had no off switch and was wired into the wall. The shaking probably didn't last all night, as it does in my memory, but it made a permanent impression. I remember nothing else about that trip.

For my mother, our Travco problems were not unwelcome because they seemed certain to put an end to my father's fascination with RVs—which had arisen suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, and was not shared by her. For my father, though, the trip had the opposite effect. RVs are the semidirect descendants of covered wagons: they embody the age-old American values of liberty, heedless optimism, self-sufficiency, and get-the-hell-out-of-my-way. Our Colorado disasters, for him, were challenges,

not defeats. All he needed was a bigger, more powerful machine.

He eventually owned three RVs, each larger than the last, and each called the Bus. The first was delivered to our home in Kansas City by a man who had driven it from Ohio, and my father impressed him by smoothly backing it up our driveway in one try. We finally got a color TV in our house a couple of years later because the second Bus had one and my mother put her foot down. My father hired a man to pour a concrete parking slab near our garage, and then made him repour it after deciding it wasn't perfectly level. My parents used the Bus for weekend outings with friends, for winter trips to Florida after my father had retired, and for tailgating at Chiefs games, both home and away. The third Bus had features that facilitated the genial alcoholism of my father's circle of friends: a built-in ice-making machine, pull-out holders for liquor bottles, and nonskid ashtrays everywhere.

I was occasionally allowed to take the first and second Buses out by myself, when I was in high school. The one inviolable rule, my father told me, was no pot onboard. He worried that if the police caught me, they would rip apart the interior looking for more. I'd pick up my girlfriend at her house, and we'd go for a ride in the country, or fill most of the back row at a drive-in movie. The Bus was ideal for parking on suburban streets late at night because a cop couldn't reach high enough to shine a flashlight through a window: he had to knock. My parents brought the Bus to my college graduation, and we watched Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn give the commencement address, in the rain, on the TV above the windshield while drinking bloody marys with one of my classmates and his parents. My best man and I slept in the Bus the night before I got married.

The third Bus was custom-built for my father in 1979 by Newell Coach, a privately owned company in Miami, Oklahoma. (The second Bus was a Newell, too, but he bought that one used.) Newell—as I discovered one day last year while avoiding work by idly searching for things on Google—was not only still around but celebrating 50 years of being in business. I emailed the owner, who remembered my father and sent me several items from his old file: an annotated blueprint, some correspondence from the late '70s and early '80s, a copy of the invoice. He also invited me to attend Newell's half-century anniversary rally to be held that April at the company's headquarters.

My father died in 2004, but my mother still lives in Kansas City. I flew there, then borrowed her car and drove 170 miles south along the Missouri-Kansas border, a trip my father had made many times. I bought gas in Louisburg, Kansas, a small town where, in 1980, he stored copies of insurance policies, investment records, and other documents, plus a few gold coins, in a safe-deposit box at a local bank. I think his idea was that in a national emergency of some kind, my siblings and I would make our way to eastern Kansas, be relieved to find the Louisburg Bank still open for business, grab our birth certificates and the Krugerrands, and flee to safety, perhaps in the Bus. (The bank no longer exists; I don't know about the Krugerrands.)

Newell builds just 26 coaches a year. I'd seen photographs on the company's web-

THE DRIVER WAS SITTING SO HIGH ABOVE THE ROAD THAT I HAD TO LEAN OVER MY STEERING WHEEL TO MAKE OUT HIS FACE.

site, but in all the years since my father owned his, I'd never spotted one on the road until I approached the outskirts of Commerce, Oklahoma, just north of Miami. Newells were now selling for roughly $2 million, or about 15 times what my father paid for his, and although the Bus had always seemed enormous to me, modern Newells are vastly larger: 45 feet long, compared with my father's 36, and a little more than 13 feet tall. Still, when I saw one bearing down on me on Highway 69, I wasn't prepared for the scale of the thing. The driver was sitting so high above the road that I had to lean over my steering wheel to make out his face, and as he passed me, at 60 or 70 miles an hour, I could feel my mother's Honda Accord being drawn into his vortex.

In 1967, L. K. Newell, a small-time entrepreneur from northeastern Oklahoma, traveled to El Monte, California, to pick up a new motor home he'd bought from Streamline, a company founded a decade earlier by two designers from Airstream, whose aircraft-inspired aluminum travel trailers are still instantly recognizable. Newell returned two weeks later with a list of complaints and suggestions, and Streamline's owner told him that if he knew so much, he ought to buy the company's motor-home division and run it himself. They made a deal that day, and Newell moved production into a building in Miami in which he had once manufactured concrete blocks. During the next few years, he made several transformative innovations, including switching from front-mounted gasoline engines (as in the Travco) to rear-mounted diesel engines (as in Greyhound buses); strengthening the chassis by engineering it like a steel-truss bridge, a change that also created a capacious "basement" under the living area; and allowing virtually unlimited interior customization. Newell's current owners, Karl and Alice Blade, discovered the company in 1979 while driving through Oklahoma on their way back to Mount Vernon, Washington—where Karl owned a Chevrolet dealership—in a new motor home they'd just bought, from a different manufacturer, in Fort Valley, Georgia.

Newell's anniversary rally attracted three dozen owners and coaches. They had the

exclusive use of the RV park at Downstream Casino Resort, in Quapaw, about 11 miles northeast of Miami, and they didn't care if their parking spaces weren't flat because modern Newells, unlike my father's, are self-leveling. The group included a former adviser to Newt Gingrich who became a Mexican citizen a dozen years ago because he felt he could no longer live in the United States; a couple who own several beautician schools and who travel with four Segways, one of which the husband rides when he walks their dog; a retired Army officer and a former federal employee who bought their Newell used, for substantially less than $2 million; a retired dentist and his wife who live in their Newell full time and don't miss owning a house; a couple who built nine paved RV hookups on their 40-acre property to accommodate visits by friends; and a 90-year-old Arkansas billionaire, now on his third cochlear implant, who has created a private museum dedicated to his own life and once proposed leading a convoy of Newells from Moscow to Vladivostok. Karl Blade told me that a typical buyer is a guy in his 60s who just sold his company, but there are plenty of atypical buyers, among them a member of the Saudi royal family who ordered his coach with a service entrance for the driver. (He wasn't at the rally.)

On my second day in Miami, after breakfast in a tent at the RV park, we rode to the plant in chartered buses and divided into groups for tours. Building a typical RV, I was told, takes about a week, but building a Newell takes at least six months, mainly because most of the elements are created from scratch by Newell's 160 employees. (When my father first saw his third Bus, it was a set of drawings and a pile of steel on the plant floor—a cherished memory for him, as for many Newell owners.) My tour started in the chassis department, where one of the company's four welders was giving demonstrations. A finished chassis weighs 10 tons and looks like the frame of a miniature skyscraper lying on its side. Every Newell has a microprocessor-controlled suspension and a power-assisted steering system (developed by Newell and TRW Automotive) that uses hydraulics and electric servo motors to compensate automatically for things like side winds and crowned roadways. At low speeds, two of the four rear wheels turn in opposition to the front wheels, shortening the turning radius to almost station-wagon length. "My coach drives like my Lexus," a rally participant told me. Painting the exterior takes 11 days.

The largest single cohort in the Newell customer base is racecar drivers. (Newell owners have won the Indianapolis 500 more than two dozen times.) We toured the interior of a coach being built for a NASCAR star. It had four flat-screen TVs, including a 75-incher in the sitting area and a 62-incher in the master bedroom (which was convertible into a playroom for the owner's two young children). It also had underlit, translucent kitchen counters, hand-painted wallpaper, and two ceramic-tiled showers. With all four of its drawerlike slideouts extended, its interior living space was 450 square feet—"almost as big as my house," one of the guys working on it said. Racecar drivers hardly ever drive their own coaches; they

The evolution of the RV, from top: a Dodge Travco, a vintage Newell, and a modern Newell. The author's father "eventually owned three RVs, each larger than the last, and each called the Bus."

use them as family living quarters during races and pay other people to move them from track to track. One of the many reasons they like Newells, an executive told me, is that the storage area in the chassis basement is large enough to hold a folding motorized golf cart. "As soon as a race is over, they jump into their golf cart and race to their helicopter, then race to their plane," he said. "Everything for them is a race."

A Newell dashboard contains a mile and a quarter of wiring, which is organized in multicolored skeins and assembled, before installation, on a steel frame called a dash loom. The control systems are so complex that new owners spend a week in Miami learning how everything works—and at some point during that week they take a solo test run, often to Branson, Missouri, and back, a four-hour round trip. "Our manufacturing process just grew by itself to what it is," Blade told me. "If someone bought us out today, I wouldn't be able to re-create it somewhere else. The engineering alone, to get it right, would take years." Newells come with a two-year warranty that covers everything, and even owners whose coaches are out of warranty often return to Miami for repairs and tune-ups—partly

because they don't trust anyone else to touch their machines, and partly because, as was true of my father, they love hanging around the plant.

My father sold the third and final Bus in 1986, when he was two years younger than I am now, and my mother wasn't sorry to see it go, although by that point she'd become a semiconvert. I occasionally feel the gentle tug of the paternal RV gene. In 2006, my wife and I rented a 25-foot camper in Las Vegas for what we figured would be the last big family vacation. We visited the North Rim of the Grand Canyon and most of the national parks in southern Utah, and we had such a good time that ever since then, we've talked about taking an RV trip again. And this past spring we finally did, although instead of taking our kids, who are grownups now, we took our dog.

We rented another 25-footer in Maryland and drove almost all the way down Skyline Drive and the Blue Ridge Parkway—from the northern end of Shenandoah National Park to Asheville, North Carolina—and then almost all the way back up, plus side trips. At the KOA campground in Fancy Gap, Virginia, an elderly man from Maine stopped by our site, where we were reading at a picnic table, and told us quite a bit about his cat. We also had a (very) long talk with a man who told us (all) about a bad flat tire that he and his wife had had a few days before: no more cheap tires for him! One of the many things my wife (surprisingly) likes about RV campgrounds is that almost everyone acts as though they already sort of know almost everyone else, making it possible to walk up to a stranger's RV in a way that you would never walk up to a stranger's house. But the best thing about traveling in an RV is all the things you don't have to deal with: airports, departure times, lost luggage, airports, missed connections, Ziploc bags, miniature toiletries, flight cancellations, airports. When you feel like going, you go; when you feel like stopping, you stop. If one of you is a lark and the other is an owl, the lark can get up, make coffee, unhook everything, and shove off while the owl is still sacked out on the full-size bed in the back.

The Blue Ridge Parkway is now probably my third or fourth favorite thing about America. Construction began during the Great Depression, as a way to put people to work, and to an extent that is almost inconceivable, most of it looks the way it must have looked back then, during the era when traveling by automobile was still "motoring." One of our problematic traits, as a nation, is our history of expressing our love of the outdoors primarily through internal combustion, but when you're in the right vehicle on the right road, you can understand where all that comes from. The parkway is 469 miles long—574 if you count Skyline Drive, which is virtually continuous with it. There are no shoulders, few signs, no streetlights, no gas stations, no fast-food restaurants. The exits are miles and miles apart. Grass and wildflowers grow right up to the edge of the pavement. Most of the guardrails are hand-laid stone. You almost never

THE BEST THING ABOUT TRAVELING IN AN RV IS ALL THE THINGS YOU DON'T HAVE TO DEAL WITH. WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE GOING, YOU GO.

see a power line, even far away. The route mostly follows the crest of the Blue Ridge, and from some of the overlooks you feel as though you are looking over the edge of the Earth. A friend had told me that an RV was a poor choice for our trip because the road is so sinuous, but the speed limit is 45 miles an hour, and at that pace not even the racks in our oven rattled very much: my khakis were safe.

My wife and I didn't spend every night in our RV. In Little Switzerland, North Carolina, we parked by the side of a state highway and got a room, with a nice shower and long views of Pisgah National Forest, at the Big Lynn Lodge. Dinner and breakfast were included, and we ate them at a table with our room number on it. Dinner was ham; breakfast was anything we wanted, "within reason," from the menu section of the placemat. The couple at the next table were in their early 50s and were celebrating their 20th anniversary. They were both large, and the man had a cane and a blood-sugar problem, currently under control. He did almost all the talking, even if a question was directed to his wife and was about her. They work at a casino—he in security, she in hospitality. They get by with one car because he doesn't have to leave for work until shortly after she gets home. (Her shift, which used to be called the graveyard shift, is now called the sunrise shift.) The casino's ceiling surveillance cameras are so good that they can resolve the date on a dime on the floor, as well as text messages that gamblers are sending and receiving. Twice they've caught women dealers hiding chips in their big hair. He thinks he probably ought to have fought for custody of his children from his first marriage. (This is something I overheard later, when he was talking to some motorcycle guys.) He owns a shotgun and a lot of old barn wood, and if you want to see the shotgun, try stealing the barn wood. In his spare time he likes to look for valuable and semivaluable minerals, which he keeps in buckets, sorted by type. He has driven the parkway from end to end multiple times. He never asked us a question, and thank goodness for that. The bill for our room, including the two dinners and two breakfasts, plus a $20 pet surcharge, my wife's wine at dinner, and tax, was $133. Five stars. We paid, walked our dog (without a Segway) in the field below the lodge, and climbed back into our Bus. ●

We Can't Make You Whole Again

STEPHEN GOODWIN

For Franny Day

Dougie Curtis did not want to sell Plum Point. The property on the Rhode Island coast—two acres on a promontory, a rickety yellow house with black shutters, ghostly pilings that showed where a dock had once reached out into the sound—had been in the family for decades. He hadn't been aware it was for sale until his oldest brother, George, called him to say that he'd received an offer of $2.8 million. A particular kind of solemnity entered his deep voice whenever he spoke about money, as if others could not be trusted to grasp its significance. The yellow house had been built during the Great Depression by their grandfather and left to his two daughters, and as the family scattered and branched out, the ownership had been divided and subdivided into ever-thinner slices. Despite his many fuckups, Dougie still owned a piece of it, two and a half percent. Dougie's share would amount to $70,000. A very tidy little windfall, George said. The forced laugh sounded like it had issued from a dungeon: *heh heh heh*. "You could get yourself a spiffy new van," George said, and chortled again. The man was 70-plus years old and still failed to grasp the difference between teasing and insult.

Dougie said he'd sleep on it. To sell Plum Point was inconceivable, though he could certainly use the money. He was the baby of the family, the darling, the one with the golden voice and quick wit, and he'd turned out to be the failure—he was a painter. Not an artist, a painting contractor. He wore white bib overalls as a sort of hair shirt, or a badge of reverse snobbery, or both. He drove a white, unwashed Econoline van with ladders racked on the roof and duct tape holding the vinyl seats together. On his rare social visits to his brother's house—they'd grown up in Washington and still lived there—George had asked him to park in the driveway

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PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY ALAN BRACE

behind the house, not on the street in his posh neighborhood.

George, the family plodder, had prospered as a lawyer. For many years he'd been the head of the family association that managed Plum Point, handling the financial and legal matters, the repairs, the maintenance, the annual assessments, the vacation assignments. When his children were growing up, he made sure that they had the place during the prime of the summer season. Now that he was semi-retired, George and his wife had become world travelers, and they'd bought a place in South Carolina on a golf course that, he couldn't help reminding you, was ranked No. 17 in the world. The other two siblings—a brother in California, a sister in Chicago—no longer had much attachment to Plum Point. Both of them, and George, too, had cast their lot with the families of their spouses.

Dougie was the only one who'd never had a family of his own. Married once, no children, three women who had really mattered. Now 62, he lived quietly and mostly soberly with Mary Mac in the small, shabby house he'd bought with the inheritance from his mother (quite a bit less than he'd expected). They'd met at an AA meeting—reconnected, rather, since she'd long ago been a roadie and remembered Dougie as a hometown star during the 1970s, a fixture at the Georgetown clubs in Washington, the white guy with soulful eyes, a crooked nose, a smoky, sexy voice, and the balls to sing anything. He'd cover songs by Dylan, McCartney, Van Morrison, James Taylor, anybody. A few times, when he'd had enough cocaine to feel immortal, he'd strutted around like Freddie Mercury, and he did so many Otis Redding songs that one of his girlfriends had started calling him Otis, a nickname that followed him for years. Dougie's voice had plenty of emotion, and he managed to project both danger and vulnerability. He fronted his own band, Last Call, and did everything the record scouts advised him to do: wrote a couple of his own songs, recorded two singles, jerked people around to try to get a certain sound from the band, went on the road to open for big names in big arenas. He knocked on the golden doors, and they never swung open. The verdict on Dougie Curtis was that he was a terrific cover artist who hadn't figured out his own sound.

It took him 15 years to admit to himself that he wasn't going to make it. In rehab and AA, there were plenty of others whose stories and dreams weren't much different from his own, a bunch of old rockers who'd been part of the Georgetown club scene before the waterfront got gentrified and M Street turned into a high-end shopping experience. Dougie and his buddies felt that they'd come along at a time when most popular music was still actually music, not techno-junk, and they liked to get together now and then to jam and bullshit about the old days, the girls and the dealers and the various bastards, the scouts and club owners and booking agents who screwed them over. They went to AA meetings together. They helped each other out when they could. Several were in the building trades—that's how Dougie got started as a painter. They played poker and sometimes, to humor Dougie, they played long, raucous trivia games. He was the kind of *Jeopardy!* fan who shouts out the answers and makes scornful remarks about the contestants on TV. He was an avid reader of magazines and had strong opinions about TV drama. On a few occasions, Last Call—what was left of the original group, plus a few replacements—rehearsed and played for a big 50th or 60th birthday party or the wedding of someone they knew, or the wedding of someone's kid. They were hanging on, barely, as a nostalgia band.

The crown of Dougie's year came in October when a bunch of them drove up to Rhode Island for a weekend at Plum Point. He was the host, planner, and social director of the trip—a buddy trip, though women sometimes came along. They feasted on lobsters at the big round table in the yellow house, a table that had been there since the place was built. They chartered a boat to fish for blues and stripers, and Dougie tried to get everyone to take a swim in the ocean every after-

noon, a cleansing ritual his mother had always insisted upon. Out past the breakers, facing the horizon as he watched the wave sets build, Dougie said what his mother always said when she led him out there, "What the hell, let's swim all the way to Portugal." He loved swimming in the Atlantic, and even at his age, his pals had to admit, he was a champion body surfer. He hadn't lost his gift for catching a wave. That was bliss, that moment when he felt himself lifted up by the salt sea, weightless in the water, before being fired toward the shore, king of the mighty ocean!

How could he sell the place?

George kept pressing him. When Dougie didn't take his calls, George started sending texts marked urgent. Dougie thought about showing them to Mary Mac, but their schedules were out of sync. By the time he got home from his painting job, she was out at an AA meeting. She'd been going to meetings for years, and her dedication to the 12-step program could feel like a reproach. Dougie had cycled in and out of AA, lasting long enough once to get his two-year medallion. Lately his attendance had fallen off. AA made him feel sorry for himself, he told Mary Mac, and he couldn't take the holier-than-thou attitude of some of the lifers. He didn't see why he had to deny himself a glass of wine now and then.

That was bliss, that moment when he felt himself lifted up by the salt sea, weightless in the water, before being fired toward the shore.

Mary Mac didn't argue with him. Anyone could see at a glance that she was kind. She had a warm, open smile that seemed to come from deep down. Yet she wasn't exactly cheery—there was a seriousness in her manner, a composure that seemed hard-won. At meetings, Dougie noticed how many people seemed to direct their stories toward her, as if she was the one whose help and approval they sought. She spoke infrequently, in a quiet voice that made people sit still and pay attention. He began to think of her as an Earth Mother type, sympathetic and strong and protective. Not his type, really. But he soon realized that part of what kept him going to the meetings was the hope of seeing her. In the old days, she had a mane of tobacco-brown hair down to her ass, and she still wore it long, in a loose bun, and it was now an even darker brown, a color from a bottle, a color that the paint manufacturers would have called mocha brown, or java brown, or dark mahogany. She'd all but given up makeup. The hair was her one vanity, and during meetings she kept fussing with it, pinning it up, patting it, collecting loose strands in her fingertips, unpinning the bun, reshaping it, pinning it up again.

As her story came out, he learned that she'd never had children, that her drug of choice had always been alcohol. At one point, she was drinking six bottles of wine a day and weighed 175 lbs. Everyone laughed when she said she'd lost more weight than Oprah and still couldn't get on the damn show. She'd been married once, to a wonderful man, a mechanic who had recently died. He'd had early onset Alzheimer's, and his care and treatment had sucked up everything—house, nest egg, IRA—and left her more than $100,000 in debt. She'd been working as a waitress at a vegetarian restaurant, Food for Thought, and one night she mentioned that she was trying to find a new apartment.

Dougie offered to take her in. By this time they'd had coffee together a few times, and he had an empty bedroom. His buddies gave him rafts of shit when they heard about the arrangement and made mock bets about how long it would remain Platonic. At first, it did feel a little strange, living with a woman as a roommate, but Mary Mac made it easy. She was gone a lot, at work or at the library, learning about bankruptcy law—it took her two years to get the court to declare her legally bankrupt and forgive her debts.

Inevitably, she and Dougie became lovers, a pair of old sexual adventurers who laughed about needing blue pills and plenty of lube. There was new life in the dingy little house that he kept saying he'd paint but never did. Inside, Mary Mac kept it cleaner and tidier than it had ever been, and Dougie ate better, too. Mary Mac bought the groceries and cooked the meals. He paid the mortgage and all the utilities. Sometimes they went out for dinner at a restaurant where Dougie knew the chef. Mary Mac had a degree in music and got him so interested in jazz piano that he started trying to learn it, noodling away many a night on the upright in the so-called living room—it was really a music room. Miraculously, after years of sending out résumés, Mary Mac got two jobs at once, one as director of the music program for grades K-4 at a private school and a summer job running a kids' arts program at a city park.

Still, in Dougie's mind they were not a couple, not exactly. They continued to sleep in separate bedrooms—they were just used to it. He worried that Mary Mac was too dependent on him. She was a believer in speaking her emotions, and told him every day how grateful she was that they'd found each other. Their refrigerator was covered with magnets printed with uplifting quotations. At the conclusion of their phone conversations, she always said, *Love you,* and he felt obliged to answer with the same words, but he had to squeeze them out. They managed their money separately. Even if they hadn't made a shambles of their lives, they were at an age when some things simply remained private. Both of them had pasts.

IT WAS JULY, AND Dougie was painting the interior of a trophy house for one of his most loyal clients, Shelley. He had kept himself up-to-date with the ever more elaborate techniques that rich people wanted, and much of his business came from a core of clients who called on him whenever they moved or redecorated. Small world—many of them he'd known since his childhood or his club days. They were nearly all women, of course. Once upon a time, he'd flirted with them—a few, like Shelley, he'd had affairs with—and now he bickered with them about colors and glazes and textures and finishes. Shelley wanted the walls of the dining room painted a delicate, mottled rose so that they looked like the walls of a 500-year-old building in the Piazza Navona.

That morning, he finished up the trim in the dining room. He'd painted the windows and the built-in shelving and let Israel, his only employee, take care of the baseboards. At his age, he was not going to spend hours on his knees. Israel was about 40, reliable, mustachioed, the father of three girls, fast and meticulous, willing to do the scut work. Dougie paid top dollar to keep him.

When they took a break, Dougie let himself look at his phone. It was close to 11. Four new messages from George.

The most recent: *Ignoring me is not going to work.*

Dougie tapped in: *It's working so far.*

Immediately a bubble appeared with the floating dots. George pounced.

It's not just me. 22 entities have a stake in this. 21 of us are ready to accept this offer. Two point eight million.

Gosh. That's a boatload of money! BTW is an entity the same as a person?

This is a cash offer. We could close tomorrow.

Dougie waited, curious to see how long it would take George to send the next text. About five seconds.

We are not going to get another offer this clean. The buyer is willing to take the place as is. Places like PP can sit on the market for years.

Get real. Waterfront property is gold. Even I know that.

We've been putting this off for too long. PP is an albatross. It's a full time job trying to run the association and keep the place from falling down. Getting people to pay their assessments is pulling teeth.

That was a whack at him. Dougie had objected to several assessments or just been unable to pay.

Poor Georgie. Maybe you should let someone else take over.

I don't think you realize how far gone the place is. It's a fire hazard. It should be rewired. It needs a new roof. The pipes are ancient.

I could live there for a year and fix it up.

Very funny. I think it's going to be a teardown.

Ridiculous.

The thought of the house being torn down—disappearing—touched a nerve of surprise and sorrow.

Let me put it this way. There will either be a large assessment next year, and you'll have to write a check. Or you can agree to this offer and get a check for 70K.

Peanuts.

It's a fair price.

What's your share? Oh wait. I just figured it out. 756K!

I held my equity instead of treating it like an ATM.

We started with equal shares. One eighth each. 12.5%.

I have a complete record of all the transactions and adjustments if you're interested.

It's not as if I blew the money. I went to rehab. Twice.

Yes, I know. We carried you.

Carried me????? You made me beg and then made me pay.

I respect you for getting sober.

The place was worth a fraction of what it is now. I own 10% less than I once did. That's worth $280,000. How much cash did I draw? $50,000?

Your share was fairly valued at the time. I have spent thousands of my own money over and above the assessments without expecting any adjustment or recompense.

Shrewd! It's gonna pay off now big time.

Dougie hit send and turned off his phone. These exchanges with George left him crazy with anger and with a tightness in his chest and throat—almost 20 years without smoking and he craved a cigarette. And a drink. Why did he always feel he had to stick it to George? And oh yeah, he ended up sticking it to himself. Though aware of Israel's funny look—Dougie had yelled *asshole* a few times while texting—he walked to the pantry where the booze was kept. Shelley and her husband appeared to be vodka lovers and owned several frosted bottles of Grey Goose in different flavors. One rule he tried to keep was no drinking on the job, but this wouldn't be the first time he'd broken it. Dougie poured himself a measure of Le Melon in a short glass that had a nice heft to it, and then lifted the glass toward Israel. "Join me?"

"Too early," he said, shaking his head.

"My brother," he said to Israel. "You know, George. Georgie Porgie, puddin' and pie, kissed the girls and made them cry. Jorge."

The nursery rhyme was probably lost on Israel, but he got the general drift of Dougie's remark.

Dougie tapped his crooked nose. "Jorge did this. He broke my nose."

"Jorge did? How he did that?"

"He socked me." Dougie threw a fake punch. "Pow. Right in the nose."

"It looks good," Israel said. "Makes you look like a tough guy."

Dougie fought back the urge to refill his glass. "I used to think so, too. You know, the girls. The girls liked it."

Some of them said so, anyway. He was stupidly proud of that boxer's nose. His trademark. He half believed what he'd told people, that it improved his voice, gave it a rich timbre. When Dougie was thinking about dropping out of college, George had taken it upon himself to drive down to Virginia to reason with him, showing up without warning in Dougie's dorm room late one Saturday afternoon when Dougie was in bed with a girl, stoned and stinking of sex. George hauled the girl out of bed, covered her with a blanket, and pushed her out the door. Out, wench! Some code of honor must have prevented him from engaging with a naked person, and he insisted that Dougie put on his underwear. Seated in his boxers on the edge of the bed, Dougie tried to keep a straight face as George loomed over him and gave him the lecture about letting the fam-

ily down and throwing his life away. Pothead! He was a pothead!

Who could keep a straight face with a brother like that? Dougie heard himself laughing, and the next thing he knew, George had slugged him, blood was gushing down his front, and he could move the nose back and forth like a toggle switch.

For years, he and George didn't speak to each other, and it took their mother's death to bring about an attempt at reconciliation. Now, when he went to George's house for holiday meals, Dougie was expected to sing for his supper, and George would say to his children—or lately, grandchildren—that Dougie was the rock star in the family, *heh heh heh*. At the baby grand in George's house, once their mother's piano, Dougie played the Christmas carols and, at George's request, sang some of the music that she had loved, the clever, sophisticated show tunes with rhymes sharp as razors. It surprised Dougie that George remembered so many of the lyrics, and his brother could halfway carry a tune. They'd reminisce about the days when she made them sing and tried to teach them to dance. But if they talked for long about her, their glamorous, needy mother, George would remind him that she'd been an alcoholic, and that would be the end of the conversation.

He poured himself another drink. The sensation was electric and soothing, like a barber placing a heated towel on his head. A binge aura. The onset.

He poured himself another drink. The sensation was electric and soothing, like a barber placing a heated towel on his head. He knew that George was legally right about the matter of ownership. He was always right legally. Dougie drank the melon vodka and experienced what he thought of as a binge aura, the drinker's version of a migraine aura. The onset. The tracks trembling as the train approached. He'd tried out the phrase at an AA meeting, and someone laughed and said, "Dude, that's not an aura. You're just thirsty." He should probably get on his phone right away and find a meeting he could go to. It was lunchtime and there had to be a meeting someplace nearby. He held up the bottles of vodka and read off the flavors—L'Orange, Le Citron, La Poire, Le Melon—pronouncing them in the cartoonish French accent he'd learned as a schoolboy.

He tried the Cherry Noir.

He checked his phone. Three new messages.

I've talked to some of the others. We are increasing your share by a full percentage point. You can do the math. That will bring your share to 3.5%. 98K.

Aha! The assumptive close.

Hold your fucking horses, George.

Are you there? Please answer.

And the third message, sent just minutes earlier: *Tell me where you are and I will come to you. This matter must be taken care of by COB today.*

Dougie replied: *Which others did you talk to? Just curious how you decided that one percent was the right adjustment. I started out with 12.5%.*

We can't make you whole again.

It took Dougie a while to decide to reply with an emoji, the sad one with tears.

I have talked to Tim and Trisha and we are all aware of your situation. Nobody wants to see you without a pot to piss in.

Dougie sent a couple of smiley-face emojis. *Gee thanks bro. Feeling warm all over.*

Do you have anything at all put away for retirement?

He sent the sad-faced emoji again.

Do you have a 401K? Do you have any plan at all?

Yes! My plan is to drop dead with a paintbrush in my hand.

And if that doesn't work out?

I see where you're going—YOU will have to step in. Big brother to the rescue yet again!

There was a lengthy pause. Then:

Try to be reasonable. This can be win-win for everybody.

Win-win. Love it! Make me whole and we got us a deal. Talk it over with the others, and then my people and your people can get together to work out the details. Over and out.

Dougie put down his phone and helped himself to another pop of the Cherry Noir. He wasn't going to be able to stop them from selling Plum Point.

From the pantry, he could see that Israel had stepped over to the side windows that looked out over the driveway. "Hey, boss," he called. "Miss Mary coming."

Mary Mac? Dougie went to the window himself, and there was her car, her little blue beater, and there she was herself, in her park outfit, blue shirt, khaki shorts, sandals. She headed toward the back door with her head lowered and a paper bag held like a football. She was supposed to be at work. Dougie felt the front pocket of his overalls—no mints. He ducked into the powder room looking for some kind of mouthwash or breath sweetener. Nothing. Yeah, well, okay, he was busted. The best he could do was wash his hands and face. Out in the kitchen, Israel and Mary Mac greeted each other in Spanish, and he heard Israel thanking her for something. For pretty combs for his daughter's hair. *Señora Mary, muy bonita*. When did she meet his daughter?

"Hey, honey," Mary Mac said when Dougie emerged. "How's it going?"

"I thought you worked today."

"I do, but we've been starting at three while it's so hot. Didn't I tell you?"

Had she? She'd taken her sunglasses off and she looked hot. Sweat glistened on her lip and dampened her hairline. The instant after her eyes met his, she looked down and started unwrapping his sandwich and arranging the paper napkins, trying to pretend they needed her attention. What radar she had for drinking!

"I've had a couple of drinks," Dougie said.

She nodded.

"You might have noticed."

She looked up warily, and did the thing with her hair, hands behind her head. "What happened? Is something wrong?"

"Plum Point," he said. "They want to sell it. George wants to sell it. Le Plum! Le Plum! *Au revoir, le Plum*." He was waving goodbye.

"They can't sell it, can they? Not unless you agree."

"*Si,*" he said, but the question was annoying. He didn't feel like explaining how the arrangement worked.

Israel was backing away, holding a sandwich and can of Coke. He was going to eat outside, he said, in the shade. *Muchas gracias, Señora Mary. Muchas gracias.*

When the door closed behind him, Mary Mac asked, "So it's really going to happen? That place means so much to you—it's your happy place."

Happy place, good god. She was talking to him in the voice she used to console distressed eight-year-olds.

He said, "I haven't agreed to anything, but they keep raising the offer. This is what they call the horns of a dilemma, eh?"

"The seller keeps raising the offer?"

"George. George keeps raising the offer—the amount I'd get. Big brother has my best interests at heart, yes he does. He's worried about my retirement plan."

"I am too," she said.

"Win-win. I say dilemma, George says win-win. If I sell, he gets something like a million dollars. Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner!"

"I thought it was divided into shares."

"It is, and I have an itty-bitty share. Itty-bitty, teensy-weensy." He smacked his forehead with the heel of his hand. "Fucking wastrel."

She was standing beside the kitchen island, a slab of marble the size of a pool table, covered with plastic now. The chandelier over the island was wrapped in plastic, too. "Did this just happen today?"

"George, you mean? We've been talking, as they say. You know, feeling each other out."

Mary Mac did not have a poker face, definitely did not. "Were you going to tell me about it?"

"Yes. Yes, of course I was. When the time was right."

"When would that be?"

"You weren't home. You were out doing good works. Holding somebody's hand, I don't know. I don't remember you telling me where you were that night. You expect me to tell you about everything?"

"I would have told you about something this important."

"It's just about money," he said.

"I don't believe that," she said. "I can see how upset you are."

"Really? It shows? I guess I am upset. I'm destitute. They're buying me out for 100K. Not even—98K, that's what they offered. I mean, fuck, you'd think George could've rounded up."

Mary Mac placed her hands on the plastic sheeting as if she were going to play a keyboard, and studied them for a few seconds. Nice hands. "If someone offered me that much money, I'd tell you."

"Well, that's not going to happen, is it? So we'll never know."

"You're cruel when you drink."

"I think I'm entitled to a drink on the day I have to give up my happy place."

"I should go," she said. "I can't talk to you now."

"I'd say it's a very good time to talk. You've caught me at a moment when I have a lot to say."

Mary Mac's eyes were cloudy with tears. "I have to tell you I'm mad—yes, I am. I'm angry. Not because you won't stop drinking, even though I pray every day that you will stop. I'm angry because you don't talk to me. You leave me out. We should make decisions like this together."

"Decisions like what? Is Plum Point where you spent your childhood? Do you have a beachfront property that you haven't told me about?"

"We have to decide how we're going to live. I know what happens when you run out of money. I'm not doing that again."

"Oh, that's right, I remember, you went bankrupt. I'm sure you understand these things much better than I do."

Mary Mac's hands started to curl into fists, but she took a breath, glanced down at them, and went into what Dougie thought of as her meeting mode, so sincere and measured that you didn't dare doubt her. She said she was afraid. Every single day she was afraid that something would happen, that one of them would get sick or hurt. She had tried not to let him see how she worried.

"Trouble," he said, remembering a line from a song. "Trouble, I can see you, hiding behind that tree."

Mary Mac paused, looked toward the door, and pressed on. She was going to finish this, Dougie realized. It sounded like she'd been rehearsing. He'd been a saint to take her in, she said. She didn't want to be a burden to him. But they were getting older. They were at an age when things did happen to people.

"You mean they die?" he asked with sarcastic cheer.

"Yes, they die."

"My plan is to drop dead with a paintbrush in my hand. That's what I told George, and now I'm telling you. See? I don't want to keep anything from you."

"We don't have any plans," she said, raising her voice slightly, and a few tears ran down her cheeks. "We haven't done anything. We don't have any insurance. We have no money put aside, no plan, nothing. This is denial, Dougie. Are you blind?"

Her hair fell loose around her neck, and she reached up to fix it, letting her eyes travel around the kitchen again, the 12-foot ceiling, the island, the chandelier, the fans, the marble, the wall of windows looking out over an infinity pool. "Have you ever listened to yourself talking to Shelley?" she asked. "I have. I hear how you flirt with her. You flatter her. She's your customer. She's a paying customer. I'm the one who loves you."

"I never realized you were so jealous," he said.

"My god," Mary Mac said. "Is that what you think I just said?"

She made a sound, less like a sob than a laugh. She picked up a paper napkin and began dabbing at her eyes and cheeks. A silence filled the kitchen, and Dougie knew that something had shifted. When she had composed herself, she

said flatly, "You still think you're special. You still think you're special, and I'm not good enough for you. That's what it comes down to. I'm not smart enough, or rich enough, or interesting enough—I don't know. Just not good enough."

She raised her hands to catch a few loose strands of hair and said, not really talking to him, "I must look a wreck." Then, she was gone.

HOURS LATER, WHEN DOUGIE awoke in his own bed, it was almost dark. A sliver of pink sunset showed in the window. For several minutes he lay still, listening to the laboring sound of the air conditioner in the window. The only clothes he had on were his boxers and one sock. It took him a while to remember that two of his friends had come to Shelley's and then, after he'd tried to get them to have a drink with him, they'd driven him home. Mary Mac had called them.

He listened for her—not a sound. The house was empty. When he went to the bathroom, he saw himself in the mirror over the sink. His friends had written on his forehead with a Sharpie: IDIOT. He could smell himself, a stink of booze, sweat, paint, and mineral spirits. Though he spent a long time in the shower, scrubbing himself, the chemical residues had seeped deep into his pores, and on his hands the discoloration showed like a faint covering of gauze. It wasn't possible to get them really clean.

At the sink, he gave up on removing the last traces of ink from his forehead. The Sharpie scrawl was there if he looked closely. Dougie took his time shaving. Once upon a time, he'd been considered good-looking, and now he looked ancient and defeated. The bones of his face—a Neanderthal face, they used to joke in the Curtis family—seemed more prominent than ever. A skull. Beneath the heavy brow, his eyes were bloodshot and brimming with remorse, and he would go to his death with that crooked nose. Some things could never be set right. Dougie had a premonition that he needed to do something he had never been able to before, that maybe no one can ever do, prepare himself for a grievous loss.

The house was stuffy downstairs. Dougie couldn't remember the last time he'd used an iron, but he found the thing along with the laundry items. On the kitchen table, he spread out a towel, dampened it, and attempted to iron the wrinkles out of a white shirt and a pair of black pants. Except for the dark suit he wore to funerals, these were the best clothes he had. When he was dressed, he stood at the window at the front of the house, watching the headlights of the few cars moving slowly under the trees that lined the dark street, looking for the blue beater. Lovers had left him before, but the loss of Mary Mac would be death.

Though he spent a long time scrubbing, the chemical residues had seeped deep into his pores, the discoloration showing like a faint covering of gauze.

The piano bench was right behind him, and he sat down. When he thought of playing something to make the time pass, it occurred to him that he and Mary Mac didn't have a song. They'd listened to a lot of music together, and there were songs they both liked, but not a song that was theirs. The song that came to mind now was "Try a Little Tenderness," one of his standbys, a song he often used to close out a set. He'd always heard it the way Otis Redding sang it, with the driving beat and the throb of the brass behind him, and that's how he'd tried to sing it, too, letting the sound build until it turned into a frenzy, working it for cheers and applause. He'd sung that song to the women in the crowd, trying to make them love him.

But now he was the one waiting, and he seemed for the first time to grasp that the song was really directed toward men, pleading with them to pay heed to their weary women. It was written for fools like him, who needed drums and trumpets to awaken them to sorrow, to care, to love, to tenderness. ●

Normal Life

OLIVIA CLARE

At last the water went down as our mother said it would. Lona and I went out into the dark street to catch and throw the lopsided ball we'd kept up high. After her fifth expert catch, Lona took on a far look and stretched out an arm and pointed.

"Look there," she said. "That lady."

I turned. A tall woman in green, buckled shoes. Her clothes were dry, and her waist-length, white hair was wet.

"Just leave her alone," I said, throwing the ball back at Lona. "She's not hurting anybody."

"Well, she's staring at me," said Lona.

I looked back to the lady, and Lona was not lying. I was three years older and there to protect her, though sometimes she did lie.

"She's not bothering you," I said. "Leave her alone."

"I will if she does."

I caught the ball with my signature eyes-closed catch, then opened them and looked back again. The lady would not leave us. I did not want to speak to her but did.

"You need something?" I said. "What can we do for you?"

I'd heard my mother ask it that way, when she was trying to help. Even when she meant *I,* she said *we*.

It was not raining, and then it was. Now it wasn't again. Hurricane Harvey had just come down on us for five days. Every day my mother looked out the window and her pained, two-note whistle was lower. She told us: stay inside, be good. Be good girls. Lord, I was good. What I wondered was if being good made a dent in the world. If being good made any scrape on the world's surface.

"If I had one wish," Lona said to the lady, "it'd be that you'd leave us alone."

Olivia Clare is the author of a book of short stories, *Disasters in the First World,* and a collection of poems, *The 26-Hour Day*. She is an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Southern Mississippi. A few lines in this story are indebted to Lucie Brock-Broido's poem "Soul Keeping Company."

"Shut up," I said. "She's not doing anything to you."

The lady bent down to wetly buckle one of her green silk shoes that had come undone, and I wondered how she'd come to be by herself.

"What can I do for you?" I said.

She walked a few steps closer and looked into us.

"You need help?" I said.

Her dress was dark, the color of soft floodwater silt. We'd had a few inches of water in our kitchen, but my mother would not let us leave. The lady had on a jean jacket and an open tongue-colored raincoat over that.

"What do you need?" I said. "You lost? Tell me."

"She's creeping on us," Lona said.

"Just stop it," I told Lona.

The lady came another step closer and looked at my rain boots, which my mother had bought secondhand, then at the lopsided ball. She held up her hands.

"Give it here," she said. "Hey. Little girl."

I threw it, and she caught and cradled the thing for a minute with her eyes closed and her white hair straight and streaming down.

THE LADY WOULD NOT leave us. The next morning she was still there, looking at us from the street with our lopsided ball in her hands. Her hair and red raincoat were damp from the hurricane's rain bands that stayed with us, no matter our mother's mealtime prayers. Some inches of rainwater in the street, up to the lady's shoe buckles.

"There's a woman outside," Lona told our mother. "Staring at us. And all of a sudden staring, too, like there's no place else to look." She sounded put out. Lona was nine and often stared at people herself.

"She need help?" said our mother.

"Don't think so," I said.

"Plenty of people are out now. Taking care of things. Let her alone." Our mother was on the kitchen floor, looking so hard, I thought she could see right through it, as she mopped up the floodwater with dirty rags she'd found in the back of a closet. We had bought some candles, but we didn't have to use them. "If she's not bothering you, you let her be."

We went outside. It was not raining. We went up straight to the lady.

"You want something?" said Lona.

"What can we do?" I said.

I wore the same clothes I had on yesterday, and so did the lady. There were a few neighbors around, poking at the water in the yards, talking into their phones, staring into the sky. Some were crying and some even laughing. Our neighbor Sue was the one laughing at something, probably in her own head. She liked to do that. The lady who would not leave us looked up, still holding our ball. She put her other hand to her cheek in an unnatural way I would not forget and stared into the sky.

"Not a thing," she said.

"You're a lunatic," said Lona. I cupped my hand over Lona's mouth.

I looked at the woman. "*Excuuuse* her," I said, again repeating something my mother had said. "She doesn't know what that word is. She just thinks it's bad."

"It's not so bad," the woman said. Her eyes reminded me of my mother's when she hasn't slept and makes no plans to. Beneath her, a yellow Bunny Bread wrapper wound its way in the water around her shoes. If she had tried to walk away—which she did not—*I would have made my body run after her. I would have made my body a sail.*

She threw the ball to me—a short, soft throw, since I stood right in front of her. I threw it back the same way.

"You lunatic," Lona said. "Leave her alone."

"She's fine," I said. "You seem fine," I said to the lady.

"That's not so bad, either," the lady answered.

We went back inside, and our mother was napping. She'd been up all night watching the storm. Uncle Jon was kneeling, all attention on the floor, mopping the water with rags and

brown, sopping wads of paper towels. We told him about the woman.

"She okay?" he said. "Looking for help?"

"Don't think so," I said.

"She's a crazy," said Lona. We had water, but my sister refused to shower when there was so much rain outside, she said. She smelled like the storm and all the torn pieces of road and mud and flies and worms.

"And so what?" said Uncle Jon, mopping in hard, broad strokes, sweat dripping from the brim of his Astros cap. "You leave her alone. She probably just wants to watch kids being kids outside. Like normal. Like normal life. You can't forget what it is to have that."

He mopped and scrubbed that floor even though he'd never lived in our house. I wondered if his coming here, if his being good made any trace of good in the world. If his being good made a difference, like the start of a drawing of some inner life of ours we were just getting to know.

It rained. We stayed inside while it rained more. I helped Uncle Jon wash the rags, but they never seemed to dry. The lady would not leave us. I saw her out the window, holding our ball or fooling with the buckles dripping rain down the sides of her shoes. Uncle Jon did not notice her; he'd look outside and only comment on the rain and say, No, no.

I left Lona watching a Jimmy Stewart movie on the small TV we did not lose and went outside. The lady had our ball in her hands—hands the texture of light, texture of stars—staring up and into the rain.

"Hi," I said. "Here I am."

"Aha," she said, looking down at me, as if I'd summoned her back from a place. "Yes, you are. Look at you." The words came suddenly, as if she shook them from her mouth. "Look. At. You."

I ran a ways away and held out my hands, and she threw the ball. Lord, we never missed a catch. Even in the dusk and rain. We played until it grew so late, I could not see, and her shadow became the dark.

It was raining, and then it wasn't. Then it was. My mother made me a thick butter and Swiss-cheese sandwich, and I ran out to give it to the lady who stood in the rain in the street and would not leave. We'd been through a fight that the rain had almost won, but we were lucky, our mother said, and you remember your luck when people want to tell you you have nothing. That's what, said Uncle Jon. You remember we have our lives.

And we did.

I told that to the lady. "And those beautiful shoes, too," I said, because I did want to try them on but knew I could not. "And that raincoat," I added.

She tugged her shimmering tongue of a raincoat close around her body. I wanted her to know I'd never take it. I wondered if any good thoughts I had about her or toward her made any difference to anyone. I gave her the sandwich, which she took but did not eat. She did not smile, though I don't know if anything I said could cheer her. Our laughing neighbor Sue was clearing fallen branches from her yard, and she looked over to us but then went back to her work. About once a week she'd complain that the heat made her melt, and I imagined her melting down with her short silver hair, down, down to a watery mirror on the pavement. Our across-the-street neighbor who was a cop during the day looked up and held his phone in front of him and took a picture of the sky.

"You look like you're lost," the lady who would not leave us said to me. "Are you lost, sweet girl?" She moved her white hair forward over one shoulder, and the water dripped in a line: her hair to her palms to her feet. Just the toes of her shoes were covered in floodwater.

"I live right there." I pointed.

"Aha," she said. "Don't worry. I live. I live here, too."

"Where? Where do you live?"

She had our ball in her hands—still the texture of starlight, of stars—which I hadn't noticed.

I thought we had our ball in the house.

"Hold on," I said.

I ran inside to Uncle Jon and my mother.

"If she doesn't need our help," he said, "she's okay standing there." The water was gone in the kitchen now; he was sweeping the leaves from the floor. "Maybe she's just watching. You know."

"Or afraid," I said.

"Bring her a bite," said my mother. She lay the dirty rags to dry on the counter. The storm dirt was coming off in her hands. I watched her face and saw her mouthing a prayer. We'd lost some things, but I won't list what. We had no insurance, and my mother refused to keep a list. There was always more to lose, she'd said, so you don't start counting.

"I did already," I said.

"Well then, ask her in for a meal," said my mother. "And a seat."

"Yes, yes," said Uncle Jon, looking out the window.

"We owe the world some things," said my mother.

Lona and I set the table with the Sunday placemats and plates from up high. She was stooped in the puddle when I went to get her, looking down into it. Her hair was wet and gray-white and aglow. I said, come with me. I wondered if she heard me at all—she did not look up—but after a minute she stood and walked through the ankle-high puddle and followed me. *I would have made my body a sail. I would have made my body an anchor. I would have made my body a body to help hers.* Our neighbor Sue looked up into the clouds that broke to pieces to shatter the blue sky behind. Never in our lives had we all stared at the sky and the ground so much. The lady who would not leave us walked up our three front steps, then stopped at the door. Damp leaves were stamped into the part of the shaggy carpet where we kept our shoes.

"Come in," our mother said in the doorway.

"Welcome," said Uncle Jon, who took off his cap.

"Well come on," said Lona, and the lady walked in with the dusky clouds forming behind her shoulder. Even that December I would still see traces on our rug of the prints left by her wet green shoes, of the rainwater that dropped in rivulets from her waist-length hair.

I said, come with me. I would have made my body a sail. I would have made my body an anchor. I would have made my body a body to help hers.

"We're having pasta and beans," my mother said. "Please." She extended her hand.

"Nice and hot," said Uncle Jon.

"Pretend it's ice cream," said Lona.

And the lady sat down.

I wondered what she thought of us at dinner: Lona and our mother recounting their dreams. One of them was the same dream, mostly of water raining down on their beds, which did not happen but might very well have, which made my mother not understand the nature of dreams, she said.

Before dark our mother turned on the porch light and sent Lona and me outside with nubs of pastel chalk to draw on the wet sidewalk by our street. The lady followed, did not leave our side. Lona drew a fenced-in horse trying to leave waves of water. I wrote down my full name and my birthday, and then I drew a horned lizard and a stick-figure boy. The lady hunched over the ground and worked quickly, but I could not read what she wrote. I did not know. I wrote my address. I wrote LONA and JON. I wrote LADY. My mother called our names. I drew my mother. I wrote her name. I drew harder, I drew faster. I pressed the pink soft point of my chalk hard into the damp. I leaned down. Lona looked into the sky and spoke like she was already asleep. She went inside, but the lady and I only looked at the ground, working into the night, making our own swift scrapes in the dark. ●

The Island

TONY EPRILE

Gray early morning light seeping through the window bars, my thin blanket barely keeping away the chill of another dawn. I can hear The Guard, an early riser, moving around, whistling to his Alsatian: a vicious brute that growls at me and all other black men, having acquired but not lost its master's biases. How I hate the Island and wonder, not for the first time, if I will live long enough to be free of this place. The Guard kicks hard at my door, jolting me out of the last moments of sleep. In spite of myself, I feel adrenaline flood my body.

"*Maak gou,*" he shouts. "We don't have all blerrie day, you lazy *skelm*."

His is a voice that cannot speak quietly; nothing less than a bellow would be satisfactory to this bull-like man. But I am grateful to him. Without his prodding, I would get no exercise at all, just grow into an old fat lag, squinting into the harsh light and lime dust of Robben Island. Today, however, I am going to punish him for this rude interruption to my sleep.

I dress quickly and lace up my running shoes, jog outside, my breath billowing steam in the dawn air. The Guard is waiting for me, shifting from one foot to another.

"10K this morning," I tell him. "And I'm setting the pace."

We take off at a good clip, leaving behind the old guards' barracks where I share a cottage with him, since both our families stayed on in Cape Town. We jog past the prison gate with the inscription "We serve with pride," then out toward the penguin rookery near the harbor, muscles beginning to warm inside our tracksuits as we settle into our strides. We will cover the whole island several times and be back in about 45 minutes, ready for a hearty breakfast and then showered and dressed well before the first tourists arrive.

Tony Eprile is the author of *Temporary Sojourner and Other South African Stories* and the novel *The Persistence of Memory.*

HANK LEUKART

I WAS 19 WHEN I first arrived on the Island, one of the youngest prisoners to be sent here, and I will never forget the way my heart fell when I first looked across the last brief stretch of gray roiling water between the ferry and my place of incarceration. I had been caught with "the goods"—a box of dynamite that had sat moldering for 20 years and was dangerously unstable, stolen from the railroads by the man who betrayed me. He was already working for the police when he persuaded me to store the explosives we planned to use to blow up a power station. The police who staged the dawn raid on my little Soweto hut just laughed when I told them I had no idea what was in the box. "Don't play the fool," one said, cuffing me hard on the temple. "We have you on tape talking about your sabotage plans."

The Guard took a special interest in me from the day of my arrival. Perhaps it was because we were close to the same age—he was the younger brother of a long-time guard, a new recruit into a life of dominating and watching over his fellow man. "You're mine now," he told me that first morning in his guttural Afrikaans, thrusting a farm-boy's massive, rock-hard fist a quarter inch below my nose. "You're never going to leave the Island."

He seemed to delight in catching me walking too slowly or pausing at the hard labor we were forced to undergo. At first I hated him as he hated me; he became the human face to my misery and imprisonment. But, over the years, I got used to him ... to his loud voice, his shoves when my chained shuffle was slower than he deemed fit, his frequent loud nose-blowing because he'd acquired a permanent allergy to the lime dust

that was ruining the health of all of us, prisoner and warden alike. His name was van Tonder, but we prisoners called him *uMninawa,* "younger brother," to distinguish him from his older sibling, Sergeant van Tonder.

At the close of one long day breaking rocks at the north end of the island, I sat down to watch several storm petrels struggling against the wind above the sparkling ocean, the long rays of the disappearing sun coloring the foamy tops of the waves a bright maroon. I suddenly felt a looming presence and tightened my muscles for the expected blow and screams of outrage at my laziness, but instead he squatted at my side and gazed out at the view that had drawn my attention.

"*Heerlik!*" The word was more drawn out of him than expressed. And, yes, the sight was glorious.

"The island *is* beautiful ..." I ventured to say. And then, "But the prison is ugly."

"Yes. But it is supposed to be that way. To make you understand that you are being punished for your crimes."

"And what is it that you look at every day?" I asked him.

He looked nonplussed for a moment, and then he stood up and nudged me with his boot, none too gently. "Up!" he commanded in his stentorian voice. "We have no more time for laziness."

I like to think that something changed in him that day, but it was several months of a shift in demeanor that took place so slowly that at first I did not notice. Then, one day, I realized that I was being chosen for work in the distant, wilder parts of the island, being allowed more time to just take in my surroundings. Van Tonder was always there, and gradually he confided in me that he loved being out in the country, that he had wanted to be a game ranger when he was a child but the prison job had come up, and besides, these days you needed university training to work in the game reserve. He was not the only guard whose attitude was undergoing a shift; you heard less shouting, and it was becoming a rarity that a warden raised a hand to a prisoner.

THEN CAME THAT WONDERFUL day when I was told that my sentence had been reduced to time served, and I packed my few belongings, was processed out and driven with a double handful of other prisoners to the dock. Aboard the ferry to Cape Town, I did not even bother looking back at the place where my youth had drained into the rock and hard soil of the Island, where I had sat longingly gazing at the lights of Cape Town, imagining the pleasures enjoyed by those lucky enough to live there. At first I was a little bewildered by the noise and bustle of the city. Several times I almost got run down by the cars that streamed too fast everywhere. I ran wild for about a year, drinking too much, getting into fights, trying to make up for the years of confinement and the loss of my youth. And then I met Nomzamo, and soon she was pregnant with my child, and I knew I had to settle down and start providing for my family. But I was not the only one searching for work in a city flooded with migrants from the countryside—after the hated Influx Control laws were lifted—and from all over the African continent. What jobs could I expect with no work history, not even my matric or high school equivalent? For mine was the generation that had brought the system to a halt by making the country ungovernable, the schools unteachable.

I was fortunate enough to land a job, through a cousin, as a parking attendant at a strip mall of fancy shops just outside of Cape Town. We lived with Nomzamo's parents in a single-room shack in Cape Flats, and six days a week I would commute by bus or *kwela* to the mini-mall, where I would don a yellow reflective vest and run up and down all day directing cars into the narrow spaces, my pay the two- or five-rand coins the more fortunate—the drivers of BMWs and VWs and Mercedeses—would slip into my proffered hands after they had returned with their purchases and backed out, ready to go on to their next destination. Nomzamo worked part-time as a maid in a house in Greenpoint—Indians, not even whites—while her mother looked after our son, Sipho, "the gift."

But still we made barely enough for food and to help with the rent, not enough to send our bright child to the kind of school he needed.

When I could, on my days off, I would go to the employment office to see if there was anything better available to me. On this one occasion, the young counselor was clearly more interested in the workings of his mobile phone than in me, the humble supplicant before him, even though he would not have had his comfort, his freedom from fear, without people like me. So when he asked me if I had any higher education, I responded sarcastically: "I'm a graduate of Mandela University. Eight years of hard study ... so what is that the equivalent of? A master's? A PhD?"

He looked at me with a gleam of respect. "You were on the Island?"

I nodded.

He began to rummage through some papers on his desk, then looked up with a smile. "This may be your lucky day. You see, one of the honorable ministers went to visit the island, and he was very distressed that his guide was not a former prisoner, nothing to do with the old days. So there's been a big shakeup, and they're looking for former prisoners, anyone who was *there*."

He saw me hesitating, formulating my reply, and he hastily continued: "The job pays well, very well. And there are government benefits that come with it."

I sat back, thinking of our overcrowded shack, of my son's bright smile.

"But ..." he hesitated. "Something I'm supposed to ask. You're not ... angry? Bitter?"

There was so much I could say to this, I had trouble formulating the words. And that was a good thing, for it gave me time to think of school fees and what it would be like for my wife and me to have privacy together. Of course the tourists don't want to hear about anyone's anger. They want to hear talk of how well the Rainbow Nation is working, a great thing, all the different many-colored birds singing joyfully in unison.

"No," I said. "Not bitter at all."

Who did I see that first boat ride back to the place I had sworn never to set foot on again, but The Guard. Spying me, he came rushing forward to pump my hand like we were old maties, the best of friends.

"You, too," he kept saying. "You, too!"

WE JOG PAST THE OLD LIGHTHOUSE, past Robert Sobukwe's hut, and then we are back at the guards' barracks. I shower first, while van Tonder cools down. He is bulkier than I am, and he finds these runs harder. While I soap off, I think about how I tried at first to commute between Cape Town and the Island, taking the first boat out and the last boat back, how burdensome that became. Then my former nemesis and I talked it over and decided to share a cottage, allowing both of our families to stay across the water and enjoy the fruits of our earnings.

We spend the rest of our day taking successive groups of tourists around: to the lime quarries and the cave that became "Mandela University," to the cracked concrete exercise yard, to that special cell—number 5 in section B—where each visitor is afforded a brief glimpse through the bars at the neatly folded blanket on the narrow bed, the tin-bucket toilet, the tiny enclosure that held that great man. I marvel at how the tourists are from every nation on the earth, how this place, my Island, has become one of the most popular destinations in all of Africa, how reverently they look at all that I point out to them.

At the end of the day, we wind up in the communal dining cell, The Guard's tourists and mine, and together, trading places like tag-team wrestlers, we tell our stories. It always ends with van Tonder relating how he had told me that this place must be as ugly as possible, to teach the prisoners a lesson for daring to defy the authority of his people. And how I had replied, "And what is it that you look at every day?" In that moment, with the late-afternoon sunlight falling through the high window bars to light up patches of the cell and throw others in shadow, the tourists look at me and see what I mean. ●

ARTS

MUSIC

Concerto in Beans and Rice

Jazz maestro Paquito D'Rivera turns 70 this year, with a major collaboration with Yo-Yo Ma in the works

DAVID GROGAN

When Paquito D'Rivera and his jazz quintet began their set at the Jazz Forum supper club in Tarrytown, New York, one evening last December, the audience stopped its clatter at the cheerful pop of a single chord, struck by pianist Alex Brown. After a pause, Brown played a sparkling melody that became a geyser of cross-hatched harmonies and syncopated rhythms as the rest of the quintet joined in. Chattering like a skylark on his clarinet, D'Rivera carried on a rollicking musical conversation with Brown, Diego Urcola on valve trombone and trumpet, Oscar Stagnaro on bass, and Mark Walker on drums and percussion. The surge in tempo from *allegro agitato* to *presto* in the final section prompted audible gasps from some members of the audience. "That piece was written by a great Puerto Rican composer—Frédéric Chopin," D'Rivera quipped. "It's called 'Fantasie-Impromptu.'"

During the remainder of the set, the quintet served up a mélange of jazz, classical, and Latin music that included a piece D'Rivera composed for Ballet Hispánico based on the *danzón,* a popular dance form from his native Cuba; a blues that Urcola wrote to honor the Argentine tango master Astor Piazzolla; and Brown's jazz arrangement of a bolero by the Mexican composer Armando Manzanero. That last number was an exhilarating set-closer that brought the entire audience to its feet. As the applause subsided, D'Rivera said, "Thank you for joining us on a journey through Latin America on the wings of the jazz."

D'Rivera is a restless spirit who defies easy categorization. He is Cuban by fervid temperament, even though he has not set foot in his homeland for nearly four decades. "You can take a Cuban out of Cuba," he said. "But you can't take Cuba out of a Cuban." He has been honored as a jazz master by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, but his work as both a composer and a performing artist transcends conventional musical boundaries. In addition to winning multiple Grammy Awards for jazz and Latin jazz over the years, D'Rivera was a member of the ensemble that cellist Yo-Yo Ma assembled for *Obrigado Brazil,* which won a Grammy Award for Best Classical Crossover Album in 2003. A year later, D'Rivera took home a Grammy of his own for Best Instrumental Composition for "Merengue," based on an exotic Venezuelan rhythm, which appeared on *Obrigado Brazil: Live in Concert*.

This is a landmark year for D'Rivera, who turns 70 this June and has a frenetic international tour lined up. "I plan to celebrate all year long," he said during a conversation we had last

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CHING-MING CHEUNG

On D'Rivera's love of classical and jazz: "Duke Ellington once said there are only two kinds of music—good and the other stuff."

December at his home in North Bergen, New Jersey, which affords a clear view across the Hudson River of midtown Manhattan. D'Rivera took a break from touring last fall to finish writing a symphonic work commissioned by the Kennedy Center. Called the *Rice and Beans Concerto,* the composition pays tribute to the historic contribution black Africans and Chinese made to Cuban culture. "Both races came to Cuba as slaves," he said. "The Chinese came under contract rather than in chains, but they were treated like slaves. I put the African element and the Chinese element together in the concerto." The work also celebrates D'Rivera's longtime friendship with Ma, the Kennedy Center's artistic adviser at large.

The concerto was conceived in jest a decade ago. "Yo-Yo was a little nervous when we began working on *Obrigado Brazil* because he had never played that kind of music," D'Rivera recalled. So they got together at D'Rivera's house for an informal jam fest. "I invited this fantastic Israeli pianist, Alon Yavnai, who said he would be happy to play Brazilian music with Yo-Yo, but only if Yo-Yo agreed to play the Brahms Sonata for Cello and Piano with him—and hearing them play that beautiful sonata together in my home was like being in heaven." As the jam fest progressed, D'Rivera's mother, Maura, made lunch for everyone.

"She cooked black beans and rice," D'Rivera said. "When we finished eating, I told Yo-Yo, 'One of these days I'm going to write the *Rice and Beans Concerto* for you and me to play." From then on, D'Rivera called Ma "Rice," and Ma called D'Rivera "Beans." But D'Rivera didn't realize that Ma had taken seriously his offhand remark about writing the concerto. "Years later I got a call from somebody at the Kennedy Center who said, 'Do you still want to write the *Rice and Beans Concerto?*' I said, 'The what?' I had completely forgotten about it." Now the challenge is finding a date for the work's premiere at the Kennedy Center, where the concert schedule for the National Symphony Orchestra is already set through much of 2019.

Ma and D'Rivera are an odd but remarkably simpatico musical couple. "He's an Asian born in Paris and trained at Juilliard. I'm a crazy Caribbean," D'Rivera said. "He's very polite, and I'm very explosive." D'Rivera is an incorrigible practical joker. Ma's dignified but openhearted sense of humor was evident during the *Obrigado Brazil* tour, when the ensemble gathered at a communal table in a luxurious restaurant in Hong Kong for an after-concert meal. "Yo-Yo suddenly came through the kitchen's swinging doors, wearing his black slacks and white shirt, with a white napkin on his forearm and a bottle of very good wine, and started serving everyone in the restaurant," D'Rivera said. "Later I went out to get some fresh air, and an American guy who was leaving the restaurant said, 'Did you see that crazy guy who looked like Yo-Yo Ma serving wine to everybody? Then he had the nerve to sit at your table and eat all your food. Amazing, isn't it?' "

Like Ma, who began playing cello at age four, D'Rivera was a child prodigy whose father began nurturing his musical talent when he was still in the cradle. Tito D'Rivera, a classical saxophone player and the Havana sales representative for the Selmer musical company, serenaded his son all day. "I had a paciphone—a saxophone pacifier," said D'Rivera. His first instrument was a curved soprano sax designed for easy handling by a kid; the first melody he mastered was a jingle for Camay soap. He made his public debut at six playing a Cuban habanera for his kindergarten graduation. At the age of eight or nine, D'Rivera fell in love with swing music when his father brought home the album *Benny Goodman: Live at Carnegie Hall*. "When my father said, 'Carnegie Hall,' I heard '*carne y frijole*,' " D'Rivera recalled. " 'No,' he said, 'Carnegie Hall.' I immediately got it in my head that I wanted to be a musician in New York." Then D'Rivera's father put a recording on the turntable of Goodman playing the Mozart Clarinet Concerto. "Duke Ellington once said there are only two kinds of music—good and the other stuff—and that's the mentality I inherited from my father," D'Rivera said.

When Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba a couple of years later, his apparatchiks echoed their Soviet counterparts and denounced jazz as a product of American imperialism. Meanwhile, D'Rivera studied the classical canon at the Havana Conservatory of Music, landed his first professional gig at age 15 playing with a musical theater orchestra, and developed his jazz chops in informal jam sessions with pianist Chucho Valdés. He performed with the army band during a mandatory stint in the military and was surprised when he was released six months early and reassigned to a government-sponsored jazz big band. "I couldn't tell you, even under duress, why the hell Orquesta Cubana de Música Moderna was established," he said.

Eventually, D'Rivera and Valdés cofounded the small ensemble Irakere. "My house in those days was like a center for jazz," D'Rivera said. One day in April 1977, one of the founding fathers of Afro-Cuban jazz showed up on his doorstep while he was out. "When I returned home, the guy at the corner grocery store said, 'There was a black guy dressed in a cape and two-brimmed hat like Sherlock Holmes looking for you,' " D'Rivera recalled. "I thought, 'That must be Dizzy Gillespie. But that's impossible.' Fifteen minutes later, the political police knocked on my door and said, 'Take your instrument with you because there are some people we want you to see.' " Gillespie, Stan Getz, and several other musicians had come to Havana on the cruise ship *Daphne* for a goodwill tour, which Cuban officials kept mostly on the QT. Three years later, D'Rivera defected while on an international tour with Irakere. Gillespie subsequently helped catapult him into the top tier of jazz musicians by inviting him to be his guest artist on a European tour. "He was very generous to me," D'Rivera said.

"Yo-Yo is like Dizzy," D'Rivera said. "He is a catalyzer who brings people together." The inspirational influence of both men on D'Rivera's life and music was palpable during a sneak preview of the *Rice and Beans Concerto* in the sunlit home studio where D'Rivera refines his composi-

D'Rivera says of Yo-Yo Ma: "He's an Asian born in Paris. ... I'm a crazy Caribbean. He's very polite, and I'm very explosive."

tions with the aid of the professional music software program Sibelius. Standing in front of an elevated work station with a two-tier digital piano, a computer keyboard setup, and an oversize monitor, he joked, "I work like Hemingway, only I don't have any shotgun here." Suddenly, the synthesized sounds of an orchestra filled the room. "The first movement is called Beans," D'Rivera said. "Beans are what they used to feed the slaves in Cuba. No meat. Just beans. This is the most jazzy, African movement and reflects who I am." Shades of Gillespie's early experimentation with Cuban and Brazilian rhythms are evident, as are elements of Brazilian *chorinho* mixed with a Cuban *danzón* and *guaracha*.

In performance, the concerto will feature a small combo—clarinet, cello, piano, percussion, and Chinese erhu—engaging with a full symphony orchestra. "It's like a concerto grosso," D'Rivera said. For the upbeat first movement there will be just two soloists—D'Rivera on clarinet and Ma on cello.

The second movement, Rice, is structured around a pentatonic melody with some Cuban *danzón* in the middle. "This is where I introduce the Chinese erhu, which I'm hoping to convince Yo-Yo to play," D'Rivera said, as he cued up the synthesized version on Sibelius. "He has an erhu, but he is a perfectionist. So I don't know yet whether he will agree. If he does, we'll give the cello part in this section to the principal in the orchestra." The instrumentation is spare: strings, piano, and some light Cuban percussion. "The movement is very polite," D'Rivera said. "Like Yo-Yo the waiter, the bartender."

The third movement, The Journey, begins with an instrumental interpretation of an Afro-Cuban religious chant—a call and response with a percussionist tapping out a Cuban *danzón* rhythm—and the cello and erhu picking up the main melody. "It's an allegory of the journey of enslaved Africans and Chinese to the New World," D'Rivera said. D'Rivera may play some passages on a suona, a double-reeded horn with a high-pitched sound used by traditional Chinese musical ensembles in wedding and funeral processions and outdoor festivals. "In Cuba they call it *la corneta china,* and it is so loud it can be easily heard over drums." Waving his right hand like a conductor as the rousing finale arrived, D'Rivera said, "I have to keep my fingers crossed that the classically trained musicians can forget their Brahms for a while and follow the rhythm. Sometimes the conductor has even less sense of rhythm than the instrumentalists, so it is problematic."

The wait goes on for the Kennedy Center premiere, but in the meantime, D'Rivera has completed a reduction of the concerto for violin, clarinet, cello, and piano—the only instruments on hand when French composer Olivier Messiaen, then a prisoner of war in Görlitz, Germany, premiered his *Quartet for the End of Time* in January 1941, at the Nazis' Stalag VIIIA camp. "There are not many pieces written in that format," D'Rivera said. "I would be honored if *Rice and Beans* and *The End of Time* could be performed in the same chamber music program."

BRENDA FELICIANO

THEATER

A Century at the Muny

The open-air St. Louis theater, set to undergo a renovation this fall, is a beloved summertime institution

WENDY SMITH

LATE LAST JULY, I accompanied my husband, Joe, on a trip to St. Louis to visit the Muny, an 11,000-seat, open-air theater built in 1917 in the city's Forest Park. Missouri in the middle of a sweltering summer would not normally be my preferred destination for a weekend getaway, but I was intrigued by Joe's enthusiasm for the Muny, which had hired his company to consult on a project to upgrade its stage, facilities, and equipment. Joe and I both love theaters as physical spaces as well as performance venues, and he relishes any opportunity to modernize historic theaters while maintaining their distinctive look and feel. He hadn't been this effusive about a job since he worked on the restoration of Radio City Music Hall, and I decided I wanted to see the Muny for myself.

Everywhere I went in St. Louis, any mention of my husband's work brought the invariable response: "Oh, I love the Muny! I've been going there since I was a kid." It's rare to find a theater so deeply embedded in a community, and not just a relatively small community of habitual theatergoers, but a broad swath of the St. Louis population. You see them picnicking before performances or sampling the various pre-show entertainments, all cannily scheduled so that 11,000 people aren't trying to park their cars during the same 15 minutes. On the evening we went, gray-haired couples sat next to tattooed and pierced millennials, and family groups spanned several generations.

"I always tell my visiting friends, 'Welcome to America,'" Muny artistic director and executive producer Mike Isaacson told me as we chatted before the show, with patrons ambling past us to their seats. *The Unsinkable Molly Brown,* a musical about a survivor of the *Titanic,* was playing that night, and before it began, the entire audience rose to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner," as spotlights lit American flags flanking the huge stage, with a canopy of trees as a backdrop. Then everyone settled in to watch the show, undeterred by the steamy temperatures and ominous sky. Shortly into the second act, it began to rain lightly, with lightning visible and thunder audible in the distance. The actors kept going; the audience matter-of-factly pulled on rain gear. We made it all the way to the sinking of the *Titanic,* but the rain grew heavier, the thunder louder, and the lightning closer, until management reluctantly stopped the performance for safety reasons. Once the crew had cleared the stage equipment, however, stars Beth Malone and Marc Kudisch returned under an umbrella to give us an impromptu summary of the show's remaining 10 minutes. It was funny and charming, one of those "only at the Muny" moments that come up whenever people talk about it.

The Muny didn't actually become its official name until 1980. The Municipal Theatre, as it was initially called, was constructed for the presentation of grand opera—the first performance was of Verdi's *Aida* in June 1917—but quickly shifted to more popular fare. The first full season opened in 1919, with St. Louis Mayor Henry Kiel playing the role of King Richard in Reginald De Koven's light comic opera *Robin Hood.* That 1919 season featured works by Gilbert and Sullivan and Victor Herbert, and operettas continued to be a staple until the 1940s Rodgers and Hammerstein

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revolution prompted a shift to Broadway musicals, which remain the Muny's mainstay today.

This year, the Muny is celebrating its centennial with two company premieres—*Jerome Robbins' Broadway* and *Jersey Boys*—following a gala headlined by Chita Rivera and Tommy Tune. Looking back on that delightful evening last summer, and having had the chance to talk further with Isaacson and other members of the staff, I realize that *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* was in some ways an emblematic production for us to have seen, a wonderful blend of old and new. Directed and choreographed by Tony winner Kathleen Marshall, it had a large cast of some 20 Broadway veterans, a full orchestra, and an abundant array of scenery taking full advantage of the roughly 50-by-100-foot stage. The design team was also mainly New York–based, but sets, costumes, and lights were executed, as always, on site by union crews. (With rare exceptions, the Muny produces all its shows: seven each year, during an intense nine-week summer season.) The production also featured a new book by Dick Scanlan, who got permission from composer Meredith Willson's estate to include some additional Willson songs in a less mythic and slightly grittier version. Isaacson's seven seasons to date have included several other shows either "reimagined" or radically revised. For the centennial season, *The Wiz* will have a new book, and such audience favorites as *Annie* (seven previous productions), *Gypsy* (five), *Meet Me in St. Louis* (seven), and *Singin' in the Rain* (five) "will have some surprises, some things we haven't done before," production manager Tracy Utzmyers says.

Set amid verdant Forest Park, the Muny is not only the oldest outdoor musical theater venue in America; it's the largest. Its audiences are loyal and diverse.

PHILLIP HAMER/THE MUNY

"If you're around for 100 years, and there are certain shows that are part of the canon, your obligation is to approach them new," Isaacson says. "The easiest thing to do with a classic is just slap it up there, add orchestra, and mix." That's what he saw at the Muny, he says bluntly, before joining in 2011. "Productions just sort of happened. There was not a great amount of thought put into

them. It befuddled me and made me angry. The Muny is one of the world's great theaters, and it was not living up to its grand traditions. I felt the theater and the audience deserved better."

Isaacson, a longtime St. Louis resident and active Broadway producer (running the gamut from *Legally Blonde* to *Fun Home*), saw no reason why Muny productions couldn't be as carefully thought out and meticulously crafted as the shows he presented in New York. He could do nothing about the realities of summer repertory—rehearsals for each show still begin just 11 days before opening night—but he brought in Utzmyers as the Muny's first full-time production manager and began planning seasons much earlier. This year, that means not just seven ambitious shows and the gala, but also "a street-fair kind of birthday party," she says, "where we invite everybody in St. Louis to come to the Muny for free, with backstage demonstrations, performances throughout the day, food trucks, camel rides, and hopefully a Ferris wheel."

Like many people at the Muny, both the full-time staff of 30 and the 700 or so seasonal employees, Utzmyers started there early, as a 21-year-old summer intern in 2000. Director of operations Sean Smith had his first job as an usher 32 years ago; his father played in the orchestra for half a century. Marketing and communications director Kwofe Coleman also began as an usher in 1998. President and CEO Dennis Reagan started out as a 16-year-old trash picker 50 years ago—since that time, he has missed only one performance, for his brother's wedding. The institution inspires that kind of affection and loyalty, and not just in the people who work there. Box office receipts account for an astonishing 85 percent of the Muny's revenue, thanks to its 24,000 subscribers, many of them the children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren of other subscribers. "There are people who go to the Muny," Reagan says, "who don't go to a lot of other theater, because it's about the tradition of coming to the Muny with your family. When you see the little girls wearing Little Mermaid costumes with their mothers and grandmothers, three generations walking through the gates, you know this is a special place."

The Muny makes every effort to attract all St. Louisans. It sets aside nearly 1,500 free seats each night and provides thousands of additional free tickets to local social service organizations. Subscriptions range from $77—ridiculously cheap for seven full-scale musicals—to $700, which is still pretty reasonable for a seat in the first 12 rows. Like most urban theaters, it has an audience a good deal whiter than the city around it, but the Muny is working on that too. Casting is colorblind: African-American actor Ken Page (a Muny regular) recently played the father of a Caucasian Ariel in *The Little Mermaid,* and casts are routinely multiracial, whether the show is set in a modern metropolis or ancient Rome. "No matter what the program is, the people onstage represent a cross section of the people in our community," says Coleman. He acknowledges that African Americans are "not always as represented in the musical theater as a genre," but adds, "In our 100th year we're looking ahead to what we will be in the next 100 years and thinking about how we can represent everyone in St. Louis."

It almost feels as if everyone in St. Louis is at the Muny on a sold-out summer night, as you sit surrounded by several thousand people all looking at a stage that seems as big as the Midwest, with scenery to match. "The size and scope of our shows is one of the things that make us unique," says Reagan. "When *42nd Street* begins, and you see 150 tapping feet, or when there are literally 76 trombones onstage for *The Music Man,* that's pretty impressive." Mike Isaacson made it his mission to sharpen up the choreography for those tapping feet and make sure the trombone players had enough rehearsal time, simply because he wanted the Muny to fully justify the commitment of its audiences. "This place means something to people," he says. "The only way I can describe it that's closest is a sports team. It's theirs, and they want it to succeed; it's part of who they are and part of their families. I don't think there's another theater in the country that has that." ●

BOOKS

ESSAY

Force of Nature

The racing tides beneath Peter Matthiessen's literary achievement

JEFF WHEELWRIGHT

SOMETIMES I FEEL that Peter Matthiessen is the most underappreciated of recent American writers. I am biased, because he was my uncle and my godfather, but I think he should be mentioned in the same breath as Saul Bellow, William Styron, Philip Roth. The 20th-century version of the cultivated 19th-century adventurer, he brought back elegant accounts of the wild parts of every continent, including Antarctica. He is the only author to have won the National Book Award in both nonfiction (*The Snow Leopard* in 1980) and fiction (*Shadow Country,* 2008). His novel *At Play in the Fields of the Lord* was a finalist for the award in 1966, and so too was a nonfiction work, *The Tree Where Man Was Born,* in 1973.

Not just ambidextrous, Matthiessen stretched both forms of writing. After reading *Under the Mountain Wall,* his 1962 account of life in a New Guinea tribe, Truman Capote credited him with inventing what would be called the nonfiction novel, whereby fictional techniques shape narrative facts. Matthiessen's experimental novel *Far Tortuga,* about a doomed voyage of turtle hunters, was his favorite of his 30-odd books. Among other conceits, it eschewed the use of adverbs and adjectives. When *Far Tortuga* was published in 1975, the poet and novelist James Dickey told him he had changed American literature.

Not quite. When Matthiessen died in 2014, the obituaries were full of praise, but they didn't say he had changed our literature. Since he was raised not to toot his own horn, Peter would not have complained. Still, he observed more than once that, in dividing his work between fiction and nonfiction, he had made the assessment of his literary achievement more difficult.

My uncle was a hard man to get a hold of, in more ways than one. Reserved and self-deprecating on the outside, he was jumpy and hotheaded on the inside. If you stood next to him, you could sense the unquenched embers of the young rebel. His politics were uncompromisingly left wing, another impediment, perhaps, to fully appreciating him. His ardent defenses of endangered species, endangered fishermen, Latino farmworkers, Native Americans, and others were modulated by an ironic, elegiac tone, which deepened as he grew older. Peter's literary voice and also his speaking voice, magnetic and low in his chest, were resonant of Zen Buddhism, a practice he adopted in his early 40s. Although "mindfulness" seems to be on everyone's lips today, a generation ago a picaresque writer who averred Buddhist restraint was a peculiar persona to understand.

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He wouldn't have liked my use of *picaresque,* but I'm thinking of the episode that—to his irritation and chagrin—he became most known for, having nothing to do with his writing. As a young man, Peter had worked for the CIA in Paris. His job at the newly founded *Paris Review* was his cover for the agency. He gave up the secret assignment after a short time, but the revelation of it, decades later, caused him a lot of trouble.

A few years before his death, Peter began to put together materials for a memoir. When he realized he would not be able to outpace his cancer, he relabeled the notes as sources for a potential biographer. A full-blown biographical treatment may or may not happen. As his admiring nephew and godson, and a writer myself, I asked Peter's executors if I might have the first crack at the notes and sketches on his computer, not for producing a book but rather an essay about my uncle and the Matthiessen family.

Quickly I saw a way to proceed. Deeper than Zen and yet connected to it was Peter's love for nature, unbridled nature, soothing him through his 86 years. The feeling had begun during his boyhood on Fishers Island, New York, where my grandparents spent their summers and falls. Fishers—he described it in the notes as *a seven-mile ridge of hills and bluffs, deciduous woods and fresh-water ponds*—lies just off the coast of Connecticut. *This broken coast and offshore islets, with their many coves and tide pools, was where I was taught to swim and fish and handle small boats, and where a lifelong fascination with wild birds and marine life had its start.*

Fishers Island, barely disguised, is the setting of *Race Rock,* Peter's first novel, and is not far from his longtime home on the eastern tip of Long Island. Published in 1954, *Race Rock* is a tyro's book, and touchingly autobiographical. The central character, George McConville, is an unhappy young man from a wealthy family who reunites with childhood companions at the family estate on the New England coast. While a hurricane slowly approaches, they drink, shoot ducks, and drink some more:

> George felt unbearably oppressed. Yet he knew there was nothing unbearable in his life ... and the guilty paradox of his existence angered him. He had money and friends and position. ... the thick slow fuse of anger curled round and round like a tapeworm in his rebellious gut.

Fishers Island represented "money and friends and position." In fact, its beauty could not have been maintained without the rich. The island fostered and harbored the two main preoccupations of Peter's life—the natural world and its creatures, whose graceful movements so gratified him, cheek by jowl with affluence and far-reaching economic power, which he began to see as enemies of nature. Since it was too late now to ask Peter about the importance of Fishers, my idea for the essay was to set his notes about his youth next to my own memories and to view the island stereoscopically, if that could be done.

Born in New York City on May 22, 1927, Peter was brought to Fishers for the first time when he was just two weeks old. From the notes:

> Our house, airy white and driftwood gray, was designed for his new family by a young New York architect named Erard Matthiessen. At the time of my arrival, pamper fresh (so to speak) from the Leroy [Hospital], his family was comprised of a known beauty, his wife Betty, née Elizabeth Carey, and little Miss Mary Seymour M., age 18 months.

Mary is my mother. Throughout my uncle's life, I could always calculate his age because my birth came 20 years after his almost to the day. A third and final Matthiessen child, George Carey, was born on Fishers Island 14 months after Peter. Although my mother stopped using Seymour and Carey never used George, Peter could be only Peter, since for some reason he had no middle name. As for my grandfather, Erard Adolph, he strongly disliked his two given names and went through life as Matty.

Of Nordic ancestry, the Matthiessens had migrated to the United States from Germany

GETTY IMAGES

Reserved and self-deprecating on the outside, Peter Matthiessen was jumpy and hotheaded on the inside. Zen Buddhism modulated the ardor of his rebellious youth.

in the middle of the 19th century. Four brothers became rich industrialists in the Midwest; their primary businesses were zinc mining and processing, clock manufacture, and sugar refining. Matty's father and mother were first cousins, so when they married, the family having gravitated to New York, two fortunes were consolidated. My grandfather went to The Hotchkiss School, Yale College, and Columbia School of Architecture knowing that he did not have to work. He practiced as an architect until easing into retirement around the age of 45.

By contrast, my grandmother came from a well-to-do Virginia family that had fallen on hard times. She had kept up all the Careys' social graces, however, and Matty provided the means to clothe and exercise them. Moving with the seasons from Park Avenue to Fishers Island to Florida, Betty and Matty Matthiessen made an impressive pair: she demure, arch, and quietly humorous, he witty, outgoing, and outdoorsy.

In the sketches of his youth, Peter focuses predominantly on his father. He introduces him as admirers saw Matty, a man's man, handy with boats, power tools, and shotguns, as deft on the dance floor as he was on the golf course. My grandfather was only 23 when he designed and built his house on Fishers Island. Although already a summer resort, Fishers in the 1920s was frequented only at its western end. E. A. Matthiessen was one of about five dozen partners in the development of the bulk of the island. The properties were large, many with their own ponds and beachfronts. According to Pierce Rafferty, the island historian, "Even today, more than 85 years later, there are only about 200 houses in the private East End section."

Fishers hardly changed between my uncle's summers during the 1930s—*in the darkest days of the great Depression, our well-insulated family maintained a summer house on Fishers Island*—and my own childhood visits a generation later. What would the place be like today? Last

October, I boarded the early ferry from New London, Connecticut, for the 40-minute ride across Fishers Island Sound. The sparkling air was cold. On the ocean, terns and laughing gulls fluttered and flashed at the baitfish that bigger fish were, no doubt, chasing to the surface. I went inside to the warmth of the cabin. Prior ferry trips, which had dwindled to 10 and 15 years apart, had made me uncomfortable, as if I were channeling Peter, put off by the prospect of perky women in Swiss-patterned sweaters and their blond, lantern-jawed husbands in lime-green pants.

Peter would have approved of the incongruous scene this morning. Wearing hoodies, black and brown high school students from the city of New London commuted to the magnet school on the island. It was an unusual arrangement between school districts in Connecticut and New York, I was told, and probably would not have been sanctioned in the old days. The ferry, preceded by a blast of its horn, sidled up to the weathered pilings of the dock. According to Rafferty, the year-round residents of the island, who still cluster about the west end, number some 230 people. The additional summer population is more than 2,000 and no longer includes any Matthiessens.

On Fishers Island, the natural world and its creatures were cheek by jowl with the far-reaching economic power he saw as an enemy of nature.

My grandfather used to berth his boats in a cove nearby. Matty did not go in for sailboats. I remember zippy Boston whalers for near-shore fishing and yachts with throbbing engines shouldering the swells aside. His large, sun-mottled hand rested easily on the helm near a gleaming can of Schlitz or Miller. But my fishing adventures with "Pa" were minor compared with Peter's:

> I was not yet ten when he first took me deep sea fishing ... miles across Block Island Sound to Montauk Light at the tip of the South Fork, then southwestward on the open ocean trolling for yellowfin tuna and ever in hopes that we might harpoon a swordfish, which in those days still lived long enough to become enormous and appear within a few miles of that coast.

I'd arranged to hire a boat to take me out to Race Rock, a real place. The Race is a shallow ledge whose menace to ships was defanged by a lighthouse built upon it in the 1870s. Ever since the light keeper left, yielding to automation, the empty rooms are said to be haunted, and cormorants squat rudely on the solar panels of the steeply gabled, corrugated roof. At this hour, the water around the lighthouse was merely ruffled, but there was an odd look to the ruffle, the whitecaps jostling and breaking along a line of smooth water that indicated treacherous currents. The Race—*that jagged meeting ground of current and broken tide*—is where the water in Long Island Sound spills from its glacier-carved basin into the depths of the Atlantic, and where it rushes back hours later on the returning tide.

Peter first saw the Race with his father: *I observed with dread the relentless shifting of dark muscled waters. ... The sheer might of this current ... had such a grip on my imagination that I named my first novel after the Race Rock lighthouse for no better reason than its evocation of the fathomless power of existence.* The Race was also a good place to cast for bluefish in my youth. The bluefish prey on small menhaden, which are caught in the rips, confused. *The Race was forever in a state of change, and its faces were gray and blue and black, and red with torn menhaden when the bluefish ran, and scarred with white.*

A border water, a no man's land, the Race lay between Fishers Island and the unruly wider world. Longing for adventure, the boy would need courage to get across that line. Later, visiting from his home on eastern Long Island, Peter would cross the Race in his own boat. He would

The Matthiessen family in Connecticut: Betty, Matty, Peter, Carey, and Mary. Peter remembered being temperamental, scrawny, too sensitive, a dreamer.

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

try to scoot through on a slack tide, though all bets were off in foul weather or wind. On one of these trips, a loose cable gave way and his brother, Carey, fell overboard, smashing his head as he fell. Peter recalled the accident in anguished detail. *Oh my God.* Please, Carey, *wait! In the cold silent water swathed in fog, there was no sign of him. I peered and shouted.* When Carey bobbed up at last, Peter hauled him violently aboard. His best friend in the world had nearly died in the Race.

Fishers is at most a mile wide, and in many parts narrower, like a corkscrewing marine worm. All that bright fall day, whenever I turned toward the sun, the sea would explode with reflection, white particles bursting on blue, as if a pointillist were attempting to blind me. I drove past the Hay Harbor golf course toward the heart of the island, the guard on the one road waving me through on the assurance of my old connections. For years my grandfather and uncles owned the large, brackish Island Pond, where Carey, a marine biologist, cultured juvenile oysters for commercial growers. Protruding into the pond is a lovely eight-acre peninsula. The Matthiessens donated it for a nature sanctuary in the name of my grandmother after her death in 1977. Matty's project in old age was to cut circuitous, interlocking trails through the beeches and scrubby oaks overlain by Virginia creeper.

As I strolled within this mini-wilderness, I felt for the first time the almost comical smallness of Fishers. Yet my grandfather must have felt secure and happy on this tidy island, protected by its moat of ocean. For, truth to tell, the Matty inside the charming man's man had endured a lonely childhood supervised by chilly Germanic parents who disliked each other deeply. Inheritance aside, Matty was not much equipped for the rough and tumble of the world, and he communicated his anxiety about competing in life's bigger race to his restless son. In short, he undercut Peter. Subtly, Matty disapproved of Peter's ambition to win a place for himself in American letters. That's not stated in the notes. I know this from

observing the two, and because my grandfather, I think with good intentions—maybe it was just prudence—doubted plans of mine, too.

Paternal approval, when and where it came, was an elixir. For example, in the family hobby of birding. Although my grandparents were always interested in birds and nature, Peter wondered, looking back, whether his father had become an expert birder and a champion of conservation in part because of his son's blooming obsession. Peter kept pigeons at their winter residence in Connecticut, and one summer he trained a "genius gull" on Fishers. The boy drew up lists of wildlife sightings of all kinds. *When I saw my first swallow-tailed kite hawking back and forth over the Tamiami Trail* [a highway in Florida], *I almost caused a car wreck. I jumped out, I couldn't stop yelling; they couldn't get me back into the car!* He doesn't mention Matty's enthusiasm, but I remember being about the same age in Florida when, with heavy, borrowed field glasses, I spotted a black-necked stilt in a line of ordinary shorebirds. My grandfather, swiveling his binoculars upon this uncommon find, doused me with praise. I drank it up. I felt like a million dollars.

Was Peter's reportorial daring, expedition after expedition on every continent, about nothing more than measuring up to his father?

Nobody's childhood is perfect, not my grandfather's, not my uncle's. The most important variable is one's inborn nature, which is like a wild card drawn from a genetic deck. Life launches a unique biological and behavioral package, after which parents, let's say Betty and Matty Matthiessen, conduct a nature-nurture experiment. As in a proper experiment, the three sun-baked children, Mary, Peter, and Carey, at the beach and tennis court, are treated just the same. But do they become the same? No, their different natures take control.

Thus Mary was forthright, glittering, and sociable, and Carey genial, athletic, and popular, both well within the family program, while Peter was—I switch to his own telling—temperamental, *too sensitive,* scrawny, a dreamer, embarrassed to need glasses, ashamed of having to wear aluminum mitts at night because he sucked his thumb. Threw up from nerves during assembly at Greenwich Country Day School. Afraid of being taken for a sissy. Churlish as a boarding student at Hotchkiss. During teenage summers, a spoiled carouser. Really, just impossible. My mother says Peter exaggerates, but allows he was "the difficult one," and sometimes she'll add "the tortured one."

When Peter learned what the Social Register was, he demanded that his parents remove his name from this snooty catalog of moneyed New York families. Volunteering one summer at an inner-city camp, he was appalled and angry that children about his own age could be so hungry. On their first day at the camp, the kids had sat down to a welcoming meal and gorged themselves until they got sick. When Peter related this story later to interviewers, he did not credit my fairly liberal grandparents for at least exposing him to the other side. Everything came to a head after his prep school graduation in 1945, which he'd refused to attend. My grandmother was beside herself. Matty told Peter to leave the house, a punishment that he felt he more than deserved. *Not just anger, mean tongue, sullen nature but insolence, disobedience, drinking, speeding tickets, hound dog dirty attitude to go with it.*

The evil climate of World War II had a lot to do with his difficulties. In the summer of 1944, just 17, he had joined the Coast Guard without telling his parents. Matty found out where he was and sent him back to Hotchkiss. In 1945, he joined the Navy but too late for combat. He was back in New York, on his own, in late 1946. *Brooding, lonely, angry, aching for faraway destinations with romantic longings for unfettered "real life," I had developed a small drinking problem and an obdurate depression.* Briefly he saw a psychologist. It was probably his lowest point. In 1947, he resumed his educa-

tion at Yale, which surely steadied him, and also resumed his partying, which probably didn't. A professor scolded him that he should have won the top literary prize. He got a concussion barreling down a ski slope. He became an uncle and godfather for the first time.

Peter's first cousin once removed was F. O. Matthiessen, the prominent literary critic at Harvard. F. O. and Matty had been friends since their time in New Haven together. *F. O.'s father, Frederick William Jr, known in the family as "Wild Bill," was my grandmother's scapegrace brother, as well as the survivor of every sort of moving accident and was still pursued by angry husbands up and down the land.* F. O.'s relationship with his hypermasculine father was like a bad caricature of the tension between Peter and Matty. Wild Bill rejected his cultured son, who was gay. *That sissy,* he called him. Told that his son was the great authority on the Jameses, Wild Bill thought it must be Jesse and Frank James, not Henry and William. In 1950, F. O. Matthiessen set his Skull and Bones key on a window ledge and jumped out of a 12-story hotel room in Boston. It was the second family suicide to rattle Peter. His maternal grandfather, sweet-natured "Pop" Carey, had killed himself before the war.

It's hard for me to square the agitated figure I was too young to know with the Zen-tinctured literary star of my grown-up years. Peter's biographical notes offer little more than bullet points or mnemonic phrases about his life and career after the 1950s. More interested in his youth, he composes scenes in a mordant minor key that resolves unexpectedly into major chords, as when he reconsiders Fishers:

> Because altogether, my childhood was not bad at all. I have the content feeling of many sun-filled summers, romantic gold-brown autumns, impressions, memories. The sounds and odors and queer lights at evening are baked in, the sea wrack on white sand, and the cold ocean swimming from the island's south beaches, body-surfing small waves coming fresh from the Atlantic through the broad reach between Block Island and Montauk Point ... and in years to come, surf-casting from rock points for striped bass and autumn gunning for wild pheasants, walking them up [jump shooting] or over [pointing] springer spaniels, not infrequently interrupted by a passion, everywhere and increasingly, for intensive birding.

My grandparents' house is on a bluff on the north side of the island, facing Connecticut and Rhode Island. The present owners, who were not at home during my visit, permitted me to go down to our little cove and beach, the place most "baked in" with Matthiessen memories. *Here twin downhill paths enclosing half-buried lichened glacial boulders and blackberry and myrtle thicket ended in stone steps descending to a shallow crescent of white sandy beach.* Although boulders and thickets have given way to smooth lawn, the beach itself is the same. I sat on a driftwood log for a long time. Here Peter and his siblings, and I and my siblings, would dig down through the sand until we got to clay. We would scoop it out and fashion all sorts of objects, and the sun, like a family servant, would cure them without being asked. Here, when his castle's moat would not fill with water—just the opposite—little Peter discovered the motion of tides. I saw my elegant grandmother once again put on her white bathing cap, the kind embossed with a floral pattern, and take her morning swim, once more her light, practiced strokes moving straight away from me into the lambent Fishers Island Sound. And here too I investigated an acquired memory, the main reason I come back. I wanted to revisit the scene of the "green-blue water" incident, the seminal incident, my uncle says, of his childhood.

Peter reviewed the incident at least half a dozen times before his death, altering details here and there, as he made the story darker and richer. A confrontation with Matty took place just beyond the rocky enclosure of the cove:

> Beyond, clear water six to ten feet deep over white sand—the "green water"—extends perhaps forty yards offshore to where clear

> sand gives way to dark rocky bottom and the "blue water" of Fishers Island Sound. That border filled me with dread—not the deep water but those shadowy indistinct boulders, dark amorphous shapes shrouded by algaes, scarcely visible below the boat, yet discernible enough to persuade child or fool that those big shapes were shifting, changing places, slowly moving, and that those strange fronds straining toward the surface—toward defenseless children, in effect—might well conceal gigantic crabs and savage moray eels and monsters heretofore unknown to science.

Peter seems uncertain of his own age, whether he's six or eight or nine. Matty has brought him, Carey, and my mother out in the boat to see how well they can swim. The kids have been taking swimming lessons this summer. Matty tells them to jump in—Mary and Carey do so eagerly, and paddle around. Eyeing the green-blue discontinuity by the anchor line, Peter refuses to go, though he's a capable swimmer and diver. *I already knew my phobia was unreasonable and felt humiliated because I had not outgrown it. My sister, vexed by the delay, pronounced me silly and my little brother looked away, made anxious by the confrontation.*

Matty loses patience and picks up Peter and throws him over. The frightened boy grabs his father's shirt, and as a result bangs his arm hard on the side of the boat. Coming gasping to the surface, he shoots a curse at his father, either *bastard* or *son-of-a-bitch,* neither believed to have been in his vocabulary and verboten at any age. The four Matthiessens go home in shocked silence. Peter is sent to his room, his arm throbbing. The worst part is that his mother, instead of comforting him, as he imagines she will do when she hears what happened, sticks her head in and says, *We are so dreadfully ashamed of you*. She closes the door. Peter writes that his alienation from his parents began then and never recovered fully. Even decades afterward, his arm would start to throb during moments of stress.

His notes make my grandparents look bad, but he makes himself seem worse, the *viper child* in full agreement with Matty that day on the boat when he *cast me from his sight.* Why did he feel that way? Was Peter's reportorial daring in Africa, the Amazon, or the Himalayas, expedition after expedition, about nothing more than measuring up to his father?

My uncle and I never spent much time together, and for that and other reasons we were not particularly close. But there was one time we were. It was 1969, and I was just out of college, hanging around San Francisco while I fenced with my draft board back home. He was 42 and was putting the final touches on *Sal Si Puedes,* his book about the farmworker leader Cesar Chavez. Peter invited me to visit him at the motel where he was staying in Fresno. We had dinner, smoked some pot. (My siblings and I still refer to him as Pete Pot, our hip uncle.) He told me that the thing he had learned about fear was to face it—and not just to face it but to go directly into its maw. In hindsight, I think it was the lesson he'd drawn from the green-blue water incident. The next morning, he gave me directions to a field and said goodbye. Alone, I drove over there and saw many farmworkers breaking their backs in the hot sun. Peter had urged me to think about them, and I have. Peter thought that Chavez, a man of the earth, was the most admirable man he had ever known.

Living across the country, I rarely saw Peter in later years. My grandfather's burial on Fishers, in 2000, marks the last time I was alone with him. He and I were walking together, from nowhere far to somewhere near. The way was wooded, lightly wooded. As he was talking, I heard a bird insistently call. Its rolling, almost metallic song seemed too powerful for Fishers Island. Its song could hardly be contained.

Since it is fine in our family to interrupt anyone on account of a bird, and since in fact I was rusty on my eastern species, I broke in.

"Peter, what's that bird?" He stopped, and we listened together. I wanted him to be proud of me.

"It's a Carolina wren," he said. ●

REVIEWS

Robben Island Days

A South African leader's jailhouse correspondence during apartheid

Review by Douglas Foster

THE PRISON LETTERS OF NELSON MANDELA
EDITED BY SAHM VENTER
Liveright, 640 pp., $35

"DEAR SIR, My colleagues have requested me to write," the prisoner began, as if he and the minister of justice had decided to settle into a nice collegial chat over tea. This letter from Nelson Mandela, dated April 22, 1969, must rank as the most politely worded explanation of revolutionary intent in human history. The colleagues he mentioned were comrades in the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party dedicated to the overthrow of the white minority government the minister represented. The purpose of this letter? "[To] ask you to release us from prison and, pending your decision on the matter, to accord us the treatment due to political prisoners."

Mandela urged the government to "avert disaster" by negotiation. The alternative, he implied, was a confrontation that would cost South Africans heavily.

Much of the correspondence in this volume is published here for the first time, on the centenary of Mandela's birth. This letter, like many others, received no response. Written from Mandela's tiny cell in Robben Island Prison, five years into his life sentence for sabotage, the letter would have seemed outlandish to its recipient. By that time, the movement to end apartheid had been crushed, its leaders in prison, hiding, and exile, or hunkered down in guerrilla training camps abroad. Mandela wasn't exactly bargaining from a position of strength.

Still, he called on universal principles, invoking the Geneva Convention and the right to self-determination, "acknowledged throughout the civilized world as the inalienable birthright of all human beings." Further, Mandela urged the government to "avert disaster" by negotiating a surrender of political power through the principle of one person, one vote. The alternative, he suggested, was a catastrophic violent confrontation that would cost South African people heavily across lines of race and class. "The obvious solution is to release us and to hold a round table conference to consider an amicable solution," Mandela wrote.

In this collection, superbly curated by South African journalist and writer Sahm Venter, the reader encounters history as it unfolded. Retrospective accounts, including Mandela's own 1994 autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom,* often leave the impression that the success of Mandela's side of the argument was somehow preordained. His prison correspondence is a poignant reminder of how unlikely that prospect once seemed. Mass uprisings, sacrifice, organizing, tightening international pressure, and the dawning realization by apartheid leaders that their own future depended on Mandela's skills as a reconciler and negotiator: all were required to achieve the long-delayed reckoning.

The volume delivers far more than politics,

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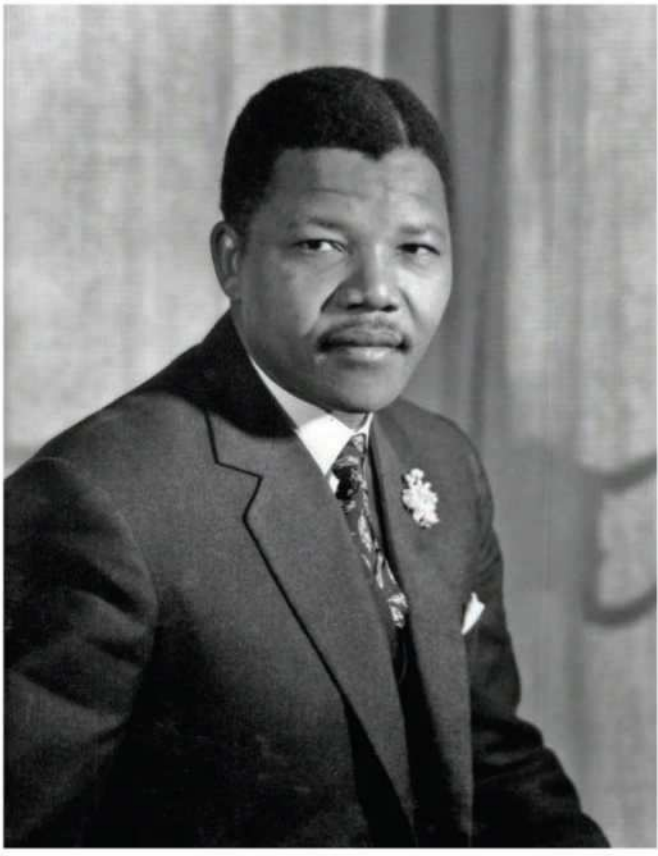

Winnie and Nelson Mandela on their wedding day in June 1958. His prison letters to her were rife with longing, but their relationship later foundered.

juxtaposing Mandela's messages of protest with revealing personal reflections meant for family and friends that are, by turns, whimsical, longing, nostalgic, hectoring, and profoundly self-critical. He died only five years ago, but Mandela, like Martin Luther King Jr., assassinated half a century ago, remains more celebrated than understood. This correspondence offers some insight.

Consider a 1971 letter from Mandela to one of his daughters. "My Darling, Friday the 5th February this year was your 12th birthday," he wrote. "I sent you a card containing my congratulations and good wishes. Did you get it?" His daughter had been only two years old when he had seen her last, at a clandestine reunion while he was on the run. They cuddled briefly, he recalled, but then "you pushed me aside and started searching the room. In a corner you found the rest of my clothing. After collecting it, you gave it to me and asked me to go home. ... You felt I had deserted you and Mummy."

Mummy, of course, was Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, his second wife. Her shadow falls over much of his prison correspondence. I was halfway through these letters when, on April 2, the woman known as the Mother of the Nation died in Johannesburg at age 81. Winnie and Nelson were star-crossed lovers, whose relationship was upended only a few years after they married by his arrest, subsequent trial, and imprisonment for 27 years. During that time, they could see each other only through thick glass barriers, for 30 or 60 minutes at a time. They had to raise their voices to be heard and were able to visit only under the gaze of prison guards.

Nelson's letters to Winnie are rife with longing. "I feel as if I have been soaked in gall, every part of me, my flesh, bloodstream, bone & soul,

so bitter am I to be completely powerless to help you in the rough & fierce ordeals you are going through," he wrote. "The other day I dreamt of you convulsing your entire body with a graceful Hawaiian dance. ... I stood at one end of the famous hall with arms outstretched ready to embrace you as you whirled towards me with the enchanting smile that I miss so desperately." Closing that part of his letter, he had a request: "The dream was for me a glorious moment. If I must dream in my sleep, please hawaii for me."

Knowledge that their world-famous relationship later foundered inflects any current reading of his letters to her. While Nelson was incarcerated, Winnie emerged as a leader in her own right. By February 1990, when they left Victor Verster Prison hand in hand, they were thoroughly ill suited for each other, not only as husband and wife but also as like-minded comrades in the struggle. Nelson, on that day, was 71, while Winnie, 19 years younger, was still in her prime. He'd been cut off from the lived experience of mostly poor, mostly black South Africans, and Winnie had experienced repeated cycles of mass repression and mass uprising. She advocated forms of violent resistance, such as the execution of suspected spies by "necklacing," or forcing a tire on the victim's shoulders and setting it aflame—a method that other leaders of the movement later criticized.

The couple separated before Nelson's 1994 inauguration as the country's first black president, and Winnie grew increasingly critical of him and successive ANC governments for failing to achieve greater measures of socioeconomic justice. In the country's iconography, Nelson has come to be the kindly *Tata* (father), known for his outsize devotion to the rule of law and his long-suffering insistence on a peaceful transition to democracy; Winnie, in death as in life, symbolizes a resurgent demand for radical redistribution of land and wealth. "I am not Mandela's product," she told a reporter in 1999. "I am the product of the masses of my country and the product of my enemy." Their competing legacies, as central figures in the founding of a new democracy 24 years ago, lie at the heart of current debates about South Africa's future in chat rooms, social media, journalistic accounts, comment on the streets, and official statements from the government and the ANC.

The minister of Justice never replied to Mandela, but the minister's successor ultimately found himself at the conference table his onetime prisoner had envisioned. In the intervening quarter century, Mandela stubbornly placed his bet on the promise, and logic, of universal human rights. Until the end, he also insisted on the possibility of late-stage redemption for white oppressors. His almost religious faith in the power of reason and the value of education comes alive in these letters. Here, too, the reader will find an inkling of the high costs of a dream so long deferred.

Monstrous Achievement

Two hundred years on, a writer's cautionary tale still captivates

Review by Valerie Martin

IN SEARCH OF MARY SHELLEY: The Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein
BY FIONA SAMPSON
Pegasus, 304 pp., $28.95

When Mary Shelley, having lost her adored and difficult husband and three of her children in Italy, at last returned to England in 1823, she chanced to ask an acquaintance for advice on choosing a school for her surviving son. "Oh, send him somewhere where they will teach him to think for himself!" her friend said. Mary replied heartily: "Teach him to think for himself? Oh, my God, teach him rather to think like other people!"

This year marks the bicentennial of the publication of *Frankenstein,* Mary Shelley's classic cautionary tale of scientific hubris and reckless-

Valerie Martin's most recent novel is *The Ghost of the Mary Celeste.*

A posthumous portrait of Mary Shelley by Reginald Easton, said to be based on his study of Shelley's death mask

ness. Therefore, we must needs have a new biography of the teenage author, who was inspired by ghost stories shared among friends on a stormy night in Switzerland. Because she was the daughter of famous parents—Mary Wollstonecraft, feminist icon, and the radical philosopher and journalist William Godwin—and also because at the age of 16, she ran away with Percy Bysshe Shelley, a young, married poet who had already kicked over the traces of an expensive education and a repressive aristocratic parent, Mary lived in the shadow of who she was and whom she knew. Now, two centuries after she imagined a monster and the mad scientist who created him, more people have read her novel than the essays of her radical parents and the poems of her husband combined. That she was 19 when *Frankenstein* was published adds a piquancy to the fame; it came early, and as often happens in such cases, though Mary wrote several books and lived off her pen throughout her life, she never surpassed this first soaring imaginative flight.

Mary lived in the shadows of others, but today, more people have read her novel than the essays of her radical parents and her husband's poems combined.

Fiona Sampson, an esteemed British poet and author in her own right, addresses the challenge of a new inquiry into Mary's not-unexamined life (there are several extant biographies) in an oddly defensive introduction, declaring her intention to show us Mary Shelley as she has not been seen before, "closer to us, and closer again, until she's hugely enlarged in close-up. I want to see the actual texture of her existence, caught in freeze-frame." It's an intriguing method, and it serves both the biographer and her subject well.

Sampson opens each chapter with a visual scene meant to bring Mary and her world into tighter focus. She gives us Mary's birth, followed hard on by the death of her famous mother from puerperal fever; the meeting, described by her future husband's best friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, when Mary summoned Percy to a tryst through a partially opened door in her father's library; the elopement, with Percy and the pregnant, seasick Mary collapsed in each other's arms on the schooner deck during a stormy night passage across the English Channel; the group of friends gathered in the drawing room of Lord Byron's villa on Lake Geneva, electrifying each other with ghost stories; the arrival of family friend Edward Trelawny with the news that the drowned bodies of Percy and his companion Edward Williams had washed up on the shore in Livorno—all these set pieces illuminate Mary in what should be a revelatory light.

But Sampson won't stand back and let the reader marvel at these beautifully drawn scenes. She's like a painter who doesn't know when to put down the brush. She insists upon reworking her canvas, over and over, until Mary loses color and vitality, and finally fades from view.

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In Hogg's description of Mary's rendezvous with Shelley, for example, he mentions that Mary is wearing a tartan dress, "an unusual dress in London at that time." Sampson pounces upon the detail of the tartan: "*This* is where we can recognise Mary." Thence follows a long series of speculations about why Mary is wearing an "unusual" dress. It's June in London, too hot for wool, but Mary has spent time in Dundee, Scotland, and might well be making a political statement. Maybe she feels the tartan highlights her Scots coloring. Or, Sampson continues, "Perhaps Mary *is* aware, after all, of how unusual her outfit is, and is determined to be special. Or else, quite the opposite: in this cash-strapped household the middle daughter is having to wear her badly chosen new dress, suitable or not, until it is worn out."

Sampson continues these increasingly bizarre and conflicting speculations as she rambles through the rest of Mary's life. She even resorts to unhelpful psychological jargon: Percy is bipolar, Mary suffers from posttraumatic stress. Recounting a time when Shelley, avowed atheist and free-love enthusiast, pressed Mary to have sex with Hogg, Sampson offers a numbered list of nine potential motives. To name a few: Shelley truly believes in free love; he feels trapped by Mary; he's distracted by her stepsister; he's bisexual; he and Hogg are both bisexual, but there are laws against sodomy, so "this is a way for them to sleep (or almost to sleep) together."

What's grievously missing here is any real sense of how Mary apprehended the world as she found it. Sampson does quote from Mary's journals and letters, allowing us to hear her voice, but never at any length. I wish I could say the lively quotation that opens this review appears in the pages of Sampson's biography, but it does not. It comes from a review of a 19th-century biography of Percy Shelley. The reviewer is Matthew Arnold, the year 1888, and Arnold reports Mary's remark as gossip he heard from a friend. *This* is where we can recognize Mary Shelley: acerbic, witty, quick, and very clear about what she sacrificed when she threw in her lot with a radical poet who insisted on thinking for himself.

A Life's Work Gone to Seed

The lost cultivations of an often overlooked colonial scientist

Review by Verlyn Klinkenborg

AMERICAN EDEN: David Hosack, Botany, and Medicine in the Garden of the Early Republic
BY VICTORIA JOHNSON
Liveright, 480 pp., $29.95

Sometime around 1820, the U.S. Mint struck a medal designed by Moritz Fürst in honor of Dr. David Hosack, who is the subject of Victoria Johnson's *American Eden: David Hosack, Botany, and Medicine in the Garden of the Early Republic*. On the obverse of the medal, Hosack is shown in profile. He's a solid man, with a substantial curve of flesh joining his plump chin to his neck. He has pendulous earlobes and a curious coiffure that licks flamelike toward the top of the coin, perhaps as a sign of his energy, his industriousness, his irrepressible desire to set others afire with his plans and projects. Looking at that face, you can see why one contemporary wrote that Hosack was "manly and dignified ... affable and engaging." You can also see why the botanist John Torrey found him "overbearing."

Perhaps it takes an overbearing man to accomplish as much as Hosack did in his lifetime (1769–1835). He was as good a doctor, scientifically speaking, as it was possible to be in that era. He was—again, according to a contemporary—"one of the greatest botanists of the age." He was also an arch-instigator, a founder of organizations and associations, like the New-York Historical Society. He worked for years to create a 20-acre private botanical garden—Elgin Garden—but was unable, in the end, to turn it into a lasting, public institution. And yet David

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David Hosack, as shown in an 1835 line engraving by A. B. Durand, based on a painting by artist Thomas Scully

WELLCOME COLLECTION

Hosack will always, and perhaps mainly, be remembered as the doctor who was present when Aaron Burr shot Alexander Hamilton, the doctor who was with Hamilton when he died.

American Eden is Victoria Johnson's effort "to bring David Hosack into living relief." It's a difficult task. Hosack was no Humboldt. He was a man of the classroom, the laboratory, the committee, the library, the club, the garden. He wasn't an adventurous traveler or a botanical explorer—he was the man to whom explorers sent seeds and plants. Hosack's life was extremely full—he married three times, had many children, taught many fine doctors and botanists, knew absolutely everyone, wrote a great deal—and yet the *story* of his life, apart from a few exceptional incidents, isn't especially compelling, as stories go.

Johnson's research is impeccable, and *American Eden* is clearly a labor of love. But I wish the book had been what I think it really wanted to be: an intellectual history with an ensemble cast, organized thematically, largely free of chronology, instead of a time-driven narrative of one man's life and his connection with the lives of others. The prevailing wisdom seems to be that readers don't want to hear about ideas; they'd rather hear a good story about people who occasionally *have* ideas. Writers are often told, for instance, that the best way to write about science is to write instead about the lives of scientists. The result is a structural cliché based on a false assumption. That's what causes the tension you can detect in *American Eden*—the effort to personalize the period and the place, to vivify the narrative through the thoughts and especially the feelings of Hosack, as if the reader wouldn't otherwise care. Johnson does this partly by vivifying her own writing in ways that are sometimes melodramatic and sometimes just silly.

Here's what I mean. One of the gardeners at Elgin Garden was John Eddy, Hosack's nephew, who happened to be deaf. It's an emotive opportunity not to be missed. "He could not hear," Johnson tells us, "the waves beating against the Paulus Hook ferryboat, the whisk of dry grass around his ankles as he crossed a field, or the snap of a branch between his hands." In fact—of course!—the list of sounds that John Eddy couldn't hear is limitless. Of another of Hosack's contemporaries, Johnson writes, he "had the look about him of a man who could not reach for a quill

Hosack will always, and perhaps mainly, be remembered as the doctor who was present when Aaron Burr shot and killed Alexander Hamilton.

pen without a fluttering of soft white cuffs." This is a sentence from a romance novel. Aaron Burr's daughter vanishes at sea, and here too the heartstrings must be plucked. "Now [Burr] would never pull a chair close to hers and laugh with her about the fascinating, maddening people he had met in Europe. He would never dazzle her with stories of the palaces, the landscapes, and the gardens he had seen. He would never get to take her little hand in his again, or that of his only grandchild." How is the reader served by this? When Johnson says that "the farmland" Hosack turned into Elgin Garden "now lies dormant beneath the limestone and steel of Rockefeller Center," I want to assure her that the soil that made it farmland in the first place was blasted and trucked away during construction in the early 1930s, if not long before.

When Johnson writes well—plainly and without trying to entice the reader—she writes very well. But *American Eden* practically swims with chronology, and the result is verb tenses darting about like unschooled fishes. She's so busy trying to propel—and follow—the narrative that she's unable to give her central themes the sustained attention they deserve. One such theme is the fate of science in a hard-headed commercial nation at a time when science was still being defined. Another theme is the fate of philanthropic institutions. Why do they succeed and how do they fail, especially in an immature society? And what about the relationship between medicinal botany and medical practice in the early 19th century? These are excellent subjects.

Hosack was both a joiner and a founder, a man who reveled in turning good ideas into well-governed associations of well-intentioned men. He believed strongly in the value of publicly funded science. He spent a fortune creating a botanical garden dedicated to the practical uses of plants—a garden that was purchased, after much delay and political maneuvering, by the State of New York and then essentially abandoned. Perhaps Hosack's Elgin Garden was the wrong model for such an institution. Or perhaps it was simply the wrong time. After all, the New York Botanical Garden wasn't founded until 1891, 56 years after Hosack's death. His garden may have faded away—its plants scattered, its buildings demolished—but it advanced the idea, in a raw, young country, that public institutions committed to scientific understanding are a fundamental mark of civilization.

Everything Was Radiant

A Soviet reactor's meltdown and its far-reaching consequences

Review by Kristen Iversen

CHERNOBYL:
The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe
BY SERHII PLOKHY
Basic Books, 404 pp., $32

In April 1986, I was living and working in a small village in Germany when I heard that radiation from an unknown source had been detected in Sweden. Later that day, the Soviets acknowledged that a nuclear accident had occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. It was one of the worst industrial disasters in world history and today serves as a defining moment of the Cold War. In my German village, we were told not to drink milk or eat blueberries. An uneasy feeling took hold. We didn't know what to believe.

Serhii Plokhy, a professor of Ukrainian history at Harvard, was an up-close observer of what happened at Chernobyl. At the time of the accident, he lived less than 500 kilometers from the damaged reactor, and a later thyroid test suggested he suffered radiation exposure. In his new book, *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe,* he casts his lyrical eye on a vast amount of detail, giving readers a sense of dramatic urgency that makes his account difficult to put down.

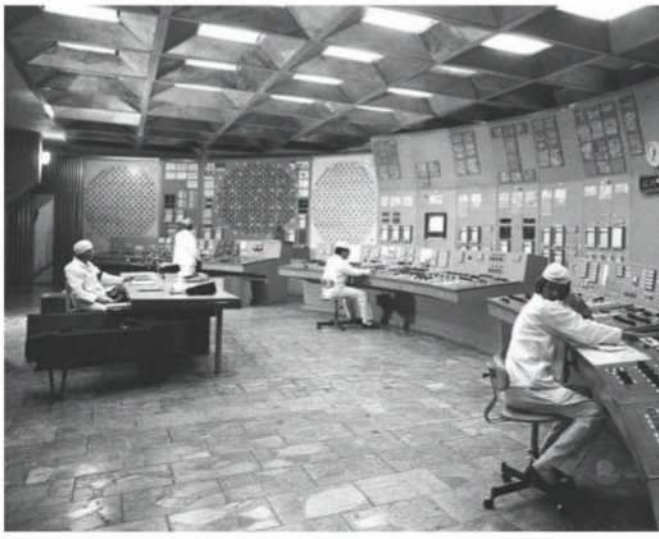
Kristen Iversen is the literary nonfiction editor of *The Cincinnati Review.* Her most recent book is *Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats.*

The town of Chernobyl was founded in 1193, established on lands that belonged to Kyivan princes. The name stems from the ubiquitous wormwood shrub, recognized by its dark color (the Ukrainian word for "black" is *chornyi*). After the accident, President Reagan became one of the many people who believed that the Chernobyl disaster had been prophesied by the story of the wormwood star in the Book of Revelation.

When engineers chose the site for a new nuclear power plant, they described the sand hills, pines, and moss as a land of "silence," where one has "a sense of primeval creation." Chernobyl's nuclear workers enjoyed special privileges, such as housing, food, and goods not available elsewhere in the Soviet Union, and overall, a higher standard of living. A bedroom community north of the plant, near the Prypiat River and a railroad station, quickly grew to a population of 12,000 people. Life was so good, in fact, that more than 1,000 babies were born in Chernobyl per year, at a rate significantly higher than elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

By 1985, the year before the meltdown, the future of the Soviet Union and the nuclear industry looked secure. But even then, Viktor Briukhanov, Chernobyl's plant director, expressed reservations. In a surprisingly frank interview with a Ukrainian journalist in 1985, he said, "We must hope that this will also promote greater attention to the reliability and safety of atomic energy generation at our Chernobyl station in particular. This is most urgent for us." Plokhy found the comment, although it was notably omitted when the interview was first published.

Despite ongoing technical problems and delays, and a design that did not allow for a concrete containment structure in the event of a reactor failure, censorship prevailed over precaution. Anatolii Maiorets, the Soviet energy minister, proclaimed that "reports on adverse consequences of ecological effects on service personnel and the population ... on the environment, are not subject to open publication in the press or in radio and television broadcasts."



Design flaws and operating errors led to unstable conditions in the reactor core that resulted in an explosion, followed by an intense fire.

On April 26, 1986, a bright spring day, the citizens of Prypiat were busy. Seven weddings were underway. A resident recalled, "There were lots of children in the street. There were kids playing in the sand, building houses, making mud pies. The older ones were racing about on their bikes. Young mothers were pushing their baby carriages. Everything looked normal." People were fishing in the cooling pond—touted as a safe place to breed fish—and exploring the neighboring forests along the Prypiat River.

All this despite what had happened the previous evening. Workers at the plant shut down Reactor Number 4 for scheduled system checks and repairs. The planned test was meant to simulate a power failure, and it involved an intentional but temporary switching off of safety controls—a fatal mistake, as it turned out. Design flaws in the reactor itself and operating errors in the control room

Above left: the control room at Chernobyl before the disaster. Right: clean-up workers prepare to climb onto the roof of the damaged reactor, October 1986.

LEFT: RIA NOVOSTI, SPUTNIK IMAGES; RIGHT: IGOR KOSTIN/SPUTNIK IMAGES

led to unstable conditions in the reactor core that, in the early hours of April 26, resulted in an explosion followed by an intense fire that raged for nine days, sending a vast plume of radioactive material high into the atmosphere. Within 24 hours of the explosion, radiation levels had risen to 80,000 times the natural background level.

Plokhy allows us to see the event unfold, moment by moment, as the reactor races out of control and workers at the plant and first responders do what they can to combat the flames. Engineer Razim Davletbaev, speaking later, described a "roar [that] was of a completely unfamiliar kind, very low in tone, like a human moan." A sense of dread permeates Plokhy's book as he narrates events through eyewitness accounts, particularly from those who took the blame from an authoritarian system that put economic development before human health and safety. Briukhanov, for example, was looking forward to a much-needed weekend of relaxing at home with his wife. Instead, he was awakened by a phone call at two A.M., and then rushed to take the company bus to the plant. As he entered the site, he realized that the top of Reactor Number 4 was gone. His heart sank. "This is my prison," he thought to himself. His life was over—he knew, guilty or not, he would bear responsibility for the crisis. Anatolii Diatlov, the plant's deputy chief engineer, was a Renaissance man who kept in shape by walking four kilometers to work and could recite from memory entire works of Russian poets, as well as the pages of technical manuals. When he arrived at the facility, he found himself surrounded by bursting pipes and crackling short circuits. "A picture worthy of the pen of the great Dante!" he wrote later.

Some of the most poignant stories, though, are those of the firefighters. Vasyl Ihnatenko lived in an apartment above the fire department's garage with his pregnant wife. She woke to see him climbing into the fire truck. "Close the window and go back to sleep," he told her. "There is a fire at the reactor. I'll be back soon." She watched as flames illuminated the night. "Everything was radiant," she recalled. "The whole sky." Her husband died of radiation exposure a few weeks later.

Firefighter Hryhorii Khmel, who drove a truck for the fire department, was one of the first to respond to the explosion. His son, Petro, also a firefighter, arrived sometime later and was sent to the roof to help douse the flames—where the escaping radiation was at its worst. Hryhorii spent an exhausting night focused on the disaster before him, only to learn, to his hor-

ror, where his son had been. "I went out onto the street, looked around," he told Iurii Shcherbak, author of the 1989 book *Chernobyl: A Documentary Story*. "It was light, and everything was visible—and saw my Petro coming in uniform, with a coat on, a fire belt, a cap, and leather boots." As Petro, sickened and nearly deaf, was taken away for decontamination, he called, "Are you here, Father?" Plokhy suggests that "Hryhorii must have felt like Nikolai Gogol's Taras Bulba at the execution of his son Ostap, who shouted into the crowd, 'Father, where are you? Do you hear me?' before he was put to death." Petro had suffered significant radiation exposure.

Chernobyl symbolized the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union. Just five years later, the superpower fell apart, "doomed not only by the albatross of its communist ideology but also by its dysfunctional managerial and economic systems." Nine years after the USSR's collapse, Chernobyl finally closed, but it would be another 25 years before a new containment shelter was built over the damaged reactor—financed, in large part, by the international community. "Relations between the two main actors in the post-Chernobyl drama, the Western funding agencies and the Ukrainian government, were not unlike those in a family with a teenager who promises not to behave dangerously if given an ever larger allowance," Plokhy writes. "Some scholars referred to it as environmental blackmail."

The further Chernobyl recedes in time, Plokhy writes, the more it fades into myth. His book, however, should help bring us back to reality. Plutonium has a half-life of 24,000 years, and all of us are living in its deadly shadow. We need only look to Japan's Fukushima disaster to be reminded of how ever-present the nuclear danger remains. Two disasters, two exclusion zones. The world, Plokhy cautions, "cannot afford any more."

"I Figured What the Hell"

A pugnacious reporter looks back on his legendary career

Review by Graeme Wood

REPORTER: A Memoir
BY SEYMOUR HERSH
Knopf, 368 pp., $27.95

AFTER A CERTAIN AGE, old newsmen start shedding inhibitions and, in a spiral of crotchetiness, picking ill-considered fights with editors, colleagues, sources, and finally, readers. For Seymour Hersh, that age was 26, and his subsequent descent into terminal grouchdom has continued for almost six decades. "Fuck them before they fuck you," a neighbor advised the young Hersh. The advice stuck. Hersh's memoir bears the arid title *Reporter,* but *Fuck Them* would better convey the author's diction, and his attitude toward enemy and ally alike.

Hersh grew up on the South Side of Chicago, the son of a dry cleaning store owner. He became a beat reporter there (a "punk Jew," he writes, among the older journos covering, and sometimes partaking in, local corruption), and like many ambitious print journalists, wormed his way into writing features by filing prose insufficiently dull for the regular newswires. Soon enough, he moved on to the Associated Press in Washington, where his natural impertinence served him well. On arrival, he spied Chief Justice Earl Warren having dinner with his wife at a restaurant. "I figured what the hell," Hersh writes (variants of the phrase are ubiquitous in this book), and interrupted the man's meal. I doubt that many lunches of the powerful went uncrashed when Hersh was present.

By 1969, after a stint as Senator Eugene McCarthy's press secretary, Hersh was working his by-then extensive D.C. connections as a full-time, freelance investigative journalist, raking muck mostly in service of the antiwar movement. A tip from a fellow activist-writer led him to the then-still-concealed court-martial of U.S. Army Lieutenant William Calley for the massacre of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai in 1968. Two years and a Pulitzer later, Hersh had become one of the best-known reporters in the country, and he has broken many stories since then, mostly about misbehavior by the United States and its allies.

Throughout this period he was, he writes, "bitching aplenty"—another missed opportunity for a title of this memoir—at colleagues and others. His relationship with his boss at *The New York Times,* A. M. Rosenthal, began with Hersh's hanging up twice. ("Do you know who I am?" Rosenthal asks. "Yes," Hersh says, slamming down the handset.) And somehow, for years, Hersh got away with being antagonistic and abusive because he was also productive. Think Werner Herzog and Klaus Kinski, but with bow ties and Selectrics. Brazenly contemptuous of virtually every *Times* policy and editor, he unearthed and published explosive sto-

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Hersh, above, became famous for breaking huge stories about the misbehavior of the United States and its allies around the world.

Graeme Wood is a national correspondent for *The Atlantic.*

ries, usually after browbeating a succession of editors into allowing an extra thousand words, or restoring a phrasing to its original vitriol.

Hersh's other outlet, *The New Yorker,* published his revelations of American incompetence—sometimes shading into evil—in the War on Terror. His editor there, David Remnick, proved judicious and canny enough to avoid the abusive dynamic that marked Hersh's frenemyship with Rosenthal. But in 2011, when Hersh produced a piece alleging that the Obama administration had lied about the SEAL raid in Pakistan that killed Osama Bin Laden, Remnick declined to publish him, and Hersh's latest claims exonerating Damascus of using chemical weapons, rebutted bitterly by nearly every expert on the conflict, have appeared instead in the *London Review of Books* and Germany's *Die Welt*.

Unidentified Vietnamese women and children, shortly before being killed by U.S. troops at the village of My Lai in March 1968

Hersh is a reporter, not a stylist, and his prose reflects a lax attitude toward cliché. This is ultimately a career memoir, and the author "jumps" at chances and gets his "dream job." Hersh is self-defending to the point of being self-regarding and quotes famous correspondents who have complimented his reportage. But he is also honest about his reliance on fact checkers at *The New Yorker* and the *LRB,* and he writes approvingly of editors at the *Times* who tell him to "shut the fuck up and get the story ready."

Hersh's memoir begins plaintively, with concern that journalism has ceased accommodating the long, expensive investigative processes that his stories typically required. "I was free to travel anywhere, anytime, for any reason, with company credit cards," he notes wistfully about an era when he carried $10,000 in petty cash on his person. Today most reporters wince before asking an editor to fund a trip to Kansas.

More striking than shrinking budgets, though, has been journalism's shrinking tolerance for rock-star levels of misbehavior. In 1976, enraged by a round of editorial revisions for a series at the *Times,* Hersh was inspired to throw his typewriter through his window and storm out of the office. "I arrived the next day to find the window replaced, and my office cleaned of glass," he writes. "Not one word about it was said to me." Rather than apologize, his next act was to write another bilious memo, "bitching about the process." Rosenthal eventually sent a mordant countermemo, telling Hersh that if he were a better reporter, the process might not be so protracted. The retort, wittier than a flying typewriter, "made me laugh," Hersh writes, absorbing the hit without rancor.

I somehow doubt that the *Times*'s policies would permit such drama in the modern era. And that, of course, leaves open the possibility that modern journalism has, for reasons unrelated to budgets, deprived itself of genius by depriving itself of depravity. Rage is a performance-enhancing drug, and the urgent exposure of war crimes is a cause for which we should be willing to break a window or two.

Still, the most thrilling moments of Hersh's memoir are not the Hulk-like rampages but the

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methodical investigative processes that characterize his best work. Does he notice his own duality? He says at one point that he likes to be blustery and noisy. In recent years, he has taken to hyperbole and strutting behavior to advertise his eagerness to talk to sources. The Hersh catalog is uneven in quality, and I suspect the best of it is borne of a subtler process than peacocking around the Beltway.

Once he catches the spoor of a My Lai, Hersh's tracking is a model of craft and control. He bargains with sources; gains knowledge by pretending to have it, or not have it, already; sneaks around; tricks, cajoles, plays his subjects; and engages in a one-man guerrilla war against an embarrassed U.S. government. He is calculating, cold-blooded, well-behaved, and professional. I think I know which Hersh I'd want in the cubicle next to mine. But to have one, I'd have to accept the other.

Split Decisions

A renowned neuroscientist examines human experience

Review by Richard Restak

THE CONSCIOUSNESS INSTINCT: Unraveling the Mystery of How the Brain Makes the Mind
BY MICHAEL S. GAZZANIGA
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 288 pp., $28

IN HIS ENGAGING and wide-ranging new book, *The Consciousness Instinct,* neuroscientist Michael S. Gazzaniga explores a conundrum that has long baffled scientists: "Gazillions of electrical, chemical, and hormonal processes occur in our brain every moment, yet we experience everything as a smoothly running unified whole," he writes. "What is the organization of our brain that generates conscious unity?"

Gazzaniga, director of the SAGE Center for the Study of the Mind at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the author of numerous books on the brain, leads us through three possible approaches to answering this question. The first, and the one to which he devotes the most attention, is the modular theory of brain functioning. It holds that the brain, rather than operating in a holistic fashion, relies instead on thousands of independent processing units, or modules—localized neuronal networks that serve a specific function.

The inner workings of these networks are often revealed when people sustain brain damage to a specific area, allowing scientists to identify the module responsible for normal processing in a particular domain. Patients who suffer damage to the parietal lobe on the right side of the brain, for instance, experience spatial neglect: everything on the left side is ignored, almost as if it didn't exist. They will not eat food on the left side of a plate, or shave or apply makeup to the left side of the face. Some even go so far as to deny the existence of a left arm or leg. This strange behavior, fully described in the 1950s, provided early evidence that the parietal lobe on the brain's right side is responsible for bodily and spatial orientation.

Some explanation is required here. Since the brain's incoming and outgoing tracts cross in the brain stem and spinal cord, the right hemisphere controls sensation and movement related to the left side of the body; the left hemisphere controls them on the right. But when it comes to representations of space, the arrangement is somewhat different: the right hemisphere mediates representations of *both* sides of space, while the left hemisphere controls only the right. In the event of damage to the right hemisphere, the intact left hemisphere maintains awareness of the right side of space. Because of this, neglect almost always involves impaired appreciation of the left side of space.

A similar dynamic, discovered in the mid-19th century, applies to speech. The brain's left hemisphere contains modules devoted to language. Damage in one area affects a person's ability to produce comprehensible speech, whereas damage in a nearby area impairs the ability to understand the speech of others.

Richard Restak is clinical professor of neurology at George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, and the author of 25 books on the brain.

What are the modular brain's implications for consciousness? "Each mental event is managed by brain modules that possess the capacity to make us conscious of the results of their processing," Gazzaniga writes. He suggests an illustrative metaphor: the bubbles in a pot of boiling water. Each bubble has in itself the capacity to evoke the feeling of being conscious, but since they percolate continuously, our sense of consciousness flows without interruption. In other words, consciousness is the product of separate, yet-to-be identified modules somehow working together. As Gazzaniga puts it, "A lot of bubbles are conjoined by the arrow of time and produce something like what we call conscious experience."

Brains and minds belong to two different categories, and the workings of one cannot be adequately described in terms appropriate for the other.

The idea that consciousness results from the confluence of multiple sources comes naturally to Gazzaniga, who along with his mentor, the neuropsychologist Roger Wolcott Sperry, was involved in the so-called split-brain studies of the 1950s—work that later earned Sperry and two of his colleagues a Nobel Prize. When the fibers connecting two cerebral hemispheres are cut, each hemisphere of the split-brain patient functions independently according to the sensory information that it receives. As Gazzaniga explains, the resulting "tug of war" between the hemispheres exposes "the illusion of a unified consciousness"—illusion because, although consciousness seems like a "coherent, flawlessly edited film," it is actually more like a stream of "single vignettes," occurring and recurring in an unpredictable sequence.

The theory of modularity provides a rich and useful approach to understanding consciousness, but it is nothing new. Neuroscientists who treat patients (e.g., neurologists, neurosurgeons, and neuropsychologists) have been studying it for well over 100 years. In terms of pedigree, a modular mind theory was predicated by philosopher Jerry A. Fodor in his 1983 book, *Modularity of Mind,* although it made no claim to anatomic localization. A decade later in my own book, *The Modular Brain,* I affirmed, based on my clinical experience, that modules provide the best explanation for brain functioning. Over the ensuing decades, as neuroscientists have learned more about the elaborate and intricate circuitry within the brain, knowledge about the number and specificity of modules has increased as well. Modular theory is a natural evolution of cerebral localization, dating back to French physician Pierre Paul Broca's 1861 observation that language is encoded in the left hemisphere.

Gazzaniga's second approach to explaining consciousness—and the brain in general—involves the application of subatomic physics, specifically the principle of complementarity, which states that quantum objects possess complementary properties that cannot be measured simultaneously. In other words, there's a gap between the subjective experience of an event ("I had so much fun bodysurfing") and the event itself as observed by someone else ("A person went swimming in the ocean"). A different but related principle prevails within the brain of the bodysurfer himself: on the one hand, the subjective experience (the fun of bodysurfing), and on the other, the associated brain activity (as revealed by neuroimaging).

This distinction between mind and brain was first made more than half a century ago by British philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who coined the term "category mistake." Brains and minds belong to two different categories, and the workings of one cannot be adequately described in terms appropriate for the other. A similar dynamic holds true on the microscopic level: a neuron and its function represent two separate entities with different protocols. Therefore, a thought cannot be reduced to something as mechanical as the interplay of multiple neurotransmit-

ters. Failure to heed these category distinctions can have real-world implications. The current debate about the role of neuropsychiatry in determining criminal responsibility, for example, rests on some variation of the often quoted but unattributed belief that "behind every crooked thought lies a crooked molecule," a dangerous and wrong-headed approach to understanding criminal behavior.

Finally, in his third approach to explaining the nature of consciousness, Gazzaniga posits that in the future, neuroengineers will be tasked with explaining the various levels of brain processing and "crack[ing] the protocols that allow one layer to interpret the processing results of its neighbor layers." But before we place confidence in the success of this approach, Gazzaniga encourages us to see consciousness as a "slippery complex instinct," not "tangible, like an apple, or elusive, like a democracy." Certainly whenever we speak of consciousness, we encounter the slippery paradox of duality: although we know consciousness exists because we experience it in ourselves and can infer it in others, we cannot be certain about consciousness in other creatures. Is a lobster conscious when we toss it into a pot of boiling water? Observing it, many of us would conclude that it "feels" pain. Assuming this to be true, does that pain sensitivity imply conscious appreciation? However unlikely that may seem, we can never know for certain, since lobsters do not possess a brain like humans but instead an arrangement of segmented nerve clusters. Thus the efforts of neuroengineers to explain consciousness must remain limited to *human* consciousness. Ultimately what's involved is consciousness itself explaining its own processing, which reminds me an awful lot of children trying to jump onto their own shadows. ●

Collected by Anne Matthews

Commonplace Book

I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.

—**Fred Allen**

I have always wondered, in reading travels, at the childish joy travellers felt at meeting people they knew, and their sense of loneliness when they did not, in places where there was everything new to occupy the attention. So childish, I thought, always to be longing for the new in the old, and the old in the new. Yet just such sadness I felt, when I looked on the island, glittering in the sunset, canopied by the rainbow, and thought no friend would welcome me there; just such childish joy I felt, to see unexpectedly on the landing, the face of one whom I called friend.

—**Margaret Fuller,** *Summer on the Lakes,* 1844

Our three boats were close together, and down the light current on the flat water we drifted toward the fishing bear.

He picked up a salmon, roughly ten pounds of fish, and, holding it with one paw, he began to whirl it around his head. Apparently, he was not hungry, and this was a form of play. He played sling-the-salmon. With his claws embedded near the tail, he whirled the salmon and then tossed it high, end over end. As it fell, he scooped it up and slung it around his head again, lariat salmon, and again he tossed it into the air.

—**John McPhee,** *Coming into the Country,* 1977

Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word—the men
Leaving the gardens tidy,
The thousands of marriages,
Lasting a little while longer:
Never such innocence again.

—**Philip Larkin,** "MCMXIV," 1964

Why, I ask myself, shouldn't the shining dots of the sky be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France? Just as we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star.

—**Vincent van Gogh,** letter to Theo van Gogh, July 1888

If an American, because his skin is dark ... cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?

—**John F. Kennedy,** June 11, 1963

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way. Some see Nature all Ridicule and Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & some scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees.

—**William Blake,** to the Reverend Dr. Trusler, August 23, 1799

When Mark and I got married we were rich and two years later we were broke. Not

actually broke—we did have equity. We had a stereo system that had eaten thousands of dollars, and a country house in West Virginia that had eaten tens of thousands of dollars, and a city house in Washington that had eaten hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we had *things*—God, did we have things. We had weather vanes and quilts and carousel horses and stained-glass windows and tin boxes and pocket mirrors and Cadbury chocolate cups and postcards of San Francisco before the earthquake, so we were worth something; we just had no money. It was always a little mystifying to me how we had gone from having so much money to having so little, but now, of course, I understand it all a little better, because the other thing that ate our money was the affair with Thelma Rice. Thelma went to France in the middle of it, and you should see the phone bills.

—**Nora Ephron,** *Heartburn,* 1983

Deep in the greens of summer sing the lives
I've come to love ...

—**Theodore Roethke,** "Infirmity," 1960

A tongue in a mouth, mouthing, whispering, and,
A pair of pricked-up, ever-listening ears.
At night you can hear her screeching as she flies
Through the darkness, gliding exactly midway between
The heavens above and the earth beneath, and sits,
Nightwatcher, on the ledges of roofs, or on
The towers of cities, and calls down on the ones
Below, her frightening mingle of truth and lies,
Rhapsodically singing about them in the darkness ...

—**Virgil,** description of Rumor, *The Aeneid* (trans. David Ferry, 2017)

I can hear echoes of my grandfather and grandmother and Aunt Emily, echoes of porch talk on the long summer evenings when affairs were settled, mysteries solved, the unnamed named. ... As a Bolling in Feliciana Parish, I became accustomed to sitting on the porch in the dark and talking of the size of the universe and the treachery of men; as a Smith on the Gulf Coast I have become accustomed to eating crabs and drinking beer under a hundred and fifty watt bulb—and one is as pleasant a way as the other of passing a summer night.

—**Walker Percy,** *The Moviegoer,* 1961

"[N]ever be flippantly rude to any inoffensive, grey-bearded stranger that you may meet in pine forests or hotel smoking-rooms on the Continent. It always turns out to be the King of Sweden."

—**Saki (H. H. Munro),** "Reginald at the Theatre," 1902

We enjoy caricatures of our friends because we do not want to think of their changing, above all, of their dying; we enjoy caricatures of our enemies because we do not want to consider the possibility of their having a change of heart so that we would have to forgive them.

—**W. H. Auden,** *The Dyer's Hand,* 1962

Everything fell, and Miss Sasaki lost consciousness. The ceiling dropped suddenly and the wooden floor above collapsed in splinters and the people up there came down and the roof above them gave way; but principally and first of all, the bookcases right behind her swooped forward and the contents threw her down, with her left leg horribly twisted and breaking underneath her. There, in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books.

—**John Hersey,** "Hiroshima," *The New Yorker,* August 31, 1946

AMERICAN PLACES

Randi Ford lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and specializes in nature paintings. Her canvas *Forever Evolving* depicts the view across Lake Michigan from South Manitou Island—part of a chain of islands reaching north to the Straits of Mackinac and known for its sand dunes and old-growth forests. In the distance is Sleeping Bear Dunes.

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