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THE MAIL

RACISM AND BARBECUE

I read with interest Lauren Collins's article about the racist barbecue baron Maurice Bessinger, and his family's handling of his legacy ("Secrets in the Sauce," April 24th). Collins writes that "barbecue might be America's most political food," citing the social and civic role of barbecue feasts in American history. Barbecue has also been used as a metaphor for the lynching of black bodies, and was a social and civic ritual of white supremacy. In 1916, the black teen-ager Jesse Washington was lynched in Waco, Texas. Afterward, his body was mutilated and burned. The murder was a public spectacle—a party, even, with white women and children in attendance—and professional photographers took pictures, which they sold as souvenir postcards. One of these postcards, which survives, has a handwritten inscription: "This is the barbecue we had last night. . . . Your son, Joe."

*Julia Lee
Los Angeles, Calif.*

Maurice Bessinger's son Lloyd claims that he doesn't know how he can make amends for his father's racism. "I'm not objecting to doing that," he told Collins. "I just need to know what that is." If you claim to have good intentions, then do something good. How hard is that? Contribute to a scholarship fund. Canvass for a voter-registration drive in an African-American neighborhood. Give money to the N.A.A.C.P. Donate resources to help restore black churches that have been attacked. Join the action to remove the last Confederate flags. There's a very long list of things that Bessinger could do. It doesn't take much imagination to make amends, but it does take genuine good will.

*Ann Terry
Bellerose, N.Y.*

TASTE BUDS

Lizzie Widdicombe's article on Laurie Wolf and edible marijuana got me thinking about the difference between what is "real" and what is "unreal" ("High Cui-

sine," April 24th). Once, after eating an edible and getting really high, I tried a seafood soup at a Thai restaurant in my neighborhood. I had never tasted anything so delicious, and I moaned with pleasure with each spoonful. The next week, I returned to the restaurant, eager to try the soup again. This time, I was sober. The soup was . . . O.K. Nothing special. I have replicated this dining experiment many times, always with the same outcome. Which of these experiences was "real"? Could it be that the marvellous flavors I experience when I am high are made possible because the part of my brain that limits taste sensations is turned off? And, if that's the case, why wouldn't one wish to be transported to gustatory heaven as often as possible?

*Simone LaDrumma
Seattle, Wash.*

THE INSTAGRAM LIFE

Rachel Monroe's depiction of Emily King and Corey Smith—who live out of their van and use corporate sponsors to support their surfing, biking, and yoga—reveals the degree to which we have lost ourselves in social media ("#Vanlife," April 24th). The excitement that I felt reading the article's opening paragraphs, which describe young people finding meaning in the natural world, quickly turned to disgust over the insidious means through which corporate sponsorships are driving consumerism. Do King and Smith really believe that they are still free spirits, despite constantly worrying about product placement and their Instagram following? Regardless of their initial intent, they have become de-facto agents of the marketing behemoth whose philosophy runs exactly counter to the hippie ideal that they espouse.

*Arup De
Delmar, N.Y.*

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The spindly compositions that Valerie Teicher records as **Tei Shi** are fierce in their modesty, making spare use of whispered high notes and loud screams for a well-studied blend of Janet and Gwen. On May 9-10, the Buenos Aires native performs her debut record, “Crawl Space,” at Rough Trade; the record’s nimble R. & B. is broken up deftly by home recordings she has saved since childhood. “I’m a bad singer, I confess it,” a young Teicher warns through cassette hiss. At twenty-six, she’s grown into her voice, and her tone is just as brave.

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY CARMEN DANESHMANDI

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Arlington

The Irish playwright Enda Walsh wrote and directs this Orwellian tale of a man monitoring a young woman in the waiting room of a tower. (*St. Ann's Warehouse, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. In previews.*)

Can You Forgive Her?

In Gina Gionfriddo's play, directed by Peter DuBois, Amber Tamblyn plays a woman afflicted by financial and romantic problems who finds refuge with an engaged couple on Halloween. (*Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Previews begin May 4.*)

Derren Brown: Secret

Brown, an Olivier-winning British performer known for his feats of mind-reading and audience manipulation, presents an evening of "psychological illusion." (*Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.*)

Ernest Shackleton Loves Me

In this new musical by Joe DiPietro, Brendan Milburn, and Valerie Vigoda, a put-upon single mother (Vigoda) embarks on an Antarctic adventure with the famous explorer. (*Tony Kiser, 305 W. 43rd St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens May 7.*)

Happy Days

Theatre for a New Audience stages James Bundy's Yale Rep production of the Beckett play, starring Dianne Wiest as a chatterbox half-buried in a mound of sand. (*Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens May 4.*)

Mourning Becomes Electra

Target Margin mounts Eugene O'Neill's dramatic trilogy, which resets Aeschylus' "Oresteia" in New England just after the Civil War. David Herskovits directs. (*Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. Opens May 3.*)

Pacific Overtures

John Doyle directs Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's musical from 1976, which recounts the opening of nineteenth-century Japan, starring George Takei as the Reciter. (*Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens May 4.*)

Seven Spots on the Sun

In Martin Zimmerman's play, directed by Weyni Mengesha, a reclusive doctor in a town ravaged by civil war and plague discovers that he has a miraculous healing touch. (*Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-627-2556. In previews.*)

Sojourners & Her Portmanteau

Ed Sylvanus Iskandar directs two installments of Mfoniso Udofia's nine-part saga, which charts the ups and downs of a Nigerian matriarch. (*New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. In previews.*)

3/Fifths

James Scruggs conceived and wrote this interactive piece, which transforms the theatre into a dystopian theme park called SupremacyLand,

celebrating white privilege. (*3LD Art & Technology Center, 80 Greenwich St. 800-838-3006. In previews. Opens May 9.*)

Venus

Suzan-Lori Parks's play, directed by Lear deBessonet, is inspired by the life of Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman who became a nineteenth-century sideshow attraction because of her large posterior. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. In previews.*)

The Whirligig

The New Group presents Hamish Linklater's play, directed by Scott Elliott and featuring Zosia Mamet, Dolly Wells, and Norbert Leo Butz, in which divorced parents care for their ailing adult daughter as figures from her past reemerge. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin May 4.*)

NOW PLAYING

Anastasia

The Romanov Grand Duchess, who at seventeen was brutally slaughtered by the Bolshevik secret police, doesn't seem like the ideal candidate for the Disney-princess treatment, but that was the idea behind the 1997 Twentieth Century Fox animated movie. This new musical, which also draws (to a much lesser extent) from the 1956 Ingrid Bergman film, picks up on the legend that Anastasia (the clear-voiced Christy Altomare) survived the revolution. With the help of a con-artist duo (John Bolton and Derek Klena), she travels to Paris to reveal herself to her grandmother, the exiled Dowager Empress (Mary Beth Peil). In Darko Tresnjak's production, it's all incredibly overblown, from the screen-saver-like cityscape projections to the earwormy score, by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty ("Ragtime"), who never met a pop ballad they couldn't top off with a sweeping high note. (*Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.*)

The Antipodes

Annie Baker is a writer of astonishing skill and believability, but after forty minutes of her dramatically confused new play you're at a loss to understand what any of it means, let alone why you should be interested. We're in a writers' room; the writers are (maybe) trying to come up with an idea for a TV show. They're all men, except Eleanor (Emily Cass McDonnell), who confesses that she, like all the women in her family, has something medically wrong with her. Sandy (the great Will Patton) heads the proceedings, and, as they spitball ideas, aspects of their lives and dreams mesh with the crushing banality of creating by committee. In part about the commodification of the imagination, the show is also a mournful paean to storytelling as a former Eden now filled with spoiled or jaded children, with elements of Richard Maxwell's stylish investigations into bro alienation, competitiveness, and secret-sharing added to the mix. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.*)

Bandstand

The best thing in this musical—about a Cleveland swing band, assembled to compete in a national

song contest in 1945, whose members all served in or were widowed by the Second World War—is that the actors play their own instruments. There's little else to recommend it: Andy Blankenbuehler's direction and choreography are often stiff and cluttered, Richard Oberacker and Robert Taylor's songs are forgettable, and Corey Cott makes an unsympathetic leading man. It's brazen the way it scolds showbiz for exploiting veterans while indulging in similar shtick. And it's risible the way it excludes nonwhite Americans from its versions both of the war and of jazz music: aside from a single, strictly peripheral black actor in a cast of twenty-one and the most fleeting of references to Fats Waller and Duke Ellington, it's all as white as a snowstorm. (*Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.*)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

There's pure imagination, and then there's overthinking it. That's what seems to have happened with this musical adaptation of the Roald Dahl classic, heavily retooled after a glitzy West End outing. In Jack O'Brien's production, Willy Wonka (an uncertain Christian Borle) disguises himself as a candy-shop proprietor, only to reemerge in purple regalia at the end of Act I. After intermission, we enter the factory, which is less a cabinet of wonders than a featureless box onto which we're supposed to project our wildest dreams. Still, the show is not without its tasty pleasures, among them the Oompa Loompas, designed by the puppeteer Basil Twist (who should have been given the run of the whole thing), and the scene-stealer Jackie Hoffman, as a boozy Mrs. Teevee. Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman wrote the mostly catchy score, interspersed with beloved songs from the 1971 film. (*Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929.*)

Hello, Dolly!

In Jerry Zaks's fairly standard production of the 1964 musical, by Jerry Herman and Michael Stewart, Horace Vandergelder (David Hyde Pierce) is a sour, money-grubbing merchant from Yonkers. His two young assistants, Cornelius Hackl (Gavin Creel) and Barnaby Tucker (Taylor Trensch), head into New York City, where they fall for two women: Irene Molloy (Kate Baldwin), a hatmaker on whom Vandergelder has set his sights, and her assistant, Minnie Fay (Beanie Feldstein). But the plot turns on Dolly Levi, the matchmaker, and the show offers ample opportunity for whoever plays the part to showcase her ability to convey pathos and defiance, grief and comedy. And who better than Bette Midler to give us all that? The role isn't necessarily tailor-made for her—she's infinitely more complicated and funny, and there isn't a corny bone in her body—but she has remade the character in her own image: as a scrappy trickster with needs and vulnerabilities. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/1/17.) (*Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.*)

Indecent

Paula Vogel's revelatory play—her belated Broadway debut—begins in Warsaw in 1906 and ends in Connecticut a half century later, but it's as intimate and immediate as a whispered secret. It tells the story of another play, Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance," which toured the theatres of Europe before coming to Broadway, in 1923, and causing a scandal, in part because of a passionate lesbian kiss. The cast was tried for obscenity, and Asch chose to distance himself from the work—all before Nazism overtook the play, its people, and the world it came from. Directed

with poetry and polish by Rebecca Taichman, Vogel's play thrums with music, desire, and fear, and it's shrewd about the ways in which America isn't free, and about how art does and doesn't transcend the perilous winds of history. (*Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.*)

The Little Foxes

Long dismissed as ripe melodrama, Lillian Hellman's 1939 play, about a Southern family rotten with greed and rancor, has a Greek tragedy's implacability and the taut plotting of film noir. Daniel Sullivan's production, for Manhattan Theatre Club, is traditional in every respect but one: Cynthia Nixon and Laura Linney take turns playing the imperious, steel-willed Regina Giddens—one of modern theatre's greatest creations—and the vulnerable, alcoholic Birdie Hubbard. While both stars play Birdie along the same lines, each brings very different shadings to Regina. Linney portrays the villainy with gleeful relish, while Nixon makes us fully understand how Regina's anger has been fuelled by decades of frustration. It's worth seeing the show twice if you can. Hellman's incisive storytelling, her razor-etched insights into women's limited options in a patriarchal society, are largely good enough to withstand the scrutiny. (*Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.*)

The Play That Goes Wrong

Mischief Theatre's combustible farce, originally staged above a pub in North London, invites us to the opening night of "Murder at Haversham Manor," a hoary nineteen-twenties whodunnit staged by the ostentatiously inept Cornley University Drama Society. "The Play That Goes Wrong" is a bit hoary, too—an intricately planned fiasco in which doors slam, cues go haywire, the leading lady gets knocked unconscious, and every inch of the musty drawing-room set (by Nigel Hook) is destined to come crashing down. Of course, it takes incredible skill to pull off such bungling, and Mark Bell's production nails every spit take and sight gag. (This is one of those genres that Brits just do better—you need those plummy accents to paper over the mayhem.) The show never tells us anything about its characters, but it succeeds as pure comedic eye candy. (*Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.*)

Six Degrees of Separation

The playwright John Guare has written at least three masterpieces, and this is one, a brilliant investigation into the lies we tell ourselves—and our children—without admitting how much we need to believe them to get through. A wealthy Manhattan couple, Ouisa (Allison Janney, tall and nimble) and Flan (John Benjamin Hickey), live to succeed while forgetting how to love. When Paul (Corey Hawkins) enters their home, saying he's the son of Sidney Poitier, the couple begin to feel things they haven't felt for years, like the excitement that comes with letting difference into their lives. While the director, Trip Cullman, manages the relatively large cast with clarity and power, nothing feels inspired except for Hawkins's performance and Peter Mark Kendall's, as Rick, one of Paul's lovers and victims. Both characters want to believe in the power of love, but are undone, in different ways, by romance: Rick's with a man he cannot know, and Paul's with himself, the person he dreams of being but can never realize. (*Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.*)

Twelfth Night

Saheem Ali's production of Shakespeare's gender-bending comedy moves from delight to delight,

its Miami-like setting invigorating it with a fresh infusion of color and song. The party scenes, fuelled by Donnetta Lavinia Grays's vocals and Michael Thurber's multi-instrumental beverage cart of wonders, are straight-up bangers. The wedding finale earns its happy tears, its couples palpably hungering for each other. The occasional passages in Spanish eloquently demonstrate how every production of Shakespeare is a translation. It seems unfair to single out any actor from such a lovable ensemble, but Christopher Ryan Grant's headlong plunge into comic invention as Sir Toby Belch deserves special commendation. After touring New York City as part of the Public's Mobile Unit, the show is now home at Astor Place for a three-week run. As Viola (a convincingly desirable Danaya Esperanza) puts it, you can keep your purse: all seats are free. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Amélie Walter Kerr. **Come from Away** Schoenfeld. **A Doll's House, Part 2** Golden. (Reviewed in this issue.) **The Emperor Jones** Irish Repertory. **Gently Down the Stream** Public. **The Glass Menagerie** Belasco. **Groundhog Day** August Wilson. **How to Transcend a Happy Marriage** Mitzi E. Newhouse. *Through May 7.* **In & of Itself** Daryl Roth. **The Lucky One** Beckett. **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. **Oslo** Vivian Beaumont. **Present Laughter** St. James. **The Price** American Airlines Theatre. **The Profane** Playwrights Horizons. *Through May 7.* **The Roundabout 59E59.** **Samara** A.R.T./New York Theatres. **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. **Sweat** Studio 54. **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. **Vanity Fair** Pearl. **The View UpStairs** Lynn Redgrave. **War Paint** Nederlander.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art

"Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction"

It looks like a typical march-of-styles historical survey, tracking high points in the boom decades of abstract art. There are ninety-four works by fifty-three international artists, all but one of them drawn from the museum's collection, dating from 1942 to 1969. They are grouped in categories of gestural, geometric, reductive, and "eccentric" abstraction, supplemented with textiles, ceramics, and decorative arts. The show's curators, Starr Figura and Sarah Meister, with assistance from Hillary Reeder, have exercised just one unusual criterion: nothing by a man. This isn't to say that no male presence is felt. Rather, the contrary: most of the works were achieved in an art world—and a culture—that discounted the feminine, presenting women less with glass ceilings than with absent floors. The level of quality is high—transcendently so, in works by Joan Mitchell and Agnes Martin—but the drama of the show is in the intermittent, solitary struggles against steep odds. That changes only toward the end, with the dawn of an era in which such newcomers as the postminimalist sculptors Eva Hesse and Lynda Benglis could at once pioneer important developments in art and invest them with peculiarly sensuous qualities that are not about what the female body is like—the fascination of male artists, for millennia—but about what it's like to have one. *Through Aug. 13.*

Queens Museum

"Anna K.E.: Profound Approach and Easy Outcome"

The highlight of this five-part installation by the cheeky Tbilisi-born, Queens-based artist, which sprawls across a hundred and forty-five feet in the museum's atrium, is a pair of billboard-size photographs, part of an ongoing series in which she photographs herself in front of famous figurative paintings (in this case, two works owned by the Met). Standing before

Otto Dix's 1922 portrait "The Businessman Max Roesberg, Dresden," she wears an anxious expression, as if oppressed by the original picture's art-historical weight. An awkward pose with Balthus's "Girl at a Window" underscores the inevitable self-consciousness of a young woman inserting herself into a history dominated by men. The artist trained as a dancer before shifting her focus to visual art, which comes through in her command of space and absurdist theatricality. *Through Feb. 18, 2018.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

John Baldessari

These works, from 1966 to 1968, mark a turning point for the great L.A. Conceptualist, when he began using a photographic emulsion process to print images directly onto canvas and hired sign painters to execute his text-based works. The most iconic of the latter category is "Pure Beauty," a white square on which the sardonic title is rendered in capital letters; "Space Available" explores the idea of a painting as placeholder. It's purposely generic and empty, but for the author's rather prominent signature, written in pencil. Baldessari extended his challenge to conventional authorship and aesthetics in "paintings" based on grainy photographs, shot at random from the window of his Volkswagen bus, and in sassy art-world appropriations, such as "A 1968 Painting," which features a small, colorless reproduction of a big, blaring Frank Stella. The intimate presentation of this funny, consequential body of work is not to be missed. *Through May 20. (Starr, 5 E. 73rd St. 212-570-1739.)*

Cindy Sherman

The title of this exhibition of three series of photographs, "Once Upon a Time, 1981-2011," aptly conjures a fairy tale: Sherman's pictures are rife with gendered archetypes, rich backstories, impending doom, and melancholic longing. The "Centerfolds," from the nineteen-eighties, evoke damsels, if not exactly in distress, then in vulnerable reverie. The "History Portraits," from the nineties, provocatively

garble art-historical painting styles, depicting aristocratic and religious subjects to emphasize their grotesque qualities. In the largest works here, the “Society Portraits,” from 2008, the shape-shifting artist assumes the eccentric glamour of women of a certain age. The severe, coiffed looks of Sherman’s characters in these later works are poignantly spot-on. They look right at home on the Upper East Side, amid the ladies who lunch. *Through June 10.* (Mnuchin, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020.)

“The Woman Question”

In 2015, Jane Kallir, who is the director of Galerie St. Etienne, curated a show at the Belvedere Museum, in Vienna, which appears in an abbreviated recap here. The broad-strokes title—which borrows a mid-nineteenth-century phrase most closely associated with Victorian England—is little more than an excuse to round up some sixty spectacular fin-de-siècle Austrian works from private collections, which you’re unlikely to see again soon. Gustav Klimt’s drawings here are mostly those of a man who’d rather be painting, though the contrast between the patterned coat and the blank dress and face of Friederike Maria Beer, in a 1916 sketch, is striking. But Egon Schiele’s insistent lines are at their best in pencil, particularly in “Seated Couple (Schiele with His Wife),” which is so cutting that its materials might have been razor wire and sheer intelligence. Oskar Kokoschka’s 1921 watercolor “Girl on Red Sofa” has the charmingly forthright innocence of a children’s-book illustration. *Through June 30.* (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 212-245-6734.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Leslie Hewitt

In this concise exhibition, Hewitt puts the genre of still-life through conceptual paces, exploiting its capacity for both withholding and divulging information. At first glance, the photographic series “Color Study” appears to be composed of variations of the same image—a trio of dahlias on a dark background—printed small and large, in black-and-white and in color. But look carefully and subtle shifts are revealed (note the leaves framing the flowers, which are arranged differently from image to image). For the series “Topographies,” items were photographed against wood surfaces and given classificatory titles. An embroidered handkerchief is identified as a “memory object”; a photograph of a well-worn copy of the post-colonialist philosopher Frantz Fanon’s book “The Wretched of the Earth” is noted as “mildly out of focus.” Throughout her cerebral project, Hewitt frustrates attempts to make simplistic sense of her aesthetic or political choices. *Through May 13.* (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Rochelle Feinstein

Painterly joie de vivre and political malaise face off in Feinstein’s new show, which is titled “Who Cares.” Spoiler alert: apathy loses. “Off Color,” a big square canvas featuring brightly colored trapezoids in pinwheel formation, greets visitors with a wow at the door. In other works, Feinstein tempers ebullience

with encroaching darkness. A white curtain is emblazoned with words and phrases lifted from political news coverage, a tempest of language in the artist’s handwriting. In the scene-stealing “H(e)art Island,” a misty gray encroaches on a maplike abstraction, embellished with a hand-sewn heart shape. Named for Hart Island, the historic New York location of a now defunct psychiatric hospital and a potter’s field, it’s a melancholic tribute to the city’s forgotten. *Through May 14.* (On Stellar Rays, 213 Bowery, at Rivington St. 212-598-3012.)

Rochelle Goldberg

Glazed ceramic figures, clad in felted human hair, hang in the gallery from steel armatures in a show haunted by histories, both recent and Renaissance. Goldberg’s impressive sculptures are loosely modelled on Donatello’s gaunt statue “Penitent Magdalene,” which similarly paired a feminine face with masculine shoulders and feet. Her works also convey some of the anguish of the dismembered forms of the mid-twentieth-century Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow. But what Goldberg achieves most powerfully is the sense of bodies undergoing both trauma and regeneration. Her non-

figurative pieces tend toward portentous opacity; an exception is “Soiled,” a foam mattress that rests on the gallery floor, sprouting grass—equal parts object and organism. *Through May 14.* (Abreu, 88 Eldridge St. 212-995-1774.)

Lee Relvas

If the show’s title, “Some Phrases,” conjures musical notation, it’s apt: Relvas has released six experimental pop albums, under the names Rind and Dewayne Slightweight. Each of the thirteen delicate wooden sculptures in her debut at the gallery is based on a simple action (“Waiting,” “Feeling,” “Adorning”). To create the bentwood forms, Relvas first cuts slender elements out of plywood, then joins them with putty, and sands them down to a satin-smooth finish. The resulting squiggles, lines, and loops suggest quickly sketched drawings of human characters. In the freestanding “Thinking,” an outline strides through a narrowing doorway; in “Holding,” a legless torso that hangs on the wall extends a hand lined with loose change toward the viewer—whether it’s offering or begging remains up in the air. *Through May 21.* (Callicoon, 49 Delancey St. 212-219-0326.)

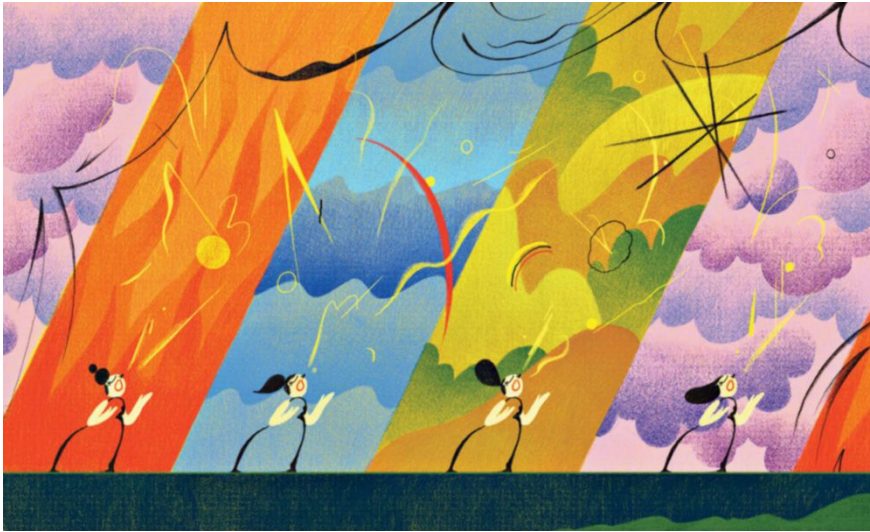


“Lynette Yiadom-Boakye: *Under-Song for a Cipher*,” opening May 3 at the New Museum, includes the British painter’s 2017 canvas “*Ever the Women Watchful*.”

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CLASSICAL MUSIC



City Opera presents “*Los Elementos*,” a charming Spanish Baroque opera by Antonio LITERES.

For the People

New York City Opera makes its second foray into Spanish-language opera.

IT WAS DURING the Paul Kellogg era of the nineties and the aughts that New York City Opera became a force for Baroque opera—specifically works by Handel, which, with their historical-mythical plots and arrays of pleasing arias, were eminently adaptable to a plethora of production styles. The newly resurrected City Opera, under the direction of Michael Capasso, has tacked away from Handel, showcasing the company’s heritage as a producer of verismo works and contemporary pieces. But this week Baroque opera makes an intriguing return with a piece by a Spanish composer whom Handel could have claimed as a colleague: Antonio LITERES (1673–1747), whose “*Los Elementos*” (“The Elements”) will be offered at the Harlem Stage Gatehouse (May 4–7).

The production is part of a new initiative, “*Ópera en Español*,” led by Capasso, who is interpreting the company’s mandate as “the people’s opera” in a new way, emphasizing outreach to the Hispanic community while inviting connoisseurs to sample an out-of-the-way treasure. The program began with last season’s presentation of Daniel Catán’s “*Florencia en el Amazonas*,” a work squarely in the post-Puccini tradition, which was offered

in a production by Nashville Opera. But “*Los Elementos*,” directed and choreographed by Richard Stafford, is an entirely original effort. And, with City Opera currently floating on a wave of critical acclaim for its recent productions of Bernstein’s “*Candide*” and Respighi’s “*La Campana Sommersa*,” its timing seems to be superb.

“*Los Elementos*” has none of the range or ambition of those twentieth-century works: it is an hour-long serenata written circa 1708 for the entertainment of members of the Spanish royal court, who had brought LITERES into their service in the sixteen-nineties. LITERES, a prolific master of vocal works both sacred and operatic, followed the fashions of the time by writing a work that combined Spanish traditions with the sonic and structural innovations of the Italian Baroque. With one exception, the cast is entirely female, following Spanish practice. The instrumental accompaniment calls not only for Italian violins but also for the *vigüela de arco*, a bowed instrument with a medieval Iberian lineage, while the opera’s fetching sequence of arias and choruses mixes Italian da-capo arias with Spanish-style songs that incorporate haunting miniature refrains. Written to amuse the Bourbon aristocracy, “*Los Elementos*” is now for everyone.

—Russell Platt

Metropolitan Opera

Opening night of the Met’s revival of Wagner’s “*Der Fliegende Holländer*” was the occasion for a well-deserved round of toasts. To the late August Everding, whose 1989 production has stood the test of time; to the veteran German baritone Michael Volle (in the title role), whose voice may have lost a bit of richness over the years, but not a bit of authority or style; to the American dramatic soprano Amber Wagner, who offered a star-making performance (as Senta) that, with its dark intensity of coloring, could stand comparison to the best of Astrid Varnay; and to the conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the company’s music director designate, whose solo curtain call brought forth a cascade of roses, thrown by a grateful orchestra. *May 4 at 8 and May 8 at 7:30.* • **Also playing:** The Met has stacked the cast of the spring run of “*Don Giovanni*” with topnotch talent, including Mariusz Kwiecien, Angela Meade, Isabel Leonard, Marina Rebeka, Matthew Polenzani, and Erwin Schrott; Plácido Domingo conducts. *May 3 at 7:30 and May 6 at 8.* • Robert Carsen’s new production of “*Der Rosenkavalier*” brilliantly updates Strauss and Hofmannsthal’s eighteenth-century setting to the turbulent, militarized pre-First World War Vienna of Schnitzler, Klimt, and Musil. Renée Fleming is a poignant Marschallin, Elina Garanča a thrilling and highly original Octavian, and Günther Groissböck a surprisingly dashing and youthful Ochs; Sebastian Weigle. *May 5 and May 9 at 7.* • Franco Alfano’s “*Cyano de Bergerac*” is a fluent example of Italian opera after Puccini, but it really owes its contemporary revival to a few star tenors who have been unable to resist the chance to play the immortal title character. Roberto Alagna headlines the current revival, opposite Jennifer Rowley and Atalla Ayan; Marco Armiliato. *May 6 at 12:30.* • The Met will probably never top the star-studded, eight-hour concert with which it marked its centennial, in 1983, but its **Fiftieth Anniversary Gala**, commemorating the company’s move to Lincoln Center, in 1966, packs its fair share of glamour, with Renée Fleming, Anna Netrebko, Plácido Domingo, Juan Diego Flórez, and René Pape among the dozens of artists scheduled to perform. *May 7 at 6.* (*Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.*)

Experiments in Opera: “Flash Operas”

Six composers have raided the fiction anthology “Flash Fiction Forward” for very short stories to inspire their brief operas. The featured authors include Jack Handey (of “Saturday Night Live” fame), Peter Mehlan (“Seinfeld”), and Patricia Marx (a staff writer for this magazine), and each fifteen-minute piece is fully staged and accompanied by a five-piece chamber ensemble. *May 5 at 7:30 and May 6 at 2 and 7:30.* (*Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway. 212-864-5400.*)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is a big musical statement in every way, and the humanistic values it promotes remain ever fragile in a fallen world. Alan Gilbert, entering his final spring as the Philharmonic’s music director, conducts it this week; Schoenberg’s “A Survivor from Warsaw,” a shattering seven-minute piece for narrator, orchestra, and male chorus that illustrates one man’s harrowing memory of the Holocaust, opens the program. The vocal soloists in the Beethoven are Camilla Tilling, Daniela Mack, Joseph Kaiser, and Eric Owens; the

Tony Award-winning actor Gabriel Ebert narrates the Schoenberg text. With the Westminster Symphonic Choir. *May 3-4 and May 9 at 7:30 and May 5-6 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

Cecilia Chorus of New York

Brahms abstained from using the Latin liturgy in his splendid “German Requiem,” employing instead consolatory passages from the Luther Bible and the Apocrypha. Here, Mark Shapiro conducts this reliably venturesome choral ensemble and an orchestra in the Brahms masterpiece and a thematically allied premiere: “A Garden Among the Flames,” by Zaid Jabri, a Kraków-based Syrian composer of complex yet urgently communicative works, who has set texts by the thirteenth-century Sufi spiritual teacher Ibn Arabi and the contemporary South African-born poet Yvette Christiansë. *May 6 at 8. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

Philadelphia Orchestra

Even while conducting “The Flying Dutchman” at the Met, Yannick Nézet-Séguin still makes time for his orchestra’s third and final Carnegie Hall performance of the season. The program features works that in their own way are as storm-tossed as Wagner’s opera: Bernstein’s Symphony No. 1 (“Jeremiah”), featuring the radiant mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke; Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, with the refined soloist Radu Lupu; and Schumann’s Second Symphony. *May 9 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

RECITALS

Yefim Bronfman

This commanding pianist is often found investigating some of the more interesting avenues of contemporary music, but for Carnegie Hall’s annual Isaac Stern Memorial Concert he’ll stick to the classics in a program that mixes pieces both acidulous and sweet: works by Bartók, Schumann (the “Humoreske”), Debussy, and Stravinsky (Three Movements from “Petrushka”). *May 4 at 8. (212-247-7800.)*

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Two of the Society’s most distinguished string players, the violinist Ani Kavafian and the cellist Carter Brey, join the insightful young pianist Orion Weiss in a program of canonical pieces: Mozart’s sprightly Trio in C Major (K. 548), Dvořák’s uncharacteristically intense Trio in F Minor, Op. 65, and Brahms’s glorious Trio in B Major, Op. 8. *May 5 at 7:30 and May 7 at 5. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)*

Bang on a Can Marathon

The postminimalist collective’s thirtieth-anniversary concert, which is as progressive politically as it is aesthetically, features not only an important work by one of its founders, Julia Wolfe (“Steel Hammer”), but also contributions from such composers, performers, and ensembles as Women’s Raga Massive, Joan La Barbara, the Oberlin Contemporary Music Ensemble, and the Brooklyn steel-pan band Pan in Motion. *May 6, beginning at 2. (Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. Attendance is free with museum admission. bangonacan.org.)*

Emerson String Quartet and Yefim Bronfman

America’s leading quartet, with an equally starry guest artist, offers a concert that touches on the range of enthusiasms it has pursued across four decades: the program includes the Piano Quintet of Brahms, preceded by a gem from the French repertory (Ravel’s sole quartet) and a modernist masterpiece (Berg’s Quartet, Op. 3). *May 7 at 3. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Demdike Stare and Regis

Navigating electronic dance music can be daunting, especially for listeners whose lives may not support late-night scouting trips and liver abuse. For those interested in the genre’s more urbane cabal, however, the producer Regis and the duo Demdike Stare are among the most exciting artists in the field. While Regis skews techno and Demdike Stare leans toward avant-garde ambient, both are influenced by upbringings in industrial British metropolises (Birmingham and Manchester, respectively), and share a fascination with goth atmospherics, post-punk aesthetics, and the occult. And in spite of (or in defiance of) their record-nerd fans both have the ability to whip the floor into a dark dance party. (*Good Room, 98 Meserole Ave., Brooklyn. 718-349-2373. May 5.*)

NAO

Neo Jessica Joshua, who performs as NAO, plays tunes that she describes as “wonky funk.” The East London-bred musician—who, as a teen-ager, studied piano and vocal jazz at London’s Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and then toured as a backup vocalist for Jarvis Cocker and other luminaries—released her debut full-length album, the ebullient, electronic-inflected R. & B. feat “For All We Know,” last year. Her salt-of-the-earth approach to songwriting on the likes of the grooving “Good Girl” has won over fans, but she’s just as fearlessly frank outside of her music. She’s joined by the electronic horn project **Brasstracks**. (*Brooklyn Steel, 319 Frost St., Brooklyn. May 5.*)

Slowdive

Contrary to what its name suggests, this Reading quintet rose quickly in the late-eighties British rock scene. The group pioneered the thunderous, atmospheric instrumentals and non-effusive vocals that came to be known as shoegaze, because guitarists often looked down toward the complex pedal boards at their feet during shows. But Slowdive was also fast to fall: the music press gleefully panned the band’s full-length records in the early nineties, and the group broke up shortly after the release of its 1995 album, “Pygmalion.” In the twenty years since, however, a slew of contemporary groups have name-checked Slowdive, with its progressive approach to layering guitars, as a critical influence. At these reunion performances, Slowdive will stage cuts from its new self-titled album. The band is joined by the dreamy pop project **Japanese Breakfast**. (*Brooklyn Steel, 319 Frost St., Brooklyn. May 8-9.*)

Hank Wood and the Hammerheads

Emerging from the fertile punk scene incubated in Bushwick warehouse spaces, Hank Wood and the Hammerheads have become the best garage act working in New York today. They play a high-octane strain of rock and roll that’s best described as “ripping,” advancing a thread of brawny, pissed-off fight music hybridized by groups like Fear and the Dwarves. The desired effect is most ideally experienced while pogo-dancing around a room

of diaphoretic night owls. (*Saint Vitus, 1120 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. saintvitusbar.com. May 5.*)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

George Garzone

A virtuoso Boston saxophonist of renowned stature, Garzone is also one of the vaunted teachers of his instrument—in short, a local legend. He brings a quartet of fine regional talent with him for this southerly visit, including the trumpeter **Phil Grenadier** and the bassist **John Lockwood**. (*Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. May 5-6.*)

Highlights in Jazz: The Joe Bushkin Centennial

Joe Bushkin was a Zelig-like figure of classic jazz and pop who flitted amid the glimmer of such giants as Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby, Benny Goodman, and Frank Sinatra, contributing idiomatic piano work and, to Sinatra’s delight, the standard tune “Oh! Look at Me Now.” Bushkin died in 2004, but his centennial will be marked by such mainstream mavens as Eric Comstock, Wycliffe Gordon, Warren Vaché, Ted Rosenthal, and Nicki Parrott. (*BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. May 4.*)

Pat Martino

Through soul jazz, bebop, modal adventures, fusion, and beyond, Martino has taken his instrument on a roller coaster of stylistic twists and turns during his six-decade career, emerging as a patriarch of jazz guitar. A serious health crisis and determined recovery in the early eighties, which climaxed with him painstakingly relearning the guitar, may be a touchstone of his iconic legacy, but Martino doesn’t have to call on an inspirational backstory to dazzle. (*Iridium, 1650 Broadway, at 51st St. 212-582-2121. May 4-6.*)

Jim Rotondi

Rock and roll may never die; hard bop appears to be striving for immortality as well. The rip-roaring trumpeter Jim Rotondi wasn’t around for the first flowering of the earthy style, but he’s thoroughly absorbed its playbook. A faithful member of the long-running neo-bop unit One for All, Rotondi here leads a quintet with such reputable associates as the pianist David Hazeltine and the vibraphonist Joe Locke. (*Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. May 5-7.*)

John Scofield Retrospective: “Quiet and Loud Jazz”

He’s a modern-jazz avatar of the electric guitar, but one of John Scofield’s masterworks is the 1996 album “Quiet,” which found him concentrating on an acoustic instrument. At this mini-retrospective, Scofield will revisit that landmark recording, minus the saxophonist Wayne Shorter, one of its key contributors (Joe Lovano, a worthy replacement, will stand in for him). Plugging in, Scofield will also cast a fond look back on “Blue Matter,” a 1986 album that made use of a groove-oriented rhythm section, which included the bassist Gary Grainger and the drummer Dennis Chambers, both of whom will be on hand to reminisce. (*Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. May 5-6.*)

MOVIES

OPENING

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 James Gunn directs the sequel to the 2014 superhero comedy-adventure, starring Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Vin Diesel, and Bradley Cooper. *Opening May 5. (In wide release.)* **The Lovers** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening May 5. (In limited release.)* **Risk** A documentary about Julian Assange, directed by Laura Poitras. *Opening May 5. (In limited release.)* **A Woman's Life** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening May 5. (In limited release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Bringing Up Baby

The enduring fascination of this 1938 screwball comedy is due to much more than its uproarious gags. Having already helped launch the genre, the director Howard Hawks here reinvents his comic voice, establishing archetypes of theme and performance that still hold sway. He turned Cary Grant into an extension of his own intellectual irony, an absent-minded professor who seems lost in thought but awaits the chance to unleash his inner leopard. He refashioned Katharine Hepburn as a sexually determined woman who hides her aggression under intricate scatterbrained schemes that force the deep thinker to deploy his untapped humor and virility. And Hawks brought to fruition his own universe of hints and symbols that conjure the force that rules the world: she tears his coat, he tears her dress, she steals his clothes, she names him "Bone," and the mating cries of wild animals disturb the decorum of the dinner table, even as a Freudian psychiatrist in a swanky bar gives viewers an answer key in advance.—Richard Brody (*MOM!*; *May 4.*)

Colossal

The director Nacho Vigalondo's new movie is partly a blandly schematic drama of self-discovery and partly a thinly sketched sci-fi monster thriller—yet his mashup of these genres is ingenious and, at times, deliciously realized. Anne Hathaway stars as Gloria, a hard-drinking and unemployed New York blogger whose boyfriend (Dan Stevens) throws her out of his apartment. She retreats to her late parents' empty house in her rustic home town, bumps into a childhood friend (Jason Sudeikis), gets a part-time job in the bar he owns, and tries to take stock of her life. Then she and the world are gripped by the sudden appearance of a gigantic monster that wreaks havoc in Seoul for a few minutes each day. The connection between Gloria's story and the monster's is too good to spoil; suffice it to say that its metaphorical power brings a furiously clarifying and progressive insight to Gloria's troubles and aptly portrays them as the quasi-universal woes of humanity at large. The trope takes a lot of setting up, but it's worth it—and Hathaway's self-transformative, forceful performance brings Vigalondo's strong idea to life.—R.B. (*In wide release.*)

Le Deuxième Souffle

The director Jean-Pierre Melville's chilled underworld romanticism, one of the most influential styles in the modern cinema, reached a height of personal expression in this crime drama, from 1966. It stars the gruff, granitic Lino Ventura, as Gustave (Gu) Minda, a principled gangster who escapes

from jail and seeks one last score to fund his getaway. The suave Paul Meurisse plays Gu's admiring nemesis, a police inspector whose honor and professional pride are matched by his deductive brilliance. From the abstract virtuosity of the opening jailbreak to the silent salute of the final heartbreak, Melville distills emotions to rarefied minimalist gestures—as in a New Year's Eve scene with Gu, alone in his hideout, stoically facing a blank future—and offers a stringent morality of self-discipline, both his heroes' and his own. In an age of philosophical and aesthetic extremism, Melville captured the second wind (or the last gasp) of a dignified formality and restraint by way of a crook and a cop who coolly left their mark as auteurs of crime and punishment. In French.—R.B. (*Film Forum*; *May 4-5 and May 9.*)

The Fate of the Furious

The latest and loudest addition to the franchise that will not die. Most of the regulars return, including Letty (Michelle Rodriguez), Roman (Tyrese Gibson), and Hobbs (Dwayne Johnson), who grapples once more with the problem of finding a vehicle large enough to fit him. He also has to lay aside his enmity with Deckard (Jason Statham) for the sake of a higher purpose: the taking down of Dom (Vin Diesel), who has turned against his erstwhile pals. Such is Diesel's dramatic range that the difference between the good Dom and the bad Dom is almost too subtle to be seen by the naked eye. Behind the chaos lurks the figure of Cipher (Charlize Theron), who combines the roles of hacker and seductress, and whose party trick—the hot spot of the story—involves taking command of multiple vehicles, by remote control, in New York, and making them race around the streets like packs of dogs. The rest of the film, directed by F. Gary Gray, is threatened by both silliness and exhaustion; cracking crime at the wheel, you sense, is not a theme on which variations can be spun forever. With Helen Mirren, who doesn't even get to drive.—Anthony Lane (*Reviewed in our issue of 4/24/17.*) (*In wide release.*)

The Lost City of Z

The new James Gray film has a scope, both in time and in geographical reach, that he has never attempted before—an anxious wrestle with the epic form. The movie, based in part on the book of the same name by David Grann, of *The New Yorker*, stars Charlie Hunnam as Percy Fawcett, a British soldier who journeyed repeatedly up the Amazon in the first quarter of the twentieth century. His goal, which came to consume his life and to cut it short, was to locate the remains of a forgotten civilization in the jungle. So implacable a quest could be taken as foolish or futile, but Gray prefers to frame it in terms of heroic striving. Whether Hunnam is the right actor to assume such a burden is open to question, and the whole movie, though shot with Gray's defining elegance and his taste for deep shadows, is often a dour affair. Still, there are welcome touches of levity and mystery, supplied by Sienna Miller, in the role of Fawcett's long-suffering wife, and by Robert Pattinson, overgrown with facial hair, as his equally loyal sidekick. With Tom Holland, as the explorer's eldest son, who vanished in the company of his father.—A.L. (*4/17/17*) (*In wide release.*)

The Lovers

This bittersweet romance thrusts its fertile and clever dramatic framework into the foreground

and leaves it undeveloped. Mary and Michael (Debra Winger and Tracy Letts) are long-married and long-frustrated suburban cubicle-jockeys who are both having affairs. Mary is seeing Robert (Aidan Gillen), a writer; Michael is seeing Lucy (Melora Walters), a dancer; and each is waiting for the right moment to tell the other that the marriage is over. But the impending visit of their son, Joel (Tyler Ross), a college student, puts a crimp in their plans; while waiting to separate, Mary and Michael suddenly rekindle their relationship—in effect, cheating on their lovers with each other. Winger is commanding in action and repose, and Letts invests his role with gruff energy, but they and the other actors exert themselves in a void—none of the characters have any substance beyond their function in the story. The writer and director, Azazel Jacobs, offers a few visual grace notes that resonate beyond the plotlines, but his script is devoid of imagination. With Jessica Sula, as Joel's girlfriend, Erin, whose quandaries go utterly unaddressed.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

A Quiet Passion

Terence Davies, who has previously adapted the work of Edith Wharton, in "The House of Mirth," and Terence Rattigan, in "The Deep Blue Sea," now turns his attention to Emily Dickinson. The arc of the film is a long one, marked by regular readings of her poems; we meet the author first as a defiant schoolgirl, played by Emma Bell, and trace her through the years of her maturity, her gradual seclusion in the Amherst family home, and the shuddering awfulness of her death, in 1886. Cynthia Nixon takes the role of the adult Dickinson, and does so without ingratiation, willing to make her difficult or, when occasion demands, unlikable; Dickinson's manners, always forthright, grow more barbed as her ailments worsen. There is strong support from Keith Carradine and Joanna Bacon, as her parents; Jodhi May, as her sorrowful sister-in-law; and Catherine Bailey, as a flirtatious friend, although the social badinage seems forced in comparison with the quieter scenes around the hearth. Most striking of all is the presence of Jennifer Ehle, whose compassionate calm, as the poet's sister, does much to lighten the movie's dark distress.—A.L. (*4/24/17*) (*In limited release.*)

A Woman's Life

This adaptation of Maupassant's 1883 novel about a woman's fall from aristocratic ease to careworn dependency starts deceptively well. Jeanne le Perthuis des Vauds (Judith Chemla) returns from convent school to her family's estate and enjoys domestic amusements and the splendors of nature. She revels in the warm wisdom of her parents, even as the director, Stéphane Brizé, seems to revel in the delicate diction of the actors who play them (Yolande Moreau and Jean-Pierre Darroussin). Then the drama kicks in, and the movie goes off the rails. Jeanne marries a local man named Julien (Swann Arlaud); he promptly impregnates her servant (Nina Meurisse) and has an affair with a neighbor (Clotilde Hesme), whose husband (Alain Beigel) kills him. Jeanne and Julien's son, Paul, grows into a ne'er-do-well whose debts reduce Jeanne to destitution. The tale of worldly affliction and spiritual redemption is, unfortunately, merely illustrated; Brizé pays more attention to the tasteful costumes and the alluring settings than to the drama or the images. The performances are muted as well, as if to link formality and misery, but his view of the milieu's hypocrisy and constraint is bland and passionless. In French.—R.B. (*In limited release.*)

DANCE



In “The Times Are Racing,” the dancers wear sneakers, and the ballet is set to rock music.

Bobby Pins Come Loose

Justin Peck softens up in a new piece for New York City Ballet.

AN ABIDING MYSTERY of ballet today is whether Justin Peck, the resident choreographer of New York City Ballet, has a beating heart in his chest or else a little piece of stone. Peck’s ballets are superbly constructed and, in the hands of City Ballet’s excellent late-twenties cadre (that’s his age, too), superbly danced, but much of the time you can’t tell what they’re about. I’ve been told that his subject is the “spirit of his generation,” and his “The Times Are Rac-

ing,” which seemed to be the most popular new piece of City Ballet’s past season—it will be repeated this season on May 5 and May 9—did show signs of trying to portray a youth group. The dancers wore sneakers instead of ballet shoes, and sported T-shirts imprinted with words like “Defy,” “Shout,” and “Change.” The score was the last four tracks of Dan Deacon’s thudding rock album “America.”

But to me what was impressive about “The Times Are Racing” was not the cool-cat factor. It was the opposite. The ballet seemed to show a softness that was new to Peck. At the top of the

women’s technical ranks at N.Y.C.B. for the past decade or so has been Tiler Peck (no relation to Justin), who can command just about everything—speed, clarity, timing—and deploy it all without making a fuss. At times, her modesty is actually a problem. She makes perfection look normal. But in the running duet that she danced with Amar Ramasar in “The Times” some of her bobby pins seemed to come loose. Beneath her little black shorts, her legs started to look not just beautiful and capable but like flesh. She even had a few butt-out moments. I’m almost embarrassed to say that Tiler Peck looked sexy, but there it is.

The ballet’s lead male, Robert Fairchild (Tiler Peck’s husband), underwent a similarly poignant disassembly. Fairchild is one of the most purely classical dancers I have ever seen. From step to step, he shows us every central principle of ballet: the rounded shapes, the long line, the solid center. As a result, the experience of seeing him get shaken from that equipoise temporarily, as he is in this jazz-baby ballet, and then return—and all of this very unself-consciously, like a bird sticking its wing out and then folding it back in—almost makes you cry. And to watch him do this alongside a man performing the same steps but in a different way—less like something from ancient Greece, more like something from a Knicks game—redoubles the sweetness. The man dancing next to him, as it happened, was Justin Peck, who still performs with the company but seldom in his own ballets. He may have given himself this role just to act as Fairchild’s foil. Possibly, for a choreographer who is wary of sentimentality or who, let’s face it, may not know what he wants to say, a way to make meaning in ballet is just to push the dancers into becoming fully human—tender, surprising, even awkward—at the same time that they are trying to be perfect. That is, Peck may be creating ballets about people trying to do ballet.

—Joan Acocella

New York City Ballet

In week two of the “Here/Now” festival, the company unveils its newest creation by Alexei Ratmansky, a ballet entitled “Odessa” and set to music by the Russian contemporary composer Leonid Desyatnikov. The score—a driving tapestry of tangos and folk music—was originally written for a film by Alexander Zeldovich based on Isaac Babel’s “Odessa Tales,” set in an Odessa ghetto. (Desyatnikov is also the composer of the music for Ratmansky’s “Russian Seasons,” which is being revived this season.) • May 3 at 7:30: “In Creases,” “The Dreamers,” “New Blood,” and “Everywhere We Go.” • May 4 at 7: “Jeu de Cartes,” “After the Rain” pas de deux, “Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux,” and “Odessa.” • May 5 at 8 and May 9 at 7:30: “Neverwhere,” “Mothership,” “Spectral Evidence,” and “The Times Are Racing.” • May 6 at 2 and 8 and May 7 at 3: “Jeu de Cartes,” “After the Rain” pas de deux, “For Clara,” “Ten in Seven,” and “Odessa.” (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through May 28.*)

Limón Dance Company

Last July, forty-four years after the death of José Limón, its namesake founder, this venerable troupe acquired its first new artistic director in nearly as long: the British-born choreographer and former company member Colin Connor. His first New York season at the helm includes his own “Corvidae,” which alludes to birdlife while swirling to part of Philip Glass’s overly familiar Violin Concerto. As for the Limón repertory, there’s “Concerto Grosso” (1945), a baroque cathedral of a dance, and “The Exiles” (1950), a vision of Adam and Eve as refugees, which Connor presents in alternate versions: one with the original Schoenberg score, the other with new commissioned music by Aleksandra Vrebalov. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 2-7.*)

Gibney Dance Company

As part of the Gibney Repertory Initiative for Tomorrow, the company presents work in its home space by two notable contemporary choreographers. Joanna Kotze, the less established of the two, offers “Already Ready,” a première that explores openness and spontaneity. Reggie Wilson mashes up three of his structurally and rhythmically invigorating earlier works—“Pang,” “The Dew Wet,” and the especially terrific “Big Brick—A Man’s Piece”—into a new one, “Config Khoum-Baie.” (*Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, 280 Broadway. 646-837-6809. May 4-6.*)

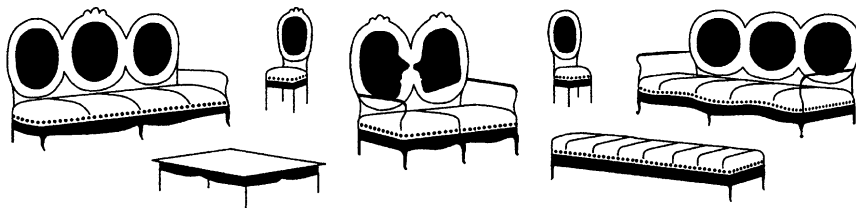
Christopher Williams

A connoisseur of the archaic and the arcane whose dances animate strange and fantastical elements of the past with rare persuasiveness and imagination, Williams now turns to “Il Giardino d’Amore,” a treatment of the myth of Venus and Adonis by the Baroque composer Alessandro Scarlatti. Aided by Andrew Jordan’s costumes, which augment as much as adorn the dancers’ bodies, Williams presents the lovers as creatures who precede—or surpass—conventional notions of gender. (*Danspace Project, St. Mark’s Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. May 4-6.*)

“Places Please!”

Larry Keigwin—the founder of the modern-dance ensemble Keigwin + Company—brings his jazzy, club-inflected dancing to the intimate quarters of Joe’s Pub. He’s teaming up with his longtime collaborator Nicole Wolcott (a powerhouse) to create a playful portrait of their friendship and the creative jockeying that has sustained them since their first duet, way back in 2002. (*425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. May 4-6.*)

ABOVE & BEYOND

**Bryant Park Fencing Class**

In 2016, Daryl Homer became the first American to win an Olympic silver medal for men’s sabre in more than a century—and certainly the first from Hudson Heights. He was one of three New York City medallists who trained at the Manhattan Fencing Center, which was founded in 2007 by Yuri Gelman as an incubator for Olympic talent, and is expanding the reach of the sport. The gym’s expert foilists host this free weekly class every Friday through the end of May, where amateurs can learn the basics of sword-handling without any prior experience. “You put a sword in any kid’s hand,” Homer observed shortly after the Games, “they’re going to like it.” Preregistration is required, and walk-ins are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. (*Bryant Park, Fifth Avenue Terrace, at 41st St. manhattanfencing.com. May 5 at 1:30.*)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Before becoming an architect, in the years after the Second World War, the Venetian artist Carlo Scarpa practiced a craft closely identified with the city of his birth: the designing of glassware. Working for Venini, one of the renowned glass factories on the island of Murano, Scarpa revived the sixteenth-century technique known as *mezza filigrana*, in which layers of thin glass encase a slender, spiralling thread, and brought back other novelties as well. **Christie’s** holds a sale devoted to these colorful, translucent objects on May 4. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*) • An affectionate letter from Ernest Hemingway to Marlene Dietrich—the two carried a torch for each other for several decades after they met during an ocean crossing in 1934—is one of the star lots at **Swann’s** sale of manuscripts and autographs (May 4). (*104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.*) • The Maastricht-based art extravaganza known as **TEFAF** (the European Fine Art Fair) returns to the Park Avenue Armory (May 4-8), featuring works from a selection of galleries specializing in modern and contemporary art as well as design objects, antiquities, and African and Oceanic art. (*Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-370-2501.*) • Meanwhile, **Frieze New York** (May 5-7), a sprawling, carnival-like showcase of contemporary and twentieth-century art, sets up shop on Randall’s Island. Beyond the art, the attractions include art talks, food, the open-air setting, and a fun ferry ride across the East River. (*Randall’s Island Park, East River at Harlem River. friezenewyork.com.*)

READINGS AND TALKS

Strand Bookstore

Christopher Kelley, a professor at the New School, argues that if the human condition damns us to disaffection and angst, then our ability to laugh at such limitations is a uniquely human privilege. He spent years studying Buddhism under Robert Thurman at Columbia, and has nursed an interest in the works of such dark comedians as Louis C.K., Tig Notaro, and Andy Kaufman, who have mined the desolate corners of everyday reality for big laughs. At this talk, Kelley screens segments from these comedians’ most famous routines and aligns them with Buddhist pillars to suggest a common approach to existential relief. (*828 Broadway. 212-473-1452. May 5 at 7.*)

Eyebeam

Futurists like Elon Musk already describe the mind in digital terms: at a recent address in Dubai, Musk looked forward to “a closer merger of biological intelligence and digital intelligence,” which would be “mostly about the bandwidth, the speed of the connection between your brain and the digital version of yourself.” The boundaries are getting thinner: “MVR,” now in its second year, is a lecture series co-presented by Pioneer Works, focussed on the increasing impact that digital practices have, and will have, on the physical body, spanning such topics as virtual and augmented reality, robotics, gaming, and machine learning. Presenters include the digital artists Ursula Endlicher and Brian House, New York University’s Ella Klik and Rodrigo Ferreira, and the video-game designer Nicholas Fortugno. (*34 35th St., Brooklyn. pioneerworks.org. May 9 at 7.*)

Powerhouse Arena

The Upright Citizens Brigade performer and occasional actor Doug Moe launches his first book, “Man vs. Child,” a tongue-in-cheek guide for new fathers with awkward questions, including—but not limited to—“Is It Okay to Bring My Baby to a Bar?” The short answer is no, but there are plenty of long answers as well: Moe writes from experience, and casts an empathetic eye on the shifting representations of modern fatherhood. “Old Dads,” Moe claims, could father from a distance, while the “New Dads” of today are rightfully expected to share playtime duties. He goes on to describe the awed affection new fathers may have for their children with relatable humor and genuine insight, offering a promising resource for the curious and the clueless. (*28 Adams St., Brooklyn. powerhousearena.com. May 9 at 7.*)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

By Chloe

185 Bleecker St. (212-290-8000)

THE FIRST THING to know about By Chloe is that the chipotle aioli and the beet ketchup are very good, and very free. Joe Gould would be delighted, but there are very few Gould-like characters left in the West Village, where this vegan fast-food chain's original branch is located, and even fewer near some of the other locations, in SoHo, Williamsburg, and the Flatiron district. Think of By Chloe as Shake Shack without the meat. Bid adieu to the days when vegans were dour granola eaters swathed in carob-stained hemp shirts, and say hello to a new, well-heeled subset of SoulCycling, health-obsessing foodies. Call them bubblegum vegans.

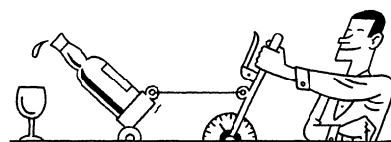
Whole families of them descend on By Chloe. Witness, in the SoHo branch, a teen-age girl, bespandexed, glued to a Y.A. soap on her phone, and chewing a tartly satisfying guacamole burger, the patty a mix of black beans, quinoa, and sweet potatoes. Her father sports a jewelled watch and stares at his phone while munching on a steaming pile of dairy-free ginger-spice pancakes. Opposite sits her mother, photographing a quinoa taco salad with her Vuitton-cased phone. Only the girl's sister, dipping a sweet-potato fry into that lusciously beety ketchup, attempts to make eye contact with her family. None of them look up.

By Chloe's upper echelons are having family issues of their own. Chloe Coscarelli, the restaurant's namesake and the originator of many of the recipes, was recently forced out of the business she founded three years ago, after the company she had partnered with alleged that she had become negligent. Cue a guerrilla war fought on the blogosphere and in New York tabloids. Cue, too, a vicious rumor that the split happened because the partner company wanted to serve animal products.

Despite Coscarelli's departure, By Chloe will keep its name. And, while this calls to mind the deletion of Trotsky from photographs during Stalin's reign, the official word is that the restaurant will stay plant-based, and won't change the food, which is undeniably delicious. The burgers are springy (the classic involves lentils, tempeh, and chia), the basil pesto is zesty, and the faux mac and cheese, with a sweet-potato-cashew-cheese sauce and shiitake bacon, is better than the real thing. At the SoHo branch the other day, over coconut waters in the shell, one bearded man said to another, "You're only a runner once you run the New York Marathon. Last year, after the race, we were picked up by a Gulfstream so we could go to French Laundry"—Thomas Keller's California restaurant. Around them, a horde of bubblegum vegans continued stuffing their faces, too content to bother with such a public boast. (*Entrées* \$5.95–\$11.95.)

—Nicolas Niarchos

BAR TAB



Snacky

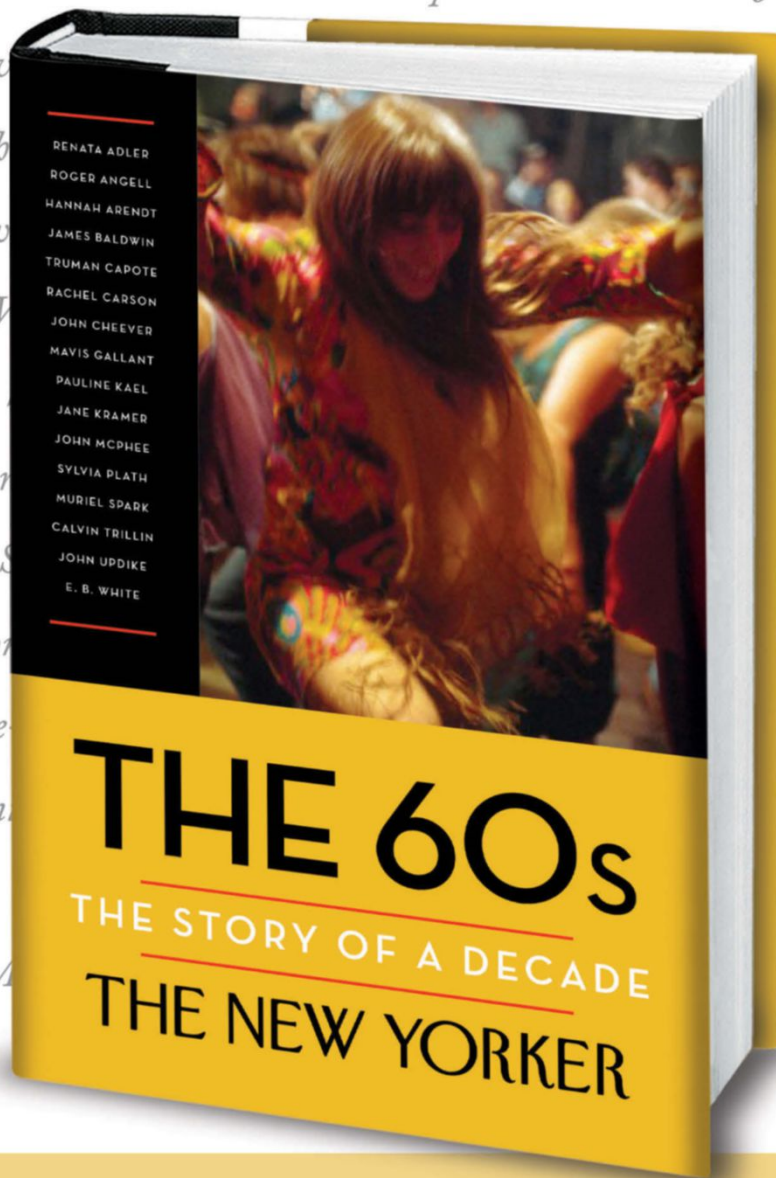
187 Grand St., Brooklyn (718-486-4848)

This little bar, tucked away on one of Williamsburg's busiest thoroughfares since 2003, is easy to miss. Inside, it recalls the bedroom of a teen-ager with a penchant for collectibles: Japanese action figures (Godzillas, Totoro, Mazinger Z), Chinese luck charms (laughing Buddhas, golden peanuts, children holding fish), original paintings and sculptures by local artists, skateboard decks, a gigantic lion head. On a recent Thursday night, moody shoegaze played while Bruce Lee's 1978 masterpiece "Game of Death" screened on a small television. A young woman's Coconutzu Freeze (sake, crema de coco, pineapple juice) arrived in the giant stomach of a ceramic Buddha: "I always rub the belly for good luck," she said. The loyal clientele consists mainly of first-wave gentrifiers: the artists and musicians who have been drinking there since it opened, many of whom have been priced out of what is now one of the most expensive areas in the city. There's a playful menu of unpretentious pan-Asian small plates, like a Szechuan chili dog, and cocktails named after Wong Kar-wai movies: In the Mood for Love (sake, ginger, cranberry juice), Chungking Express (soju, Calpico, nigori). The owner, Sandy Pei, who was born in Seoul to Chinese parents, grew up in the Midwest and moved to the city in 1998. "I came to New York to be a painter," she said. "But I'm from a restaurant family. It's in my blood." Pei has been adding trinkets she unearthed in Chinatown shops to the bar's collection all along. She glanced at a statue of the general turned deity Guan Gong, standing behind the bar, weapon in hand, and said, "I'm not that religious, but I decided that I needed him to protect me."—E. P. Licensi

Advertisement

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT OUT OF TIME

BY THE OPAQUE reasoning of capital punishment, the state of Arkansas grew some unknowable fraction safer last Monday evening, when Jack Jones, a fifty-two-year-old, overweight, hypertensive, diabetic amputee, was strapped to a gurney in the Cummins Unit prison and administered drugs to successively sedate him, impair his breathing, stop his heart, and kill him. According to the state's timeline, the process was a model of efficiency, taking only fourteen minutes to complete—less time than one might spend registering a vehicle at the Little Rock D.M.V. This was significant, as the night's work was just getting started. Arkansas was staging the first double execution in the United States since 2000. Three hours later, Marcel Williams, a forty-six-year-old man who also suffered from diabetes, obesity, and hypertension, was strapped to the same gurney, injected with the same cocktail of drugs, and declared dead within seventeen minutes.

Jones's and Williams's executions were the second and third in a four-day period; at the same facility, on the preceding Thursday, Ledell Lee, aged fifty-one, became the first prisoner to be put to death in Arkansas since 2005. A fourth man, Kenneth Williams, aged thirty-eight, who had been on death row since 2000, was executed at Cummins on Thursday, shortly before midnight, when his warrant was set to run out. These four were among eight men whom Arkansas sought to execute in eleven days. With the state's supply of the sedative midazolam due to expire at the end of the month, the proposed schedule came to resemble a lethal clearance sale. To socioeconomic and race—the known and inescapably arbitrary factors in the application of the death penalty—we may now add a novel dynamic: the shelf life of benzodiazepine compounds. There is a banal horror in the bureaucratic diligence that noted the drug's

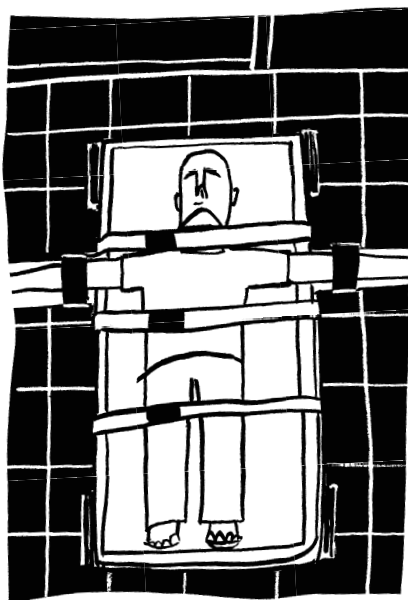
expiration date, calculated how many people might be killed before it passed, and generated the warrants that Asa Hutchinson, the state's Republican governor, signed.

McKesson Medical-Surgical, Inc., which distributes vecuronium bromide—a drug that is commonly used during surgery but that can also be used to stop a person's breathing—filed suit against Arkansas, claiming that it had been duped into providing an ingredient of the cocktail. Four of the executions were blocked by court order. The Eighth Amendment prohibition against “cruel and unusual” punishment served as a measure of the elastic morality that facilitates the death penalty: does it constitute cruelty to infuse the condemned with a sedative, rather than a stronger anesthetic, particularly if, as attorneys for Jones and Williams argued, the circulatory conditions of the men might impair its effectiveness?

The rush of executions is notable not only for its barbarism but also for its contrast to prevailing thinking about capital punishment. Support for the death penalty peaked in 1994, with eighty per cent of Americans in favor. Last year, a Pew study found that the number had fallen to forty-nine per

cent—the first time since 1971 that less than half of the public supported it. The declining crime rate accounts for part of the drop: in the mid-nineties, murders were twice as common as they are now. At the same time, the idea that death serves as a deterrent to other criminals has been consistently unsupported by evidence. Data from the Death Penalty Information Center show that, in the past forty years, there have been eleven hundred and eighty-four executions in the South, compared with four in the Northeast, yet homicide figures in 2015 were nearly seventy per cent higher in Southern states than in Northeastern ones. The death penalty is about retribution for past offenses, not prevention of future ones.

There is also a growing awareness that it is perhaps impossible to create a



justice system that both executes criminals and avoids killing innocents. The sclerotic appeals process insures that years, if not decades, will pass before the condemned meet their state-authored fate. But streamlining the process only increases the likelihood that innocent people will die. Since 1973, a hundred and fifty-eight inmates on death row have been exonerated of the crimes for which they were sent there. A prisoner in Ohio named Ricky Jackson spent thirty-nine years on death row before a key witness admitted to lying in the testimony that led to his conviction. Jackson is alive solely because of the inefficiency of the system that sought to kill him.

That complexity has been reflected in the politics of death-penalty prosecutions. In January, Bob Ferguson, the Washington State attorney general, proposed a bill that would eliminate the death penalty in his state. The same month, Beth McCann, the Denver district attorney, announced that her city was done with it. In March, Aramis Ayala, the state attorney for the Ninth Circuit, in Florida, announced that her office would not pursue capital punishment in any cases. Her office was in the midst of prosecuting Markeith Loyd, who is accused of murdering his pregnant girlfriend and a policewoman. Ayala said, "I've been unable to find any credible evidence that the death penalty increases safety for law-enforcement officers." She added

that the expense of death-penalty appeals drains resources from other prosecutions. In response, Governor Rick Scott removed the Loyd case, along with twenty-two others, from Ayala's jurisdiction—an action she is challenging in court.

Last year, the Presidential election was won by a man who had demanded the death penalty for five young black and Latino men who were convicted of a brutal rape in Central Park that they did not commit. He appointed an Attorney General who had successfully fought to vitiate federal prohibitions on the execution of the mentally ill. He chose a Supreme Court Justice who, in his first major vote on the Court, cast the decisive one, in a 5~~4~~4 decision, to allow an execution to proceed—that of Ledell Lee, who died minutes later.

These are the actions of powerful men in service of outmoded ideas. We in this country are unaccustomed to mass executions carried out under government auspices. We would prefer to believe that such things happen in less evolved locales. Yet that is precisely what the state of Arkansas set out to achieve. The condemned men perpetrated a litany of horrors, but the rationales for putting them to death—a decades-delayed catharsis for the victims' families, a lottery-slim chance that some future violence will be deterred—are as close to their expiration as Arkansas's supply of midazolam.

—Jelani Cobb

DEPT. OF SELF-HELP BIGGER



IT TOOK THE Big Book forty-five minutes to make it down to Hollywood from Calabasas, riding shotgun in a Honda Accord. By 9:30 A.M., it was reclining poolside at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel amid the memory of guests and carousers like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Montgomery Clift, and Errol Flynn, who, legend has it, made bathtub gin in the hotel's barbershop. Such ghosts, and the squiggly David Hockney mural at the bottom of the pool, and the ashy traces, among the palms, of a party the night before, seemed to call for a round of Bloody Marys. But not today, pal.

The Big Book is the founding testament and manifesto of Alcoholics Anonymous, written for the most part (anonymously) by the organization's co-founder Bill Wilson, a.k.a. Bill W., and this version, by the pool the other day, was the original working manuscript, the some hundred and fifty typed

pages, marked up with edits and corrections, that were sent to the printer in April, 1939. Its driver and escort was Zach P., an employee at Profiles in History, an auction house, which had it on consignment. (As the courier, Zach P. was not authorized by Profiles in History to speak on its behalf.) The house is offering the book at auction in June, and estimates that it will fetch as much as three million dollars. To promote the sale, Profiles in History is exhibiting the manuscript in New York later this month, at the Questroyal Fine Art gallery, and was floating a claim from an A.A. historian, Dr. Ernest Kurtz: "Not only is this manuscript the most important nonfiction manuscript in all history—I consider it right up there with the Magna Carta, because of the personal freedom it has provided so many millions of alcoholics."

This seemed like bar talk, until one thought it through a bit. The Big Book has sold tens of millions of copies, in dozens of languages, and has altered an untold number of lives, mostly, one assumes, for the better. (Aldous Huxley called Bill Wilson the twentieth century's "greatest social architect.") What, from the past century or two, at least, might compare? "The Communist

Manifesto"? The Book of Mormon? Mao's Little Red Book? "The Autobiography of Malcolm X"? "The Joy of Sex"? The Big Book represents the origin of the self-help movement; try to imagine a publishing industry without it, or without the word "anonymous."

"I've seen people who behold it as though it's a religious relic," Zach P. said, as he removed the manuscript from its sixteen-by-twenty-inch archive box and its swaddling of bubble wrap. He laid it, with some ceremony, on a table stained with water rings and cigarette burns.

Its current owner, a longtime Profiles in History client and a recovering alcoholic, who'd bought it in 2007, for just under a million dollars, had had it bound in burgundy board. Each page was encased in a clear plastic sleeve, to prevent oxidation and decay. On the title page, someone had marked to delete the misbegotten apostrophe in "Alcoholic's Anonymous." The previous page had a handwritten inscription from Lois Wilson, Bill W.'s widow, bequeathing the volume to her friend Barry Leach, on New Year's Day, 1978.

When Bill W. wrote the book, he'd been sober for fewer than four years, and there were only two A.A. groups:

one meeting on Tuesdays, in Brooklyn, the other on Wednesdays, in Akron, Ohio. The book was an attempt to spread the word. (Bill W. also had in mind a for-profit drunk-tank business, but he couldn't get the financing.)

The manuscript featured the collation and distillation of comments from about four hundred readers: A.A. members, doctors, and ministers, plus, in Bill W.'s words, "policemen, fishwives, housewives, drunks, everybody." You could see, flipping through it, what they'd been going for, on this final round: to make it more palatable to a broad audience. The changes sought to make the text descriptive, rather than prescriptive. "You should do" became "we have done." When Bill W. writes, "It works—it really does. Try it," the "Try it" is excised. There was also an effort to tamp down the Christianity.

"It's amazing how they made it more secular," Joe Maddalena, the owner of Profiles in History, said over the phone. "Still, this is a sacred text. It's not like it's some 'Chicken Soup for the Soul.'" He has sold Marilyn Monroe's subway-grate-scene white dress, the car from "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," and a manuscript of Einstein's theory of relativity. "But the Big Book is so much bigger than all of us."

After about an hour by the pool, the Big Book got back in the Accord and returned to Calabasas. It's planning to come to New York via Brink's. Not for nothing, but the Magna Carta, when it flew over from Oxford, seven years ago, for a visit to the Waldorf-Astoria, had its own seat in business class, and a bodyguard named Rocco.

—Nick Paumgarten

LETTER FROM OREGON HINDSIGHT



PATRICIA LIMERICK, well-known historian of the American West, gave a talk at the community center in the town of Burns, Oregon, one evening not long ago with her heart slightly in her throat. Limerick belongs to the small category of historians who are

occasionally recognized on the street, and she gives talks all the time. What made this one different was that Burns is the county seat of Harney County, home of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, the site, last year, of a six-week takeover by armed protesters, who demanded that the federal government return the land—though to whom was not exactly clear. One of the occupiers was killed in the standoff. Limerick knew that her audience, about seventy-five county residents, included both supporters and opponents of the protest. The mood in the room seemed congenial, not tense, but she couldn't be sure. A local man had told her about a past confrontation between the two sides in which many had likely carried firearms. He said he thought that if someone had dropped a book people might have started shooting.

Limerick wore a black Western-tailored shirt embroidered with turquoise and purple flowers, and a black skirt. Her hair is straight, parted on the left, and two feet long. When she was twenty, she happened to appear on a CBS news special having to do with a history project she put together in college, at the University of California Santa Cruz, that attempted to build bridges between students and senior citizens. When the interviewer asked about her ambition in life, she said, "To save the world." She was a hippie then, and is not much less of one now, forty-plus years later. The University of Colorado's Center of the American West, of which Limerick is the faculty director, has an official motto: "Turning hindsight into foresight." She believes that history, skillfully applied and deeply understood, can save the world.

"So I started out my talk with a story," Limerick told an amateur historian who had breakfast with her a few days after she returned to Boulder, where she lives. "I had a reason for choosing this story, but as I went along I couldn't imagine what I had been thinking. The story is this: In a small Western town one afternoon, the local folks are sitting in the saloon when they notice a stranger who comes in and sits in a corner. The stranger doesn't say anything. Suddenly, into the saloon comes a wild cowboy with a big cow-

boy hat and boots and spurs, and the wild cowboy starts knocking people's hats off and spilling people's drinks and kicking their chairs out from under them. The cowboy is raising all this havoc, and the people in the saloon are stunned, and suddenly the quiet stranger stands up and goes over to the cowboy and says, 'Mister, I'm giving you five minutes to pack up and get out of town.' And the cowboy looks at him and gets his gear and packs it on his horse and



Patricia Limerick

rides out of town! So the townsfolk come over to the stranger and they thank him, and they say, 'Stranger, if you don't mind, we do have one question. What would you have done if the cowboy hadn't left town in five minutes?' The stranger thinks and then he says, 'Well, I believe I would have extended the time.'

The audience members, who had wondered where she was going with this—they knew about strangers, like the Feds who were in Burns during the occupation—laughed at the punch line. Both sides joined in. "I was so delighted and relieved at that laugh," Limerick said. "I talk to people I disagree with politically more often than anybody I know, and I've discovered that sometimes we find the same things funny. So then I told the folks in Burns that, whatever side they were on, the conflict between local wisdom and outsider expertise has been going on over land use throughout human history, and they're at the absolute center of something very important for the country and the world. I think they were glad to hear

that. And, as for getting along with one another, I put in a big plug for hypocrisy. We don't have to be honest with each other all the time."

During her stay, she said, she also visited the wildlife refuge, which has been returned to federal control, and she stood at the foot of the bird-watching tower and thought how nice it was that it didn't have snipers in it anymore. "I know federal staff people, naturalists and so on, who are sometimes afraid they'll get shot just for doing their job," she said. "When the park rangers and other employees of the refuge came back to work, some of the citizens of Burns had a potluck supper to welcome them. Somehow, when I think of that it makes me cry."

—Ian Frazier

THE CREATIVE LIFE UNDER A BUSHEL



LATELY, THE DINING room at the Morgan Library & Museum has been offering a lunch menu inspired by one of its exhibits, of treasures from the National Museum of Sweden: cucumber-elderflower aquavit sparkler, brown-butter cod cake, lingonberry

cobbler. The restaurant has not been offering a menu inspired by another of its exhibits, "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?," about the life and work of Emily Dickinson. Visiting the other day, Terence Davies, the British filmmaker, agreed that this was just as well. "It would be very sparse," he said. "None of this 'knitted by nuns in Nepal' business."

Davies directed "A Quiet Passion," the new film about Dickinson, for which he also wrote the screenplay. Starring Cynthia Nixon, the movie starts out looking like a conventional bio-pic before turning into a devastating depiction of crushing social mores, and of the anguish of constrained creativity. Davies was turned on to Dickinson's poetry a dozen years ago. In an introduction to an anthology, he read that she "withdrew from life" beginning in her twenties. "I thought, There must be more to it than that," he said. "She loved to go out, she loved to bake, she improvised on the piano, she loved the commencement balls, she liked to dance."

Davies, who is seventy-one, has suffered his own creative constraints: it took six years to raise the money to make "A Quiet Passion," and other projects have been similarly hard to get off the ground. He recognized in Dickinson a kindred spirit. "She was a watcher, and I am not a participant," he said, over a bowl of black-bean soup.

"I am an observer. You can see things sometimes with greater clarity than people who are not, but it can be lonely." Davies grew up in a working-class family, in Liverpool, the youngest of ten, and was brought up as a devout Catholic. "Then I realized it's a lie—men in frocks, nothing else," he said. He left school at sixteen, to become a clerk in an accountant's office, before escaping to drama school in his twenties. He might have made a good actor—his voice is particularly low and sonorous. "From a very early age, I sounded like the Queen Mother, *after* she died," he said.

A few years ago, Davies took to writing poetry himself, though he has never published any of it. "I don't know if they are any good, but it gives me a great deal of pleasure," he said. "Sometimes when you are feeling low, and rather lonely, it does give some solace." He wrote one poem after being stranded in New York by Hurricane Sandy. "We were doing a casting, sitting in this very grand hotel, with an interior courtyard, and suddenly it started to snow," he said. "I just kept looking at the snow, and a poem did come out of it: Why can't I stay in the moment? Why am I outside, looking at the snow? And why should snow fall? It seems so sad. And there was a young lad sitting at a computer, and he looked like August Strindberg, and I thought, Why does he look like August Strindberg? And how can anyone be that young? And snow falling all over the Eastern Seaboard." Davies looked melancholy. "I'm very good at misery and death," he said. "A bit short on the old *joie de vivre*, but I'm working on it."

After lunch: a tour of the exhibit, with Carolyn Vega, one of the curators. Davies studied a map of Dickinson's Amherst, which he visited for research, though the movie was shot mostly in Belgium, for economy's sake. "For the exterior scenes, basically we built the portico of her house, then put the rest in digitally," he explained. He lingered over Dickinson's schoolbooks, and the register of students from Mount Holyoke, where she studied for a year. "Is this Miss Lyon?" he asked, pointing to a portrait of the school's founder. "I'm afraid I made her rather severe." (In the



"When will someone teach us how to share?"

movie, Dickinson defies the principal on religious grounds, and flees home.) There were pages of Dickinson's manuscript poems, written in pencil—"How have they survived? How have they survived?" Davies asked—and even a lock of her vivid auburn hair. "Oh, I do hope she knows we're still interested," he said.

As Davies left the exhibit, he was still mulling Dickinson's lack of recognition in her lifetime. "I just think, Oh, why couldn't she have got one success?" he said. "Or, at least, won first prize for her bread! Why couldn't she have been at the head of the class, for *once*?" The Morgan's interior courtyard was bathed in sunlight: no snow now, only the uncertain promise of spring.

—Rebecca Mead

EARWORM DEPT. THE ELEMENTS



ON A RECENT drizzly Wednesday afternoon, Jimmy Webb, the seventy-year-old Grammy-winning songwriter of "Up, Up and Away," "MacArthur Park," "Wichita Lineman," and many other wistful hits of the AM-FM era, visited Carnegie Hall with his wife, Laura Savini. Webb wore a spiffy gray suit and a paisley tie; his short gray hair was softly unruly. He and Savini left their umbrellas in the Maestro Suite (Steinway upright piano; portraits of Bernstein and Toscanini) and headed to the main stage, Stern Auditorium. There, this week, artists including Judy Collins, Art Garfunkel, Toby Keith, and Hanson (yes, *that* Hanson), will perform Webb's songs, in a fund-raiser for Alzheimer's research, presented by City Winery. Michael Douglas, Webb's former roommate, will host. In the seventies, Webb explained, "Mikey and Jann Wenner and myself were like the Three Musketeers."

As Webb approached the stage, he stopped what he was doing—reminiscing about being in the studio with the Beatles when they recorded "Honey Pie"—and paused to take it all in. "It's always awe-inspiring to walk onto this stage," he said. "I think

the first time I came here was with Artie Garfunkel. We had a chamber group, and I'd done all the arrangements." Later, in 2006, Webb played "MacArthur Park" at Sting's Rainforest Foundation Fund concert there. "Will Ferrell was climbing around in the cheap seats in a red leotard," Webb recalled. "So it was all a big sendup. But the orchestra was magnificent that night."

"MacArthur Park," made famous by Richard Harris, the regal British actor who went on to play Dumbledore, was later recorded by everyone from Frank Sinatra to Waylon Jennings (several times) and Donna Summer. Its baroque, nearly psychedelic lyrics, in which a cake left in the rain stands in for the end of a love affair—its sweet green icing flowing down—have haunted and provoked listeners for decades; their reactions have, in turn, haunted and provoked Webb. He considers the lyrics to be "a list of things that sort of happened—partly cloaked, not diabolically so." He said, "I was surprised when people ran up against this wall of incomprehensibility."

Last month, Webb published a memoir titled "The Cake and the Rain." It details his rise from Oklahoma preacher's son to young L.A. hitmaker for Glen Campbell and others to high-flying countercultural hedonist. It features Sinatra, Elvis, and, memorably, Harry Nilsson, who lures Webb into the nadir of John Lennon's Lost Weekend, as well as helicopters, hot-air balloons, cocaine, a cliffside baby-goat rescue, Jimi, Janis, and a nude chamber-music concert hosted by Webb and attended by Joni Mitchell and members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. It ends in 1973.

At center stage was a Steinway concert grand. Webb sat on the bench and began to play a rolling, majestic tune, evocative of his hits but unplaceable in the canon. He played for a minute and a half, music filling the hall as two maintenance workers mopped the aisles. He ended with a flourish. "Nothin' wrong with that!" he said. It wasn't a song; he had just made it up. "Usually, what I do when I'm writing a song is I sit down and I start playing," he said. "And then something will surface. I just wrote my first real classical piece, a nocturne

for piano and orchestra. I hope I get it played here sometime."

He talked about songwriting. He begins with chords; motifs will pop out; he begins to structure. Melody is important. So is originality. "I can't have anybody in the room with me when I do it," he said. When the song is finished, he plays it for people. "I'm watching them intently," he said. "I want their anti-gravity to kick in. You can generally tell when that happens."



Jimmy Webb

He looked philosophical. "It's always nice when people burst into tears and collapse in a pile on the rug."

He began playing "MacArthur Park," which he wrote about his first love, Susan Horton, now Susan Ronstadt, who worked at an Aetna office in Los Angeles, near MacArthur Park, where she and Webb often met for lunch. Once, it rained on them. (Two passages in "The Cake and the Rain" elucidate further.) "The melody started like—" He played minor chords. "So there's a little verse, and there's the chorus—'MacArthur Park is melting in the dark,'" he sang. "This little motif now goes into majors." He played, wordlessly, the "someone left the cake out in the rain" part, through to "I don't think that I can take it / 'cause it took so long to bake it." He went on, "Then it goes into another key; then the melody more or less turns upside down. Those are what Leonard Bernstein called 'transformational elements.'"

—Sarah Larson

LETTER FROM FRANCE

CAN THE CENTER HOLD?

Notes from a free-for-all election.

BY LAUREN COLLINS



For many French voters, the Presidential race has offered no good choices.

ON THE EVENING of April 20th, nearly a quarter of France's television-watching public was tuned in to a special called "15 Minutes pour Convaincre." Its format was simple: each of eleven Presidential candidates would appear and speak for fifteen minutes, making a final pitch to the electorate—a full third of whom, according to analysts, remained undecided, just days before the first of two rounds of voting. The hosts asked each candidate to present an object that, if elected, he'd keep in his office at the Élysée. Jean-Luc Mélenchon (who had created his own far-left movement, La France Insoumise) chose an alarm clock, "to tell me that it's time to redistribute the wealth." Nathalie Arthaud (Lutte Ouvrière) brandished a photograph of Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising gloved fists at the 1968 Olympics. Marine Le Pen (representing the extreme-right Front National) came with a key, saying that she wanted to give French people their house back. Nicolas Dupont-Aignan (Debout la France) brought a wire sculpture that

a handicapped child had given him, and then whipped out his cell phone and began reading a series of text messages from a "big media boss" who, he said, had tried to bully him into dropping out of the race.

It was around this time that viewers, fiddling with their own devices, began to receive notifications about some sort of shooting on the Champs-Élysées. One of the hosts interrupted the broadcast to announce that a possible terrorist attack had taken place. Then he introduced Philippe Poutou (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste), a trade unionist who'd made an impression at the previous debate by showing up in a long-sleeved T-shirt and mercilessly dinging his better-known opponents. Without saying a word about the attack, Poutou launched into his show-and-tell session. "This is green for the richness of the soil of the Amazon forest," he said, unfurling a miniature flag—an homage, he said, to French Guiana, where crowds had been in the streets for weeks protesting mistreatment by the mainland government.

When Emmanuel Macron (the found-

er of the centrist movement En Marche!) came out, he said he'd picked his childhood grammar book but had left it in the greenroom, given the gravity of the moment. "The first duty of the President is to protect," he asserted. Later, François Fillon (the candidate of the center-right Les Républicains), declaring that he wasn't "a fetishist," dodged the whole exercise, and, not to be outdone by Macron, announced that he was cancelling the next day's campaign events.

By late April, French Presidential campaigns have usually settled into a simple duel between the two main parties, the Socialists and the Republicans, but this race was a free-for-all. According to polls, four candidates—Mélenchon, Macron, Fillon, and Le Pen—all had a viable shot at progressing to the two-person runoff, to be held on May 7th. Mélenchon wanted a nationalist economy but a globalist identity, Macron wanted a globalist economy and a globalist identity, Fillon wanted a globalist economy but a nationalist identity, and Le Pen wanted a nationalist economy and a nationalist identity. The world was looking to the French election as either a ratification or a rejection of the populist surge that had led to Brexit and Trump. The balance of power among America, Europe, and Russia was also at stake. With four candidates hovering somewhere in the vicinity of twenty per cent, the permutations of possible matchups and outcomes were almost too complicated to contemplate.

This was clearly a "change election"—or, to hear it from French voters, a race in which they'd been presented with a dog's dinner of choices, leaving them so enraged that they could hardly see straight, much less render their vote a coherent expression of their fears and aspirations. No matter how they leaned, their first words, when asked to comment on *la présidentielle*, were more often than not "J'en ai marre," or "I'm fed up." The political analyst Brice Teinturier believed that the disappointing administrations of the two previous Presidents had led to the rise of a powerful group of voters, whom he christened the PRAF Party. The acronym stood for "*plus rien à faire, plus rien à foutre*"—nothing more to do, nothing more to give a damn about. One day, I got to talking with the proprietor of an antique shop, who said, "You want to start another French Revolution

of 1789 and cut off all their heads.”

In January, a story in *Le Monde* had likened the contest to something out of a Quentin Tarantino film, “one of those B-movie pastiches where each character who seems designated to be the hero finds himself ‘smoked’ by a Magnum to the head.” At that point, Fillon (a former Prime Minister) had vanquished Nicolas Sarkozy (a former President), winning the *Républicains*’ primary in a surprise landslide. Macron had committed a “patricide” of his former mentor, the sitting President François Hollande, by quitting as Minister of the Economy and setting up *En Marche!*, at the age of thirty-eight. Hollande, with an approval rating of four per cent and an unemployment rate of ten, had declined to seek reelection, an unprecedented surrender. His Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, sought the Socialist nomination, but was unexpectedly trounced in the primary by Benoît Hamon, a former Minister of Education, whose platform included a universal basic income and a tax on robots. This was all before prosecutors put Fillon under formal investigation for misuse of public funds (according to allegations, he paid his wife and children parliamentary salaries for work they never did) and arrested several close associates of Le Pen (who ignored a summons to testify about a fake-jobs scandal of her own). Then Mélenchon, an ex-Trotskyist who wanted to tax earnings of more than four hundred thousand euros at a hundred per cent, began soaring in the polls.

“15 Minutes pour Convaincre” didn’t end until nearly eleven o’clock. In the following hours, the specifics of the attack emerged. Karim Cheurfi, a French citizen and ex-convict, had opened fire on a parked police cruiser, killing Xavier Jugelé—a proudly gay policeman who was a first responder at the Bataclan massacre—and injuring three others. Police shot Cheurfi as he tried to escape on foot. According to prosecutors, a note praising ISIS was found near his body. Jugelé was the two hundred and thirty-ninth person since the beginning of 2015 to lose his life in a terrorist attack on French soil. French people kept their composure; they didn’t need a tweet from Donald Trump (“Will have a big effect on presidential election!”) to tell them that the news had thrown the race, which commentators kept describing as “*totalemt inédi*” (com-

pletely unheard of), into even greater chaos. Three days later, Macron and Le Pen progressed to the second round, garnering 24.01 and 21.3 per cent, respectively, of the vote.

THE LAST TIME a French Presidential election was anywhere near this wild was in 2002. Jacques Chirac, the center-right President, was supposed to face Lionel Jospin, the center-left Prime Minister. (The two men had been sharing power in a “cohabitation” government.) The extreme-right candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen—Marine’s father, an eyepatch-wearing former paratrooper and gleeful racist, who famously called the Holocaust a “detail” of history—had been polling a weak fourth. But in the first round of voting, he came in second, propelling him to a runoff against Chirac, who was embroiled in a corruption scandal. “*Le choc Le Pen*” galvanized both the political establishment and the public. An array of parties that had previously had no common interest banded together to repel Le Pen. More than a million citizens took to the streets, some bearing signs that read, “Vote for the Crook, Not the Fascist.” Ultimately, Chirac received more than eighty-two per cent of the vote, the most decisive victory in French history.

The 2002 election was *inédi* because Jean-Marie Le Pen, considered so unthinkable that the French national soccer team issued a statement condemning his racism, made it to the second round of voting. This year’s election is *inédi* not only because Marine Le Pen, considered so thinkable that both Brigitte Bardot and the President of the United States have praised her, is within reach of the Presidency but also because Macron, who has never held elected office, has become the front-runner a year after putting together a party from scratch. As soon as the results of the first round were announced, a parade of establishment figures declared their support for Macron, in an attempt to form a “barricade” like the one that had thwarted Jean-Marie Le Pen. The Prime Minister addressed the nation on live television, urging citizens “to fight the Front National and doom its catastrophic projects.”

Marine, the youngest of three Le Pen daughters, was born in 1968. After the

family’s Paris apartment was bombed, in 1976—Marine woke up to a blown-away bedroom wall—they moved to a Second Empire mansion in the Paris suburb of Saint-Cloud, which an elderly industrialist had bequeathed to Jean-Marie. (The estate “smells of death,” one of her sisters told a journalist, but Marine continued to live there until 2014.) According to Marine’s autobiography, both of her parents were spectacularly inattentive. When Marine was sixteen, her mother, Pierrette, left Jean-Marie for his biographer. Jean-Marie banished her from the family, saying, “If you want money, go clean houses.” She posed for *Playboy* scrubbing the floor.

Without any particular encouragement, except the feeling that she’d been blocked from society on account of her name, Marine gravitated toward her father’s milieu. By 2002, she was coming into her own in the F.N. A criminal lawyer, she’d joined the Party’s executive committee. After a string of defeats—running for the national legislature, she blamed the Socialist Party for five hundred thousand HIV infections—she’d finally won a seat on a regional council. She’d recently divorced her husband, an F.N. operative and the father of her three children. Soon, she married another Party activist, and again divorced. (Her current companion, Louis Aliot, is the F.N.’s vice-president.) Defending her father on television, she launched her reputation as a rivetingly aggressive interlocutor, banging the table and taking her arguments, delivered in a commanding smoker’s voice, past their logical ends. “She had an assertiveness, a glibness, and a prodigious bad faith that promised a fine career in the media,” a journalist later said.

Meanwhile, Macron was training at the *École Nationale d’Administration*, France’s elite civil-service school. The son of doctors from Amiens, he’d arrived in Paris in 1997. He’d been sent there, alone, to finish high school after falling in love with Brigitte Trogneux, a member of a prominent family of local chocolatiers. She was married, the mother of three children, and his drama teacher. (Macron and Trogneux wed in 2007, when he was twenty-nine and she was fifty-four.) As an undergraduate, Macron studied philosophy. Then, at Sciences Po, he earned a master’s in public affairs. He was a prodigy, serving as an assistant to the phenomenologist Paul



Ricœur, and an enigma, taking the train to Amiens every Friday to see Trogneux. Aurélien Lechevallier, a friend and adviser, remembers him dressing in “an East Coast Ivy League jacket” when his peers were wearing T-shirts. Lechevallier told me, “I think when we met he had no real experience of living lightly with friends—just making jokes, having a couple of beers at the bar.”

Macron went back to Amiens to announce the launch of *En Marche!* in April, 2016. “This isn’t a movement to have an umpteenth candidate in the Presidential election,” he said. Very few people thought he’d succeed. “I would be sorry if Emmanuel Macron wanted to escape, to undertake some sort of personal adventure,” François Hollande confided to a journalist. “Not because it would be a betrayal but because it would be hopeless. It would be a waste.” He added, “The system is voracious, it would crush him.”

PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D’AZUR (PACA), a region that occupies the eastern half of France’s Mediterranean coastline, has one of the highest rates of immigration in the country. It is a Front National stronghold: twenty-eight per cent of its residents—the second-highest rate in France—voted for Marine Le Pen in the first round. Le Pen’s platform calls for, among other things, outlawing dual citizenship with most countries, banning foreign languages

in schools, and exiting the European Union. (Many observers fear that her election would mean the end of the E.U.) Just before the first round of voting, she announced a plan to implement a moratorium on legal immigration, “to stop this delirium.” So far, the F.N. has been unable to win more than a handful of seats in France’s legislature. But, in the 2014 municipal elections, the Party clinched eleven mayoralties, seven of them in PACA. An opposition party for almost half a century, the F.N. is trying to prove that it can govern in places like Le Luc en Provence (pop. 10,621).

In February, when I visited Le Luc, the mimosa trees were exploding with blooms. To a foreign eye, Le Luc looked like a picturesque village out of a Provençal fantasy, all golden light and chalky pastel façades. A tourist might have happily assumed that the preponderance of shuttered storefronts indicated the persistence of some charming southern siesta tradition, but, in fact, they had long been vacant. The unemployment rate in Le Luc is twenty per cent, double the national average; fifty-six per cent of its citizens don’t earn enough money to pay income taxes. I couldn’t find a boulangerie, the classic French barometer of a town’s healthy environment. A vandal had taken a hammer to one of the windows at the Café de la Mairie.

Pascal Verrelle, Le Luc’s mayor, re-

ceived me at the town hall. He is Le Luc’s third F.N. mayor since 2014, the first having resigned for health reasons, and the second having resigned also supposedly for health reasons (but not before sending a letter to the local paper saying that she was quitting because her team reproached her for “not being F.N. enough”). Apparently, there had been some drama over a European Union flag that hung outside the town hall. When Verrelle took over, it came down. Verrelle led me up to his office. A former prison official with a buzzcut, he was wearing a khaki jacket and a lavender shirt, accessorized with wire-rimmed glasses and a gold watch.

I wanted to know why, in Verrelle’s opinion, the people of the town had put the F.N. in power. He said that their vote had not necessarily been for the most attractive party but for the one with which they were least acquainted. “Little by little, they told themselves, ‘We have to try something else,’” Verrelle said. He continued, “There were people who thought that we were going to construct watchtowers, that we were going to put up walls to separate the neighborhoods, that we were going to walk around with police dogs, that we were going to kick the foreigners out. Then they realized that we’re no more racist than anyone else, just a little more nationalist.”

Verrelle’s budget was small and his agenda modest: he spoke of having decreased the town’s debt (he’d served a rosé sangria rather than champagne at the annual New Year’s reception), solved its trash problem (he was now leading a campaign against dog poop), and hired four new police officers (“including two *maghrébins*”—North Africans—“who are excellent”). But despite his claim of representing some harmless arithmetic mean of racism, he touched on many of the F.N.’s identitarian themes. “I have nothing against immigrants, the real immigrants,” he said. But today, he told me, they were all “young men, between twenty-five and thirty, in perfect health, well dressed, with the latest phones. I don’t understand what they’re doing *chez moi*. And I’m afraid that they’re coming to prepare something.”

We left the town hall and, after a stop at the stamp museum, dropped by a clothing boutique run by a woman named Fanny, who was from Benin.

"She's the prettiest woman in Le Luc, after my wife," Verrelle said.

"The Mayor's looking for a new place for me," Fanny said, explaining that her current location didn't draw much foot traffic. She admitted that she had been afraid of the F.N., but said that Verrelle was "*super*."

I asked if her admiration for him would translate into a vote for Le Pen.

"Frankly, no. She kind of freaks me out," she said. "But I never would have imagined that a Front National mayor would come into my shop."

Verrelle seemed to be practicing a hyper-local version of *dédiabolisation*, the strategy of "de-demonization" that Le Pen has pursued over the past few years in the hope of making the F.N. seem respectable. The Party has excommunicated a few of the most flagrantly intolerant members of its establishment, including, in 2014, Jean-Marie Le Pen. It has courted groups that it has traditionally alienated, such as women, senior citizens, Jews, practicing Catholics, and gay people. Yet, every once in a while, Marine Le Pen lets a shocking comment fly. She insisted recently that France bore no blame for the 1942 Vel d'Hiv roundup, in which French police arrested nearly thirteen thousand Jews and sent them to concentration camps. The effect, if not de-demonizing, is destabilizing. Unsure what to make of the latest iteration of the F.N., or simply disillusioned with its competitors, some people figure, Why not put it to the test?

THE DAY AFTER my visit to Le Luc, Macron was hosting a rally in Toulon, a sunbaked port city less than an hour away. It was a dicey moment for his campaign. Earlier in the week, during a TV interview in Algeria, he had declared that colonialism was "a crime against humanity." French people across the political spectrum had reacted to the remark with a level of offense that surprised me. Opinions tended to vary by age and race, the most indignant skewing whiter and older. The few dissenters I encountered said that they appreciated Macron's willingness to take on a taboo subject. "France has never come to terms with its colonial history, and I share his sentiment that to move on and close this painful chapter we

need to acknowledge our past," Houmria Berrada, the thirty-three-year-old French-born daughter of Algerian butchers, told me. A partner in a consulting business and a Macron supporter, she praised "his desire to change the software of our society, to bring it into the twenty-first century, and to tap into the energy of the working-class neighborhoods."

Toulon, like many southern cities, has a large population of *pieds noirs*, Europeans who lived in Algeria during French rule, many of whom returned to France after the country gained independence, in 1962. They have traditionally formed one of the bases of support for the F.N., much of whose early leadership came out of military circles. (Jean-Marie Le Pen has long been dogged by allegations that he committed torture during the Algerian War.) F.N. Party activists were determined not to let Macron's appearance in the area pass without protest. The morning of the rally, I joined Aline Bertrand, an F.N. regional councillor,

as she canvassed the city's Saturday market.

Bertrand represents a new and potent type of figure in the Party, the articulate young woman who pits women's rights against Muslim immigration. The exemplar of this trend is Marion Maréchal Le Pen, Marine's twenty-seven-year-old niece and a member of Parliament from the neighboring Vaucluse, who has warned that the coastal cities of PACA are turning into "favelas." Maréchal espouses an ultra-hard-line social conservatism, opposing abortion (she claims that this is a feminist position) and same-sex marriage, issues on which her aunt has been ambivalent. According to Bertrand, Toulon's Muslim immigrants have driven secular, native-born women out of the center of the city. "Here you'll have a problem if you leave a bar at midnight in shorts and a T-shirt," she said.

Bertrand was handing out leaflets that featured a head shot of Marine Le Pen, wearing a jacket—in *bleu marine*, her signature color—with a beaded collar. A late-middle-aged man and woman

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approached. They were worried about their pensions.

“Go on the O.F.I.I. site,” Bertrand said, referring to the government department that deals with immigration. “Someone who’s never paid into social security in France can get retirement.”

“People think Marine Le Pen is against immigrants,” the woman, warming to the theme, said. “She’s not. It’s justice that we want.”

“It’s like when the refrigerator is full we give to our neighbors, but when the refrigerator is empty we give to our children. The refrigerator of France is empty,” Bertrand said, and the couple trudged off, carrying bags filled with cauliflower and lettuce.

I wandered away and started talking to a woman wearing a quilted leather jacket and lots of mascara. “I adore Marine!” she said, identifying herself as Michèle. She was a French teacher and a *piéd noir*. She had high hopes for the election, particularly after what had happened in America. “Bravo, bravo for Trump!” she said. She was unimpressed by Macron, whom she called “a little opportunistic asshole.” She asked if I knew that he was “a Rothschild banker” (Macron worked for the firm from 2008 to 2012, earning around a million dollars a year), invoking a slur—I heard it repeated over and over, and not just by F.N. supporters—that seemed laser-targeted toward some primal place in the French imagination, where a fondness for conspiracy theory intersected with a suspicion of high finance. “Rothschild banker” suggested, without having to say it, that

Jewish influence was at work, making it all the more irresistible for the Front National. Macron also spent four years as an inspector of finance—a high-powered position in the French civil service—but nobody was stuck on that.

THE RALLY WAS scheduled for three o’clock at the Toulon Zénith, a concert hall. When I got there, around two-thirty, the front gates were locked and the police weren’t letting anyone in. A couple of hundred protesters had surrounded the entrance, creating what they called a “hedge of horror” that anyone who wished to attend would have to traverse. They were chanting, “Macron, treason!” When a scuffle broke out, the police fired tear gas. Two protesters were arrested, a policeman was injured, and a journalist went to the hospital.

Inside, a Macron spokesman told me, “We strongly believe that some people saw the mess, were hassled, and turned around.” The auditorium was conspicuously not full. Still, the atmosphere was upbeat, in keeping with Macron’s assertion that his campaign is the only “*projet positif*”—the sole “for,” rather than “against,” on offer. Macron claims to be leading a “*transpartisan*” movement that is “neither of the left nor of the right.” He shares many of the traditional concerns of the left, but often prefers to meet them with capitalist solutions. He wants to cut corporate taxes, simplify labor laws, consolidate the retirement system, invest in education and vocational training, and reinvigorate France’s relationship with Europe. He has praised Angela Merkel’s generous

refugee policy, saying that it “saved the dignity of Europe.” Proud to be a fluent English speaker, he has even appealed to the technocratic, cosmopolitan sector of the American population that has despaired since Trump’s election. To American scientists, he has promised, “From now on, from next May, you will have a new homeland—France!”

There was popcorn for sale. Laurence Haim, a celebrated French reporter who quit journalism to join Macron’s campaign, told me that “change” and “hope” are En Marche!’s keywords. In its disciplined idealism, Macron’s campaign is self-consciously modelled on Obama’s 2008 operation, right down to the armies of fresh-faced volunteers in cool-looking T-shirts. (They have even been going door-to-door, a new tactic in France.) When I visited Macron’s headquarters, in Paris, I found a sign taped to the restroom wall that read, “According to a very serious study, we spend between forty and fifty-five seconds in the bathroom. One like takes you half a second. Ready for 80 likes?!”

A Socialist member of Parliament who’d defected to En Marche! warmed up the crowd with a *pilou pilou*, a local rugby chant. Then the lights went down and a video, a sort of “We Didn’t Start the Fire” in visual form, began playing on a big screen: contraceptive pill; Simone Weil; Berlin Wall; gay brides; Victor Hugo; Gandhi; *Je suis Charlie, liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Macron walked in to “Closer,” by the Norwegian electronic-music duo Lemaître, and took the stage.

“You are brave because you’re here,” he said. “While, at the entrance to this arena, there were those who didn’t want to let you in.” The Front National wanted “to confine France to its fears,” he said, nonetheless admonishing the crowd not to boo the opposition. He said that he wouldn’t apologize for the crime-against-humanity comment, but implored those whom he had offended to “forgive me for having hurt you.”

Macron has conjured an extreme center that didn’t exist before he identified it. He has a talent for balancing opposing ideals, sometimes to the extent of appearing disingenuous or oxymoronic. His economic program gives companies more leeway in firing workers, but it offers unemployed workers higher benefits. Meme-makers delight in his habit of



“I love spring days when we get to work outdoors.”

saying “at the same time,” which, in Toulon, he repeated twenty-two times in ninety minutes. Occasionally, his syntheses present new and even revelatory ways of seeing things. “Europe is also the place of our sovereignty,” he told the crowd in a confident voice, managing, for a moment, to unite two concepts—globalization and nationalism—that had roiled politics worldwide for the better part of a year.

As Minister of the Economy, Macron sponsored an explosively unpopular labor reform, which the Hollande government had to push through using a technical maneuver. Marc Ferracci, a friend and adviser of Macron’s, told me that Macron took it as a personal failure—his biggest—that he wasn’t able to corral the votes needed to pass the bill, and that his disillusionment at the gridlock “was the main reason he decided to launch his movement.” Macron has been accused of arrogance. He relishes confronting his detractors, once telling a man who criticized his expensive suit, “The best way to get a suit is to work.” He gets flak for having come out of nowhere, for being “a hologram” or “a marketing concept,” but his youth can be an asset, particularly when coupled with one of his strongest arguments—that the world is undergoing an epochal, accelerated transformation. This theory neutralizes charges of over-ambition while positioning him as a man of his moment. It also justifies En Marche! as part of a social evolution rather than a vanity project. “The world changes,” Macron told the crowd, announcing the end of the old order, in which “one must be right or left—in a finished taxonomy, as if political life were a frozen species, butterflies that had to be pinned to a wall.”


FRENCH VOTERS SAY that economic issues (employment, buying power, and retirement) rank just above immigration as their most pressing concerns. At the beginning of April, I went to Hayange, a town in the Grand Est region, which has been known for iron manufacturing since the de Wendel family established a foundry there, in 1704. Hayange, where unemployment is seventeen per cent, used to be a bastion of the left, but its political landscape is in flux. During the Presidential election of 2012, François Hollande

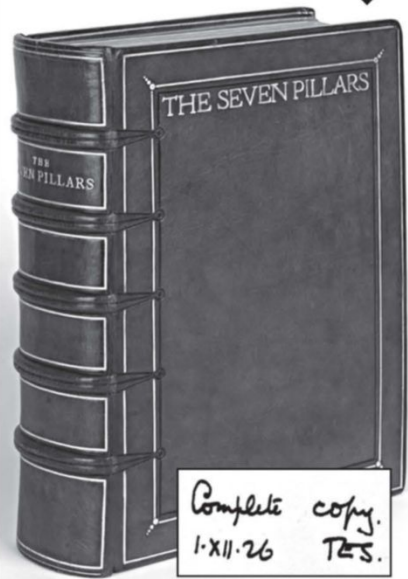
visited the ArcelorMittal steelworks, which towers over the town, and promised to keep it open. Twenty-nine per cent of the town’s residents voted for him in the first round (their second choice, at twenty-seven per cent, was Marine Le Pen). Later that year, ArcelorMittal closed two blast furnaces, eliminating more than six hundred jobs. In 2014, Hayange elected Fabien Engelmann as mayor. Engelmann, a thirty-seven-year-old vegetarian, started his career as a far-left activist but switched to the Front National in 2010, to protest the candidacy, for regional office, of a woman who publicly wore a hijab.

Hayange, for the moment, still has a middle class. The marriage banns, posted on a bulletin board in the town hall, included those for an auto-body painter and a cashier, a zinc roofer and his stay-at-home fiancée, and an optician and a midwife. In a shoe store, two saleswomen told me that they remained undecided, but were leaning toward Le Pen. “I think everyone wants her to win, but they don’t want to vote for her,” one woman said, depicting a Le Pen victory as a sort of forbidden fantasy of the collective unconscious. (In the first round, thirty-three per cent of *hayangeois* ended up voting for Le Pen, with Macron drawing only nineteen per cent.) A florist who was preparing a spray of lilies for a funeral told me that his parents were Italian immigrants and had been stalwarts of the left, but that he was considering voting for Le Pen. He dismissed Macron as “a smooth talker who proposes nothing.” His family, like many in Hayange, had jumped across the political spectrum in the space of a generation, skipping over the center entirely.

That evening, I travelled to Monswiller, a tiny village near the German border where Le Pen was speaking. Several dozen protesters were staked out across the street from the auditorium, whose windows were plastered with posters for accordion bands. “No, France Doesn’t Want to Take in Any More Racists,” one of their posters read. They banged on pots and pans.

The hall was packed. Near where I was standing, a woman in Capri pants and a young man with a scorpion tattoo that went from his ankle to his knee were hanging on to a rail, hoping to get a better look. “Marine! Marine!” the crowd yelled as Le Pen came on. She said, “My

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dear friends, I can't disguise my immense pleasure at being here, in this dear land of Alsace!" From there, she launched into an unremittingly dark oration, delineating the betrayals of the political classes ("Don't forget that François Fillon was the first Prime Minister of the Fifth Republic to celebrate the opening of a mosque with a little girl of only six years old, veiled, by his side!"), the culture of permissiveness, the unfair tax system, the dearth of public services, the abandonment of single mothers. Her gruff, sarcastic delivery held the audience spellbound. She had clearly studied the smallest particulars of their predicament.

"Look at these large, merged regions," she said, veering into a denunciation of a plan by which the French government, in 2016, had consolidated the country's administrative regions. "I was a victim in the North," she said of the area she represents. "You, too, here, with the mastodon 'Grand Est' imposed on you. Which does not represent anything, which has no history, no soul, no meaning, no coherence." Her voice booming, she built up to the line that would command the biggest applause of the evening: "I am leading the revolution of proximity. . . . I will give you back Alsace!"

"*On est chez nous!*" the crowd chanted. "It's our house!"

Not only was Le Pen talking about the "forgotten people of France," as she calls them; she was meeting them on their turf. Her rejection of globalism went smaller than nationalism. She was subdividing the country into its narrowest possible parts and trying to conquer them one by one. In the event that Macron's vision of France stretched to the outer ring of one of those diagrams of concentric circles that kids draw to represent their position in the universe, Le Pen's was confined to its tight nucleus. Her inspiration is to link the economic suffering of France with its social ills. "We are the owners of our country," she said in Monswiller. "We must have the keys to open the house of France, to open it halfway, to close the door."

THIS TIME AROUND, a Le Pen ascension comes not as a shock but as a troubling inevitability. Political leaders are not unanimous in the belief that, in the name of solidarity, they must endorse Macron. Mélenchon, the far-left candi-

date, received twenty per cent of the vote in the first round; his supporters, combined with Le Pen's, constitute a forty-per-cent share of the electorate. Both reject Macron's business-friendly economics and his affinity for Europe. In 2002, Mélenchon, then a Socialist minister, condemned Jean-Marie Le Pen, saying, "You must not hesitate. Put on gloves if you want, or hold your nose, or whatever you want, but vote. Put Le Pen down as far as possible!" This time, he was coy, declining to denounce Le Pen immediately, and leaving it to an online poll to determine whether his followers supported voting Macron, voting *blanc* (submitting a blank ballot), or abstaining. Fillon, the center-right candidate, threw his support behind Macron, but more than half of his voters are saying that they won't follow his advice.

Still, the math heavily favors Macron, whom polls, which were accurate in the first round, have put ahead by twenty points. By Nate Silver's estimate, Le Pen "could beat her polls by as much as Trump and Brexit combined, and still lose to Macron." Even if Macron wins, he will face another challenge almost immediately: the June parliamentary elections. France's system is set up so that the Prime Minister, who is chosen from whichever party controls a majority in Parliament, holds numerous executive powers. When the President and the Prime Minister come from different parties—this has happened only three times since 1958—the President is essentially paralyzed. It is far from certain that a fledgling group such as *En Marche!* can win the two hundred and eighty-nine seats needed for a majority, particularly with a slate of inexperienced candidates composed, in part, of members of civil society, whom Macron has encouraged to apply for candidacy online.

If Macron secures the Presidency and a parliamentary majority, his tenure will constitute the first and the most important fortification of the next barricade against the Front National. But, as the journalist Anne Sinclair told me, "If this next mandate is a failure, you can be sure Marine Le Pen will win next time. And Marion Maréchal Le Pen has forty years ahead of her to become President." (The F.N.'s official poster for the second round depicts Marine wearing a skirt that falls

above the knee, because, according to advisers, "women's freedom is under attack by Islamist radicals.") The interval between the two rounds of voting allows passions to cool. The system discourages extremism, but this means that a large portion of the French electorate may feel pushed into an unsatisfactory forced choice. "*Ni patrie ni patron, ni Le Pen ni Macron*" ("Neither motherland nor bossman, neither Le Pen nor Macron") someone spray-painted, the day after the first round, at the foot of the bronze statue of Marianne that soars above the Place de la République.

On the eleventh day before the French people had to make their final choice, Macron was in his home town of Amiens, meeting at the chamber of commerce with union members from a Whirlpool plant that has been threatened with closure. Its owners had declined to authorize Macron to visit, but Le Pen, sensing a publicity opportunity, showed up, unannounced, in the factory's parking lot. "When I learned that Emmanuel Macron was coming here and that he didn't intend to meet the workers, that he didn't intend to come to the picket line, but that he was going to take shelter in I-don't-know-what meeting room of the chamber of commerce to meet two or three handpicked people, I considered it such a sign of contempt for the Whirlpool workers that I decided to leave a committee meeting and come see you," she said, as F.N. activists handed out croissants. The factory would not be shut down, she promised, if she is elected President.

Macron scrambled over to the site. Even though he received a rough reception—"You don't know Amiens!" someone shouted, as smoke from burning tires filled the air—he stayed and talked with a group of workers for forty-five minutes, broadcasting the unscripted encounter on Facebook Live. Enduring insults and interruptions from the scrum, he persisted in trying to explain his perspective. He said that, as President, he would try hard to find a buyer for the factory, and, if he failed, he would work to insure the best possible deal for laid-off workers. "I'm not here to offer false promises," he said at one point. "When Marine Le Pen comes here and tells you we've got to reject globalism, she's lying to you!" ♦

FLOOD AIRLINES

BY ANN BEATTIE

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Welcome aboard! ♦

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

THE BEST MEDICINE

Onstage and onscreen, Kumail Nanjiani turns his pain into comedy.

BY ANDREW MARANTZ



IN 2009, on the “Late Show with David Letterman,” the comedian Kumail Nanjiani walked onstage, wearing a boxy black suit and a cordless mike, to do a standup set. The band played a few bars of “Born in the U.S.A.,” an allusion, presumably, to the fact that he wasn’t. The first anecdote of Nanjiani’s set fell flat. He stood stiffly, swallowing hard, his hands clasped tightly in front of his chest. Then he told a joke about theme-park attractions with excessively convoluted backstories. “It’s like a story line to a porn movie,” he said. “I really don’t care what all your professions are. I’m just here for the ride.” It wasn’t the cleverest punch line in Nanjiani’s act, but it received a big laugh and a ten-second applause break. He exhaled audibly, relaxing his

hands. His next bit was about the Cyclone, the rickety roller coaster on Coney Island. “The Cyclone was made in the year 1927! Let that sink in. They should change the name of that ride to 1927, ’cause that fact is way scarier than any cyclone,” he said. “And the whole thing is made of *wood* . . . you know, that indestructible substance that NASA uses for its space shuttles.” The bit could have been delivered in the nineteen-sixties, by Woody Allen or Mort Sahl, with one exception: Nanjiani said the ride was “the scariest experience of my life—and I grew up in *Pakistan*.”

Nanjiani spent his childhood in Karachi, Pakistan’s biggest city. In 1997, when he was nineteen, he left to attend Grinnell College, a small liberal-arts school

in the middle of Iowa. “I thought, from watching TV and stuff, that America was one place,” he told me. “They only show you L.A. and New York. They don’t warn you about Iowa.” When he got to college, he says, “I was super shy, but I learned that my friends thought I was funny.” His senior year, there was an open mike on campus, and his friends urged him to try standup. He performed for thirty-five minutes. “I don’t think I’ve ever done better than that crowd, reaction-wise,” he said. “Of course, it was full of people who knew me. But it gave me an irrational amount of confidence.” After school, he moved to Chicago and started performing. Michael Showalter, a comedian and director who has admired Nanjiani from the beginning, told me, “Anyone who saw him saw how smart and fresh his voice was. The question wasn’t whether he’d be successful, only which direction he’d choose to go in.”

The year of the Letterman set, Nanjiani landed a recurring role on “The Colbert Report,” as a Guantánamo detainee who lives under Stephen Colbert’s desk. Many of Nanjiani’s earliest film and TV credits were, he says, “more or less what you’d expect”: “Delivery Guy,” “Cable Guy,” “Pakistani Chef.” But he quickly started getting more substantial roles, and in the past few years he has appeared on almost every show beloved by comedy snobs, including “Portlandia,” “Broad City,” “Community,” “Key & Peele,” and “Inside Amy Schumer.” He now has a lead part on “Silicon Valley,” an ensemble comedy on HBO, playing a coder who, despite his good looks, remains hopelessly unlucky with women. “It’s a version of me in high school, when I was at my least confident,” he said.

As a child, Nanjiani spoke Urdu at home; he learned English at school, and picked up colloquialisms from TV. “I grew up watching ‘Ghostbusters’ and ‘Knight Rider’ and Hot Wheels commercials,” he said. “When I got to college, having never set foot in America, I knew more American pop-culture references than my friends did.” As a standup, he said, “I was so eager to avoid being known as an immigrant comedian, or as a Muslim comedian, that I would just come out wearing a T-shirt and start talking about video games. I wasn’t judgmental about other comedians using their backgrounds to their advantage—joining

Judd Apatow heard about Nanjiani’s life and said, “That should be a movie.”

the Spicy Masala Comedy Tour, or whatever—but I could never bring myself to do it, even though I could have used the work.”

Then came 9/11. “Suddenly, Islam was the elephant in the room,” he continued. “I just thought, O.K., I’m brown, I speak with an accent—I have to at least bring it up.” He began opening his sets by saying, “Don’t worry, I’m one of the good ones,” which put some audiences at ease. Other times, he was interrupted by someone shouting “Go home!” or “Go back to the Taliban!” Recalling one heckler, at a club in Milwaukee, Nanjiani said, “The room got so quiet and awkward. I fumbled around with words and tried to ignore it. It made the audience pity me, which is not a good look for comedy. After that, I came up with something to say—I realized it doesn’t have to be a perfect line, just something to show the audience that you’re still in control.” The next time he was heckled, he responded, “That guy’s right. I am a terrorist. I just do standup comedy on the side, to keep a low profile.”

A similar exchange, with “Taliban” updated to “ISIS,” appears in Nanjiani’s movie “The Big Sick.” It premiered earlier this year, at the Sundance Film Festival, where it was a favorite among both audiences and critics. The movie was directed by Showalter, whose film career has included slapstick cult classics (“Wet Hot American Summer”) as well as offbeat romantic comedies (“Hello, My Name Is Doris”), and produced by Judd Apatow, who has specialized, recently, in helping almost famous comedians adapt their formative experiences into memoiristic meta-comedies. Apatow’s producing partner, Barry Mendel, described “The Big Sick” to me as “part comedy about comedy, part drama about families, part medical mystery, and also, incidentally, a Muslim American rom-com.”

Nanjiani co-wrote the screenplay with his wife, Emily V. Gordon, and he plays its protagonist, a standup comic named Kumail. It’s the first feature either of them has written, and it’s Nanjiani’s first starring role. The fictional Kumail works as an Uber driver, a day job that didn’t exist when the real Kumail still had day jobs. Aside from that, and a few other departures to help a joke land or a plotline cohere, the movie

doesn’t stray too far from a dramatically rich series of events that befell Gordon and Nanjiani a decade ago, shortly before they turned thirty.

Nanjiani didn’t conceive of the film as at all political. “It was just supposed to be a heartwarming little movie that, if we did it right, would be funny and maybe a bit poignant,” he said. But it was filmed last summer, when much of the conversation between takes was, inevitably, about the Presidential campaign; the Sundance premiere was on January 20th, the day Donald Trump was sworn in. “That coincidence is so weird and terrible that I don’t even know what to make of it,” Nanjiani told me. (On Twitter, where he has more than a million followers, he makes no secret of his political opinions: “I’m thankful our new President-elect is anti-Muslim so now my parents & I agree on politics”; “Silver lining: one day the ocean will take us.”)

Apatow said, “We never talked about it in terms of ‘What does it mean to represent a secular Muslim onscreen?’ We talked about telling Kumail’s story, and that led us, naturally, to questions about family and culture and religion.” The movie, which will be released in June, appears at a time when an individual action can seem unusually freighted with political meaning—when a football player taking a knee during the national anthem or a passenger being dragged from a plane can be transformed, by TV pundits and tweeting politicians, into a national Rorschach test. “I still don’t look at it as a political movie, but I guess now everything is political, whether we like it or not,” Nanjiani told me. “Like that heckling scene, for instance. When we wrote it, the clear assumption was: That guy in the crowd is an asshole, an outlier, and the viewer of the movie is automatically on my side. Now that assholes like that guy have taken over the country, I’m not sure how funny it plays.”

EARLY IN HIS career, Nanjiani built his act around subjects he thought his American audiences would find relatable. While Louis C.K. and other comedians had success with an expansive, confessional style, he stuck to terse observational jokes about vintage horror movies, the nature of memory, and the pluralization of the word “octopus.” An introvert, he was scared of performing,

and he incorporated his fear into a pensive onstage persona. “He would wear loose hoodies, and he was sort of a mumbler,” Pete Holmes, a comedian who started at the same time as Nanjiani and became one of his closest friends, told me. “He was really good, but wordy, subtle—you had to pay attention.”

What Nanjiani avoided mentioning onstage was that he was brought up a strict Shiite Muslim. He was taught that a lustful glance or a sip of wine would result in perpetual torment, and that the Quran was the literal and inerrant word of God; because the Quran didn’t mention dinosaurs, dinosaurs had never existed. When Nanjiani was eight, his mother set aside a cache of jewelry that she planned to give his future wife on their wedding day. It went without saying that Nanjiani’s parents would select this future wife, and that she would be a Pakistani Shiite, possibly a family friend or a cousin. When Nanjiani left for college, his mother made him promise that he would never succumb to Western secularism. A few days later, during Grinnell’s freshman-orientation week, he shook a woman’s hand for the first time.

How could he make this upbringing funny to the tipsy patrons of Joe’s Bar on Weed Street? There would be too many terms to define, too much cultural context to establish in a ten-minute set. Besides, a successful joke requires a clear point of view, and his views were ambivalent and constantly shifting. He associated Karachi with poetry and architecture, violence and misogyny, delicious food, unnerving squalor, and every relative he’d ever loved. Part of him assumed that he would soon move back to Pakistan, and part of him knew that he never would. He couldn’t fully articulate these thoughts to himself, much less to strangers.

By 2006, Nanjiani had been doing standup for five years. He lived with a friend on the North Side of Chicago and worked a day job as an I.T. specialist. “A really cliché job for a South Asian guy to have, I realize,” he said. “On the other hand, I take some pride in how bad I was at it.” He performed three or four nights a week, around town and on the road. Many comedians, at this point, might have moved to New York or Los Angeles, where they could audition for TV jobs and get noticed by

agents. Nanjiani, out of comfort and inertia, stayed in Chicago.

With time, he grew more assured onstage. He trained himself to take the microphone out of the stand and move around—"It sounds like a tiny thing, but it was transformative," he said—and he changed his hair style from a floppy middle part, à la nineteen-nineties Hugh Grant, to an Elvis pompadour. "He started getting muscly and wearing tight T-shirts," Holmes said. "He plucked his unibrow. He started getting loud, controlling the room, high energy. It was like watching a car suddenly shift into a higher gear. Instead of calling him Kumail, I started calling him Newmail."

At one show, in a bar on the North Side, Nanjiani asked, facetiously, "Is Karachi in the house?" Someone in the audience, also facetiously, let out a "Who!" Nanjiani could see that she was a white woman, a pretty brunette with a streak of purple in her hair. "I don't think so," he said. "I would have noticed you." Two nights later, they ran into each other again, and she introduced herself as Emily Gordon. She was from North Carolina, and although she was a couples and family therapist, she knew as much about comedy—and video games, and comic books, and horror movies—as he did.

Soon they were texting almost every day. There was an obvious mutual attraction, but neither was interested in a relationship: Gordon, who was twenty-seven, had already been married and divorced; Nanjiani, then twenty-eight, wasn't supposed to be dating anyone, much less a non-Muslim. "We'd hang out, hook up, and then be, like, 'We can't do this anymore. But let's hang out again,'" Nanjiani said. "Once, before she came over to watch a movie, I threw a bunch of dirty laundry on my bed, to insure that nothing would happen. It didn't work."

Meanwhile, Nanjiani's parents, who had moved from Karachi to New Jersey, were sending him information about eligible Shiite bachelorettes in the Chicago area. He avoided meeting the women. "My American friends would be, like, 'Dude, just tell your parents you're not interested,'" he said. "But that's a misunderstanding of the culture. Arranged marriage *is* marriage. Anything else is unthinkable." He felt American enough to want to choose his romantic partners, but Pakistani enough

that he dreaded flouting his family's expectations. "I couldn't imagine a universe where I ended up accepting an arranged marriage, but I also couldn't imagine telling my parents that," he said. "So I just deflected and delayed."

One day, after Nanjiani and Gordon had been dating for a few months, she texted him to say that she was going to the doctor. Nanjiani didn't hear from her for several hours. Around midnight, he got a call: Gordon was in the emergency room, and she was having trouble breathing. He rushed to the hospital and spent the night. By the next morning, Gordon was heavily sedated and was drifting in and out of wakefulness. Her lung was infected, and the infection was spreading fast. In order to treat it, the doctors told Nanjiani, they needed to put her into a medically induced coma. They asked if he was her husband. He said no—he wasn't even sure that he was her boyfriend. They asked again, pressing him to sign a release form. Finally, at the doctors' insistence, he signed it. The doctors tied Gordon down and injected her with an anesthetic. She thrashed against the restraints, then fell into a coma.

Nanjiani was supposed to go on the road to open for Zach Galifianakis, but he stayed in Chicago and visited Gordon in the I.C.U. every day. She remained in the coma for more than a week while the doctors ruled out several possibilities, including H.I.V. and leukemia. Even a decade later, after having recounted the experience dozens of times, Nanjiani still chokes up whenever he talks about it. "I was sitting by her bed," he said. "She was unconscious, and she was hooked up to all these beeping machines, and I very clearly remember thinking, 'If she makes it out of this, I'm gonna marry her.'" His voice caught. "I know that sounds cliché, and it's actually kind of creepy and nonconsensual if you think about it too hard. But that was the thought I had."

S POILER ALERT—I made it," Gordon said, last May, flashing me a thumbs-up and a goofy smile. On the eighth day of her coma, she received a diagnosis of adult-onset Still's disease, a rare inflammatory syndrome that is manageable once it's identified and treated. "I have to sleep the right amount and exercise the right amount, and I still occasionally get flare-ups and have to stay in bed for a few

days," she told me. "But no more I.C.U.s, which is pretty fucking sweet. Now I only have to go to the hospital when we're filming a movie in one."

As a co-writer of "The Big Sick," Gordon was on set every day of the shoot, which took place in New York, last spring. She and Nanjiani now own a house in Los Angeles, but during the shoot they rented an Airbnb in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The first time I met Gordon, she was sitting in a canvas director's chair in front of a video monitor, a pair of headphones slung around her neck. Next to her were Mendel, the producer, and Showalter, the director. We were in an art space in Williamsburg that had been decorated to look like the fictional Kumail's bachelor apartment in Chicago: an Xbox, an inflatable mattress, a family-sized box of Cheerios. Between shots, Zoe Kazan, who played the fictional Emily, sat next to the real Emily, and they chatted about which books they were reading. At one point, Kazan turned to me and said, "You know the first grader who has this cool third-grade cousin, and she just thinks her big cousin hung the moon? That's how I feel about her, essentially."

Kazan swung her feet in the air and squinted at shoes the costume designer had selected, a pair of gray ballet flats. "Are these shoes you would actually wear?" she asked Gordon.

Without speaking, Gordon gestured toward her own feet: gray ballet flats.

"Fair enough," Kazan said.

When the crew was ready, Showalter called for quiet, and those of us sitting in front of the monitors put on headphones. Kazan went into an adjacent room, and she and Nanjiani started filming the next scene: the couple's first fight. At this point in the movie, their relationship seems promising, but Kumail has been avoiding some traditional landmarks of commitment, such as introducing Emily to his parents. In the scene, Emily, rummaging in Kumail's bedroom, finds a cigar box full of photos—the Pakistani bachelorettes his mother has been attempting to set him up with. Emily starts to ask questions, including, "Can you imagine a world in which we end up together?" The emotional climax of the scene is Kumail's inadequate response.

"Finding a literal box of photos—that's cinematic license," Gordon told me. "That said, the themes are obviously

drawn from reality. And it's extremely accurate to our actual conflict styles, to the point where it's almost eerie to watch. His body responds to conflict by basically shutting down and going to sleep. Which, of course, makes me fly into a fucking rage." When I took off my headphones, Kazan's voice pierced through the walls, whereas Nanjiani's was, for much of the scene, an inaudible murmur; in the video monitor, Kazan paced and gesticulated while Nanjiani leaned wearily against a doorpost, his eyes Stygian pools. In Nanjiani's comic performances, on "Silicon Valley" and elsewhere, he has demonstrated onscreen magnetism and authenticity. Here, he showed that he could anchor a tense scene, full of long pauses and light on comic relief.

They filmed the argument several more times, improvising variations on the written dialogue. (Kazan: "Are you judging 'Pakistan's Next Top Model' or something?" Nanjiani: "You know that's not an actual franchise.") Before each take, Showalter urged Nanjiani to speak more directly, sounding out the line between candor and cruelty. At the end of one take, Nanjiani said, in a near-whisper, "We've only been dating for five months, Emily. I think you're overreacting."

"Harsh," Mendel, at the video monitors, said.

"Fuck you, Kumail," Gordon said. "Character Kumail, I mean."

Because shooting had begun in the late morning and would end around midnight, they broke for "lunch" at 5 P.M. Nanjiani, Gordon, and Kazan decided to walk to a vegan Asian-fusion restaurant nearby. On the way, they passed a trailer where the props department was preparing for an upcoming dinner scene; they had ordered from a Pakistani kebab house in Queens, and were deciding which foods would look best on camera. Kumail tasted the biryani and the *haleem*, a thick wheat stew. "This is the real deal," he said. "You guys might also want to get some *barfi*. It's a milk-and-sugar thing, a dessert."

"Barfi?" a production designer asked, writing down the word.

"Barf,' with an 'i,'" Nanjiani said.

They continued walking to the restaurant. "The prop guys have been great on this," Kazan said. "Even the books in my apartment are on point."



"Do you allow progressive substitutions?"

Nanjiani nodded. "On other stuff I've done, there were always monkeys and elephants and Buddhas and Arabic script—just every possible brown-person thing."

The next scene on the shooting schedule was one that took place earlier in the movie—a makeout scene. After lunch, Kazan and Nanjiani, preparing to simulate a Chicago winter, put on bulky sweaters, which would come off in the course of the action. "I think your stubble looks awesome, but you are going to scratch the shit out of my face," Kazan said.

In a discussion the previous night, Kumail and the two Emilys had decided that, during the filming of this scene, Gordon would leave the set. "Zoe doesn't think it's weird if I'm here, and I don't think it's weird if I'm here, but Kumail does," Gordon said.

"I'm sorry," Nanjiani said.

"Dude, whatever makes it easier for you is fine with me," Gordon said, gathering her things. "Now I get to go home, nap, maybe play some video games. I wish my husband would make out with other women every day!"

WHEN GORDON WAS in the coma in Chicago, Nanjiani spent the first few days evading his parents' calls. One night, he picked up the phone and admitted that he had a girlfriend, that she was an American and a non-Muslim, and that she was very ill. "I was too exhausted to keep lying," he said. He as-

sumed that his mother would be furious, "but she kept it together. Every day, she'd go, 'Is Emily O.K.?' Then, one day, the answer was yes, and she immediately switched to 'How could you do this to us?'"

Gordon left the hospital in May of 2007. She and Nanjiani were married that July, at Chicago's City Hall, with six friends as witnesses. Two weeks later, his parents hosted a Muslim wedding in New Jersey. The cleric, in a reverse-xenophobic gesture, refused to perform the ceremony for anyone with a non-Muslim name, so Gordon went by Iman for the day. "I think that the ceremony was my mom's way of saying to Emily, Even though you're not the bride I imagined, I'm trying my best to include you in the family," Nanjiani said. Shabana, Nanjiani's mother, told me that when she first learned about Emily, "I was a bit disappointed, I admit. But later I came to love her like a daughter." On the day of the Muslim wedding, Shabana gave Gordon the cache of jewelry she had been saving for the occasion.

Nanjiani, having crossed one boundary by marrying Gordon, started to cross others. In the spring and summer of 2007, he wrote a ninety-minute one-man show about his personal relationship to Islam. He performed it at the Lakeshore Theatre, an august venue in Chicago that has since closed. In the only extant recording of the show, a low-resolution video of the opening-night performance,

the theatre's artistic director introduces Nanjiani by saying, "We've had a lot of great shows over the past few months, since we set out to become a Mecca of comedy as art—we've had Patton Oswalt, Janeane Garofalo, Maria Bamford, Louis C.K. None of them have been as exciting to me as what you're about to see tonight." The Mecca pun seemed to be unintentional.

The show was called "Unpronounceable," after Nanjiani's first conversation on American soil, with the customs agent who took his passport. ("He said, 'Welcome to America, Mr. . . . this is unpronounceable.' Not 'I can't pronounce that' or 'How do you pronounce that?' Unpronounceable.") These days, Nanjiani describes the show in self-deprecating terms, and "The Big Sick" includes a cringe-inducing sendup of a cheesy one-man show. If a few moments in "Unpronounceable" smacked of juvenilia—an overwrought description of a falling snowflake, for example—the writing, on the whole, was heartfelt and trenchant, even when tackling such difficult topics as crises of faith and the tradition of public self-flagellation. The show was a hit, and it allowed Nanjiani to sign with a prominent agent and quit his I.T. job. That October, five months after Gordon left the hospital, she and Nanjiani moved to New York. "It's not like we ever turned to each other and said, 'Life is fleeting, let's take our shot,'" Nanjiani said. "But, in hindsight, Emily getting sick was clearly a big event that spurred us to examine our priorities."

Gordon eventually stopped practic-

ing therapy, and she and Nanjiani moved to Los Angeles and started to collaborate. They co-hosted "The Indoor Kids," a podcast about video games, and, with the comedian Jonah Ray, founded a weekly standup showcase called "The Meltdown with Jonah and Kumail," which featured a rotating stable of performers curated by Gordon. From 2010 to 2016, the show took place every Wednesday, in a small black-box theatre in the back of a comic-book store on Sunset Boulevard—the heart of the heart of cool-nerd culture. During a trip to L.A. last year, I happened to catch the last-ever night of "The Meltdown," which featured standup by Apatow and a performance by a satirical pro-Trump reggae band. After the show, Nanjiani and Gordon stayed for nearly an hour, greeting and hugging several members of the audience.

Gordon has written personal essays, advice columns, and a cheeky self-help book, "Super You: Release Your Inner Superhero." She also spends much of her free time dispensing advice. Most of her friends in L.A. are comedians, and comedians tend to be, as she puts it, "wonderful, kindhearted individuals who sometimes have no fucking clue how to live like grownups." A few of her friends have compared her to Wendy among the Lost Boys.

In 2013, Nanjiani filmed an hour-long standup special in Austin, Texas. This time, he chose his own walk-on music: a rap song built around a Bollywood sample. In the special, "Beta Male," he strides across the stage, projecting swagger even as he jokes about being a coward or a

creep. The act is inflected with anecdotes about his upbringing. Once, when he was twelve, he was watching a forbidden videotape, and, during one of his neighborhood's frequent power outages, it got stuck in the VCR. He imagines running away in shame and having to fend for himself: "Any work needs doing? I can beat Mario and draw a Ninja Turtle."

At one point during the performance, it became clear that a woman in the audience was from Karachi.

"How's Karachi doing?" Nanjiani asked her, from the stage. (He has not been back to Pakistan since college.)

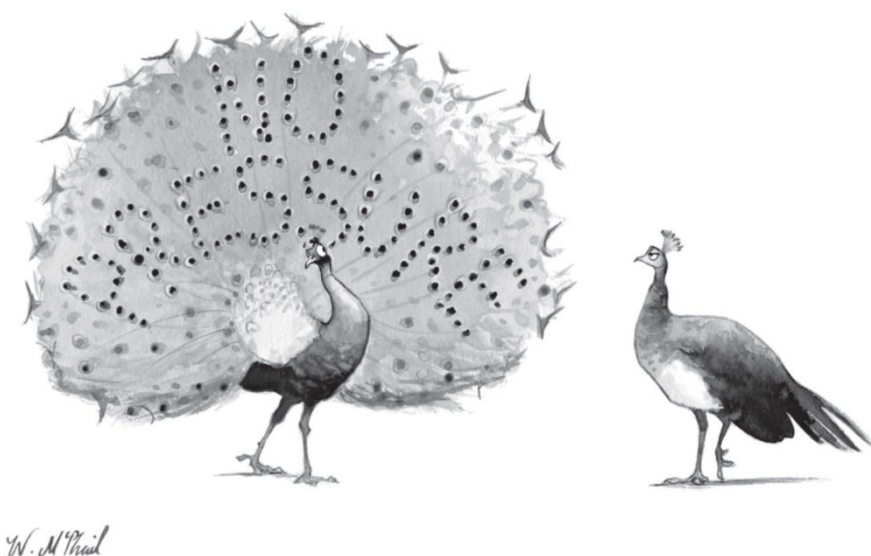
"Same as ever," she said.

"Mostly on fire?" he asked, not without affection.

IN 2012, NANJIANI performed at South by Southwest, where he met Apatow. "He started telling me about that time in his life, in Chicago," Apatow said. "I went, 'That should be a movie.'" This led to a series of meetings, which led to a series of e-mails, which led to drafts of a screenplay, which, four years later, became "The Big Sick."

The scenes in Kumail's parents' house were shot in Douglaston, Long Island. One day last summer, as the crew dusted the front lawn with fake snow, Nanjiani, Gordon, and Showalter sat in the living room, alternating between nimble banter and earnest discussions of gun-control policy. Mendel, the producer, sat in front of a video monitor in the back yard; the house's owners had cats, and Mendel was severely allergic.

"For Emily's parents, we went through a normal casting process," Nanjiani said. The roles went to Holly Hunter and Ray Romano. "When we were going to cast my parents, I called my dad and asked, 'Who should play you?' and he answered right away: Anupam Kher." Kher has been a Bollywood star for decades; "The Big Sick" was, by his count, his five-hundredth film. While Kher was filming in Douglaston, Nanjiani's parents insisted on visiting the set, a prospect that made Nanjiani palpably nervous. "The real world and the world of the movie are not supposed to be this close together," he said, stepping outside and pacing around the back yard. "There are things that come up in the script that my parents and I haven't talked about yet." Earlier that day, they'd filmed



a scene in which Kumail's mother asks him to go into another room and pray before lunch. Kumail unfurls a prayer rug and sets a timer on his phone; five minutes later, after watching a video and playing with a cricket bat, he rolls up the rug and leaves the room.

Nanjiani's parents arrived on set and made small talk with Kher. "Doesn't he look like my separated-at-birth twin brother?" Nanjiani's father, Aijaz, joked. They posed for photos, and Nanjiani's parents left after about ten minutes. "That wasn't so bad, was it?" a crew member asked Nanjiani.

Later, I asked him how his relationship with his parents had progressed in the years since the wedding. "It's a process," he said. "I think it's good. They love Emily. We see them a lot. It's complicated." He gathered his thoughts. "In the movie, the Kumail character and his parents are on step one of figuring all that stuff out. In real life, we're on step four or five. I don't know how many steps there are."

WHEN THE FICTIONAL Emily falls into a coma, the fictional Kumail doesn't know how to contact her parents. To find their phone number, he has to gain access to Emily's iPhone. He sits next to her hospital bed and whispers, "Sorry"; then he places her inert thumb on the phone's touch pad, unlocking the screen. Reading that moment in the screenplay, I worried that it might seem inauthentic, like something that would happen in a movie but not in real life. When I saw it at Sundance, sitting among eleven hundred people in a sold-out auditorium, the moment landed. From the opening credits onward, the audience was in the film's thrall. After Kumail is interrupted by the racist heckler, Emily's mother shuts the heckler down; her monologue received a spontaneous mid-scene round of applause. Emily's father, eating lunch with Kumail for the first time, leads with an offensive icebreaker: "9/11 . . . What's your stance?" Kumail's acerbic response—"It was a tragedy. I mean, we lost nineteen of our best guys"—resulted in waves of cathartic laughter.

After the Sundance premiere, Gordon posted on Instagram, "We just showed our movie for the first time. 1000 emotions." The next day, standing

on the snowy main drag of Park City, Utah, I asked her to describe a couple of them. "Euphoric?" she said. "Shell-shocked? Is nausea an emotion? When the end credits rolled and people started clapping, I had tears in my eyes, and I literally reached down as if to unbuckle my seat belt. Like, my brain was taking the roller-coaster metaphor too literally." She elbowed Nanjiani. "He was stoic, as usual."

"I was overwhelmed!" he said. "That's how I process emotions."

Within a day, Amazon had bought the movie for twelve million dollars, one of the most lucrative deals in Sundance history. (At the previous year's festival, Amazon spent ten million dollars on "Manchester by the Sea.") From then on, walking around Park City with Nanjiani was like trailing a groom at his wedding reception. Heads turned when he entered a room; people he'd never met greeted him with handshakes and hugs. His parents had been texting him, thrilled by his success. "They haven't seen the movie yet," he said, tentatively. "They're gonna like it, though. I think they're gonna like it." When I spoke with his parents, in April, they still hadn't seen it. "But we have kept up with the reviews and everything," Nanjiani's father said. "Rotten Tomatoes, IMDb, *Variety*, the *Hollywood Reporter*—I have not seen a single negative review!"

At Sundance, Nanjiani arrived at the Filmmaker Lodge, a venue with rustic wood panelling and moose heads mounted on the walls, to speak on a two-person panel with the actor John Cho. The interviewer noted that both men were born abroad (Cho is from South Korea), and asked whether they'd felt the burden of "being the representative of an entire group of people."

"First, I wanna say that when I started doing standup comedy people were racist to me, and they would call me Kumar, so I'm sure this is very confusing," Nanjiani said. He was referring to the 2004 comedy "Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle," about an Indian-American and a Korean-American embarking on a series of stoned adventures, which was one of the highest-grossing Hollywood movies without a white actor in a lead role. Although Nanjiani didn't appear in the movie, strangers called him "Kumar" so often that he wrote a

joke about it. In Nanjiani's 2013 standup special, he said, "I want to be so famous that *I'm* the pop-culture reference that people would make to try and be racist to *me*. So I'd be walking down the street and someone would be, like, 'Hey, look at *this* Kumail Nanjiani. Oh, fuck, that *is* Kumail Nanjiani!"

Cho actually did appear in "Harold and Kumar"—he played Harold. The audience laughed, and then Nanjiani addressed the question sincerely. "I don't go, 'It is now time to change Americans' perception of Muslims. It's going to be a long day,'" he said. "I think you just try to be unique and try to be yourself, and if something good comes of that then great." On "Silicon Valley," for example, Nanjiani's character fulfills some stereotypes and subverts others. He is unfashionable but insists on wearing a gold chain, for which he is roundly mocked; he's a naturalized American citizen whose nemesis, a white coder from Canada, is an undocumented immigrant. "That chain idea came directly from Kumail's life," Alec Berg, a co-showrunner of "Silicon Valley," told me. "So did the details of what it's like to apply for an American visa. It's such a luxury, when you're trying to write a character that feels grounded in reality, to be able to avoid drawing on stereotypes and instead just take Kumail out to lunch and say, 'Tell me about your life.'"

After the panel, in the greenroom, Nanjiani expanded on his thoughts about representation. "People use these words so much that they can start to sound meaningless," he said. "But I believe it matters. The stories you see as a kid show you what's possible. I mean, I'm almost forty, and when I saw a brown guy kicking ass in the new 'Star Wars' movie I started crying in the movie theatre."

He went on, "Everyone knows what a secular Jew looks like. Everyone knows what a lapsed Catholic looks like. That's all over pop culture. But there are very few Muslim characters who aren't terrorists, who aren't even going to a mosque, who are just people with complicated backstories who do normal things. Obviously, terrorism is an important subject to tackle. But we also need Muslim characters who, like, go to Six Flags and eat ice cream." ♦

ENDGAMES

What would it take to cut short Trump's Presidency?

BY EVAN OSNOS

HOURS AFTER Donald Trump's Inauguration, a post appeared on the official White House petitions page, demanding that he release his tax returns. In only a few days, it gathered more signatures than any previous White House petition. The success of the Women's March had shown that themed protests could both mobilize huge numbers of people and hit a nerve with the President. On Easter weekend, roughly a hundred and twenty thousand people protested in two hundred cities, calling for him to release his tax returns and sell his businesses. On Capitol Hill, protesters chanted "Impeach Forty-five!" In West Palm Beach, a motorcade ferrying him from the Trump International Golf Club to Mar-a-Lago had to take a circuitous route to avoid demonstrators. The White House does all it can to keep the President away from protests, but the next day Trump tweeted, "Someone should look into who paid for the small organized rallies yesterday. The election is over!"

On Tax Day itself, Trump travelled to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where he would be among his supporters again, giving a speech at Snap-on, a manufacturer of high-end power tools and other gear. Wisconsin has emerged as one of Trump's favorite states. He is the first Republican Presidential candidate to win there since 1984. He included the state in a post-election "thank-you tour." Another visit was planned for shortly after the Inauguration, but it was cancelled once it became clear that it would attract protests.

By this point in George W. Bush's term, Bush had travelled to twenty-three states and a foreign country. Trump has visited just nine states and has never stayed the night. He inhabits a closed world that one adviser recently described to me as "Fortress Trump." Rarely venturing beyond the White House and

Mar-a-Lago, he measures his fortunes through reports from friends, staff, and a feast of television coverage of himself. Media is Trump's "drug of choice," Sam Nunberg, an adviser on his campaign, told me recently. "He doesn't drink. He doesn't do drugs. His drug is himself."

Trump's Tax Day itinerary enabled him to avoid the exposure of a motorcade; instead, he flew on Marine One directly to Snap-on's headquarters. Several hundred protesters were outside chanting and holding signs. But the event's organizers had created a wall of tractor-trailers around the spot where Trump would land, blocking protesters from seeing Trump and him from seeing them.

Snap-on's headquarters, a gleaming expanse of stainless steel, chrome, and enamel, provided a fine backdrop for muscular American manufacturing, though in fact the firm closed its Kenosha factory more than a decade ago. Nick Pinchuk, the C.E.O., led Trump past displays of Snap-on products, showing him a car hooked up to state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment ("It's a different world!" Trump mused), and a table of Snap-on souvenirs, including small, colorful metal boxes that Pinchuk said some customers buy to hold ashes after a cremation. "That's kind of depressing," Trump said.

An auditorium was packed with local dignitaries and Snap-on employees. As "Hail to the Chief" played on the sound system, Trump stepped onto the stage. He stood in front of a sculpture of an American flag rippling in the wind, made from hundreds of Snap-on wrenches. Behind him was a banner: "BUY AMERICAN—HIRE AMERICAN." For a moment, the President, wearing a red tie, leaning on the lectern, looked as if he were back on the campaign trail. "These are great, great people," he began. "And these are real workers. I love the workers."

"We don't have a level playing field,"

he said. It was a treasured campaign line, to which he now added a vow of imminent progress: "You're gonna have one very soon." After Republicans abandoned their first effort to enact health-care reform, and courts blocked two executive orders designed to curb immigration from predominantly Muslim countries, he was determined to dispel any sense that his Administration had been weakened. "Our tax reform and tax plan is coming along very well," he assured the crowd. "It's going to be out very soon. We're working on health care and we're going to get that done, too."

Trump's approval rating is forty per cent—the lowest of any newly elected President since Gallup started measuring it. Even before Trump entered the White House, the F.B.I. and four congressional committees were investigating potential collusion between his associates and the Russian government. Since then, Trump's daughter Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner, have become senior White House officials, prompting intense criticism over potential conflicts of interest involving their private businesses. Between October and March, the U.S. Office of Government Ethics received more than thirty-nine thousand public inquiries and complaints, an increase of five thousand per cent over the same period at the start of the Obama Administration. Nobody occupies the White House without criticism, but Trump is besieged by doubts of a different order, centering on the overt, specific, and, at times, bipartisan discussion of whether he will be engulfed by any one of myriad problems before he has completed even one term in office—and, if he is, how he might be removed.

When members of Congress returned to their home districts in March, outrage erupted at town-hall meetings, where constituents jeered Republican officials, chanting "Do your job!" and



The history of besieged Presidencies is, in the end, the history of hubris, of blindness to one's faults, of deafness to warnings.

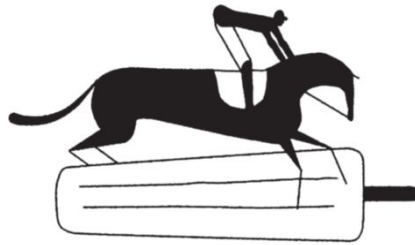
“Push back!” The former South Carolina governor Mark Sanford, who is now a Republican congressman, told me that he’d held eight town halls in his district. Trump won South Carolina by nearly fifteen points, so Sanford was surprised to hear people calling for him to be impeached. “I’d never heard that before in different public interactions with people in the wake of a new President being elected,” he told me. “Even when you heard it with the Tea Party crowd, with Obama, it was later in the game. It didn’t start out right away.”

Trump’s critics are actively exploring the path to impeachment or the invocation of the Twenty-fifth Amendment, which allows for the replacement of a President who is judged to be mentally unfit. During the past few months, I interviewed several dozen people about the prospects of cutting short Trump’s Presidency. I spoke to his friends and advisers; to lawmakers and attorneys who have conducted impeachments; to physicians and historians; and to current members of the Senate, the House, and the intelligence services. By any normal accounting, the chance of a Presidency ending ahead of schedule is remote. In two hundred and twenty-eight years, only one President has resigned; two have been impeached, though neither was ultimately removed from office; eight have died. But nothing about Trump is normal. Although some of my sources maintained that laws and politics protect the President to a degree that his critics underestimate, others argued that he has already set in motion a process of his undoing. All agree that Trump is unlike his predecessors in ways that intensify his political, legal, and personal risks. He is the first President with no prior experience in government or the military, the first to retain ownership of a business empire, and the oldest person ever to assume the Presidency.

FOR TRUMP’S ALLIES, the depth of his unpopularity is an urgent cause for alarm. “You can’t govern this country with a forty-per-cent approval rate. You just can’t,” Stephen Moore, a senior economist at the Heritage Foundation, who advised Trump during the campaign, told me. “Nobody in either party is going to bend over backwards for

Trump if over half the country doesn’t approve of him. That, to me, should be a big warning sign.”

Trump has embraced strategies that normally boost popularity, such as military action. In April, some pundits were quick to applaud him for launching a cruise-missile attack on a Syrian airbase, and for threatening to attack North Korea. In interviews, Trump marvelled at the forces at his disposal, like a man wandering into undiscovered



rooms of his house. (“It’s so incredible. It’s brilliant.”) But the Syria attack only briefly reversed the slide in Trump’s popularity; it remained at historic lows.

It is not a good sign for a beleaguered President when his party gets dragged down, too. From January to April, the number of Americans who had a favorable view of the Republican Party dropped seven points, to forty per cent, according to the Pew Research Center. I asked Jerry Taylor, the president of the Niskanen Center, a libertarian think tank, if he had ever seen so much skepticism so early in a Presidency. “No, nobody has,” he said. “But we’ve never lived in a Third World banana republic. I don’t mean that gratuitously. I mean the reality is he is governing as if he is the President of a Third World country: power is held by family and incompetent loyalists whose main calling card is the fact that Donald Trump can trust them, not whether they have any expertise.” Very few Republicans in Congress have openly challenged Trump, but Taylor cautioned against interpreting that as committed support. “My guess is that there’s only between fifty and a hundred Republican members of the House that are truly enthusiastic about Donald Trump as President,” he said. “The balance sees him as somewhere between a deep and dangerous embarrassment and a threat to the Constitution.”

The Administration’s defiance of conventional standards of probity makes it acutely vulnerable to ethical scandal. The White House recently stopped releasing visitors’ logs, limiting the public’s ability to know who is meeting with the President and his staff. Trump has also issued secret waivers to ethics rules, so that political appointees can alter regulations that they previously lobbied to dismantle.

On the day that Trump spoke in Wisconsin, the Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), a prominent legal watchdog group, expanded a federal lawsuit that accuses Trump of violating the emoluments clause of the Constitution, a provision that restricts officeholders from receiving gifts and favors from foreign interests. The lawsuit cites the Trump International Hotel, half a mile from the White House, which foreign dignitaries have admitted frequenting as a way to curry favor with the President. (“Isn’t it rude to come to his city and say, ‘I am staying at your competitor?’”) an Asian diplomat told the *Washington Post* in November.) The suit, first filed in January, in the Southern District of New York, is partly an effort to pry open the President’s business records. Two plaintiffs involved in the hotel-and-restaurant industry joined the current case, arguing that Trump’s businesses enjoy unfair advantages. “This isn’t about politics; I’m a registered Republican,” Jill Phaneuf, a plaintiff who books receptions and events for hotels, has said. “I joined this lawsuit because the President is taking business away from me.”

CREW is best known for its role in exposing the ethics violations of Tom DeLay, the former House Majority Leader, who, in 2006, resigned under indictment; and of Jack Abramoff, a lobbyist who went to prison for corruption the same year. Richard Painter, the vice-chair of CREW’s board, was formerly the chief ethics lawyer in George W. Bush’s White House. He said that the Bush Administration maintained a policy of forbidding senior officials from retaining business interests that conflicted with their responsibilities, as some in Trump’s White House have done. “We never had controversies over divestment,” Painter told me. “They’d

ask, ‘What is Hank Paulson’”—who became Treasury Secretary in 2006—“‘going to do?’ ‘He’s going to sell his Goldman Sachs stuff.’ It was pretty cut and dried.”

Meanwhile, nine months after the F.B.I. started investigating Russian interference in the campaign, it continues to examine potential links between Trump’s associates and the Kremlin. Michael Flynn, who resigned as Trump’s national-security adviser after acknowledging that he lied about his contact with Russia’s Ambassador, is seeking immunity in exchange for speaking with federal investigators, raising the prospect that he could reveal other undisclosed contacts, or a broader conspiracy. Robert Kelner, Flynn’s lawyer, wrote in a statement, “General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit.” The F.B.I. is also investigating Paul Manafort, Trump’s former campaign chairman, after it was reported that Manafort received millions of dollars in cash payments from pro-Kremlin groups in Ukraine; and Carter Page, a foreign-policy adviser to the Trump campaign until last September. The F.B.I. has described Page, in court filings, as having connections to Russian agents.

The White House maintains that it was unaware of any links to the Kremlin, and the details of the investigations are classified. But select members of Congress who oversee the intelligence agencies have access to the findings. Recently, one of them, Senator Mark Warner, of Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee, privately told friends that he puts the odds at two to one against Trump completing a full term. (Warner’s spokesperson said that the Senator was “not referring specifically to the Russia investigation, but rather the totality of challenges the President is currently facing.”)

In a gesture intended to convey transparency, Jared Kushner and Trump’s outside adviser Roger Stone have offered to speak to the Senate Intelligence Committee, but Newt Gingrich, a Trump campaign adviser who, when he was Speaker of the House, led the push for Bill Clinton’s impeachment, believes it is a risky maneuver. “Anybody who goes in front of a congressional hearing for something that is being investigated by

the F.B.I. is in immediate danger of perjury in the most innocent way, and I think that’s really dangerous,” Gingrich told me. “None of these guys understand that this is a war, and, if the left can put them in jail, they’re going to put them in jail.”

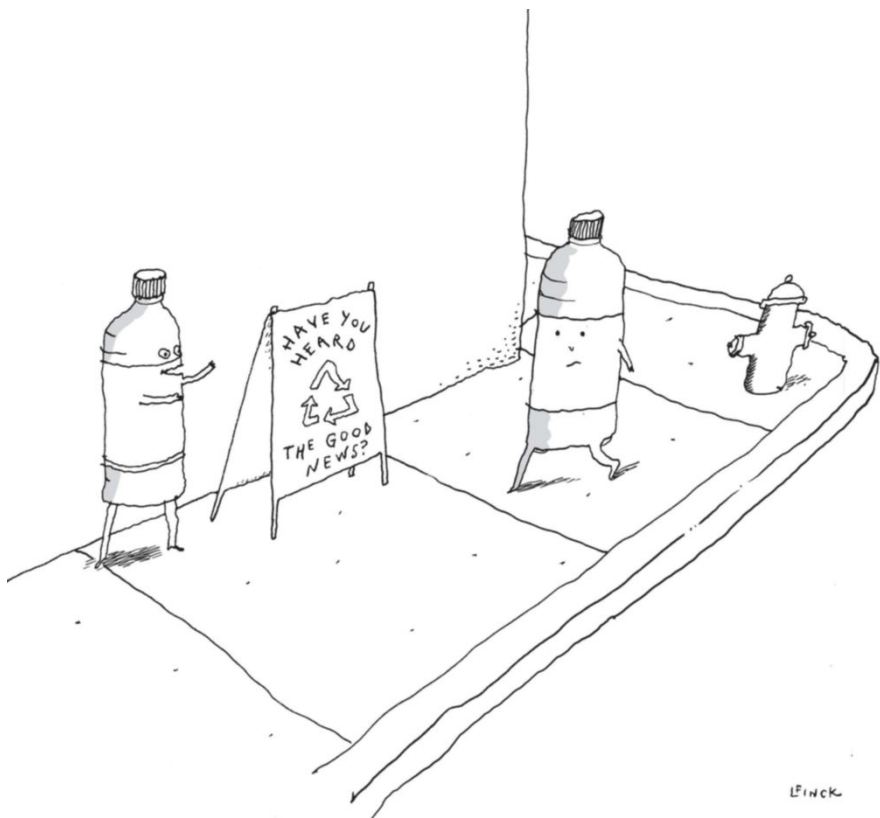
It’s not clear how fully Trump apprehends the threats to his Presidency. Unlike previous Republican Administrations, Fortress Trump contains no party elder with the stature to check the President’s decisions. “There is no one around him who has the ability to restrain any of his impulses, on any issue ever, for any reason,” Steve Schmidt, a veteran Republican consultant, said, adding, “Where is the ‘What the fuck chorus?’”

Trump’s insulation from unwelcome information appears to be growing as his challenges mount. His longtime friend Christopher Ruddy, the C.E.O. of Newsmax Media, talked with him recently at Mar-a-Lago and at the White House. “He tends to not like a lot of negative feedback,” Ruddy told me. Ruddy has noticed that some of Trump’s associates are unwilling to give him news that will upset him. “I don’t think he realizes how fully intimidating he is to many people, because he’s such a large

guy and he’s so powerful,” Ruddy went on. “I already sense that a lot of people don’t want to give him bad news about things. I’ve already been approached by several people that’ll say, ‘He’s got to hear this. Could you tell him?’”

THERE HAS BEEN considerable speculation about Trump’s physical and mental health, in part because few facts are known. During the campaign, his staff reported that he was six feet three inches tall and weighed two hundred and thirty-six pounds, which is considered overweight but not obese. His personal physician, Harold N. Bornstein, issued brief, celebratory statements—Trump’s lab-test results were “astonishingly excellent”—mentioning little more than a daily dose of aspirin and a statin. Trump himself says that he is “not a big sleeper” (“I like three hours, four hours”) and professes a fondness for steak and McDonald’s. Other than golf, he considers exercise misguided, arguing that a person, like a battery, is born with a finite amount of energy.

Secrecy about a President’s health has a rich history. “No one in the White House wants to emphasize the fact that the President might be too ill to carry out his responsibilities,” Robert E. Gilbert, a



political scientist at Northeastern University who studies Presidential health, told me. “They want everyone to think that the President is able to surmount any problem, no matter how serious, because they are thinking of reflection, and they are thinking of the judgment of history.” Although John F. Kennedy’s tan was often described as a sign of vigor, it was caused by Addison’s disease, an endocrine disorder, which Kennedy and his aides hid for decades, and which left him dependent on multiple medications.

Yet it is impossible to conceal the sheer physical strain of the Presidency. Studying the medical records of Presidents since Theodore Roosevelt, Michael Roizen, the chairman of the Cleveland Clinic’s Wellness Institute, has concluded that “unrequited stress”—the absence of peers and friends—takes the greatest toll. Kennedy, who liked to compare his critics to hecklers at a bullfight, quoted a poem by the matador Domingo Ortega: “Only one is there who knows / And he’s the man who fights the bull.” A 2015 study, led by Anupam Jena, of Harvard Medical School, analyzed the life expectancy of five hundred and forty politicians in seventeen countries. Jena found that the lives of elected leaders are, on average, 2.7 years shorter than those of the runners-up.

The Framers of the Constitution planned ahead for the death of Presidents—hence, Vice-Presidents—but they failed to address an unnerving prospect: a President who is alive and very sick. Had Kennedy survived being shot, and been left comatose, there would have been no legal way to allow others to assume his powers. To fend off that possibility, the Twenty-fifth Amendment was added to the Constitution in February, 1967. Under Section 4, a President can be removed if he is judged to be “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office.” The assessment can be made either by the Vice-President and a majority of the Cabinet secretaries or by a congressionally appointed body, such as a panel of medical experts. If the President objects—a theoretical crisis that scholars call “contested removal”—Congress has three weeks to debate and decide the issue. A two-thirds majority in each chamber is required to remove the President. There is no appeal.

AND BOTH HANDS WASH THE FACE

You were all over everything.
I just wanted to read the “Four Quartets.”
But there was your handwriting,
All over everything.

Talking about Coleridge,
Talking about sage Herakleitos.
You even spelled it like that,
With a “k.” He looked at a river once,

Famously. And in it he saw our affliction:
Nothing but time.
Because one hand washes the other,
I take down the book

And there is your hand
And here is your body
Draped over mine
In the mirror of a Carbondale motel room

In nineteen ninety-nine.

—Ryan Fox

However, the definition of what would constitute an inability to discharge the duties of office was left deliberately vague. Senator Birch Bayh, of Indiana, and others who drafted the clause wanted to insure that the final decision was not left to doctors. The fate of a President, Bayh wrote later, is “really a political question” that should rest on the “professional judgment of the political circumstances existing at the time.” The Twenty-fifth Amendment could therefore be employed in the case of a President who is not incapacitated but is considered mentally impaired.

A study by psychiatrists at Duke University, published in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, in 2006, made a striking assertion: about half the Presidents they studied had suffered a mental illness at one time or another. The researchers examined biographies and medical histories of thirty-seven Presidents, from Washington to Nixon, and found that forty-nine per cent met the criteria for a psychiatric disorder—mostly depression, anxiety, and substance abuse—at some point in their lives. Ten Presidents, or about one in four, had symptoms “evident during presidential office, which in most cases

probably impaired job performance.”

Some of these illnesses had far-reaching historical consequences. Just before Franklin Pierce took office, in 1853, his son died in a train accident, and Pierce’s Presidency was marked by the “dead weight of hopeless sorrow,” according to his biographer Roy Franklin Nichols. Morose and often drunk, Pierce proved unable to defuse the tensions that precipitated the Civil War.

Years after the death of Lyndon B. Johnson, it emerged that, as the war in Vietnam intensified, he exhibited symptoms of profound paranoia, leading two of his assistants to secretly seek the advice of psychiatrists. Johnson imagined conspiracies involving the *Times* or the United Nations or élites whom he called “those Harvards.” He took to carrying, in his jacket pocket, faulty statistics that he recited about “victory” and troop commitments in Vietnam. “For a long time, Johnson succeeded,” one of the assistants wrote, “not in changing reality, but in deceiving much of the country and, perhaps, himself.”

Only one Administration is known to have considered using the Twenty-fifth Amendment to remove a President. In 1987, at the age of seventy-six, Ronald

Reagan was showing the strain of the Iran-Contra scandal. Aides observed that he was increasingly inattentive and inept. Howard H. Baker, Jr., a former senator who became Reagan's chief of staff in February, 1987, found the White House in disarray. "He seemed to be despondent but not depressed," Baker said later, of the President.

Baker assigned an aide named Jim Cannon to interview White House officials about the Administration's dysfunction, and Cannon learned that Reagan was not reading even short documents. "They said he wouldn't come over to work—all he wanted to do was watch movies and television at the residence," Cannon recalled, in "Landslide," a 1988 account of Reagan's second term, by Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus. One night, Baker summoned a small group of aides to his home. One of them, Thomas Griscom, told me recently that Cannon, who died in 2011, "floats this idea that maybe we'd invoke the Constitution." Baker was skeptical, but, the next day, he proposed a diagnostic process of sorts: they would observe the President's behavior at lunch.

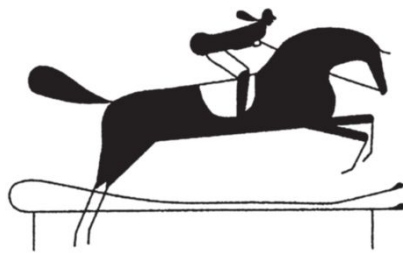
In the event, Reagan was funny and alert, and Baker considered the debate closed. "We finish the lunch and Senator Baker says, 'You know, boys, I think we've all seen this President is fully capable of doing the job,'" Griscom said. They never raised the issue again. In 1993, four years after leaving office, Reagan received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's. His White House physicians said that they saw no symptoms during his Presidency. In 2015, researchers at Arizona State University published a study in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, in which they examined transcripts of news conferences in the course of Reagan's Presidency and discovered changes in his speech that are linked to the onset of dementia. Reagan had taken to repeating words and using "thing" in the place of specific nouns, but they could not prove that, while he was in office, his judgment and decision-making were affected.

MENTAL-HEALTH professionals have largely kept out of politics since 1964, when the magazine *Fact* asked psychiatrists if they thought Barry Goldwater was psychologically fit to be President. More than a thousand said that

he wasn't, calling him "warped," "impulsive," and a "paranoid schizophrenic." Goldwater sued for libel, successfully, and, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association added to its code of ethics the so-called "Goldwater rule," which forbade making a diagnosis without an in-person examination and without receiving permission to discuss the findings publicly. Professional associations for psychologists, social workers, and others followed suit. With regard to Trump, however, the rule has been broken repeatedly. More than fifty thousand mental-health professionals have signed a petition stating that Trump is "too seriously mentally ill to perform the duties of president and should be removed" under the Twenty-fifth Amendment.

Lance Dodes, a retired assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, believes that, in this instance, the Goldwater rule is outweighed by another ethical commitment: a "duty to warn" others when he assesses that a person might harm them. Dodes told me, "Trump is going to face challenges from people who are not going to bend to his will. If you have a President who takes it as a personal attack on him, which he does, and flies into a paranoid rage, that's how you start a war."

Like many of his colleagues, Dodes speculates that Trump fits the description of someone with malignant narcissism, which is characterized by grandiosity, a need for admiration, sadism,



and a tendency toward unrealistic fantasies. On February 13th, in a letter to the *Times*, Dodes and thirty-four other mental-health professionals wrote, "We fear that too much is at stake to be silent any longer." In response, Allen Frances, a professor emeritus at Duke University Medical College, who wrote the section on narcissistic personality disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—IV*, sought to discourage the public diagnoses.

Frances wrote, "He may be a world-class narcissist, but this doesn't make him mentally ill, because he does not suffer from the distress and impairment required to diagnose mental disorder. . . . The antidote to a dystopic Trumpean dark age is political, not psychological."

To some mental-health professionals, the debate over diagnoses and the Goldwater rule distracts from a larger point. "This issue is not whether Donald Trump is mentally ill but whether he's dangerous," James Gilligan, a professor of psychiatry at New York University, told attendees at a recent public meeting at Yale School of Medicine on the topic of Trump's mental health. "He publicly boasts of violence and has threatened violence. He has urged followers to beat up protesters. He approves of torture. He has boasted of his ability to commit and get away with sexual assault," Gilligan said.

Bruce Blair, a research scholar at the Program on Science and Global Security, at Princeton, told me that if Trump were an officer in the Air Force, with any connection to nuclear weapons, he would need to pass the Personnel Reliability Program, which includes thirty-seven questions about financial history, emotional volatility, and physical health. (Question No. 28: Do you often lose your temper?) "There's no doubt in my mind that Trump would never pass muster," Blair, who was a ballistic-missile launch-control officer in the Army, told me. "Any of us that had our hands anywhere near nuclear weapons had to pass the system. If you were having any arguments, or were in financial trouble, that was a problem. For all we know, Trump is on the brink of that, but the President is exempt from everything."

In the months since Trump took office, several members of Congress have cited concern about his mental health as a reason to change the law. In early April, Representative Jamie Raskin, a Maryland Democrat and a professor of constitutional law at American University, and twenty co-sponsors introduced a bill that would expand the authority of medical personnel and former senior officials to assess the mental fitness of a President. The bill has no chance of coming up for a vote anytime soon, but its sponsors believe that they have a

constitutional duty to convene a body to assess Trump's health. Representative Earl Blumenauer, of Oregon, introduced a similar bill, which would also give former Presidents and Vice-Presidents a voice in evaluating a President's mental stability. Of Trump, he said, "The serial repetition of proven falsehoods—Is this an act? Is this a tactic? Is he just wired weird? It raises the question in my mind about the nature of Presidential disability."

Over the years, the use, or misuse, of the Twenty-fifth Amendment has been irresistible to novelists and screenwriters, but political observers dismiss the idea. Jeff Greenfield, of CNN, has described the notion that Trump could be ousted on the basis of mental health as a "liberal fantasy." Not everyone agrees. Laurence Tribe, a professor of constitutional law at Harvard, told me, "I believe that invoking Section 4 of the Twenty-fifth Amendment is no fantasy but an entirely plausible tool—not immediately, but well before 2020." In Tribe's interpretation, the standard of the amendment is not "a medical or otherwise technical one but is one resting on a commonsense understanding of what it means for a President to be 'unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office'—an inability that can obviously be manifested by gross and pathological inattention or indifference to, or failure to understand, the limits of those powers or the mandatory nature of those duties."

As an example of "pathological inattention," Tribe noted that, on April 11th, days after North Korea launched a missile, Trump described an aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. Carl Vinson, as part of an "armada" advancing on North Korea, even though the ship was sailing away from North Korea at the time. Moreover, Tribe said, Trump's language borders on incapacity. Asked recently why he reversed a pledge to brand China a currency manipulator, Trump said, of President Xi Jinping, "No. 1, he's not, since my time. You know, very specific formula. You would think it's like generalities, it's not. They have—they've actually—their currency's gone up. So it's a very, very specific formula."

Lawrence C. Mohr, who became a White House physician in 1987 and remained in the job until 1993, came to

believe that Presidential disability must be understood to encompass "very subtle manifestations" that might impair the President's capacity to do the job. A President should be evaluated for "alertness, cognitive function, judgment, appropriate behavior, the ability to choose among options and the ability to communicate clearly," Mohr told a researcher in 2010. "If any of these are impaired, it is my opinion that the powers of the President should be transferred to the Vice-President until the impairment resolves."

In practice, however, unless the President were unconscious, the public could see the use of the amendment as a constitutional coup. Measuring deterioration over time would be difficult in Trump's case, given that his "judgment" and "ability to communicate clearly" were, in the view of many Americans, impaired before he took office. For those reasons, Robert Gilbert, the Presidential-health specialist, told me, "If the statements get too strange, then the Vice-President might be able to do something. But if the President is just being himself—talking in the same way that he talked during the campaign—then the Vice-President and the Cabinet would find it very difficult."

THE POWER OF impeachment is a more promising tool for curtailing a defective Presidency. The Framers considered the ability to eject an executive so critical that they enshrined it in the



Constitution even before they had agreed on the details of the office itself. On June 2, 1787, while the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, in Philadelphia, were still arguing whether the Presidency should consist of a committee or a single person, they adopted, without debate, the right to impeach for "malpractice or neglect of duty." They gave the House of Representatives the power to impeach a President for "treason, bribery or other high Crimes and

Misdemeanors" by a simple majority vote, and they gave the Senate the power to convict or dismiss the charges, setting a high bar for conviction, with a two-thirds majority.

But what would "high Crimes and Misdemeanors" mean in practice? In 1970, during an unsuccessful effort to impeach the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, Representative Gerald Ford argued that an impeachable offense was "whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers it to be at a given moment in history." That was an overstatement—the President was never intended to serve at the pleasure of Congress—but it contained an essential truth: impeachment is possible even without a specific violation of the U.S. Criminal Code. When Alexander Hamilton wrote of "high Crimes," he was referring to the violation of "public trust," by abusing power, breaching ethics, or undermining the Constitution.

The first test came with the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, in 1868. Johnson, who became President after Lincoln's assassination, was a combative Tennessean, sympathetic to the Southern states, and was uncomfortable in Washington, which he disparaged as "twelve square miles bordered by reality." He mocked the legislative branch as "a body called, or which assumes to be, the Congress," and vetoed the Civil Rights Bill of 1866, which was intended to confer citizenship on freed slaves. Congress was incensed; Senator Carl Schurz, of Missouri, compared Johnson to "a wounded and anger-crazed boar." Eventually, the President engineered a showdown with Congress, by deliberately breaking a law against firing a Cabinet secretary without Senate consent. As a result, the House moved to impeach him, accusing him of "denying" the work of another branch of government and "preventing the execution" of laws passed by Congress. Johnson was acquitted in the Senate by one vote.

David O. Stewart, the author of "Impeached," a history of the case, told me that it established a crucial point: impeachment is not a judicial proceeding but a tool of political accountability. "Because of the unique powers of the executive, we are depending on a single person to be wise and sane," Stewart said. "If, in fact, there are enough

people who no longer think those are both true, impeachment is designed to deal with that.” For this reason, actual evidence of misconduct may not be the most important criterion in determining which Presidents get impeached. “The most important thing is political popularity,” Michael J. Gerhardt, a professor of constitutional law at the University of North Carolina, told me. “A popular President is unlikely to be threatened with impeachment. Second is your relationship with your party—how strongly are they connected to you? Third is your relationship with Congress, and fourth is the nature of whatever the misconduct may be.”

By far the most valuable lessons about impeachment come from Richard Nixon. In 1974, Nixon resigned shortly before he could be impeached, but his misjudgments—political, psychological, and legal—have illuminated the risks to Presidents ever since. In 1972, Nixon’s White House oversaw the bugging of the Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate complex and the ensuing coverup. That was illegal and unethical, but it did not guarantee Nixon’s downfall, which came about because of two critical mistakes.

First, when the scandal emerged, the President underestimated the threat. “There were any number of steps that could have made it go away,” Evan Thomas, the author of “Being Nixon,” told me. “They could have cleaned house and fired people.” But Nixon assumed that his supporters would never believe the accusations. “He was ahead by thirty-four points in the polls in August, 1972,” Thomas went on. “He could have taken his clothes off and run around the White House front yard and he was going to win reelection.”

As the scandal ground on, Nixon made his second mistake: he flouted the authority of a coequal branch of government. In October, 1973, Nixon refused to obey a federal appellate-court ruling that ordered him to turn over tapes of conversations in the Oval Office, and he forced out the investigation’s special prosecutor, Archibald Cox. For nine months, Nixon continued to resist—in effect threatening the basic constitutional system—until, in July, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that he had to comply. By then, the damage was done, and the



“I can’t remember—do I work at home or do I live at work?”

House Judiciary Committee launched impeachment hearings. By thwarting other branches, Nixon weakened his support in Congress and convinced the country that he had something to hide. Until that point, much of the public had not focussed on the slow, complex investigation, but interviews at the time show that Nixon’s stonewalling made people pay attention, and he never recovered. “Well, everything has added up to his incompetence over the last few months, and I don’t think the American people should stand for it any longer,” a woman interviewed in New York by the Associated Press said. “In fact, I just signed an impeach petition.”

By August, many of his top aides had been indicted, and polls showed that fifty-seven per cent of the public believed that Nixon should be removed from office. On August 6th, after a tape recording surfaced which captured him orchestrating the coverup, he was abandoned by Republicans who had previously derided the Watergate scandal as a witch hunt. Senator Barry Goldwater, of Arizona, told colleagues, “Nixon should get his ass out of the White House—today!” On August 9th, Nixon

sent a letter to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: “Dear Mr. Secretary, I hereby resign the Office of President of the United States. Sincerely, Richard Nixon.”

A quarter century later, the Bill Clinton impeachment yielded two related lessons—one about the path into crisis, and one about the path out of it. The first lesson was that investigations beget investigations. In January, 1994, when a special prosecutor started looking into Bill and Hillary Clinton’s investments in Whitewater, a failed Arkansas real-estate deal, there was no way to anticipate that it would conclude, nearly five years later, with Clinton’s impeachment for trying to cover up an affair with Monica Lewinsky, a twenty-two-year-old White House intern. Many raged against the conduct of that inquiry, accusing Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel, of abusing his powers, but the outcome demonstrated that a White House under investigation is in danger of spiralling into crisis.

The second lesson of the Clinton impeachment comes from the strategy adopted by his legal team. Learning from Nixon’s fate, the lawyers realized that congressional Democrats would

abandon Clinton if they concluded that he had lost the trust of the public. Gregory Craig, one of the lawyers who directed Clinton's defense, told me recently, "The fundamental point is that it's a political process." He and his team spent less energy on disputing the details of evidence than on maintaining support from fellow-Democrats and from the public. They painted Clinton as the victim of a partisan quest to exploit an offense—covering up an affair—that was not on the scale of abuse that the Framers had in mind. "To be honest, we pursued a strategy that embraced polarization," Craig recalled. "I gave a statement to the press that said this is the most unfair process since the Inquisition in Spain. Some arcane historical reference came out of my mouth. I said, 'It's like they've tied up President Clinton, put him in a closet in the middle of the night and turned off the lights, and they're whipping him.'"

The strategy succeeded. By the time the House impeached Clinton, on December 19, 1998, his approval rating had risen to more than seventy per

cent—his highest level ever. "It's a vindictive party that just went out to get him," a man at an American Legion post in San Diego told a reporter, in December, just before the House voted to impeach. When the case reached the Senate, Clinton's lawyers capitalized on his popularity and presented his misdeeds in the broader context of his Presidency. In closing arguments, Charles Ruff, the White House counsel, asked, "Would it put at risk the liberties of the people to retain the President in office?" The Senate acquitted Clinton on all charges.

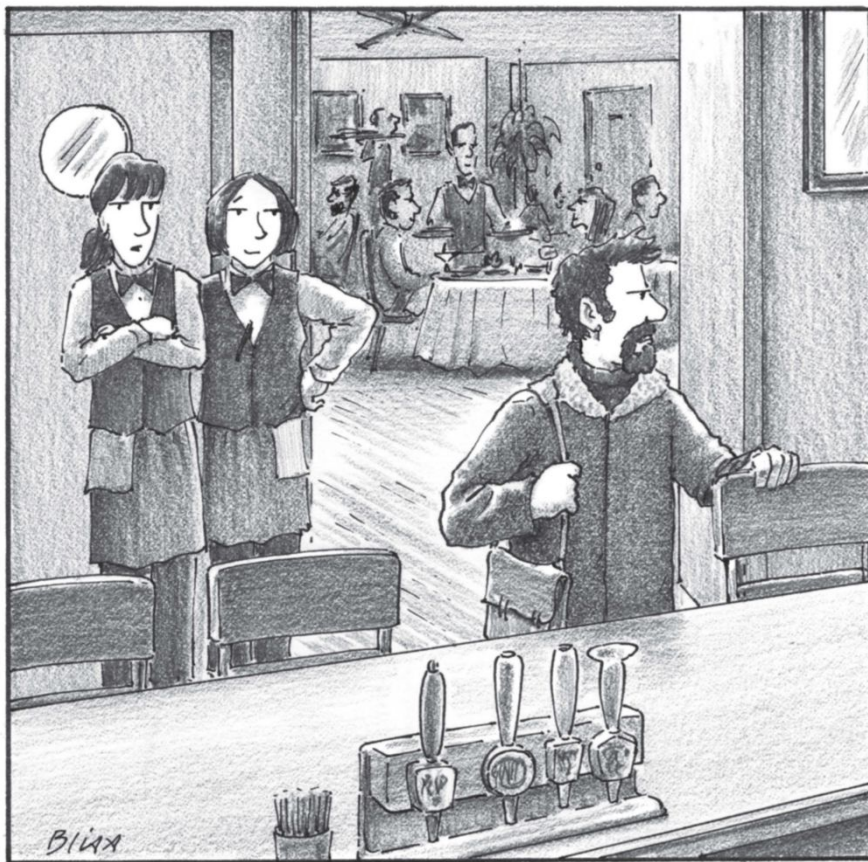
Were Trump to face impeachment, his lawyers would likely try to present him as a victim of a partisan feud, but his unpopularity would be a liability; Republicans in Congress would have little reason to defend him. Nonetheless, the Clinton impeachment may contain an even larger warning for Democrats in pursuit of Trump. "It's pretty important to be seen in sorrow rather than anger," Stewart, the historian of impeachment, said. "Don't emerge red in tooth and claw. That's not merely

tactical—it's good for the country, because you should only pursue impeachment if you really have to."

NOT LONG AGO, the topic of impeaching Trump occupied a spot on the fringe of Democratic priorities somewhere around the California secessionist movement. "If you'd have asked me around Election Day, I would have said it's not realistic," Robert B. Reich, Clinton's Secretary of Labor, told me in April. "But I'm frankly amazed at the degree of activism among Democrats and the degree of resolution. I've not seen anything like this since the anti-Vietnam movement." In April, Reich, who is now a professor of public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, released an animated short, mapping out the path to impeachment, and it became an unlikely viral hit, attracting 3.5 million views on YouTube in the first twenty-four hours.

Because the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives will almost certainly not initiate the ouster of a Republican President, the first step in any realistic path to impeachment is for Democrats to gain control of the House. The next opportunity is the 2018 midterm elections. Republicans have been relatively confident, in part because their redistricting in 2010 tilted the congressional map in their favor. But Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a Republican economist and the president of the right-leaning American Action Forum, believes that the chances of control shifting to the Democrats is greater than many people in either party realize. "After a party takes the House, the Senate, and the White House, they typically lose thirty-five seats in the House in the next midterm," he told me. "Republicans now hold the House by twenty-three seats, so, as a going proposition, they're in trouble. They need to do really, really well."

Unfortunately for the congressional G.O.P., unpopular Presidents sow midterm fiascos. Since 1946, whenever a President has had an approval rating above fifty per cent, his party has lost an average of fourteen seats in the midterms, according to Gallup; whenever the rating has been below fifty per cent, the average loss soars to thirty-six seats. Steve Schmidt, the Republican consultant, is



"Twenty bucks says he pulls out a Moleskine."

concerned that, in 2018, the Party faces a convergence of vulnerabilities akin to those which pertained during the 2006 midterms, whose outcome George W. Bush characterized as “a thumping.” Schmidt told me, “The last time Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives, it was on a mix of competency—Iraq and Katrina—and corruption in government, with the Tom DeLay Congress.” The Trump Administration has a comparable “basic competency issue,” he said. “The constant lying, the lack of credible statements from the White House, from the President on down to the spokesperson, the amateurishness of the threats to the members of Congress, the ultimatums, the talk of ‘enemy lists’ and retribution.”

Tom Davis, who twice led Republican congressional-election efforts during fourteen years as a representative from Virginia, believes that his former colleagues are overly complacent. “These guys need a wake-up call. They’re just living in la-la land,” he said. He pointed out that regardless of the final outcome of an attempt to impeach—the two-thirds majority in the Senate remains a high bar to clear—Democratic control of the House would immediately make Trump more vulnerable to investigations. “If the gavels change hands, it’s a different world. No. 1, all of his public records, they will go through those with a fine-tooth comb—income taxes, business dealings. At that point, it’s not just talk—they subpoena it. It gets ugly real fast. He has so far had a pass on all this business stuff, and I don’t know what’s there, but I’ve got to imagine that it’s not pretty in this environment.”

If Democrats retake the House, the Judiciary Committee could establish a subcommittee to investigate potential abuses and identify specific grounds for impeachment. The various investigations of Trump already in process will come into play. In addition to allegations of business conflicts and potential Russian collusion, Trump is facing dozens of civil proceedings. In a case in federal court, he is accused of urging violence at a campaign rally in Louisville, Kentucky, in March, 2016, where he yelled, referring to a protester, “Get ‘em out of here.” In a New York state court, he is facing a suit brought by Summer Zervos, a former contestant on “The Apprentice,”

who alleges that he sexually assaulted her in 2007. The constitutional question of whether a President could be impeached for offenses committed before he took office is unsettled, but, as Clinton’s case showed, civil proceedings contain risks whenever a President testifies under oath.

Many scholars believe that the most plausible bases for a Trump impeachment are corruption and abuse of power. Noah Feldman, a Harvard Law School professor who specializes in constitutional studies, argues that, even without evidence of an indictable crime, the Administration’s pattern of seemingly trivial uses of public office for private gain “can add up to an impeachable offense.” Last week, after the State Department took down an official Web page that showcased Trump’s private, for-profit club, Mar-a-Lago, Feldman told me, “A systematic pattern shown through data points would count as grounds for impeachment.” He said that economic analysis of the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s self-enrichment proves the concept. “Berlusconi is said to have gained at most one per cent per business transaction from his Presidency, but that added up to more than a billion euros,” Feldman said.

Allan J. Lichtman is an American University historian who has correctly forecast every Presidential election since 1984 (including Trump’s victory). In April, he published “The Case for Impeachment,” in which he predicted that Trump will not serve a full term, because of a “Nixonian” pattern of trespassing beyond constitutional boundaries. He cited an incident in late January, during the legal battle over Trump’s first executive order on immigration. James L. Robart, the U.S. district judge who blocked the order, rejected the White House’s claim that the court could not review the President’s decision, ruling that the executive must “comport with our country’s laws, and more importantly, our Constitution.” Trump’s response was a further violation of democratic norms: he disparaged Robart as a “so-called judge” and said that he should be held responsible for future terrorist acts on Americans. “If something happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!” Trump tweeted.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Con-

necticut Democrat who is on the Judiciary Committee, believes that the Administration’s actions denigrating or denying the power of equal branches of government portend a “constitutional crisis” akin to Nixon’s refusal to accept the appellate-court judgment regarding the White House tapes. Last week, lawmakers from both parties announced that White House officials had refused a request from an oversight committee to turn over internal documents related to the hiring and resignation of Michael Flynn. In a letter to the House oversight committee, Marc T. Short, the White House director of legislative affairs, said that the Administration is withholding documents because they “are likely to contain classified, sensitive and/or confidential information.” Blumenthal told me, “I foresee a point that there will be subpoenas or some kind of compulsory disclosure issued against the President or the Administration by one of the investigative bodies—the F.B.I. or the Intelligence Committee or an independent commission, if there is one—and, at that point, there may be the sort of confrontation that we haven’t really seen in the same way since United States versus Nixon.”

TRUMP CAMPAIGNED as a dealmaker who could woo disparate Republicans. Though there was no natural Trumpist wing of the Party, he was expected to ally with the three dozen conservative members of the Freedom Caucus, who tended to admire his anti-establishment populism. But the relationship descended into acrimony almost immediately. After the caucus objected to part of Trump’s effort to repeal and replace Obamacare, leading to the collapse of the bill, Trump publicly threatened to target its members in next year’s elections. “The Freedom Caucus will hurt the entire Republican agenda if they don’t get on the team, & fast,” he tweeted. “We must fight them, & Dems, in 2018!”

He went after individual members as well. At one point, he threatened to support a primary challenger against Mark Sanford, the South Carolina congressman. I asked Sanford if he regarded the threat as a bargaining tactic. “I think it was genuine,” he said. “It certainly wasn’t

said in a way that suggested a bluff and then a wink and a nod." Sanford said, of the level of support for Trump among Republicans in Congress, "In general, the mood of the conference is that we're in the same boat together." But he added a caveat: "This has to fundamentally be a game of addition, not just subtraction. I'm not sure the Administration has fully grasped that concept yet. You're probably not adding to the list of permanent allies and friends." He went on, "I think that there's a degree of immunity that has come with the way that he has broken all of the past molds. But I would also argue that there's a half-life to that."

Trump is not faring much better with moderate Republicans. At a meeting in March, Charlie Dent, a seven-term centrist congressman from Pennsylvania, expressed misgivings about the health-care plan, and Trump lashed out. "He said something to the effect that I was destroying the Republican Party," Dent told me. "And that the tax reform is going to fail because of me, and I'd be blamed for it." In targeting Dent, Trump found an unlikely antagonist. Dent co-chairs an alliance of fifty-four moderate Republicans so resolutely undogmatic that they call themselves simply "the Tuesday Group." Dent said that he remains ready to back Trump "when the President is on the right track," but he left no doubt that he would break when his conscience requires it. "We have to serve as a check. I mean, that's kind of our one power. We should accept that."

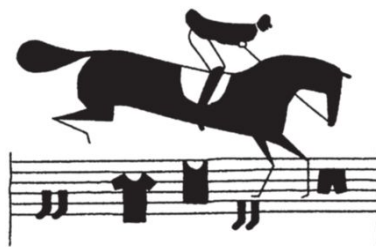
William Kristol, the editor-at-large of *The Weekly Standard*, one of the most prominent conservative critics of Trump, told me that the Administration's failure to get any bills passed was stirring frustration. "Most Republicans, I would say, wanted him to succeed and were bending over backwards to give him a chance," Kristol said. "I think there was pretty widespread disappointment. You kind of knew what you were getting in terms of some of the wackiness and also some of the actual issues that people might not agree with him on—trade, immigration—but I think that just the level of chaos, the lack of discipline, was beginning to freak members of Congress out a little bit."

Trump has been meeting with congressional Republicans in small groups.

By and large, they have found him more approachable than they expected, but much less informed. "Several have been a little bit amazed by the lack of policy knowledge," Kristol said. "God knows Presidents don't need to know the details of health-care bills and tax bills, and I certainly don't, either—that's what you have aides for. But not even having a basic level of understanding? I think that has rattled people a little bit." He added, "Reagan may not have had a subtle grasp of everything, but he read the briefing books and he knew the arguments, basically. And Trump is not even at that level."

When I asked Kristol about the chances of impeachment, he paused to consider the odds. Then he said, "It's somewhere in the big middle ground between a one-per-cent chance and fifty. It's some per cent. It's not nothing."

THE HISTORY OF besieged Presidencies is, in the end, a history of hubris—of blindness to one's faults, of deafness to the warnings, of seclusion from uncomfortable realities. The secret of power is not that it corrupts; that is well known. "What is never said," Robert Caro writes, in "Master of the Senate," about Lyndon Johnson, "is that power reveals." Trump, after a lifetime in a family business, with no public obligations and no board of directors to please, has found himself abruptly exposed to evaluation, and his reactions have been volcanic. Setting



a more successful course for the Presidency will depend, in part, on whether he fully accepts that critics who identify his shortcomings are capable of curtailing his power. When James P. Pfiffner, a political scientist at George Mason University, compared the White House crises that confronted Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton, he identified a perilous strain of confidence. In each case, Pfiffner found, the President could not "admit to himself that he had done

anything wrong." Nixon convinced himself that his enemies were doing the same things he was; Reagan dismissed the trading of arms for hostages as the cost of establishing relations with Iran; Clinton insisted that he was technically telling the truth. In Pfiffner's view, "Each of these sets of rationalizations allowed the Presidents to choose the path that would end up damaging them more than an initial admission would have."

Law and history make clear that Trump's most urgent risk is not getting ousted; it is getting hobbled by unpopularity and distrust. He is only the fifth U.S. President who failed to win the popular vote. Except George W. Bush, none of the others managed to win a second term. Less dramatic than the possibility of impeachment or removal via the Twenty-fifth Amendment is the distinct possibility that Trump will simply limp through a single term, incapacitated by opposition.

William Antholis, a political scientist who directs the Miller Center, at the University of Virginia, told me that, thus far, the President that Trump most reminds him of is not Nixon or Clinton but Jimmy Carter, another outsider who vowed to remake Washington. Carter is Trump's moral and stylistic opposite, but, Antholis said, "he couldn't find a way to work with his own party, and Trump's whole message was pugnacious. It was 'I alone can fix this.'" Like Trump, Carter had majorities in both chambers, but he alienated Congress, and, after four years, he left the White House without achieving his ambitions on welfare, tax reform, and energy independence.

Oscillating between the America of Kenosha and the America of Mar-a-Lago, Trump is neither fully a revolutionary nor an establishmentarian. He is ideologically indebted to both Patrick Buchanan and Goldman Sachs. He is what the political scientist Stephen Skowronek calls a "disjunctive" President, one "who reigns over the end of his party's own orthodoxy." Trump knows that Reaganite ideology is no longer politically viable, but he has yet to create a new conservatism beyond white-nationalist nostalgia. For the moment, all he can think to do is rekindle the embers of the campaign, to bathe,

once more, in the stage light. It lifts him up. But what of the public? Does he understand that all citizens will have a hand in his fate?

WHEN TRUMP'S SPEECH in Kenosha was over, he walked across the stage to sign an executive order. "Get ready, everybody," he said. "This is a big one." Since taking office, he had issued twenty-four executive orders, and the signings had become a favorite way of displaying his power. The scope of this order was modest—it merely established studies of visas and imports—but he described it as "historic."

He uncapped a pen and, just before he signed the order, he said, "Who should I give the pen to? The big question, right?" There was nervous laughter, and he called some local and visiting politicians up to the stage to stand beside him while he signed. Then he said, "This is a tremendous honor for me," and tried his joke again: "The only question is, who gets the pen?" He held up the signed order to the cameras, as always, pivoting left, then right, and grinned broadly.

He stepped down from the stage and walked along the front row of the audience, shaking hands, before his Secret Service detail escorted him toward Marine One. He was going straight back to Washington. The audience, kept in place until he was safely extricated, milled about awkwardly. The theatrical atmosphere dissipated, leaving behind the remainder of an ordinary Tuesday at work.

I approached a woman who introduced herself as Donna Wollmuth. She was sixty-eight years old, and she worked in Snap-on's warehouse, packing boxes for shipment. I asked her what she thought of Trump's comments. "I believe in it," she said. "And I believe in America. I want the jobs back here."

At first, I wondered if she was merely repeating Trump's slogans, but it became clear that she had thought hard about his message. Her story was of the kind that has become a stock explanation for Trump's rise. For twenty-three years, she operated a sewing machine, making briefs and sportswear at Jockey. When the plant closed, in 1993, and



"Shall I compare thee to my ex?"

production moved offshore, she found a job at the Chicago Lock factory ("Five years later, they closed") and then one at Air Flow Technology, making industrial filters. After fourteen years there, she was earning almost seventeen dollars an hour, but in 2015 she was laid off. "I lost my job there because they hired somebody that they could pay seven dollars less. It was a lot of immigrants there. Let's put it that way. I'm sure you know what I mean." She didn't like the way it sounded, but she wanted me to understand. "I'm just so stuck on this immigration thing. I really am, because I've lived through it, giving benefits and everything to people that aren't here legally."

Wollmuth had almost always voted for Democrats, but she had come to believe that her family—she has seven grandchildren and stepgrandchildren—faced a dark future. When Trump entered the race, Wollmuth was turned off by his antics. "He's gotta learn to keep his mouth shut," she said, but his pledge to reenergize American manufacturing was too specific and attractive to ignore. She took a chance on Trump, as did many of her neighbors. After going for Obama by large margins in the previous two elections, Kenosha County

sided with Trump, by just two hundred and fifty-five votes out of more than seventy-one thousand cast.

That is a fragile buffer. In late April, Trump promoted the results of a Washington *Post*/ABC News poll showing that only two per cent of those who voted for him regretted doing so. When I asked Wollmuth if she had any regrets, she made it clear that it was the wrong question. "I don't want to be disappointed, and I hope he's really trying," she said. "I'd like to believe that. I'd like to see it happen. I've got mixed emotions with him so far."

Walking out of Snap-on's headquarters, through the chanting crowd, I wondered whether Trump could see the protesters from his chopper. He knows the unpredictable potential of a crowd. I remembered something that Sam Nunberg, the Trump campaign adviser, had told me about Trump's fixation on crowds. "I said to him once, 'I understand it's the biggest. Who gives a shit? Who cares at this point? What we care about is votes,'" Nunberg said. "And he says, 'No. It's got to be.' Some of it was he was seriously concerned about the country. He also wanted to see where this went and what it was. The crowds and energy showed him it was a movement." ♦

CUT TO THE BONE

How a poultry company exploits immigration laws.

BY MICHAEL GRABELL

BY LATE AFTERNOON, the smell from the Case Farms chicken plant in Canton, Ohio, is like a pungent fog, drifting over a highway lined with dollar stores and auto-parts shops. When the stink is at its ripest, it means that the day's hundred and eighty thousand chickens have been slaughtered, drained of blood, stripped of feathers, and carved into pieces—and it's time for workers like Osiel López Pérez to clean up. On April 7, 2015, Osiel put on bulky rubber boots and a white hard hat, and trained a pressurized hose on the plant's stainless-steel machines, blasting off the leftover grease, meat, and blood.

A Guatemalan immigrant, Osiel was just weeks past his seventeenth birthday, too young by law to work in a factory. A year earlier, after gang members shot his mother and tried to kidnap his sisters, he left his home, in the mountainous village of Tectitán, and sought asylum in the United States. He got the job at Case Farms with a driver's license that said his name was Francisco Sepulveda, age twenty-eight. The photograph on the I.D. was of his older brother, who looked nothing like him, but nobody asked any questions.

Osiel sanitized the liver-giblet chiller, a tublike contraption that cools chicken innards by cycling them through a near-freezing bath, then looked for a ladder, so that he could turn off the water valve above the machine. As usual, he said, there weren't enough ladders to go around, so he did as a supervisor had shown him: he climbed up the machine, onto the edge of the tank, and reached for the valve. His foot slipped; the machine automatically kicked on. Its paddles grabbed his left leg, pulling and twisting until it snapped at the knee and rotating it a hundred and eighty degrees, so that his toes rested on his pelvis. The machine "literally ripped off his left leg," medical reports said, leaving it hanging by a frayed ligament and a five-inch flap of skin. Osiel was rushed to Mercy Med-

ical Center, where surgeons amputated his lower leg.

Back at the plant, Osiel's supervisors hurriedly demanded workers' identification papers. Technically, Osiel worked for Case Farms' closely affiliated sanitation contractor, and suddenly the bosses seemed to care about immigration status. Within days, Osiel and several others—all underage and undocumented—were fired.

Though Case Farms isn't a household name, you've probably eaten its chicken. Each year, it produces nearly a billion pounds for customers such as Kentucky Fried Chicken, Popeyes, and Taco Bell. Boar's Head sells its chicken as deli meat in supermarkets. Since 2011, the U.S. government has purchased nearly seventeen million dollars' worth of Case Farms chicken, mostly for the federal school-lunch program.

Case Farms plants are among the most dangerous workplaces in America. In 2015 alone, federal workplace-safety inspectors fined the company nearly two million dollars, and in the past seven years it has been cited for two hundred and forty violations. That's more than any other company in the poultry industry except Tyson Foods, which has more than thirty times as many employees. David Michaels, the former head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), called Case Farms "an outrageously dangerous place to work." Four years before Osiel lost his leg, Michaels's inspectors had seen Case Farms employees standing on top of machines to sanitize them and warned the company that someone would get hurt. Just a week before Osiel's accident, an inspector noted in a report that Case Farms had repeatedly taken advantage of loopholes in the law and given the agency false information. "The company has a twenty-five-year track record of failing to comply with federal workplace-safety standards," Michaels said.

Case Farms has built its business by recruiting some of the world's most vulnerable immigrants, who endure harsh and at times illegal conditions that few Americans would put up with. When these workers have fought for higher pay and better conditions, the company has used their immigration status to get rid of vocal workers, avoid paying for injuries, and quash dissent. Thirty years ago, Congress passed an immigration law mandating fines and even jail time for employers who hire unauthorized workers, but trivial penalties and weak enforcement have allowed employers to evade responsibility. Under President Obama, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agreed not to investigate workers during labor disputes. Advocates worry that President Trump, whose Administration has targeted unauthorized immigrants, will scrap those agreements, emboldening employers to simply call ICE anytime workers complain.

While the President stirs up fears about Latino immigrants and refugees, he ignores the role that companies, particularly in the poultry and meatpacking industry, have played in bringing those immigrants to the Midwest and the Southeast. The newcomers' arrival in small, mostly white cities experiencing industrial decline in turn helped foment the economic and ethnic anxieties that brought Trump to office. Osiel ended up in Ohio by following a generation of indigenous Guatemalans, who have been the backbone of Case Farms' workforce since 1989, when a manager drove a van down to the orange groves and tomato fields around Indiantown, Florida, and came back with the company's first load of Mayan refugees.

JUST BEFORE THE Presidential election in November, I toured Case Farms' chicken plant in Canton with several managers. After putting on hairnets and butcher coats, we walked into



The law makes it hard to penalize employers, and easy for employers to retaliate against workers.

a vast, refrigerated factory that is kept at forty-five degrees in order to prevent bacterial growth. The sound of machines drowned out everything except shouting. Thousands of raw chickens whizzed by on overhead shackles, slid into chutes, and were mechanically sawed into thighs and drumsticks. A bird, I learned, could go from clucking to nuggets in less than three hours, and be in your bucket or burrito by lunchtime the next day.

Poultry processing begins in the chicken houses of contracted farmers. At night, when the chickens are sleeping, crews of chicken catchers round them up, grabbing four in each hand and caging them as the birds peck and scratch and defecate. Workers told me that they are paid around \$2.25 for every thousand chickens. Two crews of nine catchers can bring in about seventy-five thousand chickens a night.

At the plant, the birds are dumped into a chute that leads to the “live hang” area, a room bathed in black light, which keeps the birds calm. Every two seconds, employees grab a chicken and hang it upside down by its feet. “This piece here is called a breast rub,” Chester Hawk, the plant’s burly maintenance manager, told me, pointing to a plastic pad. “It’s rubbing their breast, and it’s giving them a calming sensation. You can see the bird coming toward the stunner. He’s very calm.” The birds are stunned by an electric pulse before entering the “kill room,” where a razor slits their throats as they pass. The room looks like the set of a horror movie: blood splatters everywhere and pools on the floor. One worker, known as the “backup killer,” stands in the middle, poking chickens with his knife and slicing their necks if they’re still alive.

The headless chickens are sent to the “defeathering room,” a sweltering space with a barnlike smell. Here the dead birds are scalded with hot water before mechanical fingers pluck their feathers. In 2014, an animal-welfare group said that Case Farms had the “worst chicken plants for animal cruelty” after it found that two of the company’s plants had more federal humane-handling violations than any other chicken plant in the country. Inspectors reported that dozens of

birds were scalded alive or frozen to their cages.

Next, the chickens enter the “evisceration department,” where they begin to look less like animals and more like meat. One overhead line has nothing but chicken feet. The floors are slick with water and blood, and a fast-moving wastewater canal, which workers call “the river,” runs through the plant. Mechanical claws extract the birds’ insides, and a line of hooks carry away the “gut pack”—the



livers, gizzards, and hearts, with the intestines dangling like limp spaghetti.

On the refrigerated side of the plant, there’s a long table called the “deboning line.” After being chilled, then sawed in half by a mechanical blade, the chickens, minus legs and thighs, end up here. At this point, the workers take over. Two workers grab the chickens and place them on steel cones, as if they were winter hats with earflaps. The chickens then move to stations where dozens of cutters, wearing aprons and hairnets and armed with knives, stand shoulder to shoulder, each performing a rapid series of cuts—slicing wings, removing breasts, and pulling out the pink meat for chicken tenders.

Case Farms managers said that the lines in Canton run about thirty-five birds a minute, but workers at other Case Farms plants told me that their lines run as fast as forty-five birds a minute. In 2015, meat, poultry, and fish cutters, repeating similar motions more than fifteen thousand times a day, experienced carpal-tunnel syndrome at nearly twenty times the rate of workers in other industries. The combination of speed, sharp blades, and close quarters is dangerous: since 2010, more than seven hundred and fifty processing workers have suffered amputations. Case Farms says it allows bathroom breaks at reasonable intervals, but workers in North Carolina told me that they must wait so long that some of them

wear diapers. One woman told me that the company disciplined her for leaving the line to use the bathroom, even though she was seven months pregnant.

CASE FARMS WAS founded in 1986, when Tom Shelton, a longtime poultry executive, bought a family-owned operation called Case Egg & Poultry, whose plant was in Winesburg, Ohio. In the world of larger-than-life chicken tycoons, like Bo Pilgrim—who built a grandiose mansion in rural Texas nicknamed Cluckingham Palace—Shelton, with a neat mustache, a corporate hair style, and a mild manner, stood out. The son of a farmer, Shelton majored in poultry technology at North Carolina State, where he was the president of the poultry club and participated in national competitions in which teams of aspiring poultrymen graded chicken carcasses for quality and defects. Perdue Farms hired him right out of college, and he quickly rose through the ranks, attending Harvard Business School’s Advanced Management Program before becoming Perdue’s president, at the age of forty-three.

In 1986, the year that Shelton resigned from Perdue and started Case Farms, he gave a keynote address at the International Poultry Trade Show. It was a time of change: new mass-market products such as nuggets, fingers, and buffalo wings—along with health concerns over red meat—had made chicken a staple of American diets. With more women working, families no longer had time to cut up whole chickens. To meet the growing demand, Shelton told the audience, poultry plants would have to become more automated, and they would also need lots of labor.

Shelton was the kind of manager who could recite the details involved in every step of production, from the density of breeding cages to the number of birds processed per man-hour. He set about maximizing line speeds at Case Farms, buying additional family-owned operations and implementing modern factory practices. Today, the company’s four plants—Morganton and Dudley, in North Carolina, and Canton and Winesburg, in Ohio—employ more than three thousand people.

Winesburg, the home of Shelton’s first plant, is a small community in the middle of Amish country. Even today,

it's not uncommon for drivers to yield for horse-drawn buggies or to see women in long dresses and bonnets carrying goods home from Whitmer's General Store. Before Shelton bought the plant, it had employed mostly young Amish women and Mennonites. But, as the company expanded, it stopped recognizing Amish holidays and began hiring outside the insular community. "The Amish fathers found the urban newcomers objectionable because of such things as coarse slogans on T-shirts, vulgarity in conversations, and 'necking' in the parking lot," the company said later, in federal-court filings. The Amish workers left Case Farms, and, almost immediately, the company had trouble finding people who were willing to work under its poor conditions for little more than minimum wage. It turned first to the residents of nearby Rust Belt cities, which had fallen on hard times following the collapse of the steel and rubber industries. Turnover was high. About twenty-five to thirty of its five hundred employees left every week.

Scrambling to find workers in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineties, Case Farms sent recruiters across the country to hire Latino workers. Many of the new arrivals found the conditions intolerable. In one instance, the recruiters hired dozens of migrant farmworkers from border towns in Texas, offering them bus tickets to Ohio and housing once there. When workers arrived, they encountered a situation that a federal judge later called "wretched and loathsome." They were packed in small houses with about twenty other people. Although it was the middle of winter, the houses had no heat, furniture, or blankets. One worker said that his house had no water, so he flushed the toilet with melted snow. They slept on the floor, where cockroaches crawled over them. At dawn, they rode to the plant in a dilapidated van whose seating consisted of wooden planks resting on cinder blocks. Exhaust fumes seeped in through holes in the floor. The Texas farmworkers quit, but by then Case Farms had found a new solution to its labor problems.

ONE SPRING NIGHT in 1989, a Case Farms human-resources manager named Norman Beecher got behind the wheel of a large passenger van and headed south. He had got a tip about a

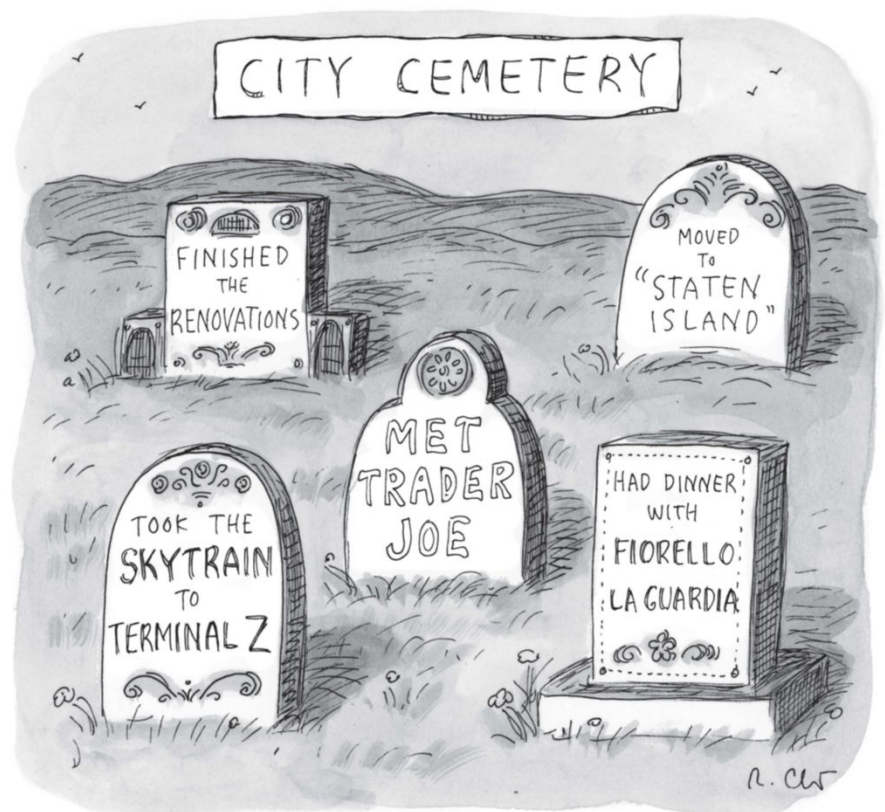
Catholic church in Florida that was helping refugees from the Guatemalan civil war. Thousands of Mayans had been living in Indiantown after fleeing a campaign of violence carried out by the Guatemalan military. More than two hundred thousand people, most of them Mayan, were killed or forcibly disappeared in the conflict. A report commissioned by the United Nations described instances of soldiers beating children "against walls or throwing them alive into pits," and covering people "in petrol and burning them alive." In 1981, in a village of Aguacatán, where many Case Farms workers come from, soldiers rounded up and shot twenty-two men. They then split their skulls and ate their brains, dumping the bodies into a ravine.

Through the years, the United States had supported Guatemala's dictators with money, weapons, intelligence, and training. Amid the worst of the violence, President Reagan, after meeting with General Efraín Ríos Montt, told the press that he believed the regime had "been getting a bum rap." The Administration viewed the Guatemalan refugees as economic migrants and Communist sympathizers—threats to national security. Only a handful received asylum. The Mayans who

made it to Florida had limited options.

Beecher arrived at the church in time for Sunday Mass, and set himself up in its office. He had no trouble recruiting parishioners to return with him to the Case Farms plant in Morganton, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Those first Guatemalans worked so hard, Beecher told the labor historian Leon Fink in his book, "The Maya of Morganton," that supervisors kept asking for more, prompting a return trip. Soon vans were running regularly between Indiantown and Morganton, bringing in new recruits. "I didn't want [Mexicans]," Beecher, who died in 2014, told Fink. "Mexicans will go back home at Christmastime. You're going to lose them for six weeks. And in the poultry business you can't afford that. You just can't do it. But Guatemalans can't go back home. They're here as political refugees. If they go back home, they get shot." Shelton approved hiring the immigrants, Beecher said, and when the plant was fully staffed and production had doubled "he was tickled to death."

EVODIA GONZÁLEZ DIMAS could feel the pain in her left arm getting worse. For eight hours a day, she stood at a cutting table at the Case Farms Morganton plant, using a knife or scissors to



remove fat and bones from chicken legs every two to three seconds. She wore a chain-mail glove on her non-cutting hand to protect it from accidental stabs by her knife or by the blades of her co-workers. The glove weighed about as much as a softball, but grew heavier as grease and fat caught in the steel mesh. By 2006, the pain and swelling were routinely driving González to the plant's first-aid station. A nursing assistant would give her pain relievers and send her back to the line. She could no longer lift a gallon of milk, and had trouble making a fist. At night, after putting her children to bed, she'd rub soothing lotion on her swollen wrist and forearm.

One Friday, in September, 2006, González was called to Case Farms' human-resources office. The director told her that the company had received a letter from the Social Security Administration informing it that the Social Security number she had provided wasn't valid. González, one of the few Mexicans at the plant, told me that the director sold her a new permanent-resident card, with the name Claudia Zamora, for five hundred dollars, and helped her fill out a new application. (The human-resources director denied selling her the I.D.) She was assigned to the same job, with the same supervisor. And Case Farms paid her more than it did new hires, noting in her file that she "had previous poultry experience."

Around that time, Case Farms workers began complaining that their yellow latex gloves ripped easily, soaking their hands with cold chicken juice. Only after pieces of rubber began appearing in packages of chicken did Case Farms buy more expensive, better-quality gloves. It passed the extra expense along to its employees, charging workers, who were making between seven and eight dollars an hour, fifty cents a pair if they used more than three pairs during a shift.

The morning the policy took effect, in October, 2006, there were grumbles throughout the plant's locker rooms. As workers began cutting chickens, the line abruptly stopped. One woman yelled that if they stuck together they could force the company to change the policy. When they refused to go back to work, managers called the police, and officers escorted workers off the premises.

More than two hundred and fifty

workers left the plant, gathering at a Catholic church nearby. González and another woman agreed to speak to a local newspaper reporter. Quoted as Claudia Zamora, González said, "Workers at Case Farms are routinely told to ignore notes from doctors about work restrictions when they've been injured on the job." OSHA later found that Case Farms often made workers wait months to see a doctor, flouted restrictions, and fired injured workers who couldn't do their job.

Returning to the factory on the Monday after the walkout, González brought a note from the local medical clinic prescribing "light work or no work" for a week. She gave it to the safety manager, who asked her to fill out a report stating when the pain began. When she wrote "2003," he was baffled. According to personnel records, "Zamora" had worked there for only a month. The human-resources director who had hired González as Zamora summoned her to the office; she had been sent a copy of the newspaper article quoting González. The pain couldn't be related to work at Case Farms, the director told González. After all, she was a new employee.

González didn't understand. "I'm not new," she said, her voice rising. "You know how many years I've been working here."

CHORUS AND ANTI-CHORUS

(January 21, 2017, Washington D.C.)

All tragedies contain us
With no beginning
To speak of; each time we talk

Ourselves back into gathering
Another step toward
The finally said

Which does not work for all.
To say to each other
What we believe

Becomes the action, to explain
The story while also being
The story. We are enough

Not as one but as one of many.
We have imagined the places
We will not be moved;

"Claudia, you're a probationary employee," the director replied. "I don't have a job for you."

González challenged her firing before the National Labor Relations Board, a federal body created to protect workers' rights to organize. The N.L.R.B. judge wrote, "In my opinion, [Case Farms] knew exactly what was going on with respect to her employment status." The company, he said, "took advantage of the situation." The board eventually ruled that González had been illegally fired for protesting working conditions. But the victory was largely symbolic. In 2002, the Supreme Court had ruled, in a 5-4 decision, that undocumented workers had the right to complain about labor violations, but that companies had no obligation to rehire them or to pay back wages. In the dissent, Justice Stephen Breyer predicted that the Court's decision would incentivize employers to hire undocumented workers "with a wink and a nod," knowing that "they can violate the labor laws at least once with impunity."

Case Farms had broken the law, but there was nothing González could do about it. The doctor told her that she needed surgery for carpal-tunnel syndrome, but she never got it. A decade later, her hand is limp, and her anger

Have given many names
To what we can make—
And the river sings as it flows

Past both sides of the city
As it splits the one
Into two. And he who was to be the hero

Is not the hero
And we who are given so much
To sing must move as if this is not

Interlude or merely disruption
As we sing by the engine
That will not cease, and the bird above the siren

In its unexamined freedom
Lifts even higher
As there is no place left to land.

—*Sophie Cabot Black*

still fresh. “This hand,” she told me, sitting in her living room. “I try not to use it at all.”

WHAT HAPPENED TO González was part of Case Farms’ decades-long strategy to beat back worker unrest with creative uses of immigration law. The year that Case Farms was founded, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which made it illegal to “knowingly” hire undocumented immigrants. But employers aren’t required to be document experts, which makes it hard to penalize them. The requirement that workers fill out an I-9 form, however, declaring under penalty of perjury that they’re authorized to work, makes it easy for employers to retaliate against workers.

In 1993, around a hundred Case Farms employees refused to work in protest against low pay, lack of bathroom breaks, and payroll deductions for aprons and gloves. In response, Case Farms had fifty-two of them arrested for trespassing. In 1995, more than two hundred workers walked out of the plant and, after striking for four days, voted to unionize. Three weeks after the protest, Case Farms requested documents from more than a hundred employees whose work permits

had expired or were about to expire. Case Farms refused to negotiate with the union for three years, appealing the election results all the way to the Supreme Court. After the company lost the case, it reduced the workweek to four days in an effort to put pressure on the employees. Eventually, the union pulled out.

Case Farms followed the same playbook in 2007, when workers at the Winesburg plant complained about faster line speeds and a procedure that required them to cut three wings at a time by stacking the wings and running them through a spinning saw. Occasionally, the wings broke, and bones got caught in workers’ gloves, dragging their fingers through the saw. One day, a Guatemalan immigrant named Juan Ixcoy refused to cut the wings that way. As word spread through the plant, workers stopped the lines and gathered in the cafeteria. Ixcoy, who is now forty-two, became a leader in a new fight to unionize. “They saw that I didn’t have fear,” he told me.

In July, 2008, more than a hundred and fifty workers went on strike. For nine months, through the depths of the recession, they picketed in a cornfield across the street from the plant. In the winter, they bundled up in snowsuits and protested from a shed made of plywood and

bales of hay. According to the N.L.R.B., when the workers walked out again, in 2010, a manager told an employee that he would take out the strike leaders “one at a time.” A short time later, Ixcoy was fired for insubordination after an argument with a manager on the plant floor prompted some workers to bang their knives and yell “Strike!” A judge with the N.L.R.B. found that Ixcoy had been unlawfully fired for his union activity and ordered that he be reinstated. After Ixcoy returned to work, however, the union received a letter saying that it had come to the company’s attention that nine of its employees might not be legally authorized to work in the United States. Seven were on the union organizing committee, including Ixcoy. All were fired.

The company’s sudden discovery that the union organizers were undocumented was hard to credit. Ixcoy had first been hired in 1999, as Elmer Noel Rosado. After a few years, a Case Farms manager told him that the company had received notice that there was another person, in California, working under the same I.D. “The manager, he told me if you can buy another paper you’re welcome to come back,” Ixcoy said. So he bought another I.D. for a thousand dollars and returned to Case Farms under the name Omar Carrion Rivera. Current and former workers at Case Farms’ four plants said that the company had an unspoken policy of allowing them to come back with a new I.D. An employee in Dudley told me that he had worked at the plant under four different names. Case Farms executives had to have known that many of their employees were unauthorized. On at least three occasions, scores of workers fled their plants, fearing immigration raids.

Ixcoy eventually received a special visa for crime victims because of the workplace abuses he had suffered. “Ixcoy lived in an atmosphere of fear created by supervisors at Case Farms,” the Labor Department wrote in his visa application. “He feared for his own safety, that if he complained or cooperated with authorities, he would be arrested or deported.”

IN THE PAST few years, Tom Shelton has cast himself as the genial proprietor of a winery that he runs on his forty-acre estate on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Its name, Bordeleau, means “the

water's edge," and it's one of the few wineries in the United States that you can visit by boat. Shelton exercises the same attention to detail at the winery that he does at Case Farms. According to Bordeaux's Web site, he is "particular about everything, from pruning vines to the operation of the bottling line to the freshness of the wines being served in the tasting room." The label features Shelton's elegant Georgian-style chateau.

Shelton never responded to my calls or letters. A Case Farms P.R. person said he declined to be interviewed and, instead, arranged for me to meet with the company's vice-chairman, Mike Popowycz, and other managers in a conference room in Winesburg. Popowycz is the son of Ukrainian immigrants, who came to America after the Second World War. His father was a steelworker, and his mother worked nights in a thread mill. "I know what these people go through every day," he said. "I can see the struggles that they go through because those are the struggles my parents went through."

Popowycz, who is the chairman of

the industry's trade group, the National Chicken Council, said that Case Farms had made some safety mistakes but was working hard to correct them. He defended the company on every question I had. Case Farms, he said, treated its workers well and never refused to let them use the bathroom. Fees for replacement equipment discouraged workers from throwing things away. As for unions, the company didn't need someone to stand between it and its employees. "Our goal is to prove that we're not the company that OSHA has basically said we are," he told me.

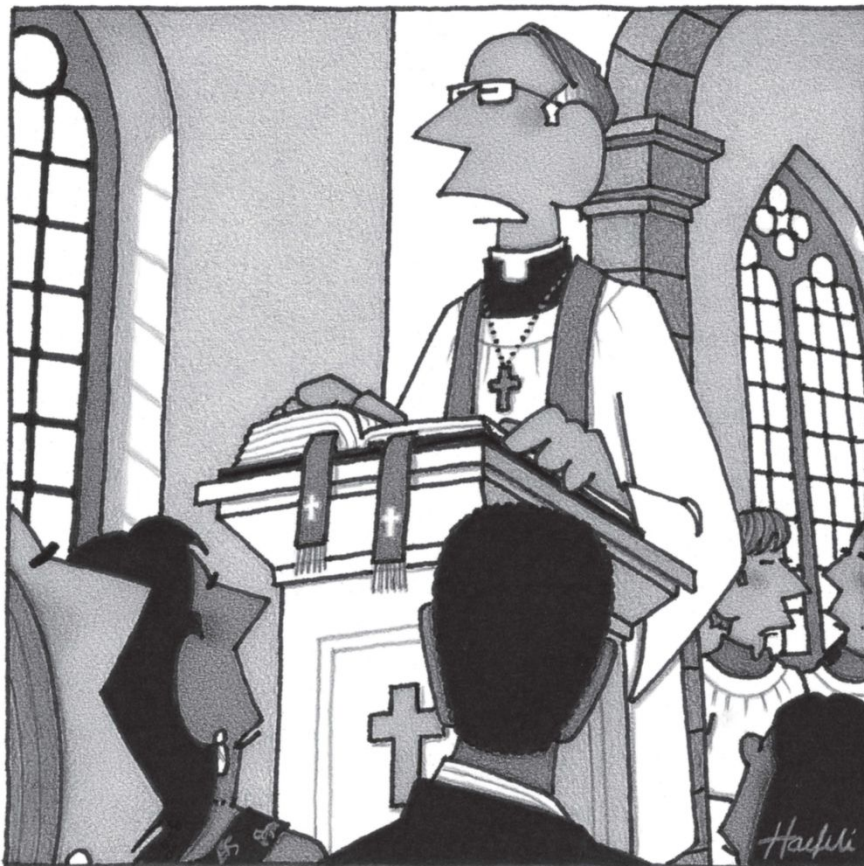
Popowycz seemed unaware of many of the specific incidents I cited. He was almost like a parent hearing of his teen-ager's delinquency: he hoped supervisors didn't do that, but, if they did, it was wrong. Case Farms operates under a decentralized management system, which Shelton instituted early on. Every Monday at 8 A.M., Shelton hosts a conference call from Maryland, but many decisions are left to local managers. "We want the people at the locations to manage their busi-

ness as if it's their own," Popowycz said.

I found it hard to believe that Shelton, who is known to ask questions about a ten-thousand-dollar equipment expense, wouldn't be aware of workplace disputes costing tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees. I contacted sixty former Case Farms managers, supervisors, and human-resources representatives. Most declined to comment or didn't return my calls, but I spoke to eight of them. Many agreed that Shelton gave them a good deal of autonomy, and denied that there was pressure to produce chickens faster and more cheaply. "When I was there, any problems that we saw, we took care of it," Andy Cilona, a human-resources director in Winesburg in the nineties, told me. But two said that promotions went to those who pushed employees hardest, which led some supervisors to treat workers harshly.

Popowycz acknowledged that some human-resources supervisors had sold fake I.D.s; when the company found out, it fired them. He insisted that Case Farms complied with immigration laws. It was one of the first companies in Ohio to report Social Security numbers to immigration in the nineties. Case Farms also periodically audits its personnel records, and when it receives letters from the authorities about discrepancies in workers' I.D.s it investigates. But the company has never used immigration status to retaliate against injured or vocal workers, Popowycz said; any firings that occurred after protests were coincidental. "At the end of the day, we need labor in our plants; we're not looking to get rid of these folks," Popowycz said. "Do we do everything right? We hope we do."

LAST FALL, I travelled to several villages in the Guatemalan state of Huehuetenango in the hope of finding former Case Farms workers. After passing through the market town of Aguacatán, where women in white-and-red *huipiles* sell everything from garlic to geese, I headed forty-five minutes up a mountain to the village of Chex, where I found a cargo truck that had careened over the side of a road. Dozens of men came from the nearby fields and helped brace the truck with branches and ropes. I asked the men if any of them had worked for Case Farms. "I worked there



"Today, I'll be cherry-picking from Deuteronomy."

for a year, around 1999 to 2000,” one man said. “2003,” another added. “Six months. It’s killer work.” “Eleven years,” said another. Two said that they had been among the first Guatemalans to work in Winesburg.

Former Case Farms workers turned up everywhere—the hotel clerk in Aguacatán, members of the local church, a hitchhiker I picked up on the way to another village. One man in Chex had been a chicken catcher in Winesburg, but years of overuse had left his elbow swollen and in chronic pain. Unaware that Case Farms is supposed to pay for workplace injuries, he told me that he had returned to Guatemala to heal and had spent thousands of dollars seeing doctors. Now his arm lay frozen at his side.

The village where Osiel grew up, Tectitán, is at the top of another mountain five hours west, reachable by a winding red-dirt road. It’s so isolated that it has its own language, Tektiteko. Like Chex, Tectitán has a long history of sending residents north to work at Case Farms. By the time Osiel was a teen-ager, a man watching a soccer match could make fun of the Guatemalan team’s goalie on Facebook by saying that he “couldn’t even grab the chickens at Case Farms.”

I met Osiel at Centro San Jose, a social-welfare agency and legal clinic operated from an old redbrick Lutheran church on the edge of downtown Canton. For the past few years, Centro San Jose has been swamped by hundreds of unaccompanied minors fleeing gang violence in Guatemala. Osiel was wearing a blue knit hat with a pompom, a white compression shirt, sweatpants with patches, and blue sneakers. He told me that he left Guatemala on his sixteenth birthday, after his mother’s murder, and, two weeks later, was in the custody of border-patrol agents in Arizona. He moved in with an uncle in Canton and befriended some other teen-agers from Tectitán who were working nights at Case Farms. He worked at the plant for eight months, earning nine dollars an hour, before the accident.

Osiel said that, on the night of the accident, after passing out in the machine, he awoke in the hospital. “The nurses told me that I lost my leg,” he recalled. “I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t feel any pain. And then, hours later, I tried



“I said it was a new idea—I never said it was a great idea.”

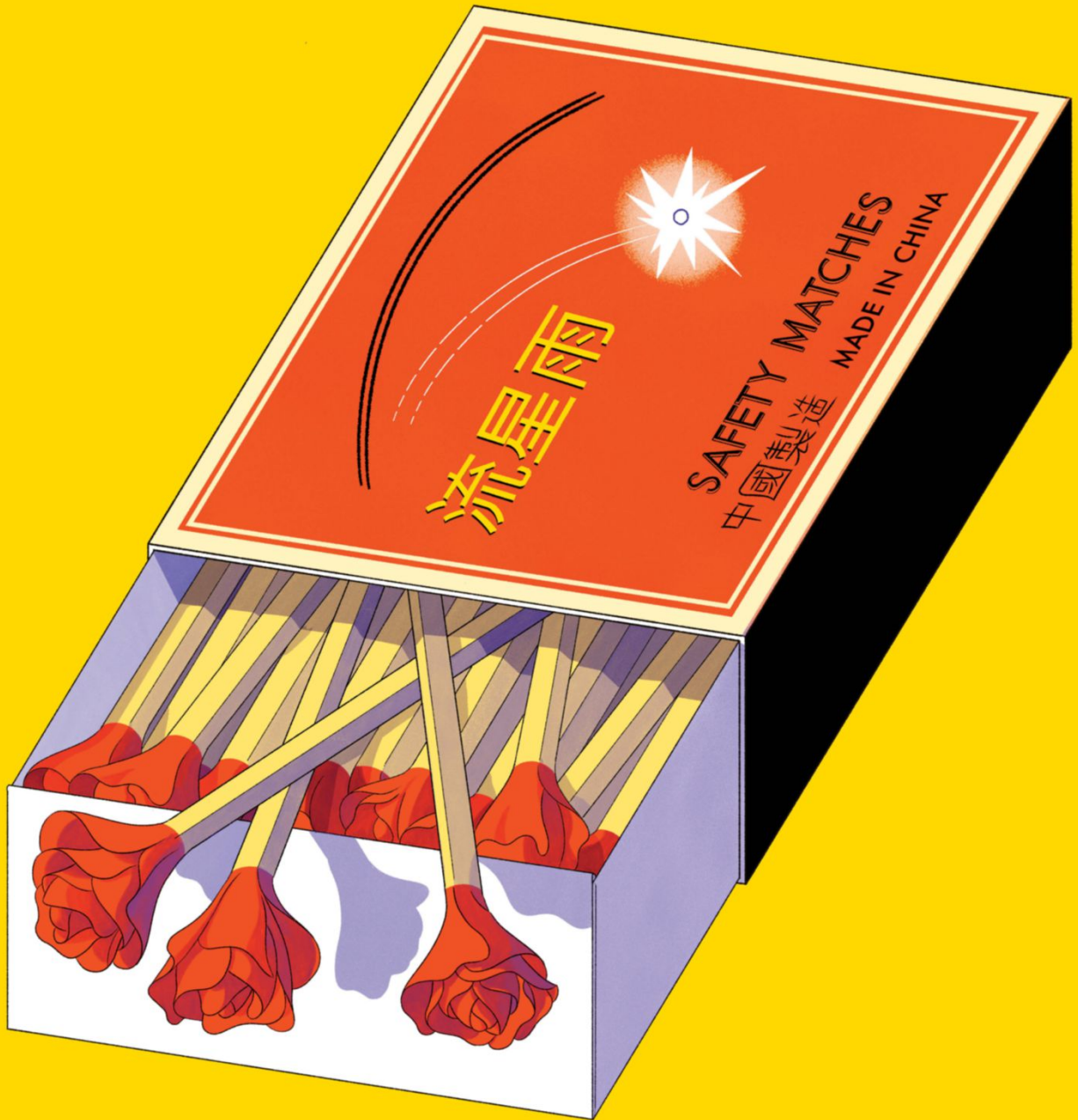
to touch it. I didn’t have anything there. I started crying.” Today, he lives with two of his brothers in a weathered gable-front house next to a vacant lot. He is still getting used to the prosthesis, and hobbles when he walks. “I never thought that something like this could happen to me,” he said. “They told me that they couldn’t do anything for my leg to get better. They told me that everything was going to be O.K.”

The Labor Department, in addition to finding numerous safety violations, fined Cal-Clean, Case Farms’s sanitation contractor, sixty-three thousand dollars for employing four child laborers, including Osiel. The fines and the citations against Case Farms have continued to accumulate. Last September, OSHA determined that the company’s line speeds and work flow were so hazardous to workers’ hands and arms that it should “investigate and change immediately” nearly all the positions on the line. As the company fights the fines, it finds new ways to keep labor costs down. For a time, after the Guatemalan workers began to organize, Case Farms recruited Burmese refugees. Then it turned

to ethnic Nepalis expelled from Bhutan, who today make up nearly thirty-five per cent of the company’s employees in Ohio. “It’s an industry that targets the most vulnerable group of workers and brings them in,” Debbie Berkowitz, OSHA’s former senior policy adviser, told me. “And when one group gets too powerful and stands up for their rights they figure out who’s even more vulnerable and move them in.”

Recently, Case Farms has found a more captive workforce. One blazing morning last summer in Morganton, an old yellow school bus arrived at Case Farms and passed through the plant’s gates, pulling up to the employee entrance. Dozens of inmates from the local prison filed off, ready to work at the plant. Even their days may be numbered, however. During the tour in Canton, Popowycz and other Case Farms managers showed me something they were excited about, something that would help solve their labor problems and also reduce injuries: in a corner of the plant was a shiny new machine called an “automatic deboner.” It would soon replace seventy per cent of the workers on the line. ♦

A SMALL FLAME



YIYUN LI

A GIRL, NO OLDER than ten, accosted Bella and Peter as they left the restaurant famous for its Peking duck. Adrian, Peter's boyfriend, was lagging behind, practicing his Mandarin one last time before the end of their trip.

"Buy a rose," the girl said to Peter in English. "For your girlfriend."

"Thank you, my dear," Peter said, "but she's not my girlfriend."

The girl did not understand English. She prompted him again with the memorized line.

"Quiet," Bella said in Mandarin. "He's not my boyfriend."

"How can it be, sister? He's handsome. And you're pretty."

"Sister? I'm old enough to be your aunt."

"Then tell my uncle to buy a rose for you," the girl said, gesturing toward the cardboard sign she wore like a bib. "10 RMB," it said, with crudely drawn flowers surrounding the price. Peter shook his head and stuck both hands determinedly into his jacket pockets.

"Listen, I'll give you the money for a rose, and you leave us alone," Bella said.

"No," the girl said. "You have to buy one. I can't go home until I sell them all."

Bella counted out three hundred RMB. "Enough?" she asked. The girl surrendered the entire bouquet, and Bella tossed it into the cypress shrubs by the restaurant's entrance, well groomed and fenced in. "Now," she said, "home you go."

The girl put the money away carefully, and then, standing on tiptoe, tried to reach the flowers. Adrian, who had just come out of the restaurant, jumped over the fence and retrieved the bouquet for the girl. She vanished into the darkness, a swift and purposeful minnow.

The April night was cool but not clear, the smog bringing tears to Bella's eyes. "What's wrong?" Adrian asked.

"You owe me three hundred yuan," Bella said.

Adrian exchanged a look with Peter, and Bella knew they were speaking to each other in that language which lovers stupidly think of as their own. She was in a horrendous mood, they were telling each other; she was angry over

her second divorce and was taking it out on them, and they had to put up with her for only one more hour.

BELLA HAD KNOWN Peter for twenty-five years. They had shared a place with two other housemates in Boston when they were in law school, and for as long as they had been friends they had been talking about visiting China together. It was one of those promises made for not keeping, similar to the solo trip to Antarctica that Bella had sometimes imagined when things were going wrong in her marriages. But China, not as far-fetched as Antarctica, had become much closer when Peter started dating Adrian, a French-Canadian whose great-grandfather had been among the Chinese laborers who collected bodies and dug graves on the Western Front in 1918. Adrian was a writer, and he was working on "a multigenerational and intercontinental epic" based on his family history, and during the past two weeks the three of them had toured a number of towns on the East China Sea, sifting through local archives, tracing the untraceable. We know his surname was Li, Adrian had said of his great-grandfather, and that his family migrated from Jiangsu to Shandong sometime during the Qing dynasty. Do you know how many people bearing that surname live in China? Bella had said. Ninety million.

It was irksome to Bella that Adrian had created romances for his characters and himself in the places he had the remotest reason to claim—Jiangyin, Wulian, Marseille, Ypres, Beaulencourt, Montreal, New York. With a novelistic certainty, this blue-eyed, pale-skinned man and his Chinese great-grandfather would be sentimentally reunited. People without genealogies, Bella thought, were like weeds, their existence of consequence to no one but weed killers. Perhaps that was why any reasonable person would try to locate a family root or two. From the roots to the flowers and the fruits: the penchant for cultivating—a garden, a love affair, a family, a friendship, a made-up epic—seemed to be a healthy, constructive habit. But Bella was no horticulturist. At work, she read legal documents and contracts and dis-

sected them with vehemence, as if out of hatred.

In the cab back to the hotel, no one spoke. Peter and Adrian said goodbye to Bella in the hallway. They were to take an early flight the next morning.

"So long, farewell," she replied in a singsong voice. "Adieu, adieu, to you and you—"

"And you," Peter said. "Come home soon."

Bella had arranged to spend a few extra days in Beijing before flying back to New York, thinking that she would need a break after playing tour guide. Now she deplored their imminent departure. Loneliness, people might call it, yet it was not loneliness that made her feel betrayed. Peter had been an early friend in America, made out of convenience when Bella first arrived, but he'd turned out to be a rarity, with a seemingly boundless memory. He could recall with precision any episode from a friend's life—and he had many friends. If Bella had to write an autobiography—what a thin, dull volume that would be—he would be her ghost-writer. If she were to put her life onstage, he would be her prompter. But the ease of having her life stored in another person's memory had done little to help Bella on this trip. Peter had become the wrong accompaniment for Bella's solo. Perhaps he and Adrian felt the same way about her.

"What's wrong with China?" Bella said now. "This is still my home country."

"You may not be an easygoing person," Peter said, "but you've always been fun. Here in China? It's like you're stoned the wrong way."

"So I'm a bore."

"A contentious bore!"

It had been a mistake to combine Adrian's research with her recovery holiday. Memory lane was barely wide enough for one traveller.

In the bathtub, Bella hummed to herself: "I'm glad to go, I cannot tell a lie. I flit, I float, I fleetly flee, I fly." To this day, she could sing from beginning to end every song from "The Sound of Music," which she had had to watch every Saturday afternoon for a year as a requirement for her high-school English class. It had so sickened her that when the English club discussed

putting on a stage production she threatened to quit—it was either Maria von Trapp or Bella, and her classmates had chosen her.

O English club, the epitome of Bella's youth!

Of course, she had had a different name then, but she had been Bella for the past twenty-five years, legalized in America, the name used for her passport, for her marriage licenses, and then for the divorce papers. Not, though, carved on her parents' gravestones: both stones bore her Chinese name, that of their only child. Bella had not included her first husband's name on her mother's gravestone—her mother had given only lukewarm approval to the marriage. When Bella's father died, she was in her second marriage, already seeing cracks, which she could have made an effort to mend had she cared a little more. She had been wise not to include a husband's name on either gravestone. Her parents could have been stuck for eternity with the consecutive ex-sons-in-law, though that possibility, a discordant note that their marriage, known for its harmony, would have had to endure posthumously, entertained Bella.

IN THE RUSSIAN NOVELS Bella had read in college, English clubs hosted feasts and boasted of social status, whereas the English club at her high school had merely collected a medley of students with various motivations and needs: some wanted to have access to the only typewriters in the school (and, quite possibly, in their lives), or to the works of Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Jack London, and Ernest Hemingway, among other writers, which were available in the English club's library; others required extra tutoring from their teacher, Miss Chu; and others chose it because, unlike the science club or the mathematics club, it was undemanding, a place to escape the heavy load of schoolwork for a few hours. Bella wanted to be near Miss Chu—there was no other reason for Bella to be in the club, which was beneath her in many ways and for which she had to tolerate the English plays they staged. She was always given the leading role. No one questioned this. She was voted "the school flower" by the boys, an honor given to the prettiest girl. She spoke

English better than anyone—she had studied with a tutor since she was seven, something unheard of among her schoolmates in Beijing in 1985.

What Bella had wanted to play, instead of Red Riding Hood or Cinderella, was the Little Match Girl. "Matches, matches, please buy some matches, sir? Please buy some matches, madam?"

Buy a rose; buy a rose for your girlfriend.

But there had never been such a production. The story did not have many roles or many lines, even for the Little Match Girl. It was silly to perform fairy tales when the students were already in high school, but most of her classmates did not speak enough English for more sophisticated work. Once, they had ventured into "The Necklace," by Maupassant, and at a rehearsal Bella had watched with abhorrence the boy who was playing her insignificant husband kick open an imaginary door. "Mathilde," he said, his voice reminding Bella of an inner tube hung at a bicycle repairman's stand—rubbery, greasy, intestine-like. "Mathilde, my dear. Look what I have got you." She had to open the card he handed her, part of the play. But, instead of an invitation to the party at the Ministry of Education, it held a love poem from the boy to Bella.

Contaminated, she remembered the episode afterward: the basement room with its buzzing fluorescent tubes, a few



chairs and curtains forming a makeshift stage, and the boy's hands clasping hers—part of the play, too. Contaminated also were Bella's memories of high school: the place, the people, the endless years. But she was unfair. Her alma mater had received support from UNESCO and had served as a model school for foreign visitors, its cluster of marble-white buildings poised like an aristocratic swan among gray alleyways and sprawling, run-down quadrangles. And

Bella had been treated well by teachers and students alike. Once, a delegation of American politicians had toured the campus, and Bella, assigned to accompany them with the headmistress, had worn her favorite dress, its lavender color matching the wisteria hanging over the pathway between the science building and the art building. The delegation did their share of praising, and the headmistress reciprocated with her share of appreciation. Bella, interpreting for the visitors, believed for a brief moment that she could have anything—all she needed was to want—but that blissful feeling was cut short by Miss Chu, who was walking across the lawn without casting even the most perfunctory glance at the visitors or at Bella.

What Bella had wanted was to be the Little Match Girl: hungry, cold, forever begging, and forever dying. What she was was the opposite. She had been raised in a family of stature. Her father was a diplomat, her mother an opera singer; her maternal grandfather had been among the group of revolutionaries who established the Chinese Soviet Republic, in the nineteen-thirties. The only imperfection—in others' eyes more than in the family's—was that Bella was not connected to these people by blood. Her mother, whose beauty and career were not to be destroyed by childbearing, had adopted a pretty baby girl from her home province. At two, the girl had been diagnosed, in the parlance of the day, as deaf-mute and had been sent away. Not to her birth parents, Bella had learned, but with her nanny, who had received a handsome sum of money for them to settle comfortably in the countryside. Bella had come later, another baby girl whose beauty was prominent, and this truth, like the story of the deaf-mute, had never been kept a secret from her.

A more sentimental heart would have experienced curiosity or sympathy for the girl whom she had replaced; a more inventive mind would have seen herself as that deaf-mute, growing up in silence. One time, a distant cousin of Bella's grandfather had come to visit, bringing with him his granddaughter, who was Bella's age. Poor relatives, Bella, ten years old then, instantly recognized. A gentler soul would have formed a kind of kinship with the girl, who was wearing a

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gray, passed-down blouse, but Bella bossed the girl around, showing off her Swiss chocolates and her Japanese stationery and her dresses made of silk and taffeta and velvet, allowing the girl to touch the fabric with only one finger. Bella would have tortured the deaf-mute girl similarly, except that the deaf-mute, even if she had been permitted a visit, would not have understood anything Bella said to her. Perhaps Bella could have locked her in a closet. Would she have banged on the door in panic, or would she, not knowing how to make a sound, have waited quietly until her death?

Once, at a rooftop party in Key West, an old man had reminisced about an encounter years before with a boy who had been adopted to be the heir of a scion: "At the dinner, he came in to greet everyone. Barely three years old. In a white tuxedo. I swear, no boy could have been more perfect than him, but the next year he was gone. The reason? The mother decided he wouldn't do. I've never forgotten him. Imagine! For a year he was destined to be one of the richest people in the country."

"He didn't know," Bella said.

"True," the man said. "Still, what a strange fate."

O changelings of the world: we go up and down the ladder in this circus called life, and we are more entertaining than clowns, more grotesque than freaks. How dare Peter call her a bore?

Bella dried herself and put on a silk robe. She uncorked a bottle of wine and thought of inviting Peter and Adrian over for a drink, but they would decline, saying they had to get up early for their flight; they might not even pick up the phone.

By the second glass, Bella did not have any difficulty seeing herself as the Little Match Girl, forever begging, forever dying, yet Miss Chu would not notice the tiny bursting flame when Bella struck a match for her; she would remain blind to the streak of light when Bella turned into a falling star.

WHAT ON EARTH had Miss Chu become—a wife? A mother? Bella, sitting alone at breakfast the next day, wondered. Miss Chu had been twenty-seven when she was the adviser of the English club, Bella sixteen. Miss

Chu would be close to sixty now, old enough to be a mother-in-law. The mathematics was disorienting. Bella did not feel a moment of wistfulness about her own aging. She was the same person she had been at six or sixteen, unchanged and unchangeable. But other people—would they stay loyal to what her memory dictated they should be?

There had to be ways to find out, from her school friends or perhaps by calling her high school. But Bella hated to put herself in such a position. Whenever she travelled back to China, she needed only to announce her visit, and there would be plenty of friends and acquaintances ready to welcome her with a banquet or a tête-à-tête. This was the first time she had not let the news out: she didn't want to see people exchanging knowing looks about her divorce. She counted the days she had left, a void she'd have to fill by herself. Perhaps she should change her return flight.

Of course, it wasn't entirely true that Bella could always play the homecoming queen. There were people whom, if she wanted to see them, she would have to seek out. For instance, Peipei. They had been boarders for three years at Sunflower Childcare before going to elementary school. Their beds placed side by side and in opposite directions, they had often, when the teachers were not looking, sneaked their hands through the rails and held each



other's feet when they could not sleep.

They had been classmates until the first year of high school, when Peipei discovered the man of her dreams, their geography teacher, Mr. Wu. For someone from a lesser background, it would have been called a schoolgirl crush, but the power of Peipei's passion matched that of her family: Bella's grandfather had political prestige, but Peipei's had political influence. When Peipei refused to accept any

solution but a consummation of her love, her grandfather had to summon Mr. Wu through a secretary. Soon after that, Peipei dropped out of school, and Mr. Wu stopped teaching. A Cinderella, Bella's mother commented, and Bella wondered if an unwilling Cinderella would make a wretched ending to a fairy tale.

Bella had always disdained Peipei a little, as she knew others might disdain her. But between Peipei and herself there was a fundamental difference. Peipei had not left China. It had been unnecessary. She and her husband had their own fast-food and hotel chains, having made good use of their assets: his handsomeness and his ability to discern and accept what could not be changed; her pedigree. Bella, despite the fact that her road had been paved more smoothly than most people's, was on her own. She had studied hard and aced college and law school; she had overcome many hurdles to establish herself—who in America would care that her grandfather was one of the founders of the Chinese Soviet Republic?

Bella's parents would have preferred that she stay in China; they would have used their connections wisely on her behalf. For that reason, Bella had decided to emigrate. What a waste, her mother said. A waste of what? Bella asked. Your good looks, her mother said, and, of course, your good fortune. Bella's good looks had been given to her by the people who had conceived her; she knew nothing of them but that they had had enough charity to not lower her into a tub of water like an unwanted kitten. Her good fortune had been given to her by her parents; to throw it away was a gesture of ingratitude.

But, by all means, it's your life, her mother said. We aren't parents who would interfere.

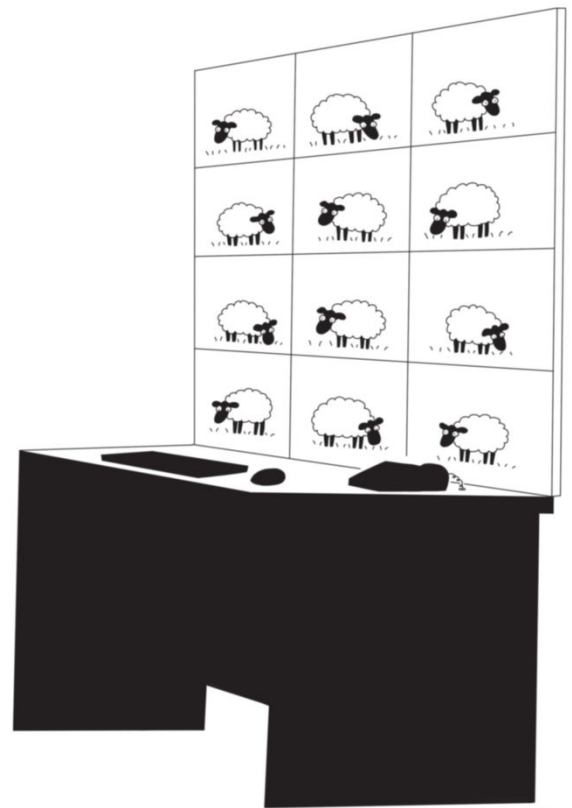
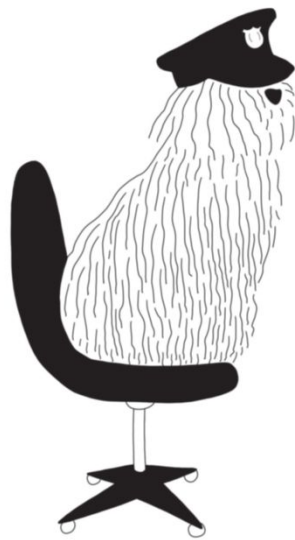
Bella had not been particularly close to her mother, but by middle school she had acquired enough sophistication to please her, and they got along nicely as two women who respected each other's beauty and brains. Bella's father, indulging her in an absent-minded manner, did not have any real interest in her—this Bella had understood and accepted when she was young, as she had the story of the deaf-mute. Her father was the kind of melancholy

man who would always be born into the wrong family, married to the wrong wife, settled in the wrong profession, and destined to die alone. Only after his death—Bella’s mother had been dead for four years by then—had Bella wondered about her parents’ relationship. The best marriage, they had once explained to Bella, is one in which husband and wife treat each other as honored guests. It was possible that there had been little, or even no, love between them. They were two guests who had lived in their shared courteousness for so long that they had mistaken it for affection or warmth. But even two guests living together for fifty years would have some secrets between them. Perhaps Bella could have understood them intuitively had she been their blood child.

In her own marriages—the first had lasted twelve years, the second five—Bella had fared poorly as host to her husband-guests. Your problem, Peter had said after the second divorce, is that you don’t take yourself seriously. I saw your eyes when you were walking down the aisle. They snickered even though you kept your face straight. With Paul? Bella asked. Both times, Peter said. What do women do when they can’t take themselves seriously? Bella asked. That’s not a question I can answer, Peter said. She wished he hadn’t taken the liberty of giving her a diagnosis without offering a cure.

Both her ex-husbands had called her toxic. She had to respect them for that and for not wanting to stay on and be poisoned. She would have respected Peipei, too, if she had outgrown her obsession with Mr. Wu. Over the years, Bella had successfully maintained the right distance between Mr. Wu and herself: too close, and Peipei would have felt jealous; too removed, Peipei would have felt slighted on behalf of her husband. If only Peipei could have an affair. Or, better, divorce her husband, and send him tumbling back to the pool of commoners. But she held on to the marriage with a kind of fairy-tale loyalty. What would Mr. Wu think of this passion which refused to die? Obsession that has outlived youth must be poison, too.

Perhaps that’s what separates a lucky person from a luckless one. The lucky,



like Mr. Wu, had to give up something essential in order to advance in the world, because a person of good luck could become a person of bad luck overnight. The luckless, like Bella or the deaf-mute, had no choice but to follow the path assigned to them. That their lives had turned out differently was a mere accident.

UNLIKE THE OTHER teachers at Bella’s high school, who had held permanent positions, Miss Chu had been hired on a contract that could be terminated at any time. The credential that had made Miss Chu attractive to the school was that she had spent a year in Australia. What connection had taken her there was not known to any student; she had taught at Bella’s school for only two years, and after she quit there were rumors that she had returned to Australia.

Miss Chu was not pretty. Her cheeks, too chiselled, had an unhealthy pallor. Her eyebrows were constantly knitted, and her eyes had a distracted and sullen look. If anything made her stand out, it was her voice. Bella, from

her experience with the students her mother had taken on as she grew older, knew that Miss Chu’s voice, had it been remedied with training, would have become unique, extraordinary, even. But nobody seemed to have put any work or imagination into it, so it had an unpleasant quality, like a piece of half-used sandpaper, its coarseness uneven.

Miss Chu made little effort to hide her irritation when her students functioned at any level below her expectation, yet who, other than Bella, could have met her demands? It was in the English club that Bella had first encountered Don McLean and D. H. Lawrence. The music of the former was the soundtrack of Miss Chu’s mood when she sat in a trance—even the chattiest girl or the neediest boy knew to leave her alone then. The work of the latter Miss Chu read aloud to them, “The Rocking-Horse Winner” and then “The Princess” and finally “The Fox,” which she read several times, no doubt her favorite.

Sometimes, when Miss Chu went on reading for too long, Bella’s club

mates brought out work sheets in math or physics or chemistry. A lyrical playing to a herd of cows masticating their own ignorance, Bella often thought. Soulless they were, soullessly they treated Miss Chu. Bella wanted Miss Chu to know that she understood the indifference they both had to endure; she wanted Miss Chu to suffer less because she was suffering with her. Yet Miss Chu treated Bella with more sarcasm than she treated the other students. Do not act like a drunken mouse, she admonished Bella when, at a rehearsal, she tottered on in a pair of heels, unfit slippers for an unenthusiastic Cinderella. But at this moment Cinderella is overwhelmed by happiness, Bella argued. Then she's an imbecile to feel that way, Miss Chu said. And please stop widening your eyes like a three-year-old.

“WAS THERE AN English teacher by that name?” Peipei said. “I have no recollection.”

“Your eyes could see only one teacher back then,” Bella said.

“And your precious eyes can't put up with a grain of dust,” Peipei answered.

“Which is why I can't keep a husband,” Bella said. Her divorce, rather than being bad news, could be used to

taunt Peipei, who had been married to the same man for too long.

Even the most superficial tie could take permanent hold if it lasted for forty years. Do you realize that only for you would I rearrange my business meetings at such short notice? Peipei had said the moment she walked into the restaurant. Do you realize no one else would count your toes hundreds of times, as I did? Bella had replied.

“What about this teacher?” Peipei asked now. “Why are you looking for her?”

“I'm not. Just curious what has become of her.”

“You always fuss over this or that random person. When are you going to outgrow this childishness?”

Bella said she had no idea what Peipei was talking about.

“All the time,” Peipei said. “Remember when we used to take turns acting deaf and mute? Until the teachers banned that game?”

“At Sunflower?” Bella asked. She did not remember the game. It appalled her that she had left such a sentimental episode in Peipei's memory. “When did you learn about the girl?”

“I don't think it was ever a secret,” Peipei said. “And after that game we pretended to be each other's nanny. You

said you were my Auntie Su and I was your Auntie Lan.”

Bella knew of the existence of Auntie Lan only from a few childhood pictures. She had stopped working for the family when Bella began boarding at Sunflower. Had she ever missed the woman, who would have become the only mother known to her had Bella been deemed flawed, as the deaf-mute was before her? Bella was surprised that Peipei, like Peter, remembered more about her life than she herself did. Friends like them gave her permission to forget, but they also summoned memories at unpredictable or inconvenient moments.

Peipei said she would ask around about Miss Chu. Bella was certain that Peipei would help her. They were each other's hostage, and no ransom could rescue them from their shared past but mutual loyalty. Who else would remember Peipei's despair at fifteen when she held a finger to a lit match until the flame scorched her? Who else would recall the deaf-mute, a reminder that Bella had been a replacement for an imperfect product?

TWO DAYS LATER, Peipei texted Bella the new name that Miss Chu was going by and the organization that she worked for. “Once a teacher, now a preacher” was Peipei's accompanying message.

Bella, who had chosen her English name the moment she landed in America, found it ridiculous that Miss Chu needed a new Chinese name. Who did she think she was, a celebrity? Bella tapped the link for the organization, a nonprofit advocating for L.G.B.T. rights. The Web site listed Miss Chu as the organization's co-founder. There was an audio clip of an interview she had given to a media company; a list of her public appearances; and blog posts signed by her, the most recent focussed on a new law against domestic violence, the first of its kind in China, which excluded protection for victims in same-sex relationships.

There was no picture of Miss Chu on the Web site, nor did a search of her new name yield an image elsewhere. Bella wanted to see Miss Chu's face. She wanted it to remain the same as she remembered, but seeing it altered by time



“We want one that's genetically gifted but not genetically spoiled.”

would bring some vindictive pleasure, too. Faceless, Miss Chu had denied Bella access. She considered texting Pepei, “I thought your omnipotence would have arranged a dinner meeting for me by now”—but what was the point of attacking Pepei?

Bella played the audio clip. Miss Chu’s voice had not changed much, though there was something different: a fervor that had not been there before, or perhaps it was simply liveliness. Miss Chu discussed the grassroots effort led by her organization and some polls and interviews conducted within the L.G.B.T. community in response to the government’s claim that there was no evidence of domestic violence in homosexual relationships.

“Why is it important to you that the law recognize domestic violence in same-sex relationships?” the reporter, a woman softening her tone into disingenuous understanding, asked.

“When members of a heterosexual relationship outside of marriage—the so-called cohabiting relationship—are protected by the law while those in a same-sex relationship are not, the exclusion raises questions about the legal rights we have as a community.”

“But why is it important to you personally? Have you experienced domestic violence?”

“Yes.”

“Can you tell our audience more about that?”

Bella found the reporter’s questions inane and Miss Chu’s willingness to cooperate distasteful. “It was thirty years ago. I was young, and I was ashamed of my relationship with another woman. In our time it was called a mental illness, defined as such in medical textbooks. I did not know anything about domestic violence, either.”

The interview went on, giving a few more details of an inexperienced woman confusing control with love, compliance with devotion. Same old story, Bella thought, and when the conversation turned to statistics and case studies she stopped listening. Whoever the person being interviewed was, she was not Miss Chu of the English club. The latter had had a heart made of polished ice, which, inviolable and immovable, had long ago absorbed what warmth could be found in Bella’s blood. This

stranger, talking about her activism and revealing her personal life, was a sham, looking for purpose and solace in the wrong place. Mistakenly, she thought she had found them in a just cause.

That basement room: Bella wished she could be there now, to study Miss Chu and herself again. Had Miss Chu, watching the falling dusk through the narrow window near the ceiling, been reliving the sordid pain another person had inflicted on her body? Had she been searching for meaning in her suffering when she listened to Don McLean? When she watched Bella’s rehearsals with derision, or when she dismissed Bella’s attentiveness with unseeing eyes, was she refraining from doing harm, or was she, familiar with conquest and surrender, relishing her power? Those who allow themselves to be hurt in the name of love must understand better than anyone the desire to hurt.

The hunter of the fox, hunted by the fox: Bella remembered falling under D. H. Lawrence’s spell while listening to Miss Chu, her voice almost beautiful when she herself fell under that same spell. The story should be made into a stage play—why had that never occurred to Bella? No doubt Miss Chu would have scoffed at her request, but Bella, who lived with a will to overwrite other people’s wills, would not have needed her grandfather to summon Miss Chu through a secretary. She would have insisted to Miss Chu that they play the two women in the story. Bella would be the unattractive and neurotic Banford—she wouldn’t mind playing an unappealing role—and Miss Chu would play the other woman, March, endowed, for the duration of the performance, with a beauty that she had not been born with. Bella would be killed by the end—someone always has to be in a Lawrence story. She wouldn’t mind that, either, because her death would leave Miss Chu in a permanent trance. Why not, if Pepei was right that everything was a game of pretend for Bella? She could be the deaf-mute; she could be the fox bewitching Miss Chu; she could make up epic tales, as Adrian did in imagining his ancestors. Adrian was still confined by geography and family. Bella had no such limits. Everything could be hers: men and women, days and nights, the stars in the sky, the eternal flame in the

hands of the Little Match Girl. Make-believe was her genealogy.

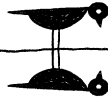
The high school had an observatory that was open, a few times a year, to students outside the science club, and once Bella had gone there with some friends. She did not recall which stars or planets they were supposed to see that night, but, after the teacher had left, a boy from the science club, in order to impress Bella, had turned the telescope toward one of the first high-rises in the city and found an uncurtained window. A man and a woman, their backs to the window, were watching a soap opera, the actress crying unabashedly. The room, with the marriage in it, with the drama onscreen, was pulled so close to Bella’s eyes that for a moment, when the boy touched her elbow timorously, she did not bother to shake him off. She could still see the space between the man and the woman: they were sitting at opposite ends of the sofa, leaning on the armrests. She could even see the piece of crochet placed on top of the television, blue and white—thirty years ago, a television set had been a luxury that a woman dedicated to housekeeping would have decorated with fine needlework.

Bella wished that the telescope had brought into her sight that night Miss Chu and her lover, instead of the insipid couple. Affection and aggression, passion and pain—Bella wished she had seen it all between the two women. But she had been too young when she met Miss Chu, and she had arrived too late to know the deaf-mute. Timing had made them the unattainable in her life, and the unattainable, which she could neither damage nor destroy, lived on as wounds. Even now, if she called the organization and demanded to speak to Miss Chu, what could she say? Faceless to Miss Chu, Bella would only be a voice on the line that could be cut off at any moment. She would be the girl on the street corner, forever striking matches, forever reaching for a different world in the small flame. When she turned into a falling star, Miss Chu, herself another girl striking matches on another street corner, would not even sense the vacancy left by Bella’s absence. ♦

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Yiyun Li on fairy tales.

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

GET OUT OF TOWN

“The End of Eddy,” a novel of class and violence in the provinces.

BY GARTH GREENWELL

SINCE IT WAS published in France, in 2014, “The End of Eddy,” Édouard Louis’s slim début novel, has sold more than three hundred thousand copies. Much of the extraordinary interest in the book has centered on its depiction of Hallencourt, a village of about fourteen hundred people in Picardy, in the north of France, not far from the sea. Hallencourt’s occasional beauty—fruit trees in gardens, explosions of color in the autumn woods—does little, in Louis’s telling, to alleviate the human suffering that takes place there. A post-industrial decline has shuttered most of the region’s factories, and jobs are scarce and hard. Children in the village leave school early; women have children young; one in five adults has difficulty reading and writing. Alcoholism is rampant and violence casual.

The village overwhelmingly votes for Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Front, and, as France has braced itself for the possibility of a Le Pen Presidency, Louis’s book has become the subject of political discussion in a way that novels rarely do. (In the first round of the current Presidential election, Le Pen received nearly twice as many votes in Hallencourt as any other candidate.) For Louis, the tide of populism sweeping Europe and the United States is a consequence of what he, citing the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, calls “the principle of the conservation of violence.” “When you’re subjected to endless violence, in every situation, every moment of your life,” Louis told an interviewer, referring to the indig-

nities of poverty, “you end up reproducing it against others, in other situations, by other means.”

“The End of Eddy” (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; translated, from the French, by Michael Lucey) covers five or six years in the life of Eddy Bellegueule, a child growing up poor and gay in Hallencourt—in the novel, Louis refers to it only as “the village”—where he’s viciously mocked for his effeminate manners, what his family calls his “fancy ways.” In the book’s opening pages, Eddy is ten, and two boys, somewhat older, are assaulting him in a middle-school hallway. They call him “faggot” before spitting in his face; soon they’re shoving him; finally, as his head slams against the wall, they kick him, laughing. The passage is brutal and vivid, but it lacks the usual markers of tension or urgency: the narration wavers unsteadily between past and present tense, and there’s a lyrical slowing of time, an almost luxurious lingering on sensation as the boys’ saliva slides down Eddy’s face. Louis pauses the drama for digressions on violence in the village, on how the structures of domination in the playground mirror those in the world at large, even on dental care:

I could smell their breath as they got closer, an odor of sour milk, dead animals. Like me, they probably never brushed their teeth. Mothers in the village weren’t too concerned about their children’s dental hygiene. Dentists were expensive and as usual a lack of money came to seem like a matter of choice. Mothers would say *There’s way more important things in life.* That family negligence, class-based negligence, means that I still suffer from acute pain, sleepless nights, and years later, when I arrived in

Paris and at the École Normale, I would hear my classmates ask me *But why didn’t your parents send you to an orthodontist.* I would lie.

The assault, it soon becomes clear, is not a single event, but a composite, a kind of ritual repeated over two years. It happens in a regular spot, a secluded corridor outside the school library, where Eddy appears daily. He submits to the beatings out of fear, and out of a desire to suffer in privacy; he wonders if his actions constitute complicity. A weird intimacy develops between him and the two boys. When one of them seems sad, Eddy worries about him. Later, attempting to have sex with a woman, he will think about the boys and their violence in a failed effort to arouse himself.

In interviews, Louis has said that everything he recounts in the novel is true. (Members of his family, as well as other inhabitants of Hallencourt, have disputed elements of his account.) Édouard Louis was born in 1992, in Hallencourt, as Eddy Bellegueule—his father, a fan of American television, thought that Eddy was “a tough guy’s name.” After joining a drama club at his middle school, Louis was accepted into a residential theatre program at a high school in a nearby city, Amiens, which provided his escape from the world of his childhood. From there, he went on to the University of Picardy Jules Verne, to study history, and to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, in Paris, for graduate work. Shortly before his novel was published, he legally changed his name to Édouard Louis.

“The End of Eddy” is an instance of what is sometimes called autofiction,



In interviews, Édouard Louis, who is now twenty-four, has said that everything he recounts in the novel is true.

which has been the source of some of the most interesting English-language fiction of the past decade. There is a long tradition of such writing, especially in French, and queer writers are central to it: behind all such novels lies the example of Proust; the works of the French novelist Hervé Guibert and the American Edmund White are more recent precursors of Louis's book. The novel is dedicated to the sociologist Didier Eribon, whom Louis met as a university student. Eribon's memoir, "Returning to Reims," also recounts a gay man's trajectory from provincial poverty to academic prestige.

"The End of Eddy" largely dispenses with the conventions of the realist novel. The book is organized topically, in short chapters, several with the feel of essays, bearing titles like "My Parents' Bedroom" and "A Man's Role." While the novel is full of incident and anecdote, scenes are interrupted by commentary so often that there is almost no sense of a forward-moving plot. The most common narrative mode is the generalized past. What distinguishes "The End of Eddy" from its autofictional antecedents is the urgency with which Louis seeks to separate himself from his previous self, a desire so intense that the novel can be seen as a kind of wake. The French title, "En Finir Avec Eddy Bellegueule," might have been more literally translated "Finishing Off Eddy Bellegueule."

Queerness is the key that springs Eddy from the various cycles—of poverty, of alcoholism, of violence—that he sees as determining life in the village. "Being attracted to boys transformed my whole relationship to the world," he writes, "encouraging me to identify with values that were different from my family's." This doesn't mean that queerness represents freedom; it's an "unknown force that got hold of me at birth and that imprisoned me in my own body." While his parents regard his mannerisms as a choice, "some personal aesthetic project that I was pursuing to annoy them," Louis considers not only his desires but also elements of cultural style often coded as queer to be corporeal, determined in and by the body: "I had not chosen my way of walking, the pro-

nounced, much too pronounced, way my hips swayed from side to side, or the shrill cries that escaped my body—not cries that I uttered but ones that literally escaped through my throat whenever I was surprised, delighted, or frightened."

The sense that his sexual identity is hardwired and essential is shared by his tormentors. After he's discovered having sex with some friends, Eddy wonders why they escape the bullying directed at him. The adult Louis, echoing the philosopher Michel Foucault, realizes that "the crime was not having done something, it was being something."

THROUGHOUT THE NOVEL, Louis catalogues the baffling contradictions of the world of his childhood: brutal racism next to friendliness toward the village's single person of color; his father's scorn for the bourgeoisie and his hope that Eddy will join their ranks; the villagers' hatred of government, which they insist must take action against immigrants and sexual minorities. Describing his mother's incoherent politics, Louis cites Stefan Zweig's account of peasant women who protested at Versailles and then shouted "Long live the King!" at the sight of Louis XVI: "their bodies—which had spoken for them—torn between absolute submission to power and an enduring sense of revolt."

Above all, Louis is perplexed by the simultaneous pride and humiliation that his parents and their neighbors feel for their particular way of life. But he comes to believe that these seeming contradictions appear paradoxical only because of his own manner of looking at things. Of his mother, he writes, "It was I myself, arrogant class renegade that I was, who tried to force her discourse into a foreign kind of coherence, one more compatible with my values—values I'd adopted precisely in order to construct a self in opposition to my parents":

I came to understand that many different modes of discourse intersected in my mother and spoke through her, that she was constantly torn between her shame at not having finished school and her pride that even so, as she would say, she'd *made it through and had a bunch of beautiful kids*, and that these two modes of discourse existed only in relation to each other.

Louis, who has edited a collection of essays on Bourdieu, uses such theory-inflected language throughout the novel. As analysis, his comments don't take us very far: he doesn't dissect which "modes of discourse intersected" in his mother, or how or why they "existed only in relation to each other." Passages like this often do little more than align his observations with common reference points in French social theory, especially Bourdieu and Foucault. Some of them echo more academically rigorous passages in "Returning to Reims," which also attempts to explain the shift of the working classes in France from leftist political parties to the National Front.

For the novelist, there's a danger in this kind of language. Structures become visible through abstraction at the cost of suppressing local variation and noise, the apparently aberrant, the individual. It's out of such noise that novels are made. French critics have compared Louis with Zola, who also wrote about the French working classes in novels informed by sociological theories. But Zola, in a novel like "L'Assommoir," sticks close to individual lives and experiences, without importing the language of specialists. The abstractions that Louis deploys can flatten out novelistic texture, rendering invisible any details that they can't accommodate. This problem is suggested in passages where Louis speaks of "the simplicity of those who possess little," or of a specific incident as "the first in an endless series, each time the same—down to the tiniest details."

Louis is a canny writer, however, and he signals his awareness of this danger in the novel's first lines. "From my childhood I have no happy memories. I don't mean to say that I never, in all of those years, felt any happiness or joy. But suffering is all-consuming: it somehow gets rid of anything that doesn't fit into its system." The word that Lucey renders as "all-consuming" is more discomfiting in the French original: "*La souffrance est totalitaire*." "The End of Eddy" is a dark book, but it isn't an entirely joyless one; nor is it "totalitarian." If the narrator occasionally offers a reductive view of his world, the novel itself doesn't exclude what

falls outside his system. Its characters act in ways that offer the novelistic pleasure of surprise.

This is especially true of Eddy's father, who is introduced in the novel's first pages as an almost gothic figure, taking startling delight in the everyday violence of rural places. He kills a litter of kittens by placing them in a plastic shopping bag and slamming it against concrete; he drinks the warm blood of pigs he has slaughtered. He joins eagerly in the brawls that are part of the rituals of manhood and falls victim to the alcoholism that is the plague of the village. And yet, despite having been brutalized by his own father, he never hits his wife or his children, breaking a cycle that Louis elsewhere suggests is invincible. In one agonizing scene, the father allows himself to be beaten, refusing to strike back as he shields Eddy from his older brother's drunken rage. For all the shame he feels at Eddy's effeminacy, he repeatedly assures him of his love. When Eddy's mother tells him stories of his father as a young man, when he struck out for a new life, travelling to Toulon and becoming best friends with an Arab man, she expresses bewilderment: "*It don't make sense, when he says we should kill all the ragheads but then when he lived in the Midi his best mate was a raghead.*" That attempt to change his life failed, and it may be irrelevant to structural analysis; Louis doesn't try to explain it. But it is not irrelevant to the human interest, which is to say the novelistic richness, of character.

Even Louis's use of academic language ultimately comes to feel less analytical than aesthetic and dramatic. For the young Eddy, refined language is a weapon, a way to turn the stigma of difference into the prestige of distinction. When Eddy uses the formal verb *diner* at home instead of the familiar *bouffer* ("to chow down"), his family takes umbrage. They accuse him of putting on airs, of "philosophizing" ("to philosophize meant talking like the class enemy, *the haves, the rich folk*"). The full implications of this come clear in the book's most sustained narrative, a story Louis tells late in the novel about Eddy's cousin Sylvain, whose short, harsh life of petty crime arouses both dismay and pride in his family.

When a prosecutor offers him a chance to provide extenuating circumstances for his crimes—"Can you affirm that your acts are imputable to external influences of some kind"—Sylvain is unable to follow the question:

He wasn't embarrassed, he didn't feel the violence the prosecutor was exercising, the class violence that had excluded him from the world of education, the violence that had, in the end, led him to the courtroom where he now stood. In fact he must have thought that the prosecutor was ridiculous. That he spoke like a faggot.

The passage is brilliant in its management of sympathy. The final clipped sentence reminds us that Sylvain, here a victim, is also an agent of the violence that Eddy suffers again and again in the novel. Louis knows that the language of social theory, which requires the kind of education the poor are denied, is complicit in the system that it seeks to make visible. His use of that language in "The End of Eddy" is freighted with an ambivalence that animates the book and gives it a devastating emotional force. To write the novel is at once an act of solidarity and an act of vengeance.

"For us, a book was a kind of assault," Louis wrote of his family recently in the *Guardian*. Some of the residents of Hallencourt have received "The End of Eddy" as just that. "It's not right, what he's done," Louis's mother told a reporter. "He presents us like backward hicks." Louis's second novel, "Histoire de la Violence," has also provoked controversy. It recounts a terrifying altercation between Louis and a man he picks up on the street on Christmas night in 2012. Their sexual encounter begins tenderly; then, after Louis catches the man attempting to rob him, the man rapes and beats him.

We learn the details of the encounter in large part in the voice of Louis's sister: he is back in Hallencourt, in her home, listening as she relates for her husband the story he has told her earlier. The book doesn't offer any resolution to the conflicts of "The End of Eddy," but it does imply that Louis hasn't turned his back on Eddy's past as finally as his first novel suggests. Injured and frightened, he wants a kind of solace that his friends in Paris can't offer him. He wants to go home. ♦



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BELIEVE YOU ME

Grace Paley's neighborhood.

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ



THERE'S A CASE to be made that Grace Paley was first and foremost an antinuclear, antiwar, antiracist feminist activist who managed, in her spare time, to become one of the truly original voices of American fiction in the later twentieth century. Just glance at the "chronology" section of "A Grace Paley Reader" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), a welcome new collection of her short stories, nonfiction, and poems, edited by Kevin Bowen and Paley's daughter, Nora. 1961: Leads her Greenwich Village PTA in protests against atomic testing, founds the Women Strike for Peace, pickets the draft board, receives a Guggenheim Fellow-

ship. 1966: Jailed for civil disobedience on Armed Forces Day, starts teaching at Sarah Lawrence. 1969: Travels to North Vietnam to bring home U.S. prisoners of war, wins an O. Henry Award.

Such political passion may seem in keeping with those times, but Paley didn't slow down once the flush of the sixties faded. In the mid-seventies, she attended the World Peace Congress in Moscow, where she infuriated Soviet dissidents by demanding that they stand up for the Asian and Latin-American oppressed, too. In the eighties, she travelled to El Salvador and Nicaragua to meet with mothers of

the disappeared, got arrested at a sit-in at a New Hampshire nuclear power plant, and co-founded the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. And that's not the half of it. She called herself a "somewhat combative pacifist and cooperative anarchist." The F.B.I. declared her a Communist, dangerous and emotionally unstable. Her file was kept open for thirty years.

Paley was an archetypal Village figure, the five-foot-tall lady with the wild white hair, cracking gum like a teen-ager while handing out leaflets against apartheid from her perch on lower Sixth Avenue. She also lived in Vermont, where her second husband, Bob Nichols, had a farmhouse. In May, 2007, they drove to Burlington to protest their congressman's support for the Iraq surge. Paley was eighty-four, undergoing chemo for breast cancer. Three months later, she was dead. "My dissent is cheer / a thankless disposition," she wrote in her poetry collection "Fidelity," published the following year. That incorrigible cheerfulness carried her to the very end. No one was more grimly adamant that the world was in mortal peril, or had more fun trying to save it from itself.

Through it all, Paley wrote, or didn't. She published only three slim collections of her wry, chatty, alarmingly wise short stories: "The Little Disturbances of Man" (1959), "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute" (1974), and "Later the Same Day" (1985). Her "Collected Stories" appeared in 1994, as if to confirm that the well had run dry. ("Just As I Thought," a collection of memoir, speeches, and reportage, from which the essays in the "Reader" are culled, followed in 1998.) This is a great shame, if not so surprising. Activism, like alcoholism, can distract a writer from the demands of her desk. Actually, Paley didn't even have one. She liked to type at the kitchen table, right in the messy heart of family life, rather than cloister herself in a Woolfian room of her own, though her characters often long for the luxury of a closed door. In her early stories, they are immigrants' children, Jews mixing with the slightly more established Irish, Poles, and Italians in the tenements and row houses of Coney Island or the Bronx, where

Paley's fiction is peopled with the politically minded but it never preaches.

“every window is a mother’s mouth bidding the street shut up, go skate somewhere else, come home.” Privacy is out of the question. Brothers, sisters, cousins, neighbors crowd around; lurking everywhere are adult “spies,” like Mrs. Goredinsky, with flesh “the consistency of fresh putty,” who stations herself in front of her building on an orange crate, or the palsy-handed “Mrs. Green, Republican poll watcher in November,” who spends the rest of the year scanning the street for kid trouble.

Then the kids grow up and find that they are under siege from their own children and from the childish men who inconsistently love them. In “The Little Disturbances of Man,” Paley introduced Faith Darwin, an alter ego who returns, like a friend, in each subsequent collection. When we meet Faith, she is in her cramped apartment, dealing with not one husband but two: her ex, the father of her two young sons, a boastful charmer who has dropped by for a brief visit before vanishing again on one of his vague adventures, and her limp, dreamy current mate. (She nicknames them Livid and Pallid, a small act of fond revenge.) The men are men. They drink the coffee Faith has brewed, complain about the eggs she’s cooked, rootle around in her cupboards for booze, grandly discuss lust, women, and Faith herself. She keeps mostly quiet, while mentally whittling them down to size. Here is Livid, greeting his sons, Richard and Anthony, called Tonto:

Well, well, he cautioned. How are you boys, have you been well? You look fine. Sturdy. How are your grades? he inquired. He dreamed that they were just up from Eton for the holidays.

I don’t go to school, said Tonto. I go to the park.

I’d like to hear the child read, said Livid.

Me. I can read, Daddy, said Richard. I have a book with a hundred pages.

Well, well, said Livid. Get it.

I kindled a fresh pot of coffee. I scrubbed cups and harassed Pallid into opening a sticky jar of damson-plum jam. Very shortly, what could be read had been, and Livid, knotting the tie strings of his pants vigorously, approached me at the stove. Faith, he admonished, that boy can’t read a tinker’s damn. Seven years old.

Eight years old, I said.

The scene pours forth with sparkling immediacy, as if transcribed in a

single bubbling rush. Everything is comic, down to the undignified string of Livid’s pajama pants and the verb “harassed,” with its tart note of household martyrdom and manipulation. Notice how Faith claims the sort of objective authority you’d expect to find in third-person narration. She doesn’t say that Livid *might* have been dreaming of Eton; she says that he was. This is the omniscience not only of a writer but of a wife. It’s the least she can do to have a laugh at his expense, though later, in a moment of rare solitude, her mood turns melancholy. “I organized comfort in the armchair, poured the coffee black into a white mug that said MAMA, tapped cigarette ash into a ceramic hand-hollowed by Richard. I looked into the square bright window of daylight to ask myself the sapping question: What is man that woman lies down to adore him?”

Into the dough of domestic life Paley folds the Bible (like Cain, Tonto “raised up his big mouth against his brother,” in Paley’s wonderful mixed metaphor), politics (there is a brief discourse on the benefits of the Diaspora over Zionism), philosophy (what *is* man that woman lies down to adore him?), and Eros (and yet she does). The story’s title, “Two Short Sad Stories from a Long and Happy Life,” assures us that all will end well—if Faith can hang on until then. Paley leaves her at the window, Tonto snuggled in her lap, nourished and imprisoned by the bonds of maternal love: “Then through the short fat fingers of my son, interred forever, like a black-and-white-barred king in Alcatraz, my heart lit up in stripes.”

PALEY WAS OFTEN asked about the connection between her politics and her fiction. Sometimes she said that her subject matter turned out to be inherently political. People like Henry Miller and Saul Bellow were not writing about the lives of people like Faith Darwin. Paley initially suspected that her work would be considered “trivial, stupid, boring, domestic, and not interesting,” but she couldn’t help it: “Everyday life, kitchen life, children life had been handed to me.” Another answer had to do with justice, the quality that Paley saw at the root of her literary and political endeavors.

In a 1985 “Fresh Air” interview, she told Terry Gross, “When you write, you illuminate what’s hidden, and that’s a political act.”

The remarkable fact is that her fiction, peopled by the politically minded, doesn’t do the things that politically infused writing typically does. It doesn’t preach; it doesn’t demonize or lionize; it doesn’t nobly set out to illustrate a set of beliefs or ideals. Indeed, it often undercuts them with sly self-awareness. “We hoped we were not about to suffer socialist injustice, because we loved socialism,” one of Paley’s narrators says, on a trip to China. Paley’s unwavering trust in the power of the collective was essential for her activism, as her clear-eyed affection for the foibles and fallibility of the individual was essential for her art, and it is a delight to encounter both Paleys in a single volume, where they can usefully converse with each other across genres. Bowen, in his foreword to “A Grace Paley Reader,” says that he and Nora Paley wanted to put together a book “that would be a good companion.” They could not have known when they began their work, in early 2015, just how valuable its companionship would prove to be. You can take the “Reader” to a rally and feel galvanized by Paley’s conviction, or you can take it to bed late at night and find pleasure and comfort in her humane prose.

Paley was a natural storyteller, and short stories were her natural form. In “A Conversation with My Father,” from “Enormous Changes at the Last Minute,” she shows us why. The narrator’s father, eighty-six years old and sick in bed, asks her to entertain him with a “simple story . . . just recognizable people and then write down what happened to them next.” She reluctantly produces the following:

Once in my time there was a woman and she had a son. They lived nicely, in a small apartment in Manhattan. This boy at about fifteen became a junkie, which is not unusual in our neighborhood. In order to maintain her close friendship with him, she became a junkie too. She said it was part of the youth culture, with which she felt very much at home. After a while, for a number of reasons, the boy gave it all up and left the city and his mother in disgust. Hopeless and alone, she grieved. We all visit her.

Her father complains that she’s left everything out. For instance: How did



"It's not the captivity—I'm just not sure if I'm ready to have kids."

the woman look? Who were her parents that she should end up like this? The narrator tries again:

Once, across the street from us, there was a fine handsome woman, our neighbor. She had a son whom she loved because she'd known him since birth (in helpless chubby infancy, and in the wrestling, hugging ages, seven to ten, as well as earlier and later). This boy, when he fell into the fist of adolescence, became a junkie. He was not a hopeless one. He was in fact hopeful, an ideologue and successful converter. With his busy brilliance, he wrote persuasive articles for his high-school newspaper. Seeking a wider audience, using important connections, he drummed into Lower Manhattan newsstand distribution a periodical called *Oh! Golden Horse!*

In order to keep him from feeling guilty (because guilt is the stony heart of nine-tenths of all clinically diagnosed cancers in America today, she said), and because she had always believed in giving bad habits a home where one could keep an eye on them, she too became a junkie. . . .

On the branches of the bare first draft, life begins to bud. Before, the woman seemed delusional, pathetic. Now we see her goodness, her confused optimism, her protective love for her son. The narrator's tone turns rueful, tender; a piece of gossip has become lit-

erature. Her father isn't convinced. He pities the woman's sad end. But it's not the end, the narrator says. In fact, the narrator decides on the spot to make her the receptionist at an East Village clinic, beloved by the community, and prized by the head doctor for her experience as a former addict. Her father finds this absurd. The woman will backslide: that's reality. His daughter, he says, doesn't understand how to craft a proper plot. He's right. She despises plot, that "absolute line" drawn between a beginning and an end: "Not for literary reasons, but because it takes all hope away. Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life."

WHO WERE PALEY's parents that she should have ended up like this? In 1904, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia had a son. To celebrate, he freed political prisoners under the age of twenty-one, among them Isaac Gutzeit, a socialist who had been sent to Siberia, and his wife, Manya Ridnyik, exiled to Germany. Two years later, they immigrated to the United States, where they changed their name to Goodside and settled in the Bronx with Isaac's mother,

called Babushka, and his younger sister, Mira. Isaac became a doctor; he learned English by reading Dickens. He and Manya had a son and a daughter right away. After a fourteen-year gap, Grace, their third child, was born in 1922, the happy accident of her parents' middle age.

Politics ran in Paley's blood. Her childhood was "rather typical Jewish socialist" in that she believed Judaism and socialism to be one and the same. Isaac wouldn't go near a synagogue, so Paley accompanied Babushka to shul on the holidays. Babushka, for her part, entertained Paley by recounting the heated arguments that had taken place around her table in the old country among her four children: Isaac the Socialist, Grisha the Anarchist, Luba the Zionist, and Mira the Communist. A fifth, Rusya, had been killed at a protest as he brandished the red banner of the working class. In the way that other children are warned not to play with matches, Mira repeatedly instructed young Grace never to be the one to carry the flag at a demonstration.

At nine, Paley joined the Falcons, a Socialist youth group, where she wore a red kerchief and belted out the "Internationale"—"with the Socialist ending, not the Communist one." (So much for the F.B.I.'s suspicions.) To her delight, she was given a small part in the group's play, "a kind of agitprop" musical about a shopkeeper's eviction. As soon as Manya heard that her daughter would be singing onstage, she pulled her from the show. Grace was tone deaf, she insisted, and would make a fool of herself: "Guiltless but full of shame, I never returned to the Falcons. In fact, in sheer spite I gave up my work for Socialism for at least three years."

Writing down this memory sixty-five years later, Paley finds in it a deeper meaning. To grow up the American child of Russian Jewish immigrants in the twenties and thirties was to live in a world of constant noise pierced by bewildering silences. Politics were debated with neighbors and friends, yet the private history of suffering went largely unspoken. Paley understood that her family had known hatred and violence in Europe, "that godforsaken place," which she connected to the

American racism she was learning about in the Falcons. Yet “despite its adherence to capitalism, prejudice, and lynching, my father said we were lucky to be here in this America.”

As a child, Paley found such contradictions perplexing. The same parents who had endured exile for their beliefs reacted with fury when she was suspended from school for signing an antiwar pledge. Socialism in America could wait, they felt; their daughter’s education could not. As an adult, Paley saw that heroic Isaac and Manya were also “a couple of ghetto Jews struggling with hard work and intensive education up the famous American ladder” until they reached the middle class. “At that comfortable rung (probably upholstered), embarrassed panic would be the response to possible exposure.” Hence Manya’s refusal to allow her to sing—or so Paley, at seventy-two, tells her eighty-six-year-old sister, who rejects her theory. Forget all the class analysis, her sister says. Manya had perfect pitch; it was torture for her to hear a wrong note. And so Paley’s account of her earliest years ends with two old ladies trying to make out the blur of their young mother, as powerfully enigmatic as ever.

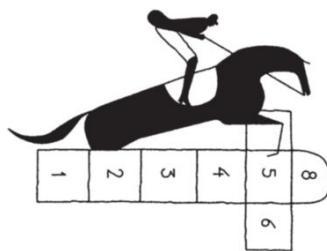
Paley dropped out of high school at sixteen. She took classes at Hunter and at City College but never got a degree. (She also studied poetry at the New School with W. H. Auden, who did her the great service of encouraging her to write in her own voice.) At nineteen, she married Jess Paley, a soldier, and went to live with him at Army bases in the South and the Midwest before moving to a basement apartment on West Eleventh Street to wait out the war, supporting herself with a string of secretarial jobs.

Mainly, though, she worked as a housewife. “That is the poorest paying job a woman can hold,” Paley wrote later. “But most women feel gypped by life if they don’t get a chance at it.” Nora was born in 1949, followed, two years later, by a son, Danny. Motherhood elated and sustained Paley; as she got older, she spoke of children with an almost mystical appreciation. (“The child, you know, is the reason for life” is a typical Paleyism.) She was also overburdened, exhausted, and lonely. Jess was

struggling with the transition to civilian life. (They separated in 1967, but stayed friends.) There was very little money. Paley had dreamed of having five or six kids, but when she learned that she was pregnant for a third time she went to West End Avenue for an abortion. Soon she was pregnant again, with a child that she wanted and Jess didn’t. She was agonizing over what to do when she suffered a miscarriage.

By the mid-nineteen-fifties, the accumulation of these experiences was “creating a real physical pressure” in Paley’s chest. “I was beginning to suffer the storyteller’s pain: Listen! *I have to tell you something!*” Her chance was a bout of sickness serious enough to keep Nora and Danny at an after-school program until dinnertime for several weeks. Freed from interruption, Paley wrote until she had her first story.

IT’S CALLED “Goodbye and Good Luck,” and it’s a triumph. Here’s how it begins: “I was popular in certain circles, says Aunt Rose. I wasn’t no thinner then, only more stationary in the flesh. In time to come, Lillie, don’t be surprised—change is a fact of God. From this no one is excused. Only a person like your mama stands on one foot, she don’t notice how big her behind is getting and sings in the canary’s ear for thirty years.” No throat-clearing preamble, no careful, self-conscious framing of the kind that so often accompa-



nies early work. Just a voice on the page, speaking high and proud, certain of being heard.

Paley grew up in three languages: Russian at home, Yiddish in the street, and English everywhere else, a blend that marks all her work. In this first story, you hear notes of Isaac Bashevis Singer; you hear Babel, a little Chekhov, some Joyce, all active influences, but above all you hear Paley inventing her own American English, one that

clucks and sings. Like many a Paley creation, Rose is a ribald genius of homebrewed figurative language. “I could no longer keep my tact in my mouth,” she says. The source of the story’s title is revealed in Rose’s summation of her mother’s marriage to her father:

She married who she didn’t like, a sick man, his spirit already swallowed up by God. He never washed. He had an unhappy smell. His teeth fell out, his hair disappeared, he got smaller, shriveled up little by little, till goodbye and good luck he was gone and only came to Mama’s mind when she went to the mailbox under the stairs to get the electric bill. In memory of him and out of respect for mankind, I decided to live for love.

And so she does. Rose’s tale opens with her youthful days working as a ticket seller at the Russian Art Theatre, on Second Avenue. There she is courted over seltzer by Volodya Vlashkin, an older, married man and a charismatic king of the Yiddish stage. Rose eventually ends the affair, but she never marries; Vlashkin’s picture stays on her wall. Rose is pragmatic, vital, without self-pity. Still, we suspect that she is a sad case, a solitary old maid gabbing to her niece about happier times. The joke is on us. Vlashkin has finally retired, she tells Lillie. Mrs. Vlashkin couldn’t stand having him around all day and has divorced him. The lovers are back together, this time for good: “After all I’ll have a husband, which, as everybody knows, a woman should have at least one before the end of the story.”

Paley counted the publication of “The Little Disturbances of Man” as a stroke of luck. She had been rejected by more than a dozen journals before an editor at Doubleday whose kids were friends with hers asked to see what she was working on. The book made her reputation; she began placing stories in *The Atlantic*, *Esquire*, and—that small pond of big fish—*New American Review*. Still, fifteen years passed before “Enormous Changes at the Last Minute” came out, and it might well have been more, had Donald Barthelme, Paley’s neighbor and friend, not badgered her into putting together the second collection.

In that time, the sixties came and went, and the women’s movement arrived. “The buoyancy, the noise, the saltiness” of second-wave feminism gave Paley a definitive framework for analyzing the

world, and a community to survive it with. As she put it, she “required three or four best women friends” to whom she could “tell every personal fact and then discuss on the widest, deepest, and most hopeless level the economy, the constant, unbeatable, cruel war economy, the slavery of the American worker to the idea of that economy, the complicity of male people in the whole structure, the dumbness of men (including her preferred man) on this subject.”

Some critics have found this side of Paley cloyingly righteous. It’s true that in her political writing she could slip into the kind of Earth Mother holiness that she loved to ironize in her fiction. Some of the pieces in the “Reader” were written as speeches for meetings or protests, and their rhetoric matches the occasion. Wars are “violent games” played by men; women, on the other hand, “know there is a healthy, sensible, loving way to live.” In an article for *Ms.*, Paley argued that the American adoption of maimed Vietnamese orphans amounted to war profiteering. (To her credit, when she republished the piece, in “Just As I Thought,” she included an exchange of letters with a furious reader, and a postscript reconsidering her position.)

But Paley’s sense of sisterhood was never complacent. Early on, she perceived the challenges posed by divisions of race, class, and sexuality to feminist solidarity, and to the broader American left. One highlight of the “Reader” is Paley’s essay about the six days in 1966 that she spent in the Women’s House of Detention, the old Greenwich Village prison, for trying to block a military parade. Paley is one of the few white women there, and the only inmate not booked for prostitution or drugs. She gets to know Rita and Evelyn, the tough tenants of a neighboring cell, and Helen, a Jew from Brighton Beach who used to hook with them. “Then one day along come Malcolm X and they don’t know me no more, they ain’t talking to me,” Helen tells her. “You too white. I ain’t all that white.” One woman has a child at Hunter High School; when she gets out, she’s going to clean up her act. Paley is deeply moved. Rita and Evelyn laugh at her naïveté. “Change her ways? That dumb bitch. Ha!!” Not everyone has equal reason to believe in the open des-

tiny of life, a lesson Paley didn’t forget. When she was tasked with drafting the unity statement for the 1981 Women’s Pentagon Action, an antiwar feminist sit-in, she spoke of women, particularly incarcerated ones, who “were born at the intersection of oppressions,” a phrase that hadn’t yet gone mainstream. As for prisons, she thought they should all be in residential neighborhoods: easy to visit, hard to hide.

PALEY WAS A feminist writer from the start, but in her first book women are preoccupied by their dealings with men. In the second, they suddenly have friends, too, other women to sit around the playground and discuss life with. Gone are Faith’s days of listening to her husbands natter on as she rolls her eyes toward the ceiling. She is hungry to talk, and so is Paley, whose language, already so fleet and free, now really begins to fly. In the story “Faith in a Tree,” one of Paley’s best, Faith perches like a Sibyl on the branch of a sycamore overlooking the playground and delivers a manic monologue on all the great Paley concerns—war, socialism, capitalism, class, parents, children, sex, love—while pausing to flirt with men, chat with women, argue with Richard and Tonto, and gossip about everyone she sees. “I digressed and was free,” Faith says, offering the perfect motto for her breathless, bravura performance. It’s as if she were trying to put the whole of her world into words before she, or it, vanished for good.

The disappearing world is Paley’s great topic, and not only when it comes to the threat of nuclear war. In “The Long Distance Runner,” Faith goes for a jog in Brighton Beach, where she grew up. Her block, once Jewish, is now black; she is an interloper, this out-of-breath middle-aged white woman in shorts, viewed with a mixture of curiosity and hostility. A Girl Scout shows her around her old apartment building, then becomes frightened of the “honky lady” and calls for help. Faith, “frightened by her fear of me,” pounds on the door of her old apartment until she’s let in. Here the story becomes surpassingly strange. Faith stays with the current tenant, Mrs. Luddy, a recluse, for three weeks. Is she there as a voyeur, peering, like Paley in prison, into a life that she’d never oth-

erwise see? Faith has gone looking for the past. What she has found is the future—the lives that came after she grew up and took hers elsewhere.

The best way to read Paley’s fiction is still by way of the “Collected Stories,” where they echo and amplify and sometimes undercut one another, growing, like life, more complex and jagged with time. Different voices, black and Latino, appear, to testify to different experiences. Close friendships between women deepen or become strained with age. Some adored children, raised by parents committed to giving them a better world, are lost to drugs, or jail, or even to Weather Underground-type political extremism; others thrive. Adults are exasperated by their aging parents even as they fear for what will happen when they’re gone. Men and women keep driving each other crazy in bed and in the head, but with more mutual sympathy and gentleness. Political urgency rattles the soul. And then, like life, it all abruptly ends.

Why did Paley stop writing short stories? Signs of renunciation are everywhere in “Later the Same Day,” her last book of fiction. “I am trying to curb my cultivated individualism, which seemed for years so sweet,” she writes at the start of one story. “It was my own song in my own world and, of course, it may not be useful in the hard time to come.” These do not sound at all like the words of someone who still has another thirty years of joyful living left. They sound like an ascetic’s vow to renounce the self’s happiness for a higher cause. The end of the book is even more severe. Faith is driving a friend, Cassie, home from a meeting. As they stop at a red light, Faith turns to admire, at lustful length, a sexy man crossing the street. She thinks, “with a mild homesickness,” of the “everyday life” he is leading; hers has been subsumed by her political work. Cassie is scornful. The man, she says, is “just a bourgeois.” And what is Faith’s everyday life, anyway? “It’s been women and men, women and men, fucking, fucking. Goddamnit, where the hell is my woman and woman, woman-loving life in all this?” Faith is shocked. She asks Cassie’s forgiveness. “I do not forgive you,” Cassie says. That frightening, damning pronouncement is the

last line of fiction Paley published. It is as if she had taken a knife and slashed through everything that had come before this unsparing final judgment.

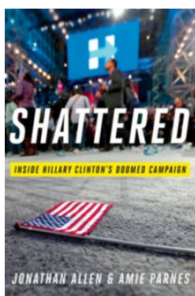
This isn't to say that Paley curbed her "cultivated individualism." In the nineties, she turned again to poems, her first literary love. They are more plain-spoken, politically and personally, than her stories, though often full of the same surprising humor and wit. Yet one wonders how Paley came to decide that the fictional imagination, which loves digression, inconsistency, and the beauty of the trivial, could no longer help her say what she wanted to about the world.

Recently, I've been thinking of one story in particular, "Anxiety," also from "Later the Same Day," which, though only about three pages long, isn't included in the "Reader." It is April, "the season of first looking out the window." The narrator, an older woman, is gazing past her box of marigolds at a young attractive father who has picked up his little girl from the school across the street and set her on his shoulders. But the girl is wiggling too much, saying "oink." Her father puts her down harshly, yelling at her. The woman leans out her window and calls after him:

Young man, I am an older person who feels free because of that to ask questions and give advice. . . . Son, I must tell you that madmen intend to destroy this beautifully made planet. That the murder of our children by these men has got to become a terror and a sorrow to you, and starting now, it had better interfere with any daily pleasure.

The father is embarrassed, a bit surly, but he listens to what the woman has to say. She wants to know what could have happened to justify his anger at his child. He thinks. The problem was the word "oink"—he once said it to the cops, and he doesn't want it said to him, as if he were some sinister authority figure. Very good, the woman says, why doesn't he try again? He lifts his daughter up, and off they gallop like horse and rider. "I lean way out to cry once more, Be careful! Stop!" She is thinking of the busy intersection they are about to reach, of all the danger that she sees ahead. They are too far off to hear her warning. So she settles back down to imagine where they will go out to play on this gorgeous day while she sits alone with her precious, bitter knowledge. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



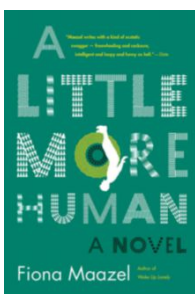
Shattered, by Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes (Crown). This withering account of Hillary Clinton's Presidential campaign draws on interviews conducted with staffers as the race unfolded. Robby Mook, who ran the operation, is portrayed as being obsessed with analytics and demographics, to the exclusion of the traditional politics of persuasion. Regional directors, begging for resources, are told that their states won't matter, and everyone waits for the next headline about e-mails. The candidate herself, largely out of view, emerges mostly to spread blame: "In her view, it was up to the people she paid to find the right message for her." The book's perspective yields a great deal of backroom color, but its insights are limited, which is partly the point: the Clinton campaign never had a clear picture of its own candidate or of what was coming.



The Great Cat and Dog Massacre, by Hilda Kean (Chicago). Over four days in September, 1939, pet owners in London, anticipating an aerial bombing campaign by the Germans, euthanized some four hundred thousand cats and dogs. Kean's goal, in this multifaceted history, is to get at the many reasons for the unprecedented event, which was voluntary, advised against by major governmental bodies, and premature: the first bombs didn't fall until seven months later. Pursuing questions as varied as a pet's value in the years leading up to the war, how the idea of war-preparedness (or "doing things") goaded people into acting drastically (and often pointlessly), and how the event shaped thinking on animal rights, Kean achieves an unusual psychological portrait of a society in wartime.



Number 11, by Jonathan Coe (Knopf). To succeed, satire needs to be self-aware, so it is a good sign when a character in this mordant novel of British politics says that "every kind of public discussion has to have a veneer of comedy. Politics especially." The book (a sequel of sorts to Coe's "The Winshaw Legacy") addresses the corrosive power of both austerity and wealth, and the burden of choice versus coddling paternalism. These weighty topics are leavened by a mischievous narrative and a gothic humor: an academic is literally crushed by his obsession; in an exclusive area of London, "closed-circuit cameras sprout among the ivy and the sycamore trees." Yet the dominant note is one of horror at the changeless injustice of the modern social compact, and the violence it entails.



A Little More Human, by Fiona Maazel (Graywolf Press). This idiosyncratic thriller, set in Staten Island, is layered with secrets: the antihero, Phil, has the power to read minds; his mother may have committed suicide; his neuroscientist father has incipient dementia; and his wife used a sperm donor to conceive. When Phil receives incriminating photographs of himself from a night he cannot remember, he's drawn into a dark conspiracy about a radically innovative medical center, founded by his parents. The novel's paranormal elements (a diabolical villain's glass eye has superhuman powers) do not fully counteract the ubiquity of the genre's tropes, like meetings conducted in remote lighthouses.

LOOKING AND SEEING

A Louise Lawler retrospective.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

*Lawler's "Untitled 1950-51" (1987): a Miró and its reflection.*

I REMEMBER WHEN photographs by Louise Lawler, currently the subject of a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, first hurt my feelings, some thirty years ago. They pictured paintings by Miró, Pollock, Johns, and Warhol as they appeared in museums, galleries, auction houses, storage spaces, and collectors' homes. A Miró co-starred with its own reflection in the glossy surface of a museum bench. The floral pattern on a Limoges soup tureen vied with a Pollock drip painting on a wall above it. Johns's "White Flag" harmonized with a monogrammed bedspread. An auction label next to a round gold Warhol "Marilyn" estimated the work's value at between three hundred thousand and four hundred thousand dollars. (That was in 1988. Today, you might not be permitted a bid south of eight figures.)

I knew what Lawler's game was: "institutional critique," a strategy deployed by members and associates of the Pictures Generation. That theory-

educated cohort—which included Barbara Kruger, who produced mordant feminist agitprop, and Sherrie Levine, who took deadpan photographs of classic modern photographs—beamed contempt at established myths, modes, and motives of prestige in art. As a sort of mandarin parallel to punk, the movement disdained the idealism of previous avant-gardes. I found most of its ploys lamely obvious: bullets whizzing past my head. But Lawler got me square in the heart.

There is a recurrent moment, for lovers of art, when we shift from looking at a work to actively seeing it. It's like entering a waking dream, as if we were children cued by "Once upon a time." We don't reflect on the worldly arrangements—the interests of wealth and power—that enable our adventures. Why should we? But, if that consciousness is forced on us, we may be frozen mid-toggle between looking and seeing. Lawler's strategy is seduction: her photographs delight. We

are beguiled by the bench, wowed by the tureen, amused by the bedspread, and piqued by the wall label. She knows what we want. Marcel Duchamp called art "a habit-forming drug." Lawler deals us poisoned fixes. The image of the Warhol appears twice in the show, under two titles: "Does Andy Warhol Make You Cry?" and "Does Marilyn Monroe Make You Cry?" Your emotional responses to the painting are thus anticipated and cauterized. The effect is rather sadistic, but also perhaps masochistic. Lawler couldn't mock aesthetic sensitivity if she didn't share it. Her work suggests an antic self-awareness typical of standup comics. It feels authentic, at any rate.

Lawler was born in 1947 in Bronxville, New York. Having graduated with a bachelor-of-fine-arts degree from Cornell University, in 1969, she moved to New York City, and got a job at the Leo Castelli Gallery. That's about the extent of the biographical information she has made available. She shuns interviews, and whenever she is asked for a photograph of herself she provides a picture of a parrot seen from behind while turning its head to look back at you, Betty Grable style. Lawler varied that tactic in 1990, when the magazine *Artscribe* requested a likeness for a cover: she submitted a photograph of Meryl Streep (with the actress's permission), captioned "Recognition Maybe, May Not Be Useful." Lawler's stand against celebrity deserves respect, despite the fact that it comes from an artist whose work advertises her entrée to the inner sanctums of museums and private collections—her derisive treatment of them notwithstanding—and her ability to have Meryl Streep return her calls. The road to becoming famous while remaining unknown does not run smooth.

Yet although Lawler has resisted public exposure, she has been collegial with her peers. Among the early pieces in the MOMA show are two photographs, from 1982, of works by fellow-artists, including Sherrie Levine, Roy Lichtenstein, and Jenny Holzer, which Lawler had arranged in two different groups, on black backdrop paper, in one case, and tulip-red paper, in the other. Dominating each

arrangement is a “Cow” poster, by Warhol, which he sent to Lawler in 1977, in return for the favor of giving him a roll of film at a party when he had run out. She has photographed more works by Warhol than by any other artist, and with what seems an unusual affection; her own art wouldn’t be conceivable without his trailblazing confections of culture high, low, and sideways. But Warhol’s happy commodifying of art couldn’t sit well with her, given the ideological slants that she shares with others in her social and artistic milieu.

From 1981 to 1995, Lawler was married to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, the formidably erudite German-American art historian and apostle of Frankfurt School critical philosophy, who can winkle out malignancies of the hopefully termed “late capitalism” in just about anything. Certainly, her work has invited that sort of analysis, which some of the eight essays in the show’s catalogue doggedly apply. But one essay pleasantly surprises. In it, the British art historian Julian Stallabrass wonders how it is “that Lawler’s art, which is sly, slight and light, quick, jokey, agile, epigrammatic, and perhaps subversive, has elicited a literature that is slow, ponderous, grinding, and heavy.” Lawler’s tendentious critics lumber past the sense of a personal drama—ethics at odds with aesthetics, and rigor with yearning—that makes her by far the most arresting artist of her kind. She transcends the dreary impression, endemic to most institutional critique, of preaching to a choir.

Humor helps. Having landed herself in a war zone between creating art and objectifying it, and between belonging to the art world and resenting it, Lawler capers in the crossfire. She charms with such ephemera as paperweights, matchbooks, napkins, and invitations—one announces a performance by New York City Ballet, tickets to be purchased at the box office—that reproduce her photographs or are imprinted with bits of teasing text. (The MOMA show takes its title from a sort of Zen koan that Lawler rendered on a matchbook, in 1981: “Why Pictures Now.”) For “Birdcalls” (1972/1981), a sound piece broadcast,

for the show, in MOMA’s garden, she recorded herself chirping the names of twenty-eight celebrated male contemporary artists, who are listed alphabetically, on a glass wall, from Vito Acconci to Lawrence Weiner.

Her recent work lampoons the pressure on artists to produce big-scale works to satisfy a trend, in galleries and museums, toward ever pompously larger exhibition spaces. It consists of photographs, or tracings of them, that she has made of art works installed in museums: sculptures by Jeff Koons and Donald Judd; paintings by Lucio Fontana and Frank Stella. The pictures are enlarged and distorted, scrunched or elongated, to fit the dimensions of vast walls. (In one of them, shot from floor level in a room displaying minimalist works by Judd, Stella, and Sol LeWitt, the blur of someone’s striding leg intrudes evidence of real time on putatively timeless art.) The effect of the mural-making distortions is spectacularly clumsy, cranking up a pitch of arbitrariness to something like a shriek.

Lawler’s work is periodically topical, as with her occasional, somewhat frail gestures of antiwar sentiment. (Shelves of glass tumblers engraved with the words “No Drones,” from 2013, don’t exactly menace the Pentagon.) But, even if she didn’t intend the significance that I take away from the show—an antagonism to art’s organs of commerce and authority in gridlock with a profound dependence on them—her career has a timely political importance. The retrospective comes at a moment when an onslaught of illiberal forces in the big world dwarfs intellectual wrangles in the little one of art. Who, these days, can afford the patience for mixed feelings about the protocols of cultural institutions? Artists can. Some artists must. Art often serves us by exposing conflicts among our values, not to propose solutions but to tap energies of truth, however partial, and beauty, however fugitive; and the service is greatest when our worlds feel most in crisis. Charles Baudelaire, the Moses of modernity, wrote, “I have cultivated my hysteria with terror and delight.” Lawler does that, too, with disciplined wit and hopeless integrity. ♦

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REWIND

Lucas Hnath's sequel to "A Doll's House."

BY HILTON ALS



“THIS IS A hard story to tell.” So writes Joan Didion near the start of her 1984 novel, “Democracy,” a book that’s narrated by a character named Joan Didion, who describes the difficulty of devising a whole fiction in the fragmented modern world. Like a number of her contemporaries or near-contemporaries—Julian Barnes and Renata Adler among them—Didion is ultimately challenging the writer’s empirical “I,” a subject that Susan Sontag tackled in an essay published in this magazine, in 1973:

Inevitably, disestablishing the “author” brings about a redefinition of “writing.” . . . All pre-modern literature evolves from the classical conception of writing as an impersonal, self-sufficient, freestanding achievement. Modern literature projects a quite different idea: the romantic conception of writing as a medium in which a singular personality heroically exposes itself.

In many ways, the work of the thirty-seven-year-old playwright Lucas Hnath grows out of the authorial complexities of that older generation of writers. (He owes something to Tom Stoppard, too.) But instead of writing directly about the experience of writing or not writing, inventing or not inventing, Hnath has now found himself by parsing and filling in a story he didn’t write, Henrik Ibsen’s “A Doll’s House.”

“A Doll’s House, Part 2” (directed by Sam Gold, at the John Golden), Hnath’s invigorating ninety-minute, intermissionless work, is an irresponsible act—a kind of naughty imposition on a classic, which, in addition to investing Ibsen’s signature play with the humor that the nineteenth-century artist lacked, raises a number of questions, such as What

constitutes an individual achievement in this age of the simulacrum, when everything owes something to something else?

Ibsen was born about a hundred and fifty years before Hnath, in Skien, Norway, into a family of merchants. His parents were unusually close, and he was both fascinated and horrified by their relationship. The question of intimacy—and its connections to money, Christian morality, and gender roles, or, more specifically, how a woman should behave—excited his dramatic imagination and also made him a critic of the mores he grew up with. Widely considered the father of modern realism, Ibsen wrote “A Doll’s House” in 1879, and it changed everything. Before that, he’d produced a number of scripts in verse, but poetry had sort of prettified his characters, and the restrictions of the form prevented them from getting to the heart, or the marrow, of their stories. Ibsen switched to prose for its more immediate effects—and as a way of shocking audiences out of their complacency. “A Doll’s House” did just that.

In Ibsen’s day, people went to the theatre to see their values upheld, not attacked. When Nora Helmer, the play’s protagonist, shut the door on her husband, her children, and her bourgeois life, and went out into the world with no connections to her past and none to advance her future, it was left to the audience to wonder what would become of her. To go from dreaming about Nora’s life to writing it required a leap of faith—an author’s faith in his own imagination—and that’s the kind of energy that jumps out at you from Hnath’s play, his strongest yet. It’s a treat to watch his Nora come to life without sacrificing the emotional and political architecture that Ibsen built into and around her.

The characters in the piece are the same as in Ibsen’s, until they become something else—Hnath’s. The setting: a high-ceilinged sitting room in a nineteenth-century middle-class home. It’s sparsely furnished and bright. What you notice first is the door, dark and tall. Someone is knocking and a maid, Anne Marie (Jayne Houdyshell), enters, huffing and puffing. “Hold on, I’m coming,” she says. Opening the door, Anne Marie discovers Nora (Laurie Metcalf). In her stylish hat, fitted jacket, and long skirt, she looks prosperous as she walks purposefully toward—what?

In “A Doll’s House, Part 2,” Nora (Laurie Metcalf) has written her own story.

Well, well. Here she is again, after so many years—fifteen, to be exact. Since leaving her husband, Torvald (Chris Cooper), Nora has discovered her own voice and become—drumroll, please—a writer. A popular feminist writer who writes under a pseudonym. Her first book was about a woman who was in a seemingly good marriage, with children and so on, and who left it all, just like that. Having basically written her own story, Nora discovered that many other women had experienced similar predicaments. Now she's in town very briefly, with a task to accomplish. It turns out that she's not divorced from Torvald. She needs him to sign a document saying that he is divorcing her: by law, no woman can divorce her husband without proof of mistreatment.

While Houdyshell and Metcalf go about their work—each gives her role the ideal pacing, balancing humor and resentment with business that is unexpected and true, such as Nora's habit of taking swigs of water from a bottle she keeps in her bag, like a jogger cooling down after a long run—the ideas keep coming, fast and delicious. Nora has written a book about her life? How could she do that when Ibsen invented her and Hnath is reinventing her? How real *is* she? Because we know her story, she's real to us, maybe even more real than what's happening outside the theatre. The thoughts go on: We're watching a play written, in a sense, by two male playwrights. Wouldn't it be "truer" if a woman wrote the story? Or is Nora, as played by the fierce Metcalf, writing her story now, by making Hnath's text her own?

Like so many of Stoppard's works in which historical figures come up against the playwright's irrepressible love of ideas, Hnath's script is a kind of metafiction.

"A Doll's House, Part 2" is a play about a play, and about men looking at women—though not condescendingly, or with anything approaching lust and, thus, the idea of possession. Although Hnath's Nora is free, she, like most of us, is still bound to the thing that we can leave behind but never fully divest ourselves of: family.

I've seen all Hnath's plays that were produced downtown. This is his first Broadway venture and the first of his works that has moved me in a complete way. There were moments in his 2015 piece, "The Christians," that rocked me, but "Red Speedo" (2016) left me cold. It felt trumped up, hanging on a sliver of an idea, and an old idea at that: male competition, inside and outside the locker room. "A Doll's House, Part 2" is less implicitly macho than Hnath's previous works, perhaps in part because it has a gay influence: David Adjmi's "Marie Antoinette" (2013). Like that work, Hnath's is divided into scenes marked by titles and uses language that stresses the colloquial in a period setting. (It has become a trend in downtown theatre to take a work set in another era and infuse it with talk from this one. Presumably, the intention is to create a slightly "off" or disjunctive atmosphere, but I suspect that the device will soon start to feel tired.) And Sam Gold's direction, very cast-supportive, reminded me of Rebecca Taichman's vision for the Adjmi play, down to the swiftness with which the lines were spoken and the way scenes sometimes began with little preamble. It was thrilling to feel that the writer and the director weren't condescending to us and assumed we'd keep up. We do, because Nora matters to us and will always matter to us.

It doesn't feel as if Gold has really done

much with Chris Cooper. But that may not be Gold's fault: Cooper's passive-aggressive energy, sublime on film, gets swallowed up by the powerful actresses around him. (He's the only man in the piece.) Metcalf does her best to draw him out, to help him dramatize his interiority, but all he really conveys is a kind of soft-edged confusion; you can't see or feel Torvald's anger when he discovers Nora in his home. Conversely, Condola Rashad, as Emmy, the daughter Nora left behind, is perfect in every way. Now a grown woman, Emmy meets her mother with her back stiff with propriety and her self firmly in place. She will not follow Nora's path, but has forged her own—in the more comforting country of convention. In Emmy's scene with Nora, recriminations float just above the strained pleasantries between mother and child. There's something profound, too, in the words that Emmy won't speak, or even let herself think: How could you have left us for anything, let alone for self-love? She stares out into the theatre. If she looked at Nora directly, would she die of love? Or rage? I have seen Rashad in a variety of roles on Broadway, and in each one she has lacked either a great script or a great director—the shows just never came together for her. This one does. And it takes a moment for us to recall that in Ibsen's play Emmy has only a walk-on part; she isn't heard from. This means that she is Hnath's most fully invented character in this spectacle about family, law, and a woman's right to choose—at a price. For Emmy, Hnath didn't need to push Ibsen aside to find his way; he simply, and not so simply, trusted his own imagination to carry the joy and the weight of telling a story, of making things up. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Peter Kuper, must be received by Sunday, May 7th. The finalists in the April 24th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 22nd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



“There goes my novel.”
William Postle, Anaheim, Calif.

“We'll see how affectionate he is when he finds out who ate his parrot.”
Adam Wagner, Santa Monica, Calif.

“He calls it Ishmeow.”
Ronnie Raviv, Chicago, Ill.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“Hire the one that said, ‘Whom.’”
Jason Berger, San Diego, Calif.

Wear a part of history.



“The March”
Abigail Gray Swartz, February 6, 2017

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