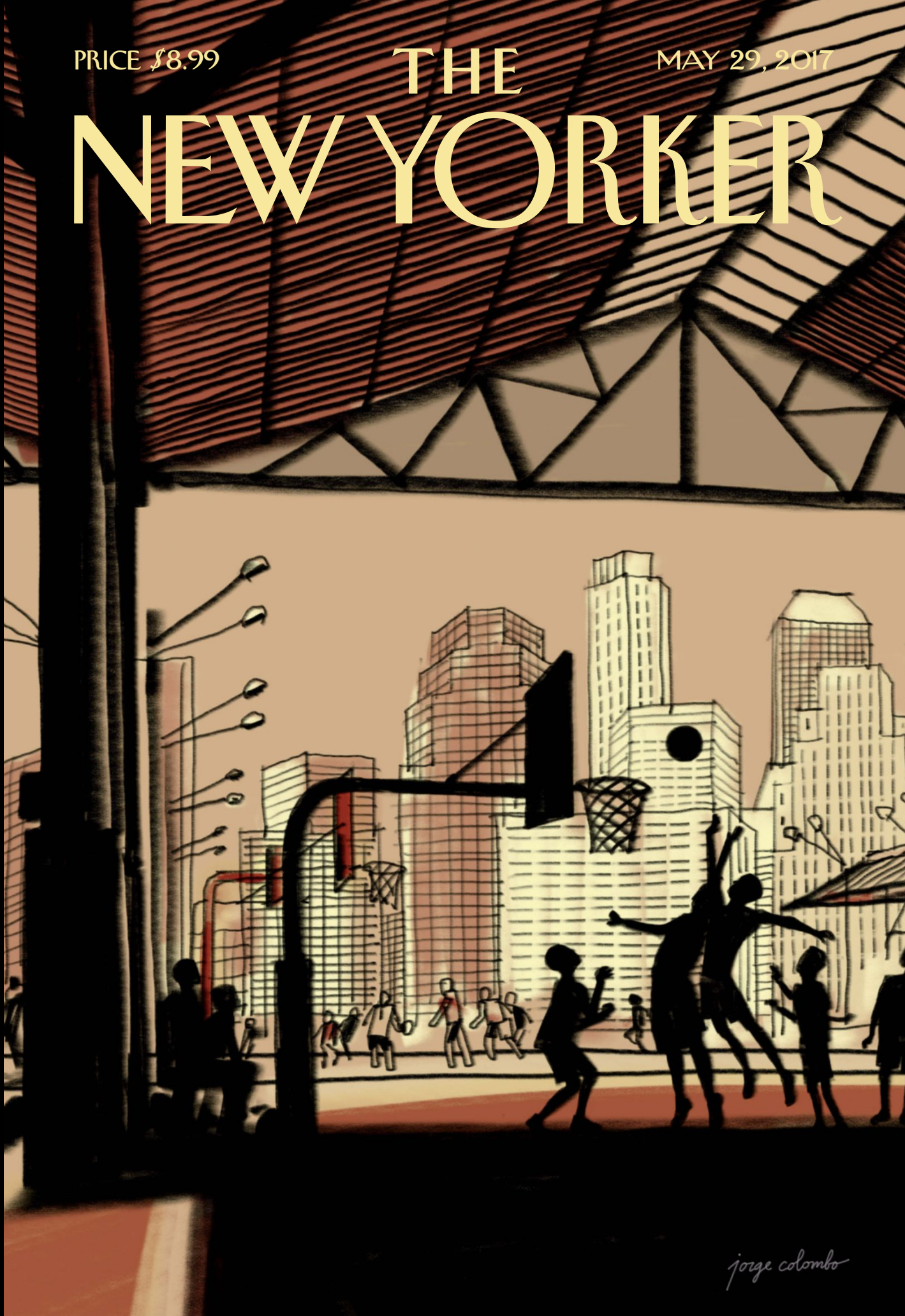


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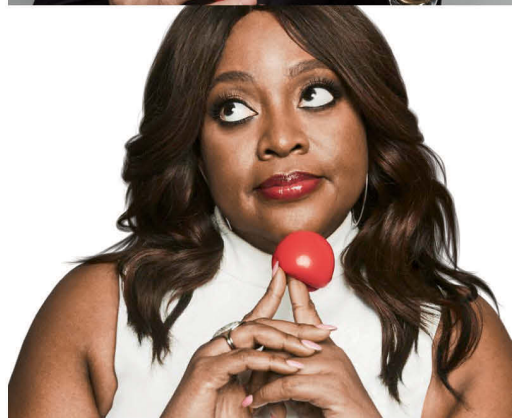
# THE NEW YORKER

MAY 29, 2017

- 4 **GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN**
- 15 **THE TALK OF THE TOWN**  
*Evan Osnos on turmoil in the White House; nation mixups; Griffin Dunne; art and Masons; Adam Davidson on fixing health-care pricing.*
- Ryan Lizza** 20 **THE POLITICAL SCENE**  
Firing Back  
*Sally Yates vs. the White House.*
- Hallie Cantor** 27 **SHOUTS & MURMURS**  
The Writer's Process
- David Owen** 28 **ANNALS OF GEOLOGY**  
The End of Sand  
*A vital resource grows scarce.*
- Dexter Filkins** 34 **PROFILES**  
The Warrior Monk  
*James Mattis leads the Department of Defense.*
- Joshua Yaffa** 46 **LETTER FROM RUSSIA**  
Oligarchy 2.0  
*Putin builds a bridge to Crimea.*
- Samanta Schweblin** 56 **FICTION**  
"The Size of Things"
- Peter Schjeldahl** 60 **THE CRITICS**  
**THE ART WORLD**  
*A Robert Rauschenberg retrospective.*
- Tobi Haslett** 63 **BOOKS**  
*Revisiting Diana Trilling.*
- Adam Kirsch** 67 *The struggles of Czesław Miłosz.*  
71 Briefly Noted
- Carrie Batten** 72 **POP MUSIC**  
*Lil Yachty's "Teenage Emotions."*
- Anthony Lane** 74 **THE CURRENT CINEMA**  
*"Alien: Covenant."*
- Mary Karr** 39 **POEMS**  
*"Carnegie Hall Rush Seats"*
- Dora Malech** 52 *"I Now Pronounce You"*
- Jorge Colombo** **COVER**  
*"Brooklyn Bridge Park"*

**DRAWINGS** Kaamran Hafeez, Harry Bliss, Tom Chitty, Carolita Johnson, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Kim Warp, Jason Adam Katzenstein, Tom Toro, Roz Chast, Edward Steed, Michael Maslin, Drew Dernavich, Joe Dator, Benjamin Schwartz, David Sipress **SPOTS** Philippe Petit-Roulet

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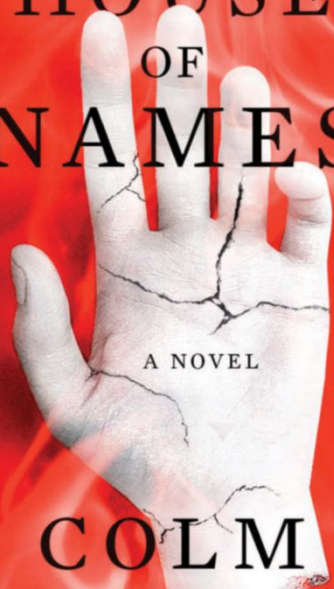
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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ryan Lizza** (“*Firing Back*,” p. 20) is the magazine’s Washington correspondent and an on-air contributor for CNN.

**Samanta Schweblin** (*Fiction*, p. 56) is the author of four books, including “Fever Dream,” which was published in January in a translation, from the Spanish, by Megan McDowell. Her short-story collection “Mouthful of Birds” comes out in English next year.

**Tobi Haslett** (*Books*, p. 63) has contributed writing to *n+1*, *Artforum*, and *Bookforum*.

**Dora Malech** (*Poem*, p. 52) has written two poetry collections. Her third, “Flourish,” will be published next fall.

**Joshua Yaffa** (“*Oligarchy 2.0*,” p. 46) is a *New Yorker* contributor based in Moscow and a fellow at New America.

**Adam Kirsch** (*Books*, p. 67) directs the M.A. Program in Jewish Studies at Columbia. He is the author of “The People and the Books,” which came out in October.

**Dexter Filkins** (“*The Warrior Monk*,” p. 34), a staff writer, is the author of “The Forever War,” which won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

**Hallie Cantor** (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 27), a regular contributor to *Daily Shouts*, on *newyorker.com*, was a writer for the third season of Comedy Central’s “Inside Amy Schumer.”

**David Owen** (“*The End of Sand*,” p. 28) is the author of “Where the Water Goes,” which came out last month. The book is based on his article “Where the River Runs Dry,” which appeared in the May 25, 2015, issue of the magazine.

**Leo Mirani** (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 16) is the news editor of *The Economist*.

**Dana Goodyear** (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 18), a staff writer since 2007, teaches at the University of Southern California.

**Jorge Colombo** (*Cover*), an illustrator, photographer, and graphic designer, has contributed covers to the magazine since 2009.

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# THE MAIL

## TERRORISM AND THE COURT

In William Finnegan's article about Zainab Ahmad, a federal counterterrorism prosecutor for the Eastern District of New York, I was surprised to see an anonymous quote from a prosecutor implying that lawyers from my office—the federal defenders—pleaded out a client even partially because of Ahmad's reputation ("A Righteous Case," May 15th). Contrary to what prosecutors may wish to believe, the reputation of a prosecutor rarely makes a difference in how we approach a case. The evidence, yes. The judge, yes. It's disheartening that Finnegan would write an uncritical piece on terrorism prosecutions. The article fails to investigate the use of evidence gained from torture by foreign law enforcement; the domestic use of informants to encourage people to express and to act on jihadist sentiments; or the mental-health issues, common to these cases, that make defendants susceptible to jihadist propaganda. Often, had the defendants received treatment, they might never have committed a crime. I am sure that readers will walk away from the piece very impressed with Ahmad's work. Sadly, their views will not be well informed or balanced.

*Deirdre D. von Dornum*

*Attorney-in-Charge, Eastern District,  
Federal Defenders of New York  
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

## SHARING NOT CARING

Reading Nathan Heller's piece on the rise of the gig economy brought to mind my experience working as a waiter in New York during the past few years ("The Gig Is Up," May 15th). Similar to the gig economy, in which workers are considered independent contractors rather than employees, the service industry features few benefits, little job security, and people living paycheck to paycheck. But there is a crucial difference: despite customers essentially paying the front-of-house staff directly, through tips, employers in the service industry are still compelled to pay an hourly wage and,

in New York City, to provide sick leave. That workers in the gig economy must accept less to insure employment is a sign of a sick economy, not a shiny new one.

*John Wolfe  
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Heller portrays the entanglement of the gig economy and the Democratic Party as an ideological collaboration. For as long as Silicon Valley has been a tech hub, waves of former Washington, D.C., political veterans, including Republican operatives, have moved there to lobby. They have also long bounced between D.C. and Wall Street, using their political and regulatory connections to maximize their earning power in the financial world. The Democratic political operatives currently working in the Valley are not necessarily there for ideological reasons. They've gone where the money is.

*Gabriel Dabscheck  
Melbourne, Australia*

## A DEATH-PENALTY DILEMMA

Jelani Cobb's article described the arguments against the death penalty, but it didn't address what to do with people who continue to commit violent crimes while in prison (Comment, May 8th). Recently, in South Carolina, two inmates serving life sentences for multiple murders strangled to death four of their fellow-inmates. A couple of years ago, here in Georgia, there was an execution of an inmate who, while serving a long sentence for murdering his girlfriend, killed his cellmate. One Georgia prison has a special section for the most violent inmates, including those who have murdered other inmates. Life sentences do not mean that these offenders just disappear. They still have to be dealt with every day.

*Lamar Smith  
Atlanta, Ga.*

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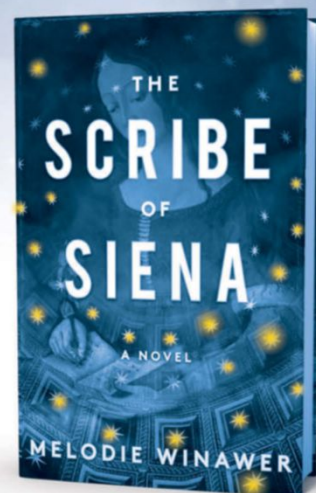
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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



**Royal Osiris Karaoke Ensemble**, the “musical priesthood” formed by Tei Blow and Sean McElroy, finds mystical absurdity in modern life by splicing found media and ancient ritual. In “The Art of Luv (Part 1): Elliot,” the group explored toxic masculinity by repurposing YouTube videos by the mass murderer Elliot Rodger while dressed like pagan gods. Part 5 of the series, “Swipe Right/ROKÉ Cupid” (above), at the Bushwick Starr May 24-June 10, draws on dating profiles and ecstatic poetry to create a postmodern courtship ceremony.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DOLLY FAIBYSHEV

# MOVIES

## OPENING

**Baywatch** A comedy, based on the television series, about two lifeguards (Dwayne Johnson and Zac Efron) who team up to solve a murder. Directed by Seth Gordon; co-starring Alexandra Daddario and Priyanka Chopra. *Opening May 25.* (In wide release.) • **Hermia & Helena** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening May 26.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center and Metrograph.) • **Long Strange Trip** A documentary about the Grateful Dead, directed by Amir Bar-Lev. *Opening May 26.* (In limited release.) • **Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales** The fifth entry in the series, starring Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow, who confronts a ghostly enemy (Javier Bardem). Directed by Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg; co-starring Kaya Scodelario. *Opening May 26.* (In wide release.)

## NOW PLAYING

### An Affair to Remember

The mess that religious piety makes of carnal passion bursts uproariously onto the screen in Leo McCarey's worldly wise yet heaven-drunk love story, from 1957. Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr meet cute aboard a New York-bound ocean liner; he's an international playboy, and she's a scuffling chanteuse. Both are engaged to people with money, but they instantly fall into the rhythm of graceful banter that reflects deep affinity, and they vow to end their prior commitments and marry. McCarey plays the shipboard courtship for generous and tender laughs—the wryly staged first kiss is one of the sweetest in all cinema—but the comedy that follows on dry land is mostly inadvertent. The Empire State Building, the pair's intended meeting place, comes off as a phallic cathedral, and the obstacles that fate throws in their way—as if in retribution for the sins of betrayal, lust, and hope for celestial happiness on Earth—are riotously cartoonish but provoke no change in directorial tone. The suddenly sanitized tale lurches toward the finish with an all-time howler of a last line.—Richard Brody (MOMA, May 25, and streaming.)

### Beauty and the Beast

Back from the drawing board, into live-action, comes yet another version of the tale. Disney has taken its own animated film from 1991 and, at vast expense, tried to keep it real—or, in the case of the actors, half-real. Emma Watson, whose determined air is not matched by her singing voice, plays the book-loving Belle. She takes the place of her father (Kevin Kline) as the prisoner of the Beast (Dan Stevens), who in turn is held captive by a magic spell. Moping and short-tempered, he dwells in his castle, attended by living objects—the clock (Ian McKellen), the teapot (Emma Thompson), the full-throated wardrobe (Audra McDonald), and so on. Belle's task, of which she seems all too aware, is to fall for the Beast and thus restore his proper nature, as a handsome and slightly boring prince. The songs from 1991 are reheated and dished up anew, together with a batch of fresh numbers, by Alan Menken and Tim Rice; the resulting movie, though stuffed with wonders, is forty-five

minutes longer than its predecessor and much less dramatically lean.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 3/27/17.) (In wide release.)

### Bless Their Little Hearts

Billy Woodberry's only dramatic feature to date, from 1983, looks deeply into the life of one family in Watts and plots its crisis in three dimensions: race, money, and gender. Charlie Banks (Nate Hardman), first seen in an employment office, has been jobless for a decade and does day labor when he can get it. His wife, Andais (Kaycee Moore), is the family's main support, but, when it's time to give their three lively and helpful young children their allowance, she slips the coins to Charlie, for him to dole out as the nominal head of the household. Working with a script and cinematography by Charles Burnett, Woodberry crafts a passionately pensive realism—nearly every scene of action is matched by a long one in which characters, in observant repose, look back and see themselves reflected in society's mirror. Bruised by struggle, Charlie seeks comfort with a former girlfriend; Andais has it out with him in a terrifying scene of domestic apocalypse, a single claustrophobic ten-minute take in which a lifetime of frustration bursts forth.—R.B. (IFC Center.)

### Chuck

Philippe Falardeau's new film is centered on the boxing ring, although only a fraction of it is spent in combat. The hero is Chuck Wepner (Liev Schreiber), a real-life fighter who almost went the distance with Muhammad Ali, in 1975, and never allowed anyone to forget it. We join him first in the buildup to the match, as he delivers liquor around Bayonne, New Jersey, and makes life tough for his wife, Phyliss (Elisabeth Moss), and then in the long and painful aftermath, when he trades on his spasm of fame, gets floored by drugs, and winds up sparring with a bear. The more intimate the movie grows, the more awkward it can be to watch—just look at Phyliss, joining her straying husband in a diner, where he's making nice to his latest pickup, or at Sylvester Stallone (Morgan Spector), offering Chuck a chance to be in "Rocky 2" and seeing him screw up. The script leans too heavily on voice-over, but there's no faulting the period texture and the rough-edged commitment of the performers; Schreiber nails both the bluster and the pathos of the hapless hulk.—A.L. (5/15/17) (In wide release.)

### The Commune

The Danish director Thomas Vinterberg has often turned to group studies—dramas that seem like anthropological experiments, bringing people together and noting the ways in which they form bonds and pull violently apart. That was the case with "The Celebration" (1998) and "The Hunt" (2012), and it happens again with his latest film, set in the nineteen-seventies. An architect named Erik (Ulrich Thomsen) inherits a large house in Copenhagen. His first impulse is to sell, but his wife, Anna (Trine Dyrholm), and their teen-age daughter, Freja (Martha Sofie Wallstrøm Hansen), think otherwise, and a new plan is hatched. The place becomes a haven for friends and strangers, as well as a testing ground for the idealistic liberties of the age; when Erik falls for a student named Emma (Helene Reingaard Neumann), she

is invited by Anna to join them in the communal home. By Vinterberg's standards, the drama feels meek; there's a regrettable subplot about an ailing child, and a surprising number of characters linger in the margins. Yet Dyrholm's performance is as tough and as truthful as ever, not least when Anna takes to the bottle and starts to crack. In Danish.—A.L. (In limited release and streaming.)

### The Devil Is a Woman

For his last film with Marlene Dietrich, from 1935, the director Josef von Sternberg—working as his own cinematographer—streaked and slashed the screen with shadows and highlights, clotted it with lace and foliage, to match the serpentine extravagance of his wily heroine's schemes. The surprise is in the politics: as the Spanish Civil War was heating up, von Sternberg set the action in turn-of-the-century Spain, where Antonio (Cesar Romero), a dashing young revolutionary, returns from Parisian exile amid the turmoil of carnival week and encounters the bewitching songstress Concha Perez (Dietrich). Antonio's friend Don Pasqual (Lionel Atwill), one of her victims, issues a warning with his own tale of woe (seen in extended flashbacks), but the romantic adventurer is not to be deterred, even at the risk of his mission and his life. Despite von Sternberg's evident sympathies for the daring freethinker Antonio, he finds a lurid erotic charge in the cruelty and the constraints of church-bound despotism and a heightened thrill in a femme fatale who may prove truly fatal.—R.B. (Metrograph, May 23–24, and streaming.)

### Good Morning

The opening shots of this 1959 comic drama—with their electrical towers on a hillside suburb, passers-by peeking through gaps between little houses, and uninformed schoolboys pretending to be flutulent robots—seem straight out of Jacques Tati but actually belong to the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu, whose sense of generational conflict is here at its sharpest and most anarchic. The story is centered on two young boys, the willful Minoru and his impish little brother, Isamu, who sneak out to watch sumo-wrestling broadcasts at a friend's house and protest, with a vow of silence, their father's refusal to buy a TV set. The title refers to grownups' small talk, which the boys find repellent; Ozu uses their silence as a shattering reproach to an insincere society—and their blunt aggression as a reproach to sincerity. The malice of gossip, the grinding struggle of office work, and the yearning for love are all softened by material comforts even as their production—as seen in a nightmarish jangle of overhead wires and smoke-spewing factories—evokes a country finally at peace but devoid of calm. In Japanese.—R.B. (Metrograph, May 27, and streaming.)

### Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2

The return of the ragtag outfit that made such an unexpected impression in 2014—here was a Marvel movie that presumed, if only in fits and starts, to spear its own pretensions. The crew in the sequel is pretty much unchanged: Peter Quill (Chris Pratt), who is way too goofy to deserve his title of Star-Lord; the mint-green Gamora (Zoe Saldana) and her semi-robotic sister (Karen Gillan); the enormous Drax (Dave Bautista), a stranger to the social graces; a thieving and sadistic critter named Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper); and Baby Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel), formerly a tree. New to the scene is Ego (Kurt Russell), whose name, it must be said, is a ready-made spoiler—he likes to flaunt his own planet in the way that other guys show off their sports

cars. The director, as before, is James Gunn, but, as the plot grinds onward, with its compound of the flimsy and the over-spectacular, and as the finale drags on forever, you sense that the genial balance of the first film has been mislaid. When the biggest laughs arise from a small piece of computer-generated wood, where does a franchise go next?—*A.L.* (5/15/17) (In wide release.)

### Hermia & Helena

The fanciful twists of this romantic roundelay by the Argentinean director Matías Piñeiro keep the Shakespearean promise of the title. It's centered on a Mulberry Street apartment that serves as an "institute" for one artistic fellow at a time. The story begins with a Buenos Aires artist named Carmen (María Villar), who's ending her fellowship in the vain hope that the program's manager, Lukas (Keith Poulson), a standoffish ex-rocker, will leave with her. She's replaced by a longtime friend, Camila (Agustina Muñoz), who's translating "A Midsummer Night's Dream" into Spanish. Camila has a boyfriend back home and an ex in Brooklyn (played by the filmmaker Dustin Guy Defa), but she's also in love with Lukas. Piñeiro keeps the action swinging freely between New York and Buenos Aires with bold subplots and pucky flashbacks, the shimmering mysteries of tenuous friendships and the breathless melodrama of family secrets. Filming cityscapes and intimate gestures with avid attention, adorning the dialogue with deep confessions and witty asides, Piñeiro conjures a cogently realistic yet gloriously imaginative vision of youthful ardor in love and art alike. Co-starring the filmmakers Mati Diop and Dan Sallitt.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center and Metrograph.)

### 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, and both are 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 in 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 wide release.)

### Snatched

In this leaden comedy, Emily (Amy Schumer), a retail clerk with delusions of glamour, plans an exotic vacation in Ecuador with her musician boyfriend. When he dumps her, she coaxes her mother, Linda (Goldie Hawn), who's divorced and solitary, into joining her on the trip. Happily enticed by a romance-novel-type hunk at the hotel bar, Emily persuades Linda to come with them on a back-road adventure that results in a kidnapping by local bandits. Spirited away to Colombia and left to their own devices, the women try to escape, leading to a series of tribulations that are meant to furnish comedic situations. But the director, Jonathan Levine, has no feel for comedy. Schumer fires off some asides of sharp obliviousness, but the humor, which may have seemed to fly in a script conference, sinks without a trace. Only one mercurial stunt, involving two retired American operatives (Wanda Sykes and Joan Cusack), has any glint of wit. With Ike Barinholtz, as Emily's agoraphobic brother, Jeffrey, and Bashir Salahuddin, as the State Department officer whom he badgers into action.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### Wakefield

This drama is adapted from a short story by E. L. Doctorow (originally published in *The New Yorker*) that is itself adapted from a story by Hawthorne. Unfortunately, the writer and director, Robin Swi-

cord, displays too little originality for the film to seem like anything but a dutiful copy. Bryan Cranston stars as Howard Wakefield, a New York corporate lawyer who lives in a sumptuous suburban house with his wife, Diana (Jennifer Garner), and their twin teen-age daughters. One night, coming home during a power outage, Howard chases a raccoon from the attic of the house's detached garage and decides to stay there. He takes up clandestine residence in the attic and settles in for days, weeks, months, living as a furtive scavenger and watching with binoculars as Diana copes with his disappearance. Howard recalls, in flashbacks, the stresses of their marriage, and he bemoans, in voice-over, the constraints of his comforts and responsibilities. But his clichéd life is rendered in clichés; his feral survivalism and his extended solitude are grossly oversimplified and underimagined.—*R.B.* (In limited release and video on demand.)

### The Woman Who Left

The Filipino director Lav Diaz wrote, directed, filmed, and edited this heatedly monumental drama of injustice and revenge, which runs nearly four hours. Set in 1997, it stars Charo Santos-Concio as Horacia, a woman who was falsely convicted of murder and has been imprisoned for thirty years. When the actual killer confesses, Horacia is freed, and she plots vengeance against her former lover, a plutocrat named Rodrigo, who had her framed after she left him. On returning to her town, she finds the privileges of wealth and power unchecked and the misery of the poor utterly unrelieved. Selling her home, she mingles with workers in Rodrigo's neighborhood in order to carry out her plot, and becomes deeply involved in their lives—especially that of Hollanda (John Lloyd Cruz), a cross-dressing gay man who is routinely brutalized by local men. Diaz displays the steadfast endurance of those who bear up under gross inequities in long, static, black-and-white shots that emphasize the grandeur and the dignity of their struggles, exchanging psychology for politics, but the pace is an anti-ornamental affectation that artificially distends an hour's worth of action. In Filipino.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center.)



"Hermia & Helena," the Argentinean filmmaker Matías Piñeiro's fifth feature, is his first to be set in New York. The action revolves around a downtown apartment where young artists (including a theatre director, played by Agustina Muñoz) pursue creative ambitions and romantic dreams.



# ART



An installation view of Joan Jonas's spellbinding "Reanimation (2010/2012/2013)," at the Harlem headquarters of Gavin Brown's Enterprise.

## Arc of Joan

*A pioneer of performance and video is finally getting her due.*

In 1970, Joan Jonas, then in her mid-thirties, took a trip to Japan, where she first encountered Noh theatre. The fourteenth-century form's use of masks and embrace of the supernatural would both become hallmarks of her own work. She also bought a Sony Portapak camera—her next-door neighbor in SoHo, Nam June Paik, had recently invented video art—setting the course for a genre-bending career in which distinctions between ritual and technology, performance and drawing, image and language, figure and landscape, and even human and animal become moot. It has taken art-world power brokers almost fifty years to catch up to Jonas's mythopoetic vision. (Never mind that when the German artist Joseph Beuys waxed similarly shamanic, he was labelled a genius.) Jonas triumphed at the 2015 Venice Biennale with an audiovisual ghost story, based on accounts collected in

Nova Scotia. (The artist has long divided her time between Cape Breton and her native New York City.) Next year, the Tate Modern will mount a career retrospective. And in Harlem the taste-making gallerist Gavin Brown inaugurates his new four-story headquarters with a show by the eighty-year-old artist, through June 11.

Before visitors reach the two immersive video installations at the heart of the exhibition, on the second and fourth floors of Brown's still not-quite-finished space, Jonas plays Toto to her own Wizard of Oz, pulling back the curtain to offer a behind-the-scenes glimpse of her process. A big room on the ground floor is filled with found objects that have appeared in Jonas's works over the decades and, to less winning effect, with repetitive charcoal drawings of her body, made during past performances. A taxidermic coyote, perched on top of a packing crate, oversees the proceedings. Tables display orderly arrangements of fishing lures, ramshackle models of houses, a painted-tin butterfly, a stitched-leather polar bear, a flea-market painting

of three shaggy dogs, talismanic rocks, and much more. On one wall, a bestiary of masks is punctuated by mirrors: you become just another prop in Jonas's animal pageant, which also includes watercolor sketches of birds.

"It's a pity we don't whistle at one another like birds. Words are misleading," the Icelandic novelist Halldór Laxness wrote in "Under the Glacier," the 1968 book that inspired the most soul-stirring work in Jonas's exhibition, "Reanimation." What began as a lecture-performance at M.I.T., in 2010, has evolved into a multiscreen extravaganza surrounding a sculpture of dangling prismatic crystals, which sends flashes of light darting onto projections of glacial landscapes and the occasional seal, filmed in an archipelago in the Arctic Circle. Jonas also appears onscreen, drawing with black ink and with ice. The spellbinding piece is non-narrative, with no sense of beginning or end. As long as you remain in this world, Jonas seems to suggest, you're still just passing through.

—Andrea K. Scott

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**Metropolitan Museum**

“Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons: Art of the In-Between”

This year’s Costume Institute exhibition eschews chronology, instead presenting the radical Japanese fashion designer’s exquisite and brutal pieces as a solar system of ideas. Among the first garments you encounter is a voluminous dress of crinkled brown paper, whose sealed sleeves suggest deflating beach balls, from Kawakubo’s Autumn/Winter 2017-18 collection, “The Future of Silhouette.” The oversized, crumpled form is exemplary of Kawakubo’s haute-punk conceptual sensibility; the gown’s sculptural presence flaunts its impracticality, issuing a challenge to the accepted purposes of both clothing and bodies. The elusive designer became infamous in the early nineteen-eighties for such resolutely drab clothing as the gathered cocoon dresses of her “Round Rubber” collection. Shroudlike disguises figure into her work from subsequent decades, too, counterbalanced by absurdly tailored pieces, including cinched whirlpools of deconstructed menswear and gingham frocks deformed by asymmetrical humps. Kawakubo’s visionary designs are marvellously displayed in an airy white hive of compartments, with elevated ledges and roundish rooms to peer into. Although a substantial printed guide is made available at the entrance, wall text is kept to a blissful minimum. Given Kawakubo’s rejection of historical narrative and of fashion’s winking self-referentiality, there is only one rule for experiencing the joys of this exhibition: go. *Through Sept. 4.*

**New Museum**

“Carol Rama: Antibodies”

At long last, New York is granted a retrospective of the incomparable, morbidly oracular, category-defying, and—until recently—overlooked Italian artist. This condensed, career-spanning show is the largest U.S. exhibition of her work to date. Rama, who died in 2015, at the age of ninety-seven, grew up under Fascist rule, and her delightfully lewd, menacing œuvre can be seen as a lifelong rebuke of its strictures. Her early watercolors feature figures with darting, knifelike tongues; images of dismemberment; phalli cradled in low-heeled pumps; and women squatting to expose their genitals, or being penetrated by snakes—all rendered with a perverse, untrained delicacy. Following the censorship of her work, in 1945, Rama eschewed figuration for years, aligning herself with the Concrete Art movement’s project of geometric abstraction. But her art retained a visceral energy and an underlying gruesomeness, and in the sixties her bricolage works again incorporated direct references to the body, or body parts. Her use of swarms of glass doll eyes is an unsettling foil to scabby surfaces and splatter-painted compositions. Eventually, elements of her original, figurative lexicon, such as the obscene, taunting tongues, returned to her work. “Antibodies” is a satisfying and invigorating, though small, survey of a brilliant and prolific artist, who is deserving of a more prominent place in avant-garde history. Those new to her work will be astounded, and devotees will find her anti-Fascist provocations evergreen. *Through Sept. 10.*

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**Lonnie Holley**

Holley’s life story, at least as he tells it, would knock you out even if he weren’t an artist of exceeding gifts. Born around 1950 in Jim Crow Alabama, at the age of four he was traded for a bottle of whiskey, and was later raised in a family with twenty-six children. (Holley is now a father of fifteen.) He left school after the seventh grade, then dug graves, picked cotton, worked as a short-order cook, and was run over by a car—all before his twenty-ninth birthday. He then began making art of such elegance and economy that even a random pile of garbage bound to a wooden board with plastic netting pleases the eye. Simpler assemblages, such as a lawn jockey in a gas mask or a dress form with four wooden pistols attached to it, are equally powerful. Holley also cuts steel: “The Seer” combines several profile silhouettes into an eight-foot-tall sculpture, a striking vision of consciousness as ad hoc and multifarious. *Through May 28. (Fuentes, 55 Delancey St. 212-577-1201.)*

**Shara Hughes**

The young American painter describes her enchanted vistas as “invented landscapes.” They recall picturesque images from vintage postcards, blown up and abstracted to assume a fantastical ambiguity. Bright stains, spray-

painted marks, and fluid gestures are topped with impasto and scumbled areas, which lend the saturated, portal-like compositions a magnetic depth. The confetti sky and fairyland meadow of “It’s More Than a Guilty Pleasure” have the mod ebullience of Vera Neumann’s floral textiles; “Feels Heavy from Here” suggests a sunlit lake glimpsed through the jewel-toned curtain of a waterfall. These lush works, like Hughes’s paintings currently on view in the Whitney Biennial, use every trick in the book to seduce, but still manage to come off as guileless visions of not-so-far-away worlds. *Through June 25. (Uffner, 170 Suffolk St. 212-274-0064.)*

**Lizzie Wright**

Imagine a line of home furnishings designed by benevolent aliens. Colored lights, goose and ostrich eggs, and white fur, among other materials, create a mood of eerie calm in the Louisiana-born, New York-based sculptor’s show. Two wall-mounted white wooden boxes, embellished with cutouts, strike a note of wistful romance; stacks of ceramic pancakes glazed in silver, gold, and black come across as conceptual but earthy jokes. Fragments of found glass, soldered together into the shape of an animal hide, suggest a flea-market find. Like all the works here, this one splits the difference between the tangible and the ethereal. *Through June 4. (Rawson Projects, 221 Madison St. 212-256-0379.)*

## NIGHT LIFE

## ROCK AND POP

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

**Holy Ghost!**

The New York City natives Nick Millhiser and Alex Frankel, who have known each other since childhood, formed a hip-hop group in high school that caught the attention of James Murphy, of LCD Soundsystem and the label DFA Records, who released their debut album in 2004. A few years later, still under Murphy’s dance-punk guidance, they created the pop duo Holy Ghost! As remixers, they’ve etched deep disco riffs onto work by the likes of Katy Perry and Blood Orange; live, they deliver full-fledged dance parties with a band. Their groove machine churns out powerful hooks, crisp keyboard arpeggios, and punchy bass lines reminiscent of their eighties predecessors New Order and Soft Cell. They kick off “Good Roof,” a weekly summer party series hosted by the Greenpoint dance nook Good Room; food by Roberta’s will be served in the courtyard. (64 Dobbin St., Brooklyn. [goodroombk.com](http://goodroombk.com). May 29.)

**Pixies**

Whether for classmates or bandmates, reunions are all the same: the old gang gets back together for a few nights, everyone looks and sounds a little (or a lot) different, and the no-shows are no fun to gossip about. This institutional Boston

college-rock band reconvened onstage in 2004, most notably at that year’s Coachella, and set the mold for a late-career revival that countless indie bands would follow over the next decade. The Pixies’ grainy, scabby riffs had already inspired a generation of rock breakouts, including Radiohead and Nirvana, and, despite shaky recent work, they are still rightly cherished. They return to New York for three nights. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. May 24. Brooklyn Steel, 319 Frost St., East Williamsburg. May 25-26.)

**Wale**

As hip-hop changed hands in the mid-aughts, from those of platinum-selling pros to those of scrappy self-starting amateurs, this D.C. native turned a regional profile into national buzz with a string of self-released singles and a formidable sneaker collection. By 2007, Wale’s “Nike Boots” was getting radio play, a feat once considered out of reach for independent artists; shortly after, Wale issued a mixtape series inspired by “Seinfeld.” His distinct cultural scope, punny lyrics, and mid-Atlantic lilt have shored up a devoted fan base that fends off detractors; his latest cut, “Fashion Week,” an upbeat ode to the runway sect, recalls what might be his most fully realized record, “Pretty Girls,” from 2009. (Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. May 25.)

**Whitney**

The guitarist Max Kakacek, formerly of the Smith Westerns, and Julien Ehrlich, the one-time drummer for Unknown Mortal Orchestra, came together to form this soft-psychedelic out-

fit. Honeyed timbres support their back-road-folk influences in songs about heartache and home towns. The group's ambitious arrangements include warm strings and horns, pastel bridges, and swelling, shout-along choruses. "Golden Days," an excellent calling-card single, crams in guitar and brass solos, but Ehrlich's soft-whine vocals keep it delicate and compact. The duo's first album, "Light Upon the Lake," was released last June, by the Indiana label Secretly Canadian, home to soul stirrers like Anohni and the War on Drugs. (*Brooklyn Bowl, 61 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg, 718-963-3369. May 24.*)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Bruce Barth and Ray Drummond

Unabashed swinging from assured and passionate improvisers is a gift that should be treasured while it still exists. The pianist Barth and the bassist Drummond may not come from the same generation—Drummond can be heard on memorable recordings by, among others, Art Farmer and Woody Shaw—but they share a commitment to direct and unpretentious musical expression. (*Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. May 26-27.*)

### Gene Bertoncini

Bertoncini has been upholding the standard for elegant jazz guitar since the early sixties. Playing both classical and electric instruments, this musician's musician keeps melody and chiselled harmony in full view, his sumptuous technique beholden to halcyon-era music-making. He's joined by the fine vocalist **Melissa Stylianou** and the bassist **Ike Sturm**. (*Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. May 26.*)

### "Honoring Danny Gatton"

Every major city probably has its own fabled guitarist—a scene pillar who, though revered by locals, is basically unknown to the wider world. The Washington, D.C., legend Danny Gatton was one such figure: a stupefyingly gifted player, equally adept at blues, rock and roll, country, and jazz, whose limited career ended with his suicide, in 1994, at the age of forty-nine. Joel Harrison, who soaked up inspiration from the master firsthand, has organized a long overdue tribute that includes such Gatton devotees as **Oz Noy**, **Pete McCann**, **Anthony Pirog**, and **Brandon Seabrook**. (*Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. May 24.*)

### "Miles Davis Celebration"

It's difficult to imagine Davis in his dotage, but the monumental trumpeter would have turned ninety-one this month. Honoring the occasion will be such seasoned players as **Eddie Henderson**—a trumpeter who wears his admiration of Davis proudly—and the pianist **George Cables**, as well as younger acolytes like the saxophonist **Eric Alexander**. (*Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. May 26-28.*)

### Daryl Sherman Trio

No veteran singer inhabits the full range of the American popular-song repertoire quite like the irreplaceable Sherman, and precious few possess her abundant versatility, style, and charm. A gently swinging pianist as well, she gets like-minded support from the guitarist **James Chirillo** and the bassist **Boots Maleson**. (*Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. May 27.*)

# CLASSICAL MUSIC

## OPERA

### Heartbeat Opera

For its spring festival, the company takes two prime examples of exoticism in Western opera and condenses each one into a ninety-minute adaptation. In Ethan Heard's production of "Madama Butterfly," a nine-year-old biracial boy looks to the opera's story of a geisha and her American husband to understand his parents' separation; Louisa Proske's staging of Bizet's Spanish Gypsy fantasy, "Carmen," homes in on the smugglers' story line to explore the borders that separate the opera's characters by gender and culture. The ensemble Cantata Profana plays in chamber configurations specifically tailored to each work. *The productions run in repertory May 25-28. (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. heartbeatopera.org.)*

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### New York Philharmonic

The fast-rising Czech conductor Jakub Hruška—the principal guest conductor designate of the Philharmonia Orchestra, in London—makes his Philharmonic debut with an all-Czech program. Dvořák's songful Violin Concerto in A Minor features Augustin Hadelich, an agile, insightful soloist; also on the bill are three of Dvořák's Slavonic Dances, and Janáček's regal, atmospheric "Taras Bulba." *May 25 at 7:30, May 26 at 2, and May 27 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)* • Alan Gilbert, making his final appearance as music director in the Philharmonic's traditional free Memorial Day concert at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, conducts a grand yet gentle work: Mahler's Fourth Symphony. The soprano soloist in the finale is Ying Fang. *May 29 at 8. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. Seating is first come, first served; tickets will be distributed beginning at 6 P.M.)*

### Sacred Music in a Sacred Space: "The Creation"

The Choir and Orchestra of the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola concludes its season with Haydn's best-loved vocal work, which offers up a shining, uninterrupted paean to the splendors of creation, as narrated in the Book of Genesis, through a sequence of choruses and arias. K. Scott Warren conducts. *May 24 at 7. (980 Park Ave. 212-288-2520.)*

### Orchestra of the League of Composers

The fine ensemble gathers once again under the baton of Louis Karchin, who conducts new and recent works by Sheree Clement, Arvo Pärt (the beloved "Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten"), and Fred Lerdahl; the conductor David Fulmer and the pianist Andrew Armstrong join the group for "Start," a piano concerto by Lisa Bielawa. *May 25 at 7:30. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. leagueofcomposers.org.)*

### Trident Ensemble: "Outliers"

Though it specializes in early music, this men's vocal group sometimes ranges into farther territory—that of our own time. This concert marries works by Gesualdo and Monteverdi with works by two of their distinguished late-twentieth-century successors in the Italian avant-garde, Giacinto Scelsi and Salvatore Sciarrino. *May 27 at 7:30. (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. tridentensemble.com.)*

## RECITALS

### Bang on a Can: "Music Among Friends"

One of the wonders of postwar Gotham was the New York School: an informal but deeply committed band of artists, writers, and composers who were dedicated to creating an aesthetic free from tradition but high in artistic standards. Robert Rauschenberg, one of the most pivotal visual artists of the group, collaborated closely with such composers as Cage, Feldman, and Christian Wolff; now David Lang and his friends in the Bang on a Can All-Stars (among other musicians) will perform, across two concerts, music from the era by all three composers as well as contemporary celebrations of the movement's legacy by Anna Clyne, Christian Marclay, and others. On the first evening, Wolff will join Lang in conversation. *May 23-24 at 7. (MOMA, 11 W. 53rd St. moma.org.)*

### Maryanne Amacher: "Petra"

An innovative composer and installation artist who worked closely with Cage and Stockhausen, Amacher diligently investigated both the physical and the metaphysical aspects of sound. "Petra," a 1991 work for two pianos, conflates impressions of a church in Boswil, Switzerland, with ideas from a short story of the same title by the American science-fiction writer Greg Bear. Here, two sympathetic interpreters, Marianne Schroeder and Stefan Tcherepnin, offer the work's American premiere as part of the new-music concert series Blank Forms. *May 24 at 8. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. blankforms.org.)*

### "The Wanderlusting of Joseph C."

Joan La Barbara—greatly esteemed as a contemporary-music champion, a pioneer of unconventional vocal techniques, and a composer—enlists three bright young singers and the ensemble Ne(x)tworks for the premiere of a new song cycle she created, with the Vietnamese-American author Monique Truong, which imagines the vivid interior life of the reclusive artist Joseph Cornell. The concert initiates a series of events celebrating La Barbara's seventieth birthday, on June 8. *May 24 at 8. (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org.)*

### National Sawdust: "Music from Yellow Barn"

The noted Vermont festival's annual "Music Haul" comes to New York this year; the most important of several appearances will be at the stylish Williamsburg music club, where a combine of established and younger artists (including the violist Roger Tapping, of the Juilliard String Quartet) will perform an eclectic program featuring Wagner's "Wesendonck Lieder," Steve Reich's "Different Trains," and a risqué work by Schulhoff, "Sonata Erotica." *May 28 at 7. (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*

### Dover Quartet: "Twin Peaks"

The Dover, one of the most accomplished and persuasive of young American string quartets, takes to Le Poisson Rouge to offer a concert sure to appeal to the players' elders in Generation X, a "damn fine cup" of a program to honor the return of David Lynch's TV series. In addition to excerpts from Angelo Badalamenti's immortal score, the group plays works by Daniel Schlosberg ("Twin Peaks Fantasy"), David Ludwig, and Caroline Shaw. *May 30 at 8. (158 Bleecker St. lpr.com.)*

# THE THEATRE



In "Julius Caesar," Marvel plays Marc Antony as a modern female politician in a pants suit.

## Lend Me Your Ears

*Elizabeth Marvel's authority figures.*

"I've never been a girl-woman," Elizabeth Marvel said recently. "I've always been a Woman with a capital 'W.'" With her deep timbre and penetrating eyes, the forty-seven-year-old actress knows how to make her presence felt; the women she plays demand to be reckoned with. Lately, Marvel's roles could be seen as a collective essay on female political authority. On "House of Cards," she played Heather Dunbar, a U.S. Solicitor General and Presidential candidate, whose moral righteousness vexes Kevin

Spacey's curdled Frank Underwood. On the new season of "Homeland," she plays President-elect Elizabeth Keane, the first woman to hold the office. Why is she suddenly being cast as politicos? "Maybe it's because I have a very low, strong voice," she said. "It's hilarious, because, for people who know me, I'm just a crazy old hippie."

To those formidable characters, add Marc Antony, of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar"—Marvel's first stage role in six years. Oskar Eustis's Shakespeare in the Park production, at the Delacorte, through June 18, is reset in the world of contemporary politics: Antony wears a

pants suit. ("It seems to be my fashion signature these days.") Marvel sources her characters from real politicians. For Dunbar, she read up on Robert F. Kennedy; Keane is part Shirley Chisholm, part George W. Bush, if you can imagine those two in the same body. For Antony, she drew on Nikki Haley, the Ambassador to the United Nations. "It really resonates, putting a woman in that story, in that power structure," she said of the very male play. "Marc Antony is underestimated for various and sundry reasons. But when the underestimation is gender-centric the lens that you look through is really interesting."

Growing up in Pennsylvania, Marvel was a misfit who got expelled from boarding school, where she was studying visual arts. She switched to acting after she saw Vanessa Redgrave—another Woman with a capital "W"—in a London production of "A Touch of the Poet." "She brushed the hair off her face, and her face turned into water, and you saw thirty years just . . . happen," Marvel recalled. "It blew my mind." After she studied at Juilliard, her breakout roles were in two Off Broadway collaborations with the director Ivo van Hove, who matched her intensity, or at least gave it an outlet: "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1999), in which her Blanche DuBois spent much of the play naked and drenched in bathwater, and "Hedda Gabler" (2004), in which she laid waste to a flower arrangement. Van Hove, she says, taught her that human beings are irrational.

"It is such a complicated tightrope, being a woman with power," Marvel said of her latest roles, and, perhaps, of her own place in the acting world. "You can't show too much, you can't show too little. You get shut out for being too strong, too loud, too forceful." On television, female Presidents are ubiquitous: Cherry Jones on "24," Julia Louis-Dreyfus on "Veep." In reality, as we've learned, it's a steeper climb. "Americans want Daddy," Marvel said. "They don't want Mommy." But she's doing her part to change that, one pants suit at a time.

—Michael Schulman

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHIE POPE

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

**Animal**

In Clare Lizzimore's play, directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch, Rebecca Hall plays a woman who starts to experience creeping anxiety in her home. (*Atlantic Stage 2*, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

**Bella: An American Tale**

Robert O'Hara directs a new pioneer-era musical by Kirsten Childs, about a wanted woman (Ashley D. Kelley) who flees out West, where her Buffalo Soldier awaits. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews.)

**The Cost of Living**

Martyna Majok's play, directed by Jo Bonney for Manhattan Theatre Club, tells the parallel stories of an unemployed truck driver who reunites with his ex-wife and a doctoral student who hires a caregiver. (*City Center Stage I*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.)

**The Government Inspector**

Red Bull Theatre stages the Gogol satire, directed by Jesse Berger and featuring Michael Urie, in which the corrupt officials of a provincial town assume a new arrival to be an undercover inspector. (*The Duke on 42nd Street*, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. In previews.)

**Master**

The Foundry Theatre presents W. David Hancock's play, a collaboration with the visual artist Wardell Milan, about the widow and the estranged son of a black artist famous for his radical take on "Huckleberry Finn." (*Irondale Center*, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. Previews begin May 25.)

**1984**

Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan's adaptation of George Orwell's dystopian novel transfers from the West End, featuring Tom Sturridge, Olivia Wilde, and Reed Birney. (*Hudson*, 139-141 W. 44th St. 855-801-5876. In previews.)

**Rotterdam**

In Jon Brittain's Olivier-winning play, at the "Brits Off Broadway" festival, a lesbian woman is about to tell her parents she's gay when her partner comes out as a transgender man. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Opens May 24.)

**Seeing You**

The immersive-theatre producer Randy Weiner and the choreographer Ryan Heffington (known for Sia's "Chandelier" video) created this site-specific piece, which transforms a former meat market into nineteen-forties Hoboken. (450 W. 14th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

**Somebody's Daughter**

Chisa Hutchinson's play, from Second Stage Theatre Uptown, is about an Asian-American teen-ager desperate for her parents' attention. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422. In previews.)

## NOW PLAYING

**Derren Brown: Secret**

Unlike most of his colleagues in the illusion and mind-reading business, Brown does not pretend that he has supernatural "mentalistic" powers. He's very up front about using psychological manipula-

tion, body language, and misdirection to bamboozle the audience—the ultimate trick is that, even forewarned, you still don't see him coming. For his U.S. debut, the British magician turns the theatre into his playground. Some of the banter may not be quite as witty as Brown thinks it is, but no matter: after seeing the show, you may spend nights wondering how the heck he does what he does. The eventual reveal of the meaning behind the show's title comes at the end of a terrific, lengthy buildup that few will even recognize as such. We should count ourselves lucky that Brown uses his powers of suggestion for good, not evil. (*Atlantic Theatre Company*, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

**A Doll's House, Part 2**

Lucas Hnath's invigorating ninety-minute work, directed by Sam Gold, is an irresponsible act—a kind of naughty imposition on a classic, investing Ibsen's signature play with the humor that the nineteenth-century artist lacked. When Nora Helmer, Ibsen's protagonist, shut the door on her husband, her children, and her bourgeois life, it was left to the audience to wonder what would become of her. Here she is again, after so many years—fifteen, to be exact. Since leaving her husband, Torvald (Chris Cooper), Nora (Laurie Metcalf) has discovered her own voice and become a popular feminist writer under a pseudonym. (Condola Rashad, as Emmy, the daughter Nora left behind, is perfect in every way.) The ideas keep coming, fast and delicious. 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. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/8/17.) (*Golden*, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**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—but she has remade the character in her own image: as a scrappy trickster with needs and vulnerabilities. (5/1/17) (*Shubert*, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**The Lucky One**

Alan Alexander Milne's play premiered in 1922, just a year before the introduction of his Christopher Robin series of light verse, which would lead to the enormous popularity of Winnie-the-Pooh. In the Mint's production, Robert David Grant plays Gerald Farringdon, the Farringdon family's golden boy—a bit shallow, perhaps, but oozing charm and good will. Ari Brand plays his older brother, Bob ("Poor Bob," they all say), bitter, dark, and in more than a spot of bother as the play begins. Pamela Carey (Paton Ashbrook) is the woman caught in the middle of this long-simmering sibling rivalry. Milne navigates through bright, silly golf jokes to serious issues of responsibility and regret. The director, Jesse Marchese, offsets the play's tendency toward melodrama with an emphasis on honest emotion, especially

in the big confrontation between the brothers in Act III, which reveals unexpected truths and complexities in both characters. (*Beckett*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

**Sojourners & Her Portmanteau**

Mfoniso Udofia wrote these two plays, presented in repertory, as part of a projected nine-part saga about an extended Nigerian family in America. At the center of "Sojourners" is Abasiama (Chinasa Ogbuagu), a serious-minded and heavily pregnant university student in late-seventies Houston, surrounded by big talkers all jockeying to possess her, including her irrepressible husband, Ukpong (Hubert Point-Du Jour). The first thing you notice in Ed Sylvanus Iskandar's production is how beautifully all the design elements work in concert: Jiyoun Chang's imaginative lighting, Jeremy S. Bloom's perfectly calibrated sound design, and Jason Sherwood's turntable set. In the opening moments of "Her Portmanteau," which takes place decades later, the turntable becomes an airport baggage carousel: an evocative image before any of the actors have appeared. When they do, their performances are deeply freighted with the events of the previous play. Ogbuagu returns as Abasiama's very American daughter, Jenny Jules takes a turn as Abasiama, and Adepero Oduye plays the child she bore in "Sojourners," now thirty-six and shot through with hurt. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

**Venus**

Suzan-Lori Parks's 1996 play, revived for the Signature by Lear deBessonet, constructs and deconstructs Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman brought to Europe in the early nineteenth century and exhibited in a loincloth as the Hottentot Venus. Parks shows how the white male gaze turns an able-bodied girl into a freak, a spectacle, a sex object, and finally, after the flesh has been melted from her bones, a scientific curiosity. For all the play's looky-looky theatricality and audacious language, Parks's ultimate goal is to afford Baartman her own dignity and desires, to plumb the heart and the mind inside that body. Though deBessonet's production sometimes chafes against the script's stylistic variety, Zainab Jah, so ferocious in last season's "Eclipsed," gives a poignant, spirited performance, with John Ellison Conlee as her anatomist lover and Kevin Mambo as a baleful narrator. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

## ALSO NOTABLE

**Anastasia Broadhurst.** *The Antipodes* Pershing Square Signature Center. **Arlington** St. Ann's Warehouse. *Through May 28.* **Bandstand Jacobs.** *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* Lunt-Fontanne. *Come from Away* Schoenfeld. **Groundhog Day** August Wilson. **Happy Days** Polonsky Shakespeare Center. *Through May 28.* **In & of Itself** Daryl Roth. **Indecent** Cort. **The Little Foxes** Samuel J. Friedman. **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. **Oslo** Vivian Beaumont. **Pacific Overtures** Classic Stage Company. **The Play That Goes Wrong** Lyceum. **Present Laughter** St. James. **The Roundabout** 59E59. *Through May 28.* **Six Degrees of Separation** Ethel Barrymore. **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. **Sweat** Studio 54. **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. **3/Fifths** 3LD Art & Technology Center. *Through May 28.* **Vanity Fair** Pearl. *Through May 27.* **War Paint** Nederlander.

# DANCE

## American Ballet Theatre

After rolling out the premiere of “Whipped Cream,” by Alexei Ratmansky, A.B.T. returns to familiar ground: the much loved Romantic ballet “Giselle,” livened up by a series of débuts. On May 26, Misty Copeland, who for many people has become the face of American ballet, gets her turn in the title role, as a delicate young woman who dies for love in the first act, only to return as a spirit in the second. The object of her tragic affection will be danced by Alban Lendorf, another New York début. At the May 27 matinee, the title role goes to Sara Lane, a soloist with a clean, classical style; that evening, it will be danced by the powerhouse Gillian Murphy. • May 24 at 2 and 7:30: “Whipped Cream.” • May 25-26 and May 29-30 at 7:30 and May 27 at 2 and 8: “Giselle.” (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-477-3030. Through July 8.)

## New York City Ballet

The company closes the season with a week of storytelling: George Balanchine’s 1962 evening-length “Midsummer Night’s Dream.” The music, by Mendelssohn, is detailed in its depiction of two pairs of human lovers who stumble into a quarrel between the Fairy Queen and her consort. Magic potions are misapplied; confusion ensues. In the second act, once peace has been reestablished, Balanchine provides a suite of courtly dances, the pinnacle of which is a ravishing pas de deux illustrating love’s Platonic ideal. Plus, there are scores of children running around in butterfly costumes. What more could you ask for? • May 24-25 at 7:30, May 26 at 8, May 27 at 2 and 8, and May 28 at 3. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600.)

## Purchase Dance Company

Less famous than Juilliard, the Conservatory of Dance at Purchase College, SUNY, regularly educates a similar calibre of dancer. The program for this student concert features the Trisha Brown classic “Glacial Decoy,” as well as Norbert de la Cruz III’s “Talsik” and the successful Purchase alumnus Doug Varone’s “Mass.” (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. May 24-27.)

## Parsons Dance

David Parsons is best known for an effective gimmick: the strobe-lighted, gravity-flouting illusions of his 1982 solo “Caught.” That signature piece is on both programs again this season, joined by a more up-to-date device: small drones that buzz around the dancers in “Hello World,” a premiere that grapples with human and technological evolution. There’s also “UpEnd,” a fresh collaboration between Parsons and Ephrat Asherie, a skilled and imaginative b-girl whose open spirit should fit well with the company’s enthusiastic, athletic style. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 24-28.)

## Vanessa Anspaugh

Last year, Anspaugh, a lesbian choreographer then pregnant with a boy, made her first work with an all-male cast. Though it was called “The End of Men; An Ode to Ocean,” it was mostly

a celebration of a kinder, gentler masculinity, a talky piece with a lot of boyish horsing around. Anspaugh now continues her investigation into maleness, with most of the same cast, in “The End of Men, Again.” (Danspace Project, St. Mark’s Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. May 25-27.)

## “La Mama Moves!”

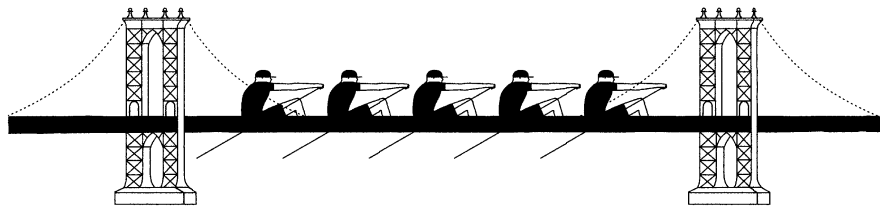
The second week of this year’s festival sees the premiere of “Welcome,” a work about walls that is mostly against them, by the visually stylish choreographer Stefanie Batten Bland. On a different bill, with the Cambodian choreographer Nget Rady and the local duo Brother(hood) Dance!, comes the latest entry in Yoshiko Chuma’s rambling “ $\pi=3.14 \dots$ ” multimedia series,

this one graced by Vicky Shick and Jodi Melnick. There are also some notable Indian programs: a mixed-genre solo by Astad Deboo and a tribute to Pandit Ramesh Misra by the always charming Malini Srinivasan. (Ellen Stewart, 66 E. 4th St. 646-430-5374. May 25-28. Through June 4.)

## DanceAfrica 2017

Forty years on, America’s premier festival of African dance is still going strong. Abdel R. Salaam, who last year succeeded the event’s titan founder, Chuck Davis, as artistic director, celebrates the anniversary with a big mashup, combining his own company, Forces of Nature, with the excellent Philadelphia hip-hop outfit Illstyle & Peace Productions and Asase Yaa African-American Dance Theatre. In the second half of the program, the Wula Drum and Dance Ensemble, led by the djembe-drum master M’Bemba Bangoura, showcases the traditions of Guinea. (BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. May 26-29.)

# ABOVE & BEYOND



## World Science Festival

This annual festival, now in its tenth year, packs fifty events at a myriad of venues into five days, bringing together some of the brightest minds in fields including biology, medicine, and technology, to show how deeply science is embedded in daily city life. This year, there will be several installations in Times Square, including “Holoscenes,” a performance piece featuring a twelve-ton glass aquarium that repeatedly fills and drains, a comment on the role of water in climate change. A highlight among the panels is “Forever Young: The Promise of Human Regeneration,” in which the regenerative-medicine experts Dany Spencer Adams, Stephen Badylak, and Doris Taylor discuss biochemical advances. The festival kicks off with a concert, in honor of its anniversary, that features David Drainman (the lead singer of Disturbed), the violinist Joshua Bell, and the opera singer Renée Fleming, at Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Rose Theatre. (Various locations. [worldsciencefestival.com](http://worldsciencefestival.com). May 30-June 4.)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

As in other years, the week that follows major sales devoted to contemporary art is given over to art from Latin America, including many pieces by twentieth-century modern masters. Sotheby’s holds two Latin-American sales on May 25, led by the Mexican painters Rufino Tamayo (“The Bird Charmer”) and Diego Rivera. Rivera’s work

is a bit of an anomaly for this painter of heroic scenes—a portrait of the Mexican movie diva Matilde Palou, wearing a traditional dress. Another outstanding lot consists of a pair of still-lives by José Agustín Arrieta, a Mexican painter who specialized in the form. Both of the paintings depict a luscious spread in a style reminiscent of the Dutch masters: in one, a parrot perches on a basket full of giant vegetables, and in the other a cat presides over a colorful feast. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • Christie’s divides its Latin-American lots into two sessions (May 24-25). Tamayo once again leads the pack; in this case, the prize lot is a ghostly depiction of three guitarists (“Músicos”) in shades of gray. The Chilean hyperrealist Claudio Bravo is represented by one of his mysterious “package” canvases, a trompe-l’oeil painting of a parcel wrapped in paper of different colors and textures, each wrinkle and shadow lovingly rendered in oil. The sale also includes works by Lam, Botero, and Matta. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • Phillips’s sale of Latin-American art on May 25 skews more toward mid-century and contemporary works, though the leading lot here, too, is by Tamayo. (The house also offers a lovely fairy painting, “La Mujer Libélula,” by the Spanish Surrealist Remedios Varo.) Among the more recent pieces: a sculpture made from metal rods and string, by Jesús Rafael Soto; a pair of paintings by Mathias Goeritz (“Dos Mensajes”); and a collage of Barack Obama’s face made out of magazine images, by Vik Muniz. (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### abcV

38 E. 19th St. (212-475-5829)

Although no meat is served at abcV, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's new restaurant—his third in the Flatiron store ABC Carpet and Home—he won't call it vegetarian. The word, he likes to say, "sounds like a disease." Instead, he uses descriptors made for our current age of mindfulness in corporate boardrooms and ayahuasca ceremonies in Brooklyn lofts. On the back of the menu, his mission statement explains his intent to "inspire a cultural shift towards plant-based intelligence" by offering "high-vibration foods."

Behind the bar are several machines that could be mistaken for iMacs but are high-tech juicers by Juicero, a new Silicon Valley outfit that was a hit with investors before becoming Twitter's favorite joke in April, less than two months after abcV opened. (It turns out that Juicero's juice packs can be easily squeezed by hand, producing the same exact results as the expensive machines.) Jokes aside, fresh juices and restorative tonics—featuring herbal ingredients like ashwagandha (a mild stimulant) and blue lotus (a mild sedative)—are a prominent part of the menu. The space is as bright as a research laboratory by day and, thanks to a mélange of light fixtures (which are for sale at ABC), filled with pastel warmth by night. The all-white furnishings are

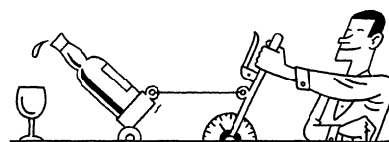
paired with Bolivian textiles: an Apple store designed by an Andean weaver.

The menu includes an illustrated plant encyclopedia. It may not be a document of great scientific rigor, but it's good to know that beets not only will purify your blood but are "an ancient aphrodisiac for both men and women." Soft, thin, sunset-hued slices of the root vegetable, garnished with pickle bits reminiscent of capers, taste like a distant cousin of smoked salmon. Other dishes also delight. One evening, lettuce cups were light, balanced bundles of cumin, chili, lime, pepitas, and avocado. Warm crimini and morel mushrooms were salty, garlicky, and scrumptious, especially mixed with an order of coconut sticky rice. A few noodle bowls proved the most satisfying: fresh spinach spaghetti, with broccoli, kale, preserved lemon, Parmesan, and saffron crumbs, was precisely al dente and return-worthy.

For all the hits, there are plenty of misses. A roasted cauliflower was gorgeous to look at but disappointing to eat, with an overdone, mushy texture. The whole artichoke, a hard one to screw up, was forgettable. While the cocktail list was creative (try the matcha colada), it also seemed out of place. Two diners, after noticing that their neighbors were all drinking juice, suddenly felt self-conscious about their vodka. They kept drinking, newcomers to Martini-glass shame. (Dishes \$9-\$18.)

—Carolyn Kormann

## BAR TAB



### Fishbowl

210 W. 55th St. (646-756-2077)

A lot of physical effort goes into the signature offering at Fishbowl. It's an eponymous jumbo-sized pitcher, meant to serve eight, that easily holds a litre or more of Dark and Stormies, or another cocktail from a short list. It causes the wasp-waisted barmaids in strappy green minidresses to grunt audibly as they muddle handfuls of cherries, and scoop ice as if shovelling a driveway. For ninety dollars, you can share your Fishbowl with several friends in the downstairs bar at the Dream Hotel, on a spiritless midtown block. The crowd, which seems to be made up mostly of mid-tier financiers, takes up the offer as if it's a happy-hour bargain, well into the night. There's a plethora of paunchy men in ill-fitting suits, paired with leggy, stiletto-heeled counterparts. The bar, down a tight spiral staircase of smoked glass, feels like part game room, part fashionable lounge circa 1978: the percussive sounds of Skee-Ball and mini-bowling echo the beat of the Cure; there's lots of red vinyl and dizzily patterned black-and-white tiles. If there is irony in the décor, it's difficult to ascertain, an enigma that extends to the fare: cocktail shrimp practically brined in chili seasoning; listless crudités; artichoke dip updated, needlessly, with kale. The Thai Tea (Belvedere vodka, Thai tea, orange bitters) is refreshing and strong, but the Rum Cannonball (Bacardi, pineapple, grenadine) has the toothachy sweetness of an alcohol-soaked Jolly Rancher. Front and center is a huge glass column filled with water, through which tropical fish flutter in pretty circles around juts of coral. This floor-to-ceiling spectacle of captivity prompts tipsy reflections on the nature of freedom, and what the fish might know.—Talia Lavín



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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT MAY DAYS

During Donald Trump's first three months in the White House, America found ways to compartmentalize the convulsions of Washington. The stock market hit record highs. The unemployment rate approached historic lows. The baseball season opened, even as Trump, wary of protesters, declined to throw out a first pitch.

Then, in the third week of May, the crisis consuming Trump's Presidency exceeded the capacity for containment. On Monday, the *Washington Post* revealed that Trump had shared highly classified material with the Russian foreign minister and the Russian Ambassador. Aides disputed the story until the next morning, when Trump undermined them, writing, on Twitter, that he had the "absolute right" to give "facts pertaining to terrorism and airline flight safety" to the Russian government. His response revealed a tenuous grasp of his situation. The critics weren't disputing his rights; they were decrying his judgment. The editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*, the house organ of mainstream conservatives, questioned the Administration's viability: "Presidencies can withstand only so much turbulence before they come apart."

On Tuesday, Trump confronted a larger problem: the reports of a memo by the former F.B.I. director James Comey alleging that the President had urged him to stop investigating Michael Flynn, the Trump loyalist who was forced out as national-security adviser after lying about his contacts with the Russian Am-

bassador. "I hope you can let this go," Trump reportedly told Comey, an action that many legal scholars described as a potential obstruction of justice. On Wednesday, as the Dow sank nearly four hundred points, the Justice Department named Robert Mueller as special counsel to oversee the rapidly expanding Russia investigation and its offshoots.

For the first two years of Trump's political career, no scandal could stall his rise. Comey's revelation marked the threshold of a new era, thrusting Trump and the country into the full machinery of Presidential reckoning, an American ordeal not experienced since the Clinton-era Washington wars of two decades ago. Trump is no longer facing just a frenzy over policy or decency or style. This is a legal threat that will not go away until it is resolved, and the chain of events to come will shape the fate of

Trump's aides and defenders, as well as of the President himself.

Every Presidential scandal generates a dramatis personae—heroes, scapegoats, opportunists, and bitter-enders whose roles are unknowable at the outset. Some emerge reluctantly. In a congressional hearing on July 16, 1973, Alexander Butterfield, a little-known deputy assistant to President Richard Nixon, revealed the existence of secret Oval Office tapes. Congress subpoenaed the tapes, which confirmed the Watergate coverup, and Nixon became the first American President to resign. Butterfield never intended to bring down his President, but the legal process left him no choice. "I got caught up in a wave," he said, decades later, to Bob Woodward, who told Butterfield's story in "The Last of the President's Men." He added, "I don't think anyone who worked for him likes to say that—or even think that—Richard Nixon was guilty. But I think we have to face the facts."

The day after Robert Mueller's appointment, Rick Wilson, a longtime Republican consultant and a Trump critic, urged the President's aides to quit. "G.O.P. friends, I'm here to help you," he wrote, in the *Washington Post*. "You don't want to break from the pack too soon, but there's greater risk in waiting too long," when history will judge you "like a Baath Party generalissimo." Some members of the Administration have a great deal to lose. Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster, the national-security adviser, was among those sent out on Monday to deny that Trump had shared secrets with Russia. John Weaver, a Republican strategist, tweeted, "General McMaster spent



decades defending this nation, earning his integrity and honor. Trump squandered it in less than twelve hours.”

There is a long tradition of staffers leaving a troubled White House and then helping the public make sense of the dysfunction. A notable recent example is Scott McClellan, George W. Bush’s press secretary, who quit in 2006, after five years in the White House, and published a memoir titled “What Happened,” which offered a blunt portrait of Bush as “authentic” but “terribly off course.” Last week, speaking about Trump staff members who may be weighing their options, McClellan said, “It’s kind of a question of appreciating your own conscience and doing what you believe is right.”

Meanwhile, the F.B.I. and at least one congressional committee have started issuing subpoenas, and, before long, Trump’s lieutenants and associates will have to decide which information to volunteer. In some cases, Trump is making

their decisions easier, by humiliating them. “In terms of achievement, I think I’d give myself an A,” the President said on Fox News. He was less generous to his communications staff, giving them a “C or a C-plus.” Trump’s press secretary, Sean Spicer, has borne the brunt of that criticism. Last Thursday, White House reporters noted that Spicer was stepping back from his role in the daily briefing.

The next day, Trump embarked on his first foreign trip—a nine-day visit to Saudi Arabia, Israel, the Vatican, Belgium, and Italy. Many Presidents in crisis savor the chance to escape to distant capitals and stately photo-ops, but Trump hates sleeping away from home, and he knows little about the complex issues and figures he will encounter. More to the point, less than an hour after Air Force One left for Riyadh, Washington was absorbing the latest astonishment: the *Times* had reported that Trump, in the meeting with Russian officials, called Comey

“crazy, a real nut job,” adding that firing him had relieved a “great pressure.” The *Washington Post* added its own revelation: the F.B.I. is investigating a current senior White House official—“someone close to the President”—as a “significant person of interest” in the Russia case.

With each headline, Trump’s aides are acquiring a strange new power over him, because they will decide when to protect him and when to protect themselves. Washington specializes in theatrical demonstrations of fealty to the boss, but the real objects of dedication are country and self. If Donald Trump has one fundamental commitment, it is to his own preservation, a celebration of personal well-being that he has elevated to a world view—the very world view that made men and women want to work for him in the first place. There is little reason for them to adopt a more selfless creed now.

—Evan Osnos

## DEPT. OF GEOPOLITICS YOU SAY SLOVAKIA



Three weeks after Donald Trump’s election, Miro Cerar, the Prime Minister of Slovenia, spoke to the President-elect and offered his services as a mediator with Vladimir Putin. It seemed appropriate: Slovenia was the location of the first meeting between George W. Bush and Putin, in 2001, and it is the birthplace of the First Lady, Melania Trump. After the call to Trump, Cerar told reporters, “I know that Mr. Trump is very aware of the difference between Slovenia and Slovakia.”

Not everyone is as well informed as the President of the United States. Confusion over the two countries is common. Slovenia and Slovakia are both tiny, Slavic nations, with a combined population smaller than New York City’s. Both acceded to the European Union in 2004. Their flags both have horizontal white, blue, and red stripes, with a coat of arms on the hoist side. In 2002, the first President of independent Slovenia was welcomed to Romania with the Slo-

vakian national anthem. This month, Slovakia beat Italy, 3-2, at the Ice Hockey World Championship, in Germany, and heard the Slovenian national anthem over the loudspeakers. In 2003, in Rome, Silvio Berlusconi introduced his Slovenian counterpart as “the Prime Minister of Slovakia.”

On a recent drizzly afternoon in London, the two states co-hosted an educational event designed to clear things up. Tadej Rupel, the Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia to the Court of St. James’s, had concocted the idea with his Slovakian counterpart. Journalists, policymakers, diplomats, and businesspeople received invitations to the event, titled “Distinguish Slovenia and Slovakia,” which was held at the National Liberal Club, in Whitehall.

Rupel addressed the crowd. “We would like to not confuse you more: we would like to make you aware of the differences in Slovenia and Slovakia,” he said, then added, unhelpfully, “It is fair to say they have a lot in common.” Lubomír Reháč, the Slovakian Ambassador, stood next to Rupel and pointed at his own chest. “I am wearing the tie from the Slovenian presidency” of the Council of the E.U., he said. Behind them a poster displayed maps of both countries, but in different scales and with

no neighboring nations shown. Reháč reminded the audience that George W. Bush once confused the two countries. “But I think the current President would never confuse them,” he said, “because his wife is from Slovenia, and his ex-wife is from Czechoslovakia.”

Next, the head of the Slovenian Tourist Board played a YouTube video of scenes from his country: castles; the Alps; town squares; cobblestone streets; blue-eyed, blond children. An economic adviser talked up the country’s technological achievements, which include the publication of an early volume of logarithm tables. She made no mention of the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, probably Slovenia’s best-known export after the First Lady.

Reháč returned for Slovakia’s part of the presentation. “We don’t have a tourism representative,” he said, and suggested that the Slovenian rep might help him out, “because we are quite similar. Except we don’t have the sea. We have mountains.” He played a video, too: castles, mountains, town squares, cobblestone streets, children.

Slovakia and Slovenia are not the only countries to create confusion for foreigners. In 2013, the Swiss and Swedish consulates in Shanghai ran a campaign to help locals tell the two apart. The Danes

and the Dutch have a similar problem, despite sharing neither longitudinal nor nominal similarities. (Both are fond of bicycles.)

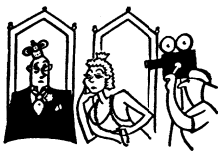
At the National Liberal Club, guests drifted toward a bar stocked with wine from Slovenia and Slovakia. Posters listed fun facts about the countries' languages (the creator of the standardized Slovak accidentally shot himself in 1855, while hunting), literature (February 8th is a public holiday in Slovenia to celebrate the national poet, whose first name is France), and history (Milanštefánik, a minor planet discovered in 1982, is named after the father of Czechoslovakia).

As the event wound down, Reháč reminded guests to pick up their goody bags: salt from Slovenia and cheese made in Slovakia.

In parting, Reháč confided that the Slovenia/Slovakia problem is an issue for his people as well. "In our own language, Slovakia is called 'Slovensko,'" he said. As for Slovenia: in 2003, the nation's parliament sponsored a competition for a new flag, partly to distinguish it from Slovakia's. A winning design was picked. Nothing came of it.

—Leo Mirani

## DOUBLE-ENTENDRE DEPT. INSPIRATION



"Is this your first visit to the Museum of Sex?" a docent asked Griffin Dunne.

"Yes, my deflowering!" Dunne said. Though the sixty-one-year-old actor wore an untucked pin-striped shirt, sported a two-day beard, and carried a cappuccino, embodying the urbane New Yorker, he seemed eager to be amazed.

In the new Amazon series "I Love Dick," co-created by Jill Soloway, of "Transparent" fame, Dunne plays a smug Manhattan writer named Sylvère, who moves with his younger wife, Chris, to Marfa, Texas. The show's title comes from the erotic letters that Chris (Kathryn Hahn) writes to a broody sculptor named Dick (Kevin Bacon)—and the double entendre is deliberate. The show is about the female sexual gaze, which

men can find withering. Or amazing. Or both. Dunne, who gained early lustre starring in "An American Werewolf in London" and "After Hours," has long exuded sexual panache; Carrie Fisher chose him to relieve her of her virginity. He admitted, "I'm a little leery of our title. Who would wear a T-shirt that said 'I Love Dick?'"

As Lissa Rivera, the museum's young associate curator, led Dunne into a gallery of risqué photographs taken at Studio 54, she said that the photos "really reveal how trans women, black people, and queer people drove the disco era." Dunne grinned, beginning to situate himself. After relocating here from Los Angeles at eighteen—"New York is the place you move to really begin your life"—he immediately gravitated to the famously laissez-faire disco. "I remember being on the balcony there and looking down for someone to dance with," he said. "I saw this completely naked woman in high heels, and I went down and started dancing with her. And she went"—he made a disgusted face and turned away.

Upstairs, Rivera showed off a trove of carnal doodads, including a pharmacist's condom cabinet, a bicycle-powered dildo, and a Victorian "anti-onanism device" made of stiffened leather. "So a male chastity belt, basically?" Dunne asked. Rivera nodded sympathetically. On the other hand, she noted, "vibrators were once one of the top five household products!" She pointed out a vintage eggbeater-like contraption, and Dunne eyed it with cautious respect.

An old Ivory Snow box featuring Marilyn Chambers, who went on to star in such X-rated films as "Behind the Green Door," reminded Dunne of his experience in an acting class with Linda Lovelace, the star of "Deep Throat." "I brought in an excerpt from 'Franny and Zooey'—the Salinger novel—"so we could do the bathtub scene, and Linda was chosen to play my sister, Franny," he said. "She had a fish-net shirt on without a bra, and it was the kind of fish-net you use to catch tuna, so I'm looking at Franny's tits throughout this poignant dialogue. Afterward, we walk outside, and there's Sammy Davis, Jr., waiting at the curb in his Bentley to pick Linda up."

Dunne then spent some time in the "Hardcore" gallery, perusing brothel hand-

books from the nineteenth century, the Zagat guides of their day. On his way out, he caught sight of a video loop of Lovelace in "Deep Throat" and cried, "There's Franny!"

Afterward, around the corner at the NoMad Hotel, Dunne ordered another cappuccino and sat in a rocking chair. As he rocked, he began to improvise a folksy one-man show about J.F.K.: "I hurt my back in the PT-109!" Steadying himself,



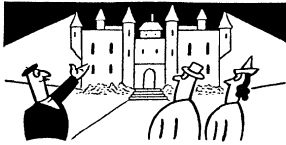
Kathryn Hahn and Griffin Dunne

he said that if Sylvère, his "I Love Dick" character, visited the Museum of Sex "he'd approach it from an academic, historical perspective and be very verbose and insightful—and then be aroused for the rest of the day." Sylvère has reached the age where the gap between sexual theory and practice yawns. "At one time, he enjoyed a Pygmalion-like power over Chris," Dunne said, "so he feels he still has game, and assumes younger women are attracted to him." Yet the younger women of Marfa aren't.

Dunne has lately given himself over to making a documentary about his aunt, Joan Didion. "The acting I've done the last ten years has just been being needle-dropped into other people's movies," he said. "So when I got this show I was surprised. I was, like, I know Sylvère—he's the guy who gets really upset about things and is funny when he's upset: Wow, I'm able to go back to my strengths! When I did a Skype meeting with the producers, Jill and Sarah Gubbins, as soon as the screen came on I knew I had the part. I could see it in the look they exchanged—*There he is! That's the guy!*"

—Tad Friend

L.A. POSTCARD  
DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS



Let's say you are Maurice Marciano: Small of stature, sun-kissed, dapper, with a rough Gallic timbre, hooded chestnut eyes, white hair. You smell—*sb-b-b*—of Hermès, though with your three brothers you founded Guess, the eternally eighties apparel, fragrance, and accessories company that celebrates blondness, buxomness, and acid-washed jeans. Several years ago, you and your younger brother Paul, seeking a place to house a large collection of contemporary art, bought a hundred-and-ten-thousand-square-foot travertine-and-marble Scottish Rite Masonic temple on Wilshire Boulevard, in Los Angeles. You wanted to run away from this thing—forget it!—but you couldn't. Now all you want is for the visitors to your museum to have the same experience that you had upon entering: *Whoa*.

Built in 1961 by Millard Sheets, a prolific mosaic artist and bank architect, the building was more or less abandoned by the Masons in the mid-nineties, given over to rave promoters and spillover crowds from nearby synagogues on the

High Holidays. At its peak, in the sixties, the Masonic temple is said to have had eighteen thousand members; its vast auditorium could seat three thousand. Unlike regular Freemasonry, which has three degrees, Scottish Rite has thirty-two, which are attained by performing dramatic initiation plays. According to Susan Aberth, an art-history professor at Bard who serves as the Marcianos' Masonry consultant, the dramas provided a welcome outlet for the frustrations of mid-century middle-class male life. "Businessmen who sold shoes could escape their homes and become patriarchs of old and fight with swords and do things that masculinity did not allow," she said. "It was a safe space."

The building was a Tut's tomb of ritual accoutrements. There were scripts for plays likely never seen by the uninitiated: "4th Degree: Court of the Secret Master," "32nd Degree: Master of the Royal Secret." In the basement, the Marcianos found special cabinets containing fezzes, crowns, faux-chain-mail headdresses, fanciful Egyptian-style hats like the ones worn by Osiris, or Papa Smurf; a huge space devoted to strappy Biblical sandals. "Those guys like a lace-up sandal, I'll tell you that much," Aberth said.

"The wildest, wildest was the wig room," Maurice Marciano said the other day in the museum. (The building will

open to the public, as the Marciano Art Foundation, on May 25th, with a show that includes work by Paul McCarthy, Louise Lawler, and Sterling Ruby.) Marciano wandered around the room he thinks of as "the museum of the museum," where the Masonic objects—sceptres, ledgers, velvet capes, combo goggle-blindfolds known as hoodwinks, and, everywhere, the all-seeing eye with compass ("G," for "Geometry" or "God")—will be on permanent display. "We want to explain the process of becoming a Freemason. I hope they're not going to get mad, because they can be so secretive."

An occult fraternal order is not a bad way to describe the contemporary-art scene. Some of our most cryptic symbolologists dabble in Masonic iconography: Bruce Nauman's "Topological Gardens," in which words such as "Fortitude" and "Justice" appear in neon on classical buildings, brings to mind the eighteenth degree of the Scottish Rite; Matthew Barney devoted one of his "Cremaster" films to a Masonic murder plot.

In the temple's lobby, Marciano described how he had carefully preserved the mosaics and the terrazzo floors but removed a fresco depicting the history of Freemasonry in California. Before him was a thirty-foot-long Cindy Sherman print, in which Sherman wears a velvety tunic with an all-seeing eye, knee-high boots, and a wig. "My God! People come in and they have Cindy Sherman dressed as a kind of Freemason welcoming them," Marciano said.

Speaking of symbols, is there a more potent one than the Guess logo, an upside-down red triangle that in three strokes conjures up Claudia, Anna Nicole, and Paris? Its shape has a certain Masonic resonance. "Their thing was all about geometry, the pyramid and all that," Marciano said. "You reverse the pyramid, it's the Guess triangle!"

Aberth, the on-staff symbolologist, elaborated. "We live in a forest of signs we no longer understand," she said. "A triangle pointing down is a really early alchemical symbol, symbolizing the downward flow, and water, which always represents the feminine. Since Guess makes sexy women's jeans, I think it's great that it's a symbol of femininity. Definitely, it represents the pubic triangle. I mean, how could it not?"

—Dana Goodyear



## THE FINANCIAL PAGE PRICE FIX

William Stanley Jevons, the nineteenth-century English economist, once wrote to a friend that he'd had no special ambition as a young man. He just did what he had to do. After his father went bankrupt in the iron business, in 1848, Jevons reluctantly left London for Sydney, to take a job analyzing the quality of the coinage at the Australian Mint. Somehow, this combination of work, family history, and deep boredom led Jevons to spend his days developing a theory about value, helping to start what is known as the marginal revolution. Before Jevons, economists thought that prices should be based on the cost of making goods. Jevons showed that prices should reflect the degree to which a consumer values a product. The marginal revolution taught a seeming paradox: if industrialists lowered their prices, they could make more money; more people would buy their goods, enabling economies of scale. It was a change in pricing strategy, almost as much as one in technology, that led to mass production and the modern world.

There is one sector of the U.S. economy, however, that is stuck in the pre-Jevons conception of value: health care. The health-care crisis in the United States is in many ways a pricing crisis. Nearly all medical care is paid on a fee-for-service basis, which means that medical providers make more money if they perform more procedures. This is perverse. We don't want an excess of health-care services, especially unnecessary ones; we want health. But hardly anybody gets paid when we are healthy.

A superior payment model has existed in various corners of the country for a long time. Mark Twain, in recalling his youth in Missouri, described a Dr. Meredith, who "saved my life several times" and charged the families in town twenty-five dollars a year, whether they were sick or well. This is what is now called capitation, an ungainly name for a system in which a medical provider is paid a fixed amount per patient—these days, it is typically upward of ten thousand dollars a year—whether that person needs expensive surgery or just a checkup.

This encourages maintaining health. Geisinger Health System, which is based in Danville, Pennsylvania, has used a capitation model for more than a century. Geisinger has long known that many of its diabetic patients live in areas with an abundance of fast-food places but no supermarkets. Last year, it began providing free, healthy groceries to those patients through a hospital pharmacy. "The results are so spectacular," David Feinberg, the C.E.O. of Geisinger, told me. The average weight and blood pressure among diabetics fell, and fewer required dialysis or eye surgery, a costly side effect of unchecked diabetes. The cost for the food was two thousand dollars a year per patient. The savings from doing fewer



procedures will come to more than twenty-four thousand dollars a year per patient. Similar experiments elsewhere in the country show better outcomes at a lower cost for joint replacement, post-surgical care, and over-all population health.

So why isn't capitation everywhere? One reason is history. The 1973 Health Maintenance Organization Act took a then obscure model of capitation and mandated it for all large companies that offered health insurance. The law was poorly written, and led to a proliferation of H.M.O.s that failed to cut costs and deprived people of care, putting many off the idea of capitation. The Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, experimented more gingerly with new payment systems. It left fee-for-service largely in place but created the

Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, to explore alternative payment systems. The center's experiments have shown that, in order to assure adequate care, providers must be rewarded based on objective indicators of health—to prevent doctors from profiting by withholding care—and that patient groups must be large enough and diverse enough that treating sick people does not jeopardize the financial health of providers.

Capitation, at its best, both improves health care and cuts costs. David Feinberg estimates that replacing fee-for-service with per-patient payment would cut the nation's health-care costs in half; others believe that the savings would be closer to ten per cent, which, for an industry that makes up nearly a fifth of the economy, would still mean an enormous savings. Capitation even has bipartisan support. Paul Ryan has called for alternatives to fee-for-service, as have both conservative and liberal think tanks. The left and right continue to argue about who should pay, the government or the private sector, but it is still remarkable that they find anything to agree on.

It's strange, then, that in the rush to "repeal and replace" the Affordable Care Act the pricing of health-care services has scarcely been mentioned. The health-care bill recently passed by the House of Representatives would transfer money to the rich (in the form of a tax cut) and slash Medicaid, which would lead to an existential crisis for many health-care providers, leaving them in no shape to overturn the way they charge for their services.

If Republicans in Congress read their Jevons, they might appreciate that a properly designed payment system could, with time and good faith, lower costs and government spending while improving the health of Americans. Jevons seemed to anticipate this moment. He wrote that politicians are often asked to lower taxes to "leave the money to fructify in the hands of the people." But, he reasoned, a short-term postponement of tax cuts could favor a long-term improvement of fiscal health. "Could a minister be found strong and bold enough" to make such common-sense economic policy, he wrote, "he would have an almost unprecedented claim to gratitude and fame."

—Adam Davidson

## FIRING BACK

*How Sally Yates stood up to the President.*

BY RYAN LIZZA



It is hard to locate when President Trump first declared war on the government establishment, but the story may well begin on the night of January 30th. Three days earlier, Trump, prodded by his most ideological aides, had issued an executive order banning travellers from seven Muslim-majority countries. On the 30th, Sally Yates, the acting U.S. Attorney General, refused to defend the order, saying that she was not convinced that it was lawful. Trump reacted with a fury not seen in the White House since the Nixon era.

Yates had been working in her office at the Department of Justice, several blocks away. A twenty-seven-year vet-

eran of the department, she knew that she would not occupy the office long. Jeff Sessions, a Republican senator from Alabama, was Trump's choice to be Attorney General, and although he was likely to face some tough questioning from the Senate Judiciary Committee, he was also almost certain to win confirmation.

Yates heard a knock at her door. "I remember it vividly," she told me. "They came to the door of my office."

A senior Trump appointee in the Justice Department handed her a letter. It said, "I'm informing you that the president has removed you from the office of deputy attorney general

of the United States." A few minutes later, the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, issued a corrosive statement regarding the action: "Ms. Yates is an Obama Administration appointee who is weak on borders and very weak on illegal immigration. It is time to get serious about protecting our country."

Sally Quillian Yates, who is fifty-six, spent more than two decades as a federal prosecutor in Georgia before being named a U.S. Attorney and then the Deputy Attorney General by President Obama. She and her husband, Comer, live in Atlanta, but she keeps a modest apartment in Washington, where I met her for her first interview since her career at the Department of Justice ended. Yates was composed, disciplined, and sharp-witted as she spoke about her brief time in the Trump Administration, but she showed more emotion when we came to the moment of her firing.

"Intellectually, I absolutely knew that this was a strong possibility," she said. "But I didn't want to end my service with the Department of Justice by being fired. Of course, I was temporary—I understand that. But, after twenty-seven years, that's not how I expected it to end. Knowing something intellectually, and feeling it emotionally, as I am demonstrating right now, are kind of two different things."

After her dismissal, Yates went home to Georgia, and refused all media requests. When she returned to Washington, more than three months later, it was to appear before a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee about her ten tumultuous days in the Trump Administration. Yates testified about the travel ban, and about the potentially criminal conduct of General Michael Flynn, the former national-security adviser, who was forced to resign after lying about conversations with the Russian Ambassador. In her Georgia lilt, Yates explained that she had repeatedly warned the White House about Flynn, contradicting the Trump Administration's story. She recalled that she told the White House counsel, Don McGahn, that "the national-security adviser essentially could be blackmailed by the Russians."

Yates faced nine senators, eight of

them men, who at times lectured her about her responsibilities.

“Are you familiar with 8 U.S.C. Section 1182?” Senator Ted Cruz asked.

“Not off the top of my head, no,” Yates replied.

“It is the binding statutory authority for the executive order that you refused to implement, and that led to your termination. So it—it certainly is a relevant and not a terribly obscure statute.”

Cruz read a portion of the law, which vested the President with the authority to “suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants,” and gave a self-satisfied grin.

“I am familiar with that,” Yates told Cruz. “And I’m also familiar with an additional provision of the I.N.A.”—the Immigration and Nationality Act—“that says no person shall receive preference or be discriminated against an issuance of a visa because of race, nationality, or place of birth, that I believe was promulgated after the statute that you just quoted.” She added that, beyond the text of the statute, she had to judge whether Trump’s executive order was in violation of the Constitution.

The video clip of Yates’s retort became a social-media sensation. During the subsequent round of questioning, Cruz was conspicuously absent.

Before her firing, few people had heard of Sally Yates, but she became a hero to the Trump opposition. Hundreds of people sent her letters of thanks, which are stacked in her home in Atlanta. “‘Humbling’ is the only word I can think of,” she said. “I’ve never been generous enough to write somebody else a letter who did something that didn’t personally involve me.” After her Senate appearance, many young women—and plenty of men—made Yates their social-media avatar, as Yates’s twenty-five-year-old daughter proudly informed her.

Sally Caroline Quillian was born in Atlanta in 1960, into a family of lawyers and Methodist ministers. “Those were the two career options,” she told me. Her father, J. Kelley Quillian, served as a judge on the Georgia Court of Appeals from 1966 to 1984. His father, Joseph Dillard Quil-

lian, who was born in Georgia in 1893, practiced law for thirty-eight years before becoming a judge, serving on the state supreme court from 1960 to 1966. When he died, in 1968, his official court obituary praised him for having “an insatiable desire to follow the letter of the law in all opinions that he wrote or participated in.”

Yates’s paternal grandmother, Tabitha Quillian, was one of the first women to be admitted to the Georgia bar, in 1934. She had studied under a lawyer, without telling her husband. According to family lore, he learned about it when he found her name in the newspaper one morning. Yates told me, “My grandfather turned to her and said, ‘Look at that! There’s another Tabitha Quillian who passed the bar.’” At that time in the South, it was unheard of for women to practice law, so she worked as her husband’s legal secretary and then played a similar role for her two sons. Yates was impressed by her willingness to speak out. “Mama, as we called her, was not one to hold back her opinion on things,” she said.

Yates’s mother, Xara Terrell, was also a Georgia native and the daughter of a lawyer. She and Kelley Quillian had two daughters, Sally and her sister, Terre, who is now a conservative talk-radio host in Birmingham, Alabama. Yates went to college at the University of Georgia, where she studied journalism. “When I graduated from college, my thought was: I don’t want to be a lawyer. I don’t want to marry a lawyer. And I don’t even really want a lot of lawyer friends,” she said. “I am a lawyer. I married a lawyer. And I’ve got a lot of lawyer friends. So much for knowing what you’re going to do.” Thinking that she might want to work on Capitol Hill, she spent a summer in Washington as an intern for Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia. After college, she moved to Washington and worked as a staff assistant for Representative Jack Brinkley, a conservative Democrat, also from Georgia. The experience helped change her mind about studying law. “I loved the process of being in the center, where it felt like the important decisions are being made about our country,” she said.

After working for Brinkley, Yates

attended the University of Georgia School of Law, receiving a full scholarship and graduating in 1986. That year, her father, who had long suffered from depression, committed suicide. Yates told me, “Tragically, the fear of stigma then associated with depression prevented him from getting the treatment he needed.”

After law school, Yates spent three years in private practice at King & Spalding, in Atlanta, a prestigious firm founded in 1885. When she was there, it was run by Griffin Bell, Jimmy Carter’s Attorney General. Bell was a family friend, and he became her mentor. “He had a strong moral compass,” she told me. “He was very clear about keeping the Justice Department separate from other parts of government, particularly the White House.”

Yates did not find her work at King & Spalding especially satisfying; she described most of it as “two companies fighting over money.” Bell, knowing that she was “itching for a cause,” found a pro-bono case for her. The client was Lovie Morrison Jones, an African-American woman in her nineties. Decades before, Jones had inherited ninety-two acres in rural Barrow County, Georgia, from her family, who were among the first black landowners in the area. Because Jones distrusted the courts, she never filed the deed, and kept it tucked in her shirt as she tilled the land. In the early eighties, she learned that several acres, mostly swampland, had been sold without her knowledge, and that a developer planned to build a subdivision there.

Yates was then in her late twenties. “I had absolutely no idea what I was doing,” she told me. But she remembered an obscure doctrine from law school. “There’s an old theory called adverse possession that you learn in property law,” she said. “If you use property openly and notoriously for seven years with a claim of right, then it’s yours. The theory being ‘I’m putting everybody here on notice: This is my property. You got a problem with that, you need to say something.’”

Yates found a woman, Ruth Chancey, who had seen Jones working the disputed piece of land. But Chancey was from a moonshining family that



*"I don't know about you, but I say it's time we started experimenting with drugs."*

was part of the Dixie Mafia, a criminal organization in the South, and she wasn't eager to testify. "Her son had been convicted for murder," Yates said. "My recollection is that he killed a man and dropped him into a well, so Chancey didn't have a lot of warm feelings for the court system." But Chancey finally agreed, and she helped convince the jury that the land belonged to Jones.

That jury left a deep impression on Yates. "They were so proud of what they were doing, because they were taking really seriously their oath and their obligation to uphold the law and to apply the law to the facts," she said. "I still have the image of them coming back in. I was just ready to throw up, I was so nervous at that point."

Soon afterward, Yates had dinner with friends who had worked in the U.S. Attorney's office, and she realized, she said, that, with the exception of Jones's case, "I didn't have the

sense of purpose behind my practice there that they were describing." She sought advice from Bell, who encouraged her to join the Justice Department.

Bob Barr, then the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, and later one of the most conservative anti-Clinton Republicans in the House, hired her in 1989. "I remember her very vividly as an outstanding candidate for an Assistant U.S. Attorney position," Barr told me. "I was very pleased to hire her and never regretted it."

One of the Assistant Attorneys in the office cautioned Yates against taking the job, telling her that, coming from a silk-stocking firm, she might not be ready to deal with criminals. But Yates went on to prosecute a series of high-profile cases. One, in 1994, implicated some of Atlanta's most prominent officials, including Ira Jackson, its first black city councilman, in a corruption scheme

at Hartsfield International Airport. Douglas A. Blackmon, who covered the case for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and has known Yates for decades, recalled, "She was facing off in this gigantic corruption trial not just against the city's most powerful figures but against a dream team of the highest-paid criminal-defense attorneys in Atlanta." Yates won the case, sending Jackson to prison, along with the brother-in-law of a federal judge. "That was awkward," she told me. The judge was a close friend.

Perhaps her most famous case was against Eric Rudolph. He was charged with bombing the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, a lesbian bar in Atlanta in 1997, and two abortion clinics in 1997 and 1998, killing three people. Rudolph's bombs were "grisly, ugly things," Yates recalled, with "two-inch nails laid head to toe that are circling all the pipes." He was finally apprehended in 2003, when a police officer found him eating from a dumpster in a small town in North Carolina.

Rudolph had stolen a large cache of dynamite, which he used to detonate the bombs, and much of it remained missing. One day, Yates received a call from Paul Kish, an attorney for Rudolph. As Yates recalled, "Paul told me, 'He's got about two hundred and fifty pounds of dynamite that is buried in a national forest, but it's not very far beneath the surface.'" The forest was popular with Scout troops, and if a camper pounded a tent stake into the dynamite it could detonate. Kish said that Rudolph had agreed to tell Yates where the dynamite was if she took the death penalty off the table.

"We're thinking, What do we do here?" Yates said. "If you're going to have a death-penalty case, this is a death-penalty case. But, on the other hand, are we going to put people's lives at risk?" She decided to make the deal. Alberto Gonzales, who was George W. Bush's Attorney General at the time, approved her decision.

Rudolph gave directions over the phone to Kish, who gave them to Yates. She then relayed the information to federal agents, who went into the forest. "The agents were very leery," Yates said. "They thought, We may very well



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be being sent out to this place where his real goal is not for us to find his dynamite but to kill us.” The agents found the dynamite and safely detonated it, leaving behind enormous craters. Rudolph pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison.

In 2009, the Obama White House wanted to nominate Yates to be the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia. Her record of prosecuting local Democrats presented a problem, however. Representative John Lewis, the celebrated civil-rights leader and Georgia Democrat, told me, “The four African-American members, and three of the members in particular, that made up the delegation at the time had raised some concerns, and part of it had to do with her prosecution of the former mayor of the city of Atlanta, Bill Campbell.” Yates said that she heard about these concerns, and, after running into Lewis on a flight, she asked him for a meeting. Afterward, Lewis said, “I threw all of my support behind her.” The Senate voted unanimously for her confirmation.

As a U.S. Attorney, Yates pursued several significant white-collar criminal cases, among them a Ponzi scheme in which some hundred and fifty people were defrauded of more than twelve million dollars; Allergan’s fraudulent promotion of Botox as a treatment for headache, pain, and juvenile cerebral palsy; and an international hacking ring that stole nine million dollars from more than two thousand A.T.M.s in less than twelve hours.

In September, 2014, Eric Holder, then the Attorney General, announced that he was leaving the Justice Department. Obama nominated Loretta Lynch, a U.S. Attorney from Brooklyn, to replace him, and Yates as the Deputy Attorney General. That November, Obama announced several executive orders that would have protected more than eight million undocumented immigrants. The Republican Congress revolted, claiming that the President’s actions were illegal. Lynch told me, “It came out while I was in the middle of my confirmation process. I wasn’t involved in it at all, but it became a focus of my hearing.”

Yates started out as acting Deputy

Attorney General under Holder, in January, 2015. At the hearing to officially confirm her for the position, in March, 2015, Republicans, including Jeff Sessions, asked her whether she would stand up to President Obama if he defied the law. “They were all over me about ‘Look, you’ve got to be independent. You don’t work for the President,’” Yates said. “They’re absolutely right. You’ve got to be able to say no to the President. You’ve got



to make your own decisions about what’s lawful and constitutional.”

The vote on Yates was 84–12. One of the “No” votes was from Sessions, whom Trump chose to lead his Justice Department.

Obama and Holder had worked together on criminal-justice-reform efforts, including reductions in sentencing for nonviolent drug offenders. After Holder’s departure, Obama relied on Yates to lead those efforts, Holder told Blackmon, who is a senior fellow at the University of Virginia’s Miller Center and is co-writing a book with him. Holder recalled that, when he was Attorney General, Yates had accompanied him to a meeting at the White House, and Obama came away impressed. After Holder left the department, Obama, who still solicited his advice, continued to ask him, “‘What does Sally think?’”

Some career prosecutors were skeptical of the reform efforts, including the Smart on Crime program, which Holder started in 2013, and which urged prosecutors to allocate fewer resources for low-level convictions. Lynch recalled, “Many senior Assistant U.S. Attorneys initially said, ‘What is this? Are you saying that I was doing something wrong for doing my job before?’” Cecilia Muñoz, the director of Obama’s White House Domestic Policy Council, told me that Yates successfully reframed the issue: “She argued there is

something to be gained by actually focussing your resources where they are going to make the biggest difference if we have better sentencing policy.”

During Obama’s final two years in office, he intended to work through an enormous backlog of commutation requests, and Yates was his primary contact. Valerie Jarrett, Obama’s senior adviser, told me, “He looked to Sally to do that last review before the recommendations were sent over to the White House counsel.” Yates spent hours on the phone with Obama, who eventually commuted more than a thousand sentences.

Several Obama Administration officials said that, by the end of Obama’s second term, Yates was effectively running the Justice Department. A former senior Justice official said, “A lot of people by default looked to Sally and to her folks if you needed to get a decision made.” Another senior Obama Administration official said, of Yates, “The reality was that the President saw her as more committed and more effective to his agenda than he did Loretta. That’s just a fact.”

This January, before Trump was inaugurated, the incoming and outgoing leaders of departments held a four-hour exercise in emergency planning on the White House grounds. Lynch was out of town, so Yates represented the department, sitting next to Sessions as they role-played responses to events such as a terrorist attack or an Ebola outbreak. Sessions made it clear that Trump wanted Yates to stay on as acting Attorney General. “I expected this to be an uneventful few weeks,” she told me.

Around that time, Yates reviewed an intelligence report that would have profound consequences for the Trump Administration. On December 29th, President Obama had announced sanctions against Russia, in response to its interference in the Presidential election. That day, Michael Flynn, Trump’s designated national-security adviser, had spoken on the phone to Sergey Kislyak, the Russian Ambassador. In Yates’s Senate testimony, she said that Flynn’s “conduct” during the call was “problematic.” Flynn reportedly discussed the sanctions with Kislyak, a possible violation

of the Logan Act, which prohibits civilians from intervening in a dispute with a foreign government. (Yates declined to comment on Flynn's conversations with Kislyak or on any other classified information.)

Yates faced an extremely difficult decision: Was it more important to protect the F.B.I.'s investigation, which included the question of whether Trump officials had colluded with the Russians, or to notify the White House that Flynn's conduct was potentially criminal? Yates consulted with James Comey, then the F.B.I. director. She said, "We wanted to do it as quickly as we possibly could. Yet we also wanted to be respectful of how a notification like that might impact the F.B.I.'s underlying investigation." Yates added, "There's no playbook for this. The good news is, this doesn't come up very often."

As a U.S. Attorney, Yates was part of a group that had developed a risk-assessment policy for prosecutors, and she described the situation in those terms. "It might be that you've got an agent who's sitting on a wiretap and he finds out that they're threatening a witness," she said. "What do you do there? If you go tell the witness, you're going to blow the wire, but it's more important that you tell the witness than that you keep the wire."

In most cases, Yates said, "you try to find a way of balancing it, of figuring out timing and how you do a notification." With Flynn, the balance shifted after he lied to White House officials and they repeated those claims. On January 15th, Vice-President Mike Pence said in an interview with CBS that Flynn and Kislyak hadn't discussed sanctions. On January 23rd, Sean Spicer gave a summary of Flynn and Kislyak's conversation, and he, too, denied that there had been any discussion of sanctions. At this point, Flynn was in what Yates called a "compromise situation." The Russians knew that he had lied, and he was vulnerable to blackmail.

On January 24th, the Justice Department sent F.B.I. agents to interview Flynn. Yates was briefed about the session the next day. I asked her if the agents believed that Flynn had lied to them, which would be a

federal offense. "I can't answer that," she told me.

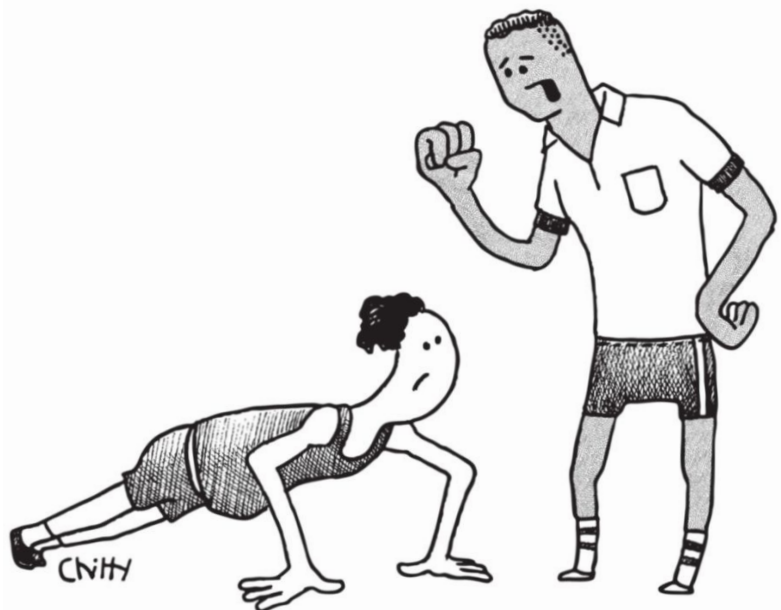
On Thursday, January 26th, Yates, accompanied by a career official from the Justice Department's National Security Division, went to the White House to give a warning about Flynn. They arrived in a car with her security detail, and passes that allowed them to go directly to the office of the White House counsel, Don McGahn. Yates said that, after outlining what Pence and others had said about Flynn's conduct, she "then walked him through how we knew it was untrue and what our evidence was." She told me that McGahn did not appear to know that the F.B.I. had interviewed Flynn two days earlier. (He may have been playing dumb. Last week, the *Times* reported that, on January 4th, the F.B.I. notified McGahn of a separate investigation involving payments made to Flynn by an agent of the Turkish government.) McGahn "got that it was serious," Yates said. He asked if Flynn should be fired, and Yates declined to offer an opinion. (McGahn did not respond to requests for comment.)

On Friday, McGahn invited Yates and the Justice Department official back to the White House. He asked

how serious the potential violations were, and how likely it was that Flynn would be prosecuted. Yates recalled that she said, "That misses the point of why we're telling you about all this." She told me, "We had just gone and told them that the national-security adviser, of all people, was compromised with the Russians, and that their Vice-President and others had been lying to the American people about it." McGahn asked whether taking action against Flynn would interfere with the F.B.I.'s investigation. "You should not worry about that," Yates said. "It's not going to impact the investigation. Flynn has already been interviewed. We're telling you this so you can act." Finally, McGahn asked that the F.B.I. make the evidence against Flynn available to him.

Yates told McGahn that she would have the Flynn materials for him by Monday morning. She left the White House, stopped at the Justice Department to pick up some documents, and continued on to the airport. She was returning to Atlanta for a dinner honoring a camp for children with serious illnesses and disabilities, which her husband has supported for years. On the way to the airport, she received

## IMPERSONAL TRAINER



*"Go for it, whatshisname! You can, or possibly cannot, do this!"*

a call from her deputy, Matt Axelrod. “You’re not going to believe this, but I just read online that the President has executed this travel ban,” he said.

It was the first Yates had heard of the order. “I had been sitting in Don McGahn’s office an hour before that,” she said. “He didn’t tell me.” She later learned that lawyers in the Office of Legal Counsel, at the Justice Department, had reviewed the order, and that they had been instructed not to share it with her. A source familiar with the process said that even the most senior Trump aide assigned to Yates’s office didn’t know about the order until he saw the news on CNN.

Yates found the order online and read it on her iPad. At the dinner, she spent much of the evening on her phone at the back of the ballroom. Over the weekend, several individuals challenged the executive order in federal court. Yates read through the briefs, and thought that two arguments against the order were particularly strong. Because it appeared to be based on the Muslim ban that Trump had proposed during the campaign, and because it gave preferential treatment to Syrian Christians, it arguably violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. And, because the ban denied entry both to visa holders and to legal residents, there seemed to be serious due-process questions. From Atlanta, Yates instructed Justice lawyers to address any procedural issues, but to refrain from taking any position on the constitutionality of the order.

On Monday, back in Washington, Yates gathered about a dozen Trump political appointees and senior career staff in her conference room, where she had hung a large portrait of former Attorney General Griffin Bell. “It was a long discussion about the order and whether it was appropriate and constitutional,” a source familiar with the process said. “There was no consensus, but there was a lot of discussion.”

Yates recalled saying, “I’m troubled about this from a constitutional standpoint—really troubled about this—but I want to hear, O.K., here are the challenges, but what’s the defense to this?” She wasn’t impressed by the argument, made by some officials, that the order had nothing to do with religion.

After the meeting, she asked Trump’s most senior appointee in the office to stay, and told him that she remained concerned, and wasn’t sure what she would do.

Yates went back to her office, where she weighed her options: she would either resign or refuse to defend the order. She told me, “But here’s the thing: resignation would have protected my own personal integrity, because I wouldn’t have been part of this, but I believed, and I still think, that I had an obligation to also protect the integrity of the Department of Justice. And that meant that D.O.J. doesn’t go into court on something as fundamental as religious freedom, making an argument about something that I was not convinced was grounded in truth.” She went on, “In fact, I thought, based on all the evidence I had, that it was based on religion. And then I thought back to Jim Crow laws, or literacy tests. Those didn’t say that the purpose was to prevent African-Americans from voting. But that’s what the purpose was.”

She continued, “This is a defining, founding principle of our country: religious freedom. How can the Department of Justice go in and defend something that so significantly undermines that, when we’re not convinced it’s true?”

Yates then wrote a statement, in which she concluded, “For as long as I am the Acting Attorney General, the Department of Justice will not present arguments in defense of the Executive Order, unless and until I become convinced that it is appropriate to do so.”

She called the senior Trump appointee into her office and handed him a copy. As he read it, he thought, “Oh, my God, the President’s gonna fire you for this.”

The statement was sent to thousands of department employees around the country. About four hours later, at around 9 P.M., McGahn’s office asked the senior Trump appointee to deliver a letter to Yates, notifying her that she had been fired. He said a prayer, and walked down the hall.

“Madam Attorney General, I have a memorandum for you from the White House that I’ve been asked to deliver,” he said.

Yates read the letter, and he said,

“Ma’am, thank you for all your service.”

“Thank you,” she replied. “I understand.”

Yates gathered up some of her things, and her security detail dropped her off at her apartment. The objects she’d left behind—files, plaques, photos—were cleared out, so that her replacement, Dana Boente, who was then the acting Deputy Attorney General, could start right away.

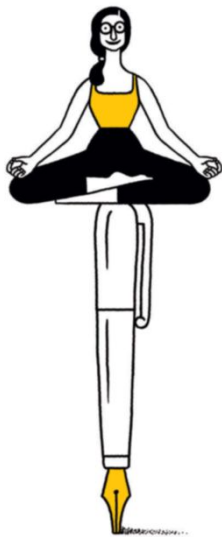
When I sat down with Yates, it was the day after Trump fired James Comey. As with Yates’s dismissal, Comey’s raised questions about whether the President was trying to obstruct the F.B.I.’s investigation.

Yates told me, “The White House is not supposed to be involved in any investigations of the Department of Justice, which includes the F.B.I., and certainly not any investigations that involved the campaign of the President.” She added, “That’s just not who we are—or who we were, I guess.”

The next day, the *Times* reported that, hours after Yates’s second meeting with McGahn, Trump had dinner with Comey and asked the F.B.I. director to pledge his loyalty to him. Comey refused. Last week, it emerged that Trump had subsequently asked Comey to end the F.B.I.’s investigation of Flynn. Rod Rosenstein, the Deputy Attorney General, appointed Robert Mueller, the former F.B.I. director, as a special counsel to oversee the investigation.

Yates has been following these developments from Georgia, where Democrats have been trying to recruit her to run for governor in 2018. Yates told me, “I am totally ruling out the governor’s race.” But she also said that she wants to find another role in public life. “I recognize that I may have a voice that I didn’t have before, and part of what I want to be able to do is to figure out how I can responsibly use that voice in a way to impact things that I think really matter,” she said.

Yates remained at the Department of Justice for almost three decades because she thought that she was making a difference. “I know all of this sounds so holier-than-thou and corny and all of that, but that’s the case,” she said. “I want to find something—I just don’t know what that’s going to be.” ♦



## THE WRITER'S PROCESS

BY HALLIE CANTOR

Hmm, what's my process? Funny, I don't think anyone's ever asked me that before. I don't really have a "process," per se, just a simple routine that I meticulously follow every day like a disciplined genius robot.

I usually wake up around 5 or 5:05 A.M., and get out of bed immediately. I do not press snooze. I do not start scrolling through Twitter so that the brightness of my phone's L.E.D. screen will force my eyes into awakeness, but then continue reading tweets for so long that my eyes adjust to the brightness and I get sleepy again.

I meditate first thing in the morning. I do this sitting down on a meditation pillow (which is not painful, because I have naturally good posture). I do not use a meditation app, because I am not a baby. I just set a timer to emit a gentle gong sound after an hour, and I empty my mind. When thoughts do arise, they are usually really smart thoughts about my writing, but I do not hold on to them in a panic, because I have enough faith in myself to know that they will return when it is time.

Then I run ten miles and make a smoothie. I don't drink coffee, because that would probably just lead to hours of wondering if maybe I haven't had enough coffee but being unwilling to drink more because I don't want to get

addicted and need more and more coffee every day just to be able to function. The smoothie usually has coconut oil in it—yum!

Finally, it's time to write.

My desk is a clean, uncluttered expanse that I use solely for writing, and certainly not as a dumping ground for wedding invitations, gum wrappers, and grocery-store receipts that I'm afraid to throw away in case I need them for "tax purposes." On the wall above my computer, I have taped up an index card with a quote from Kafka or Don DeLillo or some other cool writer, which inspires me anew each time I look at it. You'd think that I would become blind to it after a while, or that I might occasionally feel embarrassed by its pretentiousness when guests come over, but nope! It's just constantly inspirational and not embarrassing.

I remain seated at my desk for the entirety of my writing session. (I do not attempt to convince myself that I could be just as productive if I were writing in bed, and that it would be kind of fun and "like college.")

I don't need to disable my Internet connection, because—honestly?—I'm not even tempted. I understand that social media does not hold the answers I seek, and that looking at it will only

make me feel terrible. And, what's more, my understanding of this fact translates seamlessly into my actual behavior.

I have a friendly relationship with the mysterious forces that govern my creative inspiration—my muses, if you will. When they visit me, a soft smile alights on my lips. "Hello, old friends," I murmur fondly. My experience of writing is a giddy, pleasurable one, and does not feel like being trapped inside a cage that is on fire.

When I write, I let my characters speak through me—I am but a vessel for their words. I shut out all distractions and turn off my phone, because I definitely don't worry that if I take too long to text people back they'll decide they hate me and never text me again.

In the afternoon, I typically take a long walk. I do not listen to podcasts. Why would I? The music of the natural world is podcast enough. As you may have noticed, a running theme in my process is that I am not afraid to be alone with my thoughts. Not at all.

Of course, some days the muses may not visit me. When this occurs, I accept the situation with equanimity and give myself permission to write a clumsy first draft and vigorously edit it later. This approach is possible because I understand that my intrinsic self-worth is separate from my talent and my productivity, and because I know that I am deserving of love even if my writing is not very good. This gives me the freedom to take risks, which, in turn, actually makes my writing very good. Funny, right?

If I am truly stuck, I read a book. I do not watch a twenty-two-minute sitcom as a "break" from the immense stress of waking up and sitting down at a desk. Not even if there is a new episode on Hulu of a show I don't particularly like but have seen every previous episode of.

Anyway, I guess that's my process. It's all about repetition, really—doing the same thing every single day. No one else in the world cares at all, yet I still do it! Because I, a human being, have the self-control to maintain this routine in a complete vacuum of social interaction or any positive reinforcement.

Oh, and I almost forgot—I go to bed super early. ♦

# THE END OF SAND

*It's one of our most widely used natural resources, but it's scarcer than you think.*

BY DAVID OWEN



*A report said that sand and gravel mining “greatly exceeds natural renewal rates.”*

The final event of last year’s beach-volleyball world tour was held in Toronto, in September, in a parking lot at the edge of Lake Ontario. There’s a broad public beach nearby, but few actual beaches meet the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball’s strict standards for sand, so the tournament’s sponsor had erected a temporary stadium and imported thirteen hundred and sixty tons from a quarry two and a half hours to the north. The shipment arrived in thirty-five tractor-trailer loads.

I visited the site shortly before the tournament, and spoke with Todd Knapton, who was supervising the installation. He’s the vice-president of

the company that supplied the sand, Hutcheson Sand & Mixes, in Huntsville, Ontario. He’s in his fifties, and he was wearing a white hard hat, a neon-yellow-green T-shirt, dark-gray shorts, and slip-on steel-toed boots. We walked through a gate and across an expanse of asphalt to a pair of warmup courts, which from a distance looked like enormous baking pans filled with butterscotch-brownie batter. “You want to see the players buried up to their ankles,” he said, and stuck in a foot, to demonstrate. “Rain or shine, hot or cold, it should be like a kid trying to ride a bicycle through marbles.”

Ordinary beach sand tends to be too firm for volleyball: when players

dive into it, they break fingers, tear hamstrings, and suffer other impact injuries. Knapton helped devise the sport’s sand specifications, after Canadian players complained about the courts at the 1996 Olympic Games, in Atlanta. “It was trial and error at first,” he said. “But we came up with an improved recipe, and we now have a material that’s uniform from country to country to country, on five continents.” The specifications govern the shape, size, and hardness of the sand grains, and they disallow silt, clay, dirt, and other fine particles, which not only stick to perspiring players but also fill voids between larger grains, making the playing surface firmer. The result is sand that drains so well that building castles with it would be impossible. “We had two rainstorms last night, but these courts are ready to play on,” he said. “You could take a fire hose to this sand and you’d never flood it.”

Beach-volleyball promoters all over the world have to submit one-kilogram samples to Knapton for approval, and his office now contains hundreds of specimens. (He also vets beach-soccer sand for FIFA.) Hutcheson doesn’t ship its own sand to events overseas, but Knapton and his colleagues often create courts in other countries, after sourcing sand where they can. He took off his hard hat and showed me the underside of the brim, on which he had recorded, in black Sharpie, the names and dates of big events they’ve handled, among them the Olympic Games in Sydney, Athens, Beijing, and London. (The sand for London came from Redhill, in Surrey; the sand for Athens came from Belgium.) The company’s biggest recent challenge was the first European Games, which were held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2015. Baku has beaches—it’s on a peninsula on the western shore of the Caspian Sea—but the sand is barely suitable for sunbathing, much less for volleyball. Knapton’s crew searched the region and found a large deposit with the ideal mixture of particle sizes, in a family-owned mine in the Nur Mountains, in southern Turkey, eight hundred miles to the west.

The mine is within shelling distance of the Syrian border. Knapton had planned to transport the sand across central Syria, through Iraq, around

Armenia, and into Azerbaijan from the northwest, in two convoys of more than two hundred and fifty trucks each. But geopolitics intervened. “You can cross those borders only at certain hours of the day, and ISIS was making the guys antsy,” he said. “In the end, we said, ‘Well, we could have handled *one* war.’” Instead, Knapton and his crew bagged the sand in one-and-a-half-ton fabric totes, trucked it west to Iskenderun, and craned it onto ships. “We did five vessels, five separate trips,” Knapton said. “The route went across the Mediterranean, up the Aegean, through the Bosphorus, across the Black Sea, and into Sochi.” From there, they took the sand by rail through Russia and Georgia, around Armenia, and across Azerbaijan. “The Syrian exodus was on at that time, and we saw people walking for their lives,” he said. “But these were the first-ever European Games, so everything had to be right.”

Sand covers so much of the earth’s surface that shipping it across borders—even uncontested ones—seems extreme. But sand isn’t just sand, it turns out. In the industrial world, it’s “aggregate,” a category that includes gravel, crushed stone, and various recycled materials. Natural aggregate is the world’s second most heavily exploited natural resource, after water, and for many uses the right kind is scarce or inaccessible. In 2014, the United Nations Environment Programme published a report titled “Sand, Rarer Than One Thinks,” which concluded that the mining of sand and gravel “greatly exceeds natural renewal rates” and that “the amount being mined is increasing exponentially, mainly as a result of rapid economic growth in Asia.”

Pascal Peduzzi, a Swiss scientist and the director of one of the U.N.’s environmental groups, told the BBC last May that China’s swift development had consumed more sand in the previous four years than the United States used in the past century. In India, commercially useful sand is now so scarce that markets for it are dominated by “sand mafias”—criminal enterprises that sell material taken illegally from rivers and other sources, sometimes killing to safeguard their deposits. In the United States, the fastest-growing uses include the fortification of

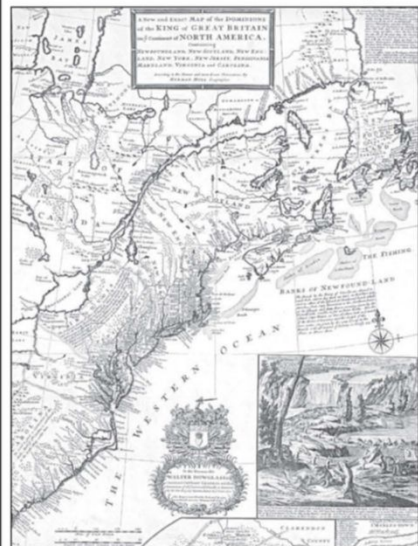
shorelines eroded by rising sea levels and more and more powerful ocean storms—efforts that, like many attempts to address environmental challenges, create environmental challenges of their own.

Geologists define sand not by composition but by size, as grains between 0.0625 and two millimetres across. Just below sand on the size scale is silt; just above it is gravel. Most sand consists chiefly of quartz, the commonest form of silica, but there are other kinds. Sand on ocean beaches usually includes a high proportion of shell pieces and, increasingly, bits of decomposing plastic trash; Hawaii’s famous black sand is weathered fragments of volcanic glass; the sand in the dunes at White Sands National Monument, in New Mexico, is mainly gypsum. Sand is almost always formed through the gradual disintegration of bigger rocks, by the action of ice, water, wind, and time, but, as the geologist Michael Welland writes, in his book “Sand: The Never-Ending Story,” many of those bigger rocks were themselves formed from accumulations of the eroded bits of other rocks, and “perhaps half of all sand grains have been through *six* cycles in the mill, liberated, buried, exposed, and liberated again.”

Sand is also classified by shape, in configurations that range from oblong and sharply angular to nearly spherical and smooth. Desert sand is almost always highly rounded, because strong winds knock the grains together so forcefully that protrusions and sharp edges break off. River sand is more angular. William H. Langer, a research geologist who retired from the U.S. Geological Survey a few years ago and now works as a private consultant, told me, “In a stream, there’s a tiny film of water around each grain, so when the grains bang together there’s enough energy to break them apart but not enough to let them rub against each other.” The shape of sand deposited by glaciers and ice sheets depends partly on how far the sand was moved and what it was moved over. Most of the sand in the Hutcheson quarry is “sub-angular”: the grains have fractured faces, but the sharp edges have been partly abraded away. Sand that’s very slightly

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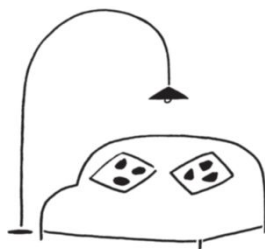
Aggregate is the main constituent of concrete (eighty per cent) and asphalt (ninety-four per cent), and it’s also the primary base material that concrete and asphalt are placed on during the building of roads, buildings, parking lots, runways, and many other structures. A report published in 2004 by the American Geological Institute said that a typical American house requires more than a hundred tons of sand, gravel, and crushed stone for the foundation, basement, garage, and driveway, and more than two hundred tons if you include its share of the street that runs in front of it. A mile-long section of a single lane of an American interstate highway requires thirty-eight thousand tons. The most dramatic global increase in aggregate consumption is occurring in parts of the world where people who build roads are trying to keep pace with people who buy cars. Chinese officials have said that by 2030 they hope to have completed a hundred and sixty-five thousand miles of roads—a national network nearly three and a half times as long as the American interstate system.

Windowpanes, wineglasses, and cell-phone screens are made from melted sand. Sand is used for filtration in water-treatment facilities, septic systems, and swimming pools. Oil and gas drillers inject large quantities of hard, round sand into fracked rock formations in order to hold the cracks open, like showing a foot in the door. Railroad locomotives drop angular sand onto the rails in front of their wheels as they brake, to improve traction. Australia and India are major exporters of garnet sand, which is crushed to make an abrasive material used in sandblasting and by water-jet cutters. Foundries use sand to form the molds for iron bolts, manhole covers, engine blocks, and other cast-metal objects. I once visited a foundry in Arizona whose products included parts for airplanes, cruise missiles, and artificial hip joints, and I watched a worker pouring molten stainless steel into a mold that had been made by repeatedly dipping a wax pattern into a ceramic slurry and then into sand. The work area was so hot that I nervously checked my arm, because I

thought my shirt was on fire. Factories that produce plate glass—by pouring thin layers of molten silica onto baths of molten tin—can be hotter.

In some applications, natural aggregate can be replaced by or supplemented with recycled materials, but the possibilities are limited. And efforts to reduce consumption are complicated by the fact that many environmentally desirable products and activities depend as heavily on aggregate as environmentally undesirable ones do: solar panels are made from silica and silicon; wind turbines are manufactured with foundry sand; autonomous electric vehicles need roads and highways, too.

Last summer, at a quarry in western Connecticut, I put my hand into a big pile of sand that was the pinkish-gray color of calamine lotion. In a couple of months, the pile was going to be trucked to New York City, eighty miles south, and spread on top of Wollman Rink for the annual Rolex Central Park Horse Show. (Afterward, the sand would be trucked back to the quarry, to be stored until the following fall.) Bill Stanley, a vice-president of the construction company that owns the quarry, told me, “We make a customized, proprietary blend of horse-footing sand, and we’re sending it all over New York State and out to the Rocky Mountains. People want it in Europe, too.” The color comes from



a dye; fibres and other additives are mixed in as well, to create a material that is sufficiently yielding to protect the feet and legs of very large animals but firm enough to support running and jumping. (It’s too stiff for volleyball.)

There’s no single standard for equestrian sand; different producers have different recipes. The pile I stuck my hand into is known as a manufactured sand, because it was produced by crush-

ing stone—in this case, dolomitic marble. The marble in the quarry is part of the Stockbridge Formation, which runs from eastern New York to Vermont. “You can’t really use it as building marble, because it’s too jointed,” Stanley said. “But it makes exceptionally high-quality sand. It’s all calcium carbonate and magnesium carbonate, and Portland cement chemically bonds with it. We sell it mostly for landscaping and for architectural concrete.” He drove me up a narrow access road to a spot overlooking the main pit. “We developed this quarry for sand,” he said. “Sand is something you’ve got to keep your eye on, to be sure you have a good, reliable source for the long term.” For many years, Stanley’s company bought large quantities of high-quality aggregate from a dredging operation off the southern end of Staten Island, not far from an entrance to New York Harbor, but that operation was shut down in 2015, amid concerns that the dredges were doing environmental damage to the seafloor.

One engineer I spoke to told me that transporting sand and stone for ordinary construction becomes uneconomical after about sixty miles, and that builders usually make do with whatever is available within that radius, even if it means settling for materials that aren’t ideal. In some places, though, there are no usable alternatives. Florida lies on top of a vast limestone formation, but most of the stone is too soft to be used in construction. “The whole Gulf Coast is starved for aggregate,” William Langer, the research geologist, told me. “So they import limestone from Mexico, from a quarry in the Yucatán, and haul it by freighter across the Caribbean.” Even that stone is wrong for some uses. “You can build most of a road with limestone from Mexico,” he continued, “but it doesn’t have much skid resistance. So to get that they have to use granitic rock, which they ship down the East Coast from quarries in Nova Scotia or haul by train from places like inland Georgia.” When Denver International Airport was being built, in the nineteen-nineties, local quarries were unable to supply crushed stone as rapidly as it was needed, so vast quantities were brought from a quarry in Wyoming



whose principal product was stone ballast for railroad tracks. The crushed stone was delivered by a freight train that ran in a continuous loop between the quarry and the work site.

Deposits of sand, gravel, and stone can be found all over the United States, but many of them are untouchable, because they're covered by houses, shopping malls, or protected land. Regulatory approval for new quarries is more and more difficult to obtain: people don't want to live near big, noisy holes, even if their lives are effectively fabricated from the products of those holes. The scarcity of alternatives makes existing quarries increasingly valuable. The Connecticut quarry I visited is one of a number owned by Stanley's company, and like many in the United States it's in operation today only because it predates current mining regulations.

Stanley showed me an old tunnel, barely visible in the underbrush, through which miners in the nineteenth century hauled stone from the quarry's original pit, on the other side of a tree-covered rise. (In those days, the principal product was lime, which was used to make mortar in the era before Portland cement.) The old pit was abandoned many years ago, and is now almost completely overgrown. "It looks like Jurassic Park," Stanley said. The company is planning to resume excavation near that area, though, as other sources become depleted. Before the work can begin, a large colony of bats—which took over the tunnel when miners stopped using it—will have to be relocated to a cavelike bat hibernaculum, which the company will build on another part of the property, with guidance from the state's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

Ten years ago, I spent a week in Dubai, which at the time was one of the fastest-growing cities in the world. Construction cranes and imported laborers were everywhere. The work went on all night, and the city's extraordinary traffic congestion was continually being made worse by road-widening projects intended to relieve it. Exhaust from cars and trucks, in combination with wind-borne dust from the Arabian Desert and humid air from the Persian Gulf, formed a



*"I'm going to miss standing and staring balefully at seated passengers on the subway once it's over."*

thick, phlegm-colored haze that made breathing unpleasant—an effect exacerbated by the ferocious heat. (Dubai gets so hot during the summer that many swimming pools are cooled, rather than heated.)

One day, I played golf with an Australian who worked for a major real-estate developer. The course, like Dubai itself, had been built on empty desert, and I commented that creating fairways and greens in such a forbidding environment must be difficult. "No," the Australian said. "Deserts are easy, because you can shape the sand into anything you like." The difficult parts, paradoxically, are the areas that are supposed to be sand: deserts make lousy sand traps. The wind-blown grains are so rounded that golf balls sink into them, so the sand in the bunkers on Dubai's many golf courses is imported. Jumeirah Golf Estates—on the outskirts of the city, next to the desert—

has two courses, Fire and Earth, both designed by Greg Norman. The sand in the bunkers on the Earth course is white (the most prized color for golf sand) and was bought from a producer in North Carolina. The sand on the Fire course is reddish brown—more like the desert across the road. Norman's company bought it from Hutcheson, which mined it at its quarry in Ontario, sifted it to make it firmer than volleyball sand, kiln-dried it, dyed it, and loaded it onto a ship.

Unfortunately for Dubai's builders and real-estate developers, desert sand is also unsuitable for construction and, indeed, for almost any human use. The grains don't have enough fractured faces for concrete and asphalt, and they're too small and round for water-filtration systems. The high-compression concrete used in Dubai's Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest structure, was made with sand imported from Australia. William

Langer told me that other desert countries face similar shortages. “Mauritania is trying to catch up with the world,” he said. “They’ve got sand all over the place, but it isn’t good even for highway construction.” Stone is so scarce in Bangladesh that contractors commonly resort to making concrete with crushed brick.

When I was in Dubai, rich people from across the world were paying such absurdly high prices for its real estate that the government decided to create more of it. From a window in a restaurant on an upper floor of my hotel, seven hundred feet above the Persian Gulf, I looked down on two vast offshore land-creation developments: Palm Jumeirah and the World. Both are artificial archipelagos. From above, Palm Jumeirah resembles a palm tree with spreading branches, or maybe a trilobite fossil. The World consists of three hundred small islands arranged in clusters that (vaguely) suggest a Mercator projection of Earth. Creating so much artificial land required enormous shipments of quarried stone, from across the Emirates, as well as hundreds of millions of tons of sand, which foreign contractors dredged from the floor of the Gulf and heaped into piles. According to a U.N. report, the dredging “exhausted all of the marine sand resources in Dubai,” and also did extensive environmental damage. Seafloor

dredging creates the undersea equivalent of choking sandstorms, killing organisms, destroying coral reefs and other habitats, and altering patterns of water circulation. In 2011, a British scientist who had studied the Dubai projects told *Nature*, “All the ecological trajectories are downhill.”

Dubai’s archipelago developments were profoundly affected by the global recession. Palm Jumeirah survived, and today its curving branches—roughly a hundred yards wide and edged by narrow artificial beaches—are covered with double rows of multimillion-dollar villas, as well as hotels, clubs, and shopping malls. But the World remains undeveloped and has essentially been abandoned, as have two other sites that were intended to be bigger versions of Palm Jumeirah. It seems unlikely that anything significant will ever be built on them, although if construction picks up elsewhere they could conceivably serve as (phenomenally expensive) aggregate mines, since marine sand can usually be used to make concrete, as long as it’s been rinsed sufficiently to remove all the salt and other undesirable materials.

**H**urricane Sandy, the most destructive ocean storm ever to strike the Northeast, made landfall on October 29, 2012, near Brigantine, New Jersey, a town on a barrier island just north of

Atlantic City. The resulting water surge flooded streets, subway tunnels, and buildings in New York and its suburbs; the storm knocked out power, and did more than sixty-five billion dollars’ worth of damage in a dozen states. (Among other alarming effects, it created twenty-foot waves in the middle of Lake Michigan, six hundred miles to the west.) The devastation in places like Brigantine—and in the Rockaways, in New York—was especially severe. I visited Brigantine two years after Sandy struck, and saw damaged houses that had been raised onto elevated concrete-block foundations in the hope of protecting them from future storm surges. Houses were still awaiting their turn with booked-up contractors; one looked like a doll house, because an exterior wall was missing, revealing the rooms inside.

The barrier island on which Brigantine sits is part of a semi-continuous chain of skinny, shifting accumulations of sand that lie a short distance offshore along much of the Gulf Coast and most of the way up the Eastern Seaboard. Robert S. Young, a geology professor at Western Carolina University, in North Carolina, told me recently, “When people first settled this country, nobody built on the barrier islands. They were too stormy, and they weren’t good places to live.” Today, however, many barrier islands are densely covered with houses—the biggest and the most expensive of which often have the greatest exposure to ocean storms, since they’re the ones with the best water views. The rapid growth in construction has been driven by lax land-use ordinances, below-market flood-insurance rates, the indomitability of the human spirit, and, mainly, the willingness of Congress to cover much of the cost when the inevitable occurs. “The Feds have poured in money over and over,” Young continued. “Folks will say to me, ‘Gosh, Robert, people must be crazy to rebuild their roads and homes again and again, after all the storms,’ and my answer is ‘No, they’re making a perfectly rational economic decision. We’re the crazy ones, because we’re paying for it.’”

Congress responded to Sandy by passing the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013, also known as the



*“Remember how nice things were before they made America great?”*

Hurricane Sandy Supplemental bill. It allocated a little more than forty-nine billion dollars for a long list of relief efforts, including more than five billion for the Army Corps of Engineers. Much of the Corps's money has been spent on dredging sand from the seafloor and piling it up on shorelines between oceanfront real estate and the water. "The federal government had been involved in similar projects over the past couple of decades," Young said. "But the projects had become so expensive that money wasn't really available anymore. Then, suddenly, after Sandy, they all became practical." An executive of Great Lakes Dredge & Dock—the country's largest dredging company, and the contractor on many Corps projects—told me that ships belonging to his company began restoring a storm-damaged beach seventy miles up the coast from Brigantine a week after Sandy. "That was actually a preexisting contract," he said. "But we really haven't left New Jersey since then."

This past October, I watched a Great Lakes crew working on Long Beach Island, a densely developed barrier island up the Jersey coast from Brigantine. The island is a little more than twenty miles long, and for most of that length it's no wider than two or three residential blocks. The crew I watched was working on a beach in Harvey Cedars, a town near the island's northern end. Two red-hulled dredging ships were anchored offshore—one in federal waters, three miles out, the other much closer. The far ship vacuumed sand from the ocean floor, fifty feet down, and when its hold was full it switched places with the near ship, which had pumped its own load into a submerged steel pipe that ran all the way to the beach. As the far ship filled, its hull slowly sank from view; as the near ship emptied, its hull slowly rose.

A dozen porpoises swam past, between the near ship and the shore. On the beach, a dark torrent of sand and seawater gushed from the open end of the pipe and through a cagelike screen—whose functions included filtering out unexploded surplus munitions, which the American military dumped in the ocean following the end of the Second World War. Dozens of wading gulls

picked edible items from the slurry, and workers with bulldozers and bucket loaders shaped the pumped sand into an extension of the dune I was standing on. That dune, which rose more than twenty feet above the water, looked more like a levee than any natural beachscape. It was roughly trapezoidal in cross-section—a long, unbroken loaf of sand running most of the length of the island, with sprigs of beach grass growing in evenly spaced rows on top of the completed sections, like hair-transplant plugs. When the project began, some homeowners complained that the dune would block their view of the water—as was certainly the case in my ground-floor room at the Drifting Sands Oceanfront Motel, in Ship Bottom.

A woman watching the Great Lakes crew from the same spot told me that she owned one of the houses now protected by the dune. Her house was very large, and, like virtually all the houses closest to the ocean, it stood on what looked like a grove of buried telephone poles: a foundation made of wooden piles, whose purpose is to allow storm surges to pass under the habitable spaces. She said that the heavy machinery on the beach was making her whole house shake. That's because vibrations were breaking the adhesion between the piles and the sand—an effect called liquefaction. Still, she said, the shaking didn't bother her very much: "The spin cycle on my washing machine makes my house shake, too."

Robert Young told me, "Storms are not a problem for barrier islands in their natural state. Think of the undeveloped portions of Fire Island. No one talks about beach erosion there, because in storms the beach doesn't disappear—it just rolls landward. A storm will take sand from the front and blow it on top and across, and the island will grow on the back side. Barrier islands are dynamic systems, and they actually need storms, because plants and animals indigenous to the islands are adapted to them."

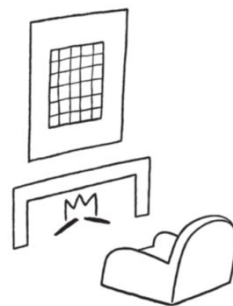
The problems start when people begin to think of mutable landforms

as permanent property. Building houses and creating artificial dunes to protect them are mutually reinforcing interventions, because the houses turn the dunes into necessities and the dunes make the houses seem rational. As in Dubai, the seafloor suffers. Offshore sand dredging has been described as "submerged, open-pit strip mining." It directly kills organisms that live or feed

on the seafloor, including sea turtles, and it stirs up clouds of fine particles, which can suffocate fish by clogging their gills. Young told me that most of the specific effects are still unmeasured and unknown, because the places from which sand is taken are hard to monitor. "They're

underwater and they're three miles offshore," Young said. "You can't just send graduate students out there once a week to see how things are going." Still, it was easy to tell that the dredges were having an impact: all those feasting gulls hadn't gathered to eat sand. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, which is part of the Department of the Interior, funded surveys after Hurricane Sandy to collect core samples from the outer continental shelf. But the program's purpose is to identify potential resources for beach nourishment, not to assess biological depredation.

I went back to the dune that evening. The Great Lakes crew was still there, a little farther up the shore, working under lights. The company's dredges operate around the clock, seven days a week, all year long; they are expensive to run and leaving them idle is uneconomical. And the job is open-ended, since the artificial dune isn't meant to be permanent: its purpose is to neutralize big waves by allowing them to consume it. The Corps expects to rebuild the entire system, from end to end, on a four-to-six-year cycle. The dredges I was watching were scheduled to move south, to Delaware, as soon as they'd finished on Long Beach Island, and then to begin working their way up the coast again. And then again, and then again after that—until either the money has run out or the ocean has risen too high to be held back by sand. ♦



# THE WARRIOR MONK

*James Mattis spent four decades on the front lines. How will he lead the Department of Defense?*

BY DEXTER FILKINS

On January 22nd, two days after President Trump was inaugurated, he received a memo from his new Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, recommending that the United States launch a military strike in Yemen. In a forty-year career, Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general and a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, had cultivated a reputation for being both deeply thoughtful and extremely aggressive. By law and by custom, the position of Defense Secretary is reserved for civilians, but Mattis was still a marine at heart. He had been out of the military for only three years (the rule is seven), and his appointment required Congress to pass a waiver. For the first time in his professional life, he was going to the Pentagon in a suit and tie.

Mattis urged Trump to launch the raid swiftly: the operation, which was aimed at one of the leaders of Al Qaeda in Yemen, required a moonless night, and the window for action was approaching. Under previous Administrations, such attacks entailed deliberation by the National Security Council. Instead, the request was discussed over dinner three days later at the White House, where Trump was joined by Mattis and several advisers, including Mike Flynn, who at the time was the national-security adviser, and Joe Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The target of the raid, they explained, was a mountain camp where the Al Qaeda leader was holed up. The military hoped to apprehend him and capture his comrades' computers and phones, which could be scoured for intelligence.

A plan for the operation had been developed under the previous Administration, but President Obama didn't want to commit to a risky mission at the end of his term. Obama's restraint was in keeping with an over-all preference for caution, which often rankled leading generals at the Pentagon. For

eight years, the White House had tightly managed the Pentagon's operations in the Middle East and in South Asia; even something as mundane as moving helicopters from one part of a war zone to another might require top-level discussion. "The Pentagon said they had to crawl through glass to get anything out of the White House," a former defense official told me. Now the generals wanted to move. "There was an eagerness in the military to do something quickly," a senior official with knowledge of the strike told me. "There was a frustration because a lot of operations had been held up." When Trump heard the plan for the Yemen strike, he gave the order to go.

Four days after the dinner meeting, SEAL Team Six landed in Yemen, under dark skies, expecting to surprise the Al Qaeda encampment. Instead, the SEALs came under attack the moment they landed. "They were waiting for us," the senior official said. The mission devolved into a firefight, which involved SEALs, Harrier jets, helicopters, and armed jihadis. At least fourteen members of Al Qaeda, including the targeted leader, were killed. But a SEAL commando also died in the fighting, and an aircraft was irreparably damaged. As many as twenty-five civilians were killed. Among them was an eight-year-old girl, the daughter of the American-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, who had been killed by a U.S. drone strike six years ago.

After press reports said that the raid had produced little valuable intelligence, Trump blamed the operation's troubles on "the generals." The senior official suggested that the real fault lay in the President's hasty decision-making. "Mattis owed it to Trump to let him know that things might go wrong," he said. "But there was no process." Still, the official told me, Mattis spread the word that he would smooth things over with the President. He publicly endorsed the opera-

tion and praised the valor of the SEAL who was killed. "The United States would not long exist were it not for the selfless commitment of such warriors," he said.

During the Presidential campaign, Trump's pronouncements on foreign policy showed little consistency, but their outlines suggested that it was isolationist and dismissive of the international order that had been constructed, largely by the United States, after the Second World War. Trump declared NATO "obsolete," and criticized previous Presidents for starting costly, unwinnable wars. His focus would be on domestic policy, and on putting "America first."

For Trump, the choice of Mattis seemed more emotional than deliberative. Their initial meeting lasted just forty minutes, and Trump seemed drawn to him less for his world view than for his fearsome reputation. Announcing his nomination for Secretary of Defense, Trump revelled in using the general's nickname—Mad Dog—and compared him to General George S. Patton, who was famous for his tactical brilliance, his profane language, and his merciless style. Anecdotes about Mattis's audacity in the field are legion. Early in the Iraq War, he met with local leaders and told them, "I come in peace. I didn't bring artillery. But I'm pleading with you, with tears in my eyes: if you fuck with me, I will kill you all."

But, in embracing Mattis's Mad Dog persona, Trump neglected a side of him that appealed to many others—that of the deeply read scholar-soldier and sophisticated analyst. In this view, Mattis is a kind of anti-Trump, a veteran of three wars who has been sobered by their brutalities, a guardian of the internationalist tradition in American foreign policy. Mattis was endorsed by Henry Kissinger, whom he had worked with at Stanford University. As if to prove his judiciousness, Mattis, during his job interview,



*Mattis is by turns deeply thoughtful and ferociously aggressive about war; he's seen by peers as both soldier and scholar.*

tried to persuade Trump to abandon the idea of reinstating torture as an interrogation tool, saying that offers of beer and cigarettes work just as well. Even the nickname Mad Dog is a misnomer; none of his friends use it, and Mattis himself does not care for it.

At his confirmation hearing, Mattis performed far better than many of his colleagues in the Trump Cabinet. He came across as prudent and broadly informed. "History is clear," he told the Senate Armed Services Committee, in a tacit rebuke of his future boss. "Nations with strong allies thrive, and those without them wither." Senators from both parties seemed eager to embrace him as a competent, reassuring figure in an otherwise chaotic Administration. Jack Reed, a Democrat from Rhode Island, told Mattis, "You will be, to paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, the saucer that cools the coffee." It didn't hurt that Mattis seemed prepared, if necessary, to defy his boss's orders and walk away from the job. "If I ever thought it was something immoral, I'd be back fishing on the Columbia River tomorrow," he has said.

Mattis could well turn out to be a brake on Trump's impulsive tendencies. But it's also possible that, with the President uninterested in many details of in-

ternational affairs, the military will also lack restraint. In the weeks after the Yemen raid, it launched a series of operations on a scale rarely seen in the Obama years. It stepped up air strikes in Iraq and Syria, killing many Islamic militants but also hundreds of civilians. In Afghanistan, the Air Force dropped a bomb weighing twenty-two thousand pounds—the largest conventional weapon ever used—on an ISIS bunker complex. The Navy fired fifty-nine cruise missiles at an airbase in Syria, meant to punish the regime of Bashar al-Assad for using chemical weapons. An aircraft-carrier battle group was sent to the waters off the Korean Peninsula, in an effort to persuade the North Korean government to scale back its nuclear ambitions. And the decision was made to arm Syrian Kurds against the Islamic State.

In a press conference, Trump boasted about the flurry of activity, which he described as the result of giving the military "total authorization." While some of the initiatives—the Syrian strike, for instance—were undertaken on Trump's orders, many were initiated by Mattis or by the generals reporting to him. Along with the Administration's budget proposal to increase defense spending by fifty-four billion dollars, these actions suggest that Trump, despite his early iso-

lationalist statements, is bringing a new calculus to global politics, in which the use of force plays a more prominent role, and that Mattis may be the policy's principal driver.

With the United States engaged in open-ended hostilities in at least five countries—and with military challenges looming from Eastern Europe to North Korea—some worry that Mattis will be left to determine foreign policy himself. "Mattis wants to win. He wants victory. He wants to kick ass," the former defense official, who has known Mattis for years, told me. "The White House is much looser now. They're turning to the military and saying, 'You do it. We trust you. You're the pros.' I'm worried the pendulum is swinging the other way, and that the military gets whatever the hell they want. Because General Mattis is a warrior. He has spent forty years killing people, and his whole career has been built to win."

In December, 2001, Nate Fick, a young captain in a Marine reconnaissance unit near Kandahar, Afghanistan, was checking on his men. The war had begun two months earlier, and Fick had ordered them to fan out in pairs and man defensive positions around the outpost. "It's a twenty-four-hour operation," Fick told me. "Really austere. No food. Freezing cold." Around 3 A.M., Fick spotted a foxhole with three men in it; he strode up, preparing to chew out the marines who had disobeyed his orders. To his surprise, he saw Mattis, at that time a one-star general, checking on the men. "It was a corporal and a sergeant—and General Mattis, at three in the morning, doing the same thing I was," he said.

Marines see themselves as a kind of warrior caste: Spartans who live by a code of loyalty, toughness under fire, and savagery in battle. The Marine Corps is much smaller than the Army. Its budgets are slimmer and the equipment sometimes antiquated, and its fighters are often pitched into terrible conditions. Their scant resources are a source of pride. Where the Army scatters recruits across a vast institution that includes accountants and mechanics who have little contact with the harsher realities of military work, every marine is trained as a rifleman. For the same reason, marines tend to be fitter than their counterparts in the Army.



*"Listen, Poirot, if you don't shut up there's going to be another murder on the links."*

Mattis fulfills every aspect of the Marine ideal. At sixty-six, he remains trim, and he pushes himself relentlessly. People often describe him as a “warrior monk,” and though he likes to respond that the only monastery he’d enjoy is one supplied with “beer and ladies,” he acts the part. He rarely drinks and has little in the way of a social life. “He’s the most self-disciplined person I’ve ever known,” Mike Ennis, a retired two-star general who roomed with Mattis when they were lieutenants on Okinawa, forty years ago, told me. Mattis is known almost universally among colleagues for his honesty. “Jim Mattis has more integrity in his little finger than almost anyone in Washington,” Michèle Flournoy, an Under-Secretary of Defense under Obama, told me.

Mattis is unabashed about the pleasures of being a soldier; he is happy to describe a fellow-officer as “a wild man,” or to tell you that “there’s nothing better than getting shot at and missed.” In Iraq, his radio call sign was Chaos. When he talks about the moral dimension of war, he is capable of both deep thoughtfulness and also ferocious aggression. In 2004, giving a speech to midshipmen at the Naval Academy, he spoke of the imperative of sparing innocents in battle. As an officer in the first Gulf War, he said, he nearly shot two unarmed Iraqi soldiers who he believed were responsible for killing a young woman. He stopped himself at the last second—“My training kicked in,” he said—and the men turned out to be innocent. “Your moral crisis will come to you not when you’re rested, not after a good day of athletics out on the field,” Mattis said. “You’re going to have the flu, and be dead tired, and surprised.” In the same speech, he told the midshipmen, “If we are to keep this great big experiment called America alive—and that’s all it is, an experiment—we need cocky, macho, unselfish, and morally very straight young men and women to lead our forces against the enemy. Your job, my fine young men and women, is to find the enemy that wants to end this experiment and kill every one of them until they are so sick of the killing that they leave us and our freedoms intact.” The crowd applauded and whooped.

Over the years, Mattis became known for his supply of rousing epigrams—a

kind of fighting man’s Bartlett’s, rich with high-minded incitements to violence. Fick showed me a copy of a letter that Mattis distributed to each of the twenty thousand-plus marines who went into Iraq under his command in 2003. “On your young shoulders rest the hopes of mankind,” he wrote. “Be the hunter, not the hunted.” In a Marine base in Falluja, I saw a poster on the wall quoting Mattis’s advice on how to succeed in Iraq: “Be polite, be professional, but always have a plan to kill everyone you meet.”

Unlike other modern generals, Mattis fights. In April, 2004, when he was in command of several thousand soldiers during an uprising in Iraq, he climbed into an armored vehicle to drive to meet with Iraqi leaders and with General James Conway, who was then the top Marine commander in Iraq. On the way, Mattis’s convoy was ambushed; he and his security detail exchanged fire with the insurgents, and, when the battle was over, headed to the meeting. “He walked in the room and there was blood all over his uniform,” Conway told me.

Mattis grew up in Richland, Washington, in a bookish household without a television set. His mother had been a cipher clerk for the Army during the Second World War. His father, a former merchant marine who had retrained as a nuclear engineer, came to Richland to work for a plant that supplied fissile material to the Manhattan Project. The community was tight-knit, made up almost entirely of people who had relocated to work for the plant. The high school’s crest included a mushroom cloud. Mattis steered clear of the upheavals of the sixties. “His parents were kind of hippie-dippie,” one of Mattis’s friends said. “He didn’t turn out that way.”

Mattis graduated from Central Washington University, with a history degree, in 1972, and then, inspired by his older brother, who had fought in Vietnam, joined the Marines. The war was starting to wind down, and, with protests raging at home, it was not an auspicious time to be a military man. A few years after enlisting, Mattis proposed to a woman named Alice Gillis,

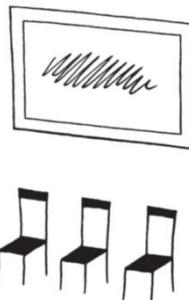
who said that she would marry him only if he left the Corps. Mattis began the resignation process, but his fellow-marines stopped him. “Basically, a lot of the officers got together and tried to talk Alice into withdrawing her demand,” an old friend of Mattis recalled. “They told her that his future was too bright.” Alice agreed, and a wedding date was set. Then, three days before,

she called it off. “She said she didn’t want to burden him,” the friend said. Mattis dated other women, but struggled to imagine a marriage that could accommodate his job, which required him to be away for months at a time. “I think he just gave up,” the friend said. Mattis, talking recently to a group of reporters

in Munich, said that he would not have taken the job of Secretary of Defense if he were married, because of the risk of opprobrium that is inherent in American politics. “I have seen too many good people destroyed in public life,” he said.

Mattis’s bachelorhood allowed him a single-minded focus on his career and a passionate engagement with the military’s traditions and history. He got a master’s degree in international security from the National War College; among marines, he became known for carrying a copy of the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* on deployments. Friends say that his library contains thousands of books. In one of our talks, when the subject of the Afghan conflict came up, Mattis offered a detailed comparison with the Algerian War, in the nineteen-fifties. During an interview for an official history of the Marine Corps, in 2009, Mattis spoke of the ways that culture and history informed effective counter-insurgency campaigns: “You’re as well off if you’ve read ‘Angela’s Ashes’ and Desmond Tutu’s writings, and if you’ve studied Northern Ireland and the efforts for rapprochement there, and in South Africa following their civil war, as you are if you’ve read Sherman and, obviously, von Clausewitz.”

In a morally complicated profession, Mattis often seems to take solace in the lessons of the past. After retiring, in 2013, he returned to Richland to be near his mother, who is ninety-one. He shuttled back and forth to Palo Alto, where he



was a fellow at the Hoover Institution, a conservative think tank based at Stanford. In Richland, he worked on the board of a food bank and lived in a modest wood-frame house that was originally built for workers at the nuclear plant. During his confirmation hearing, when he was asked if he had any friends or family members in attendance, he said, “Thank you, Senator. They are safely west of the Rockies right now.”

Mattis avoids talking to the press, preferring to remain behind the scenes, but, by following his team on two weeklong trips to Europe this spring, I was able to talk with him several times. On the airplane, dressed in a business suit, he looked like a banker, except for the closely cropped gray hair on the sides of his head. There are heavy bags below his eyes, giving him a weary aspect. His accent is Western flat. He usually had a book with him. During our first talk, it was “Earning the Rockies,” by Robert Kaplan, about how geography has shaped Americans’ role in the world.

When I asked what worried him most in his new position, I expected him to say ISIS or Russia or the defense budget. Instead, he said, “The lack of political unity in America. The lack of a fundamental friendliness. It seems like an awful lot of people in America and around the world feel spiritually and personally alienated, whether it be from organized religion or from local community school districts or from their governments.

“I come out of the tight-knit Marine Corps, but I’ve lived on college campuses for three and a half years,” he went on. “Go back to Ben Franklin—his descriptions about how the Iroquois Nations lived and worked together. Compare that to America today. I think that, when you look at veterans coming out of the wars, they’re more and more just slapped in the face by that isolation, and they’re used to something better. They think it’s P.T.S.D.—which it can be—but it’s really about alienation. If you lose any sense of being part of something bigger, then why should you care about your fellow-man?”

The first time I saw Mattis, in March, 2003, he was a two-star general commanding the 1st Marine Division, as it pushed toward Baghdad on a highway that ran near the Euphrates River. I was

covering the Iraq War for the *Times*. Mattis stepped out of a helicopter, wearing a helmet and sunglasses, and joined a group of officers waiting for him. Even then, other marines viewed him with a sort of awe. Mattis spent more than a decade embroiled in the Iraq War, and he was frequently able to offer his men a sense of integrity amid the ambiguity and chaos.

Mattis believed from the start that invading Iraq was a bad idea. In the spring of 2002, he told me, he was in Kandahar, commanding a Marine task force, when a superior officer summoned him to the United States to begin preparing his men for the invasion—which had not yet been publicly discussed. “I said, ‘Are you joking?’” Mattis recalled. “And I’ll never forget what he said. He said, ‘Jim, just go down and get those sailors and marines ready. You’re going.’ And so we went down and we did it.”

As a division commander, Mattis was in charge of four regiments—about twenty-five thousand marines. He and other generals had ordered their men to move through the Iraqi heartland toward Baghdad as rapidly as possible, to disorient the Iraqi Army and avoid chemical-weapons attacks, which they believed to be likely. “The President, the National Command Authority, the American people need speed,” Mattis said. “The sooner we get it over with, the better. Our overriding principle will be speed, speed, speed.” Since crossing into the country from Kuwait, the 1st Marine Division had moved almost without pause for nearly two weeks. The Iraqi Army was fighting sporadically, but, where it engaged, it fought intensely, and some Marine units had taken heavy casualties.

A few days after I saw Mattis, the 1st Marine Division approached the city of Kut, on the Tigris River. One of the regiments, commanded by Colonel Joe Dowdy, a highly regarded veteran, had been instructed to contain an Iraqi division that was inside the city, in order to keep it away from two other Marine regiments that were heading toward Baghdad.

The details of what happened next are in dispute, but Dowdy believes that he received contradictory orders. The division’s assistant commander, General John Kelly (who is now the Secretary of

Homeland Security), told him to push through Kut, but Mattis had told him to pin down the enemy by attacking targets around the perimeter. Dowdy recalls that he and his men were exhausted; they had been fighting and moving without rest for two days. “I saw this movement through Kut as a gamble—more than a risk,” Dowdy told me. “It could have been a confused, jackass circus.”

Kelly was insistent. “Why aren’t you going through Kut? The enemy isn’t there,” he demanded on the radio, according to a report on the incident. Kelly complained that Dowdy’s regiment was “sitting on its ass,” and threatened to have him relieved. Instead, Dowdy led his men to the outskirts of Kut. They encountered heavy fire, but kept the Iraqis busy. After the other regiments had moved safely toward their destination, Dowdy’s men drove through the night to catch up. Dowdy believed that he’d accomplished the objective without any loss of life.

Mattis evidently decided to back Kelly. The next morning, Dowdy was summoned by helicopter to headquarters, just behind the lines. When he walked into Mattis’s tent and sat down, Mattis sat next to him, placing a hand on his knee. Kelly sat nearby. “What’s wrong?” Mattis asked. “Why aren’t you going into the cities?”

Dowdy told Mattis that he had been attacking: “I’ve been fighting up this motherfucking highway.” But, he said, “I love my marines, and I don’t want to waste their lives.” Dowdy said that he’d grown up in a one-parent family, and he didn’t want his men’s children to lose their fathers for no good reason. With that, Mattis said that he was replacing him. Dowdy pleaded with him to reconsider, reminding Mattis of a principle that he often preached: the man on the ground knows best. But Mattis said it was too late, that he needed to “go away.” A C-130 took him to Kuwait. Dowdy retired soon afterward, and went on to become the chief of staff at the Kennedy Space Center. American troops captured Baghdad five days after he was relieved.

Mattis’s decision became front-page news in the United States. Officers are almost never relieved of duty. “You’re ending the career of someone who has had great success,” a former American general told me. “Anyone who plays God in that situation—it weighs on you



## CARNEGIE HALL RUSH SEATS

Whatever else the orchestra says,  
the cello insists, You're dying.  
It speaks from the core

of the tree's hacked-out heart,  
shaped and smoothed like a woman.  
Be glad you are not hard wood

yourself and can hear it.  
Every day the cello is taken  
into someone's arms, taken between

spread legs and lured into  
its shivering. The arm saws and  
saws and all the sacred cries of saints

and demons issue from the carved cleft holes.  
Like all of us, it aches, sending up moans  
from the pit we balance on the edge of.

—*Mary Karr*

heavily.” The moment has been analyzed repeatedly inside the military. Bing West, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Marine officer who witnessed the incident, told me that Dowdy was a “great officer” but was clearly unable to complete the mission. “I think Dowdy was just sleep-deprived—he hadn’t slept in three days,” West said. Others point out that the disruption of relieving a regimental commander during a combat operation could well have slowed down the mission.

The incident raised a larger question about the invasion of Iraq: why was speed so important? The quick operation was meant to demonstrate that Iraq could be invaded and secured relatively easily—with far fewer troops than commanders had originally asked for, and with minimal work after the Iraqi government was destroyed. Shortly after Dowdy was removed, he told an investigator that he was sacrificed to that notion. The former American general I spoke with agreed: “We didn’t have enough boots on the ground.” As the American military raced through the Iraqi heartland, it left an opening for a violent insurgency, which took nearly eight years to subdue.

In Mattis’s view, the initial mistake of invading was compounded by bad deci-

sions that followed. When the Iraqi government collapsed, Marine commanders hoped to stem the anarchy by holding together the Iraqi Army, one of the country’s only remaining institutions. Officers told me that, at the time, entire Iraqi divisions were presenting themselves and offering to cooperate. Instead, in what proved to be one of the crucial decisions of the war, the Bush Administration moved to dissolve the Army. Mattis and other senior commanders argued against it. “We took the one institution that had earned the respect of the country, and we just pissed on them,” Kelly told me. “You had three hundred thousand, four hundred thousand young fighters, and we just said, ‘Go home.’ That was the beginning of the insurgency.”

After a speech in 2014, Mattis was asked whether there was a situation in which he’d resign over bad orders from civilian leaders. “Had I ever been asked to do something unethical, immoral, or . . . felony stupid—of course you’d owe it to yourself, you’d owe it to your troops,” he said. But he went on to argue for the innate wisdom of the chain of command. “I always expected to be heard as I rose in rank,” he said. “But under our system of government—if you really believe in it, if you trust in it, if you have faith in

it—you don’t expect to be obeyed as a general.” He added, “Words like ‘You serve at the pleasure of the President’—you can’t say, ‘Those words only count when I agree, and the President agrees with me.’ Loyalty really counts when there’s a hundred reasons not to be loyal.”

Mattis and the 1st Marine Division returned to Iraq in February, 2004, after four months in the United States. In its absence, the Iraqi state had collapsed, and in its place was a small, ineffectual council of American-appointed leaders. The U.S. military had blundered badly in the early days of the occupation. Its heavy-handed tactics alienated many Iraqis and drove thousands of others into the insurgency, which was growing more vicious by the day.

The 1st Marine Division was sent to Anbar Province, which at that time was among the most violent parts of the country. The area was dominated by Sunni Arabs, who had formed the backbone of Saddam’s government and had long dominated the Iraqi state. To prepare his marines, Mattis took a novel approach, instructing them to familiarize themselves with Iraqi culture and history. “This was based on a study of history and of counter-insurgency doctrine,” he told a Marine historian in 2009. “And a recognition that this was going to be an ethically and morally bruising environment.” He gave his troops a rudimentary course in Arabic, a reading list that included T. E. Lawrence’s guide to warfare in the region, and orders to avoid wearing sunglasses while talking with Iraqis, who consider it impolite. Mattis even encouraged his men to grow mustaches so that they would seem more familiar. Above all, he urged them to restrain themselves in the use of deadly force and to spare civilians wherever possible. In a counter-insurgency manual that Mattis wrote with David Petraeus, he noted, “The more force applied, the greater the chance of collateral damage and mistakes. Using substantial force also increases the opportunity for insurgent propaganda to portray lethal military activities as brutal.” Mattis described his philosophy by adapting a maxim often attributed to the Roman general Lucius Cornelius Sulla: “No better friend, no worse enemy.”

In March, 2004, four contractors working for Blackwater, the private

security firm, were driving through Falluja when they came under attack. Insurgents fired on the vehicle, set it aflame, and dragged the charred bodies of the contractors through the streets, finally stringing them up on a bridge, as Iraqi civilians crowded around and cheered.

After the attack, an order came from the White House to send in the Marines to occupy the city. "The feeling was, we had to do something," James Jeffrey, who was then a senior diplomat in Iraq, said. Mattis told me that he strenuously objected. A large-scale attack, with little preparation, would be a bloody affair and would enrage the Iraqis. He recalled telling commanders, "No, don't do that—that's what they want. Take a knee, breathe through your nose. Let me handle this." After three days, he said, "I got an order, verbal, that said, 'You will, within twenty-four or forty-eight hours, have a sustained Marine presence inside the city, and you will attack to clear it.' There was no discretion left. I said, 'O.K. Put it in writing.'"

When the Marines moved in, they provoked what amounted to a popular uprising. As footage of the battle aired across the Arab world, Iraq's civilian leadership rebelled, threatening to withdraw its support of the occupation. President Bush abruptly ordered commanders to stop the operation. Mattis was furious; he thought that the order made his men look simultaneously brutal and ineffectual. In a meeting with General John Abizaid, his boss, he quoted Napoleon: "If you start to take Vienna, take Vienna!" But the Administration thought the operation too costly to continue.

In the aftermath of the fighting, the extent of the Marines' ferocity became clear. "About a thousand civilians were killed," Saad Manthor, a senior Iraqi police officer and an ally of the American forces, told me; other estimates suggest at least seven hundred. The city's cemeteries were so full that the main football stadium was converted to a burial site. Warzer Jaff, a *Times* photographer who was there, told me, "I saw entire families inside the graves, the bodies of women and children, along with small pieces of paper that had their names. Everywhere in the city you smelled bodies."

When I asked Mattis about this, he didn't dispute the numbers, but suggested

that they were relatively low compared with Falluja's population of three hundred thousand. In any case, he said, the Marines went to great lengths to spare innocents, allowing them to leave the city before and during the attack. "This enemy didn't give a damn about them," Mattis said. "We went out of our way to take care of the civilians."

Other eyewitness accounts suggested that ambulances had been fired on and passengers killed, that snipers shot Iraqis as they tried to pull the dead off the streets, and that marines blocked military-age males from leaving the city, often separating fleeing families in order to keep the men inside. All those actions are banned by international treaties, to which the United States is a signatory. There were also widespread reports that the Americans had attacked Falluja with white phosphorus, a chemical agent that burns through human skin.

Gabor Rona, a professor of law at Cardozo and a legal adviser to the International Committee of the Red Cross during the battle, told me that he regarded the claims of harsh tactics as credible. "There is plenty of evidence that either the U.S. was targeting civilians or that the U.S. was conducting indiscriminate attacks without knowing, or taking sufficient precautions to determine, whether individuals were combatants or civilians," he said.

In one sense, Mattis was right. The halt to the fighting left a power vacuum; Falluja became a safe haven for insurgents, and violence in Iraq soared. Six months later, sixty-five hundred marines invaded Falluja, after first allowing safe passage for nearly all the city's civilians. Hundreds of insurgents were killed in the battle, and the city was razed. But, afterward, the citizens mostly returned. Manthor, the Iraqi police officer, told me that, despite all the destruction, ordinary Iraqis did not necessarily oppose the Marines. "Most people were just looking for peace," he said.

Not everyone was pleased by the U.S. presence, of course. In 2004, a group of Iraqi sheikhs asked Mattis angrily when the Americans were planning on leaving the country. Mattis gave a bluff response. "I'm never going to leave," he said. "I found a little piece of property down on the Euphrates. I'm going to retire here."

As it turned out, Mattis left Iraq that year, and later became the commanding officer of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, based at Camp Pendleton, California. It was one of the premier combat commands in the Marines; he flew in and out of Iraq, helping to oversee what became the decisive phase of the war. The Marines had become embroiled in a grinding insurgency, with the enemy hiding among civilians and striking with ambushes and hidden bombs. In Anbar Province, on average one American serviceman was killed every day. At times, the Marines struck back with unrestrained violence. As the "convening officer" of the expeditionary force, Mattis was responsible for deciding how the Corps should respond. Two cases provided exceptional challenges.

In April, 2006, in the village of Hamdania, seven marines and a Navy corpsman were sent to arrest a man suspected of planting roadside bombs. Unable to find him, they grabbed an Iraqi who was not a suspect, Hashim Ibrahim Awad, a fifty-two-year-old father of eleven. The marines bound Awad's feet and hands and shot him eight times, then placed a shovel next to his body to make it appear that he had been caught trying to plant a bomb. "Congratulations, gents," the ringleader, Sergeant Lawrence Hutchins, told his men. "We've just gotten away with murder."

Not long before, in Haditha, on the other side of Anbar Province, a group of marines driving in a convoy had struck a roadside bomb, and a popular lance corporal named Miguel (T.J.) Terrazas was killed. The marines went on a rampage. They killed five unarmed Iraqi men in the street, and then, after claiming to have come under enemy fire, they stormed four nearby houses. In one house, they killed Younis Khafif and Aida Ahmed, Ahmed's sister, and five children, the youngest of them an infant. All were shot in their heads and chests. Afterward, one of the marines, Corporal Sanick Dela Cruz, urinated into the skull of one of the dead Iraqis. ("I had to piss at the time, and I was pissed off that T.J. had died, so I decided to piss on one of the dead Iraqi males," he later said.) In all, twenty-four Iraqi civilians were killed in Haditha. In only one of the houses did the occupants, four men, have guns. Marine headquarters distributed a press release about the

incident, stating that fifteen Iraqis had been killed by a roadside bomb. The coverup unravelled several months later, after a *Time* investigation.

In Hamdania and in Haditha, Mattis was responsible for deciding who would be charged. By his account, he read more than nine thousand pages of documents and met regularly with military lawyers, “every weekend for five and a half months.” Both prosecutions dragged on for years and ultimately embarrassed the Marine Corps.

In the Hamdania case, Mattis charged the eight servicemen with murder and kidnapping; five pleaded guilty, and two of the three others were convicted. But the sentences were lenient. Hutchins, who had fired three shots into the victim’s head, was sentenced to fifteen years but was released after seven. Several of the other men served terms ranging from a few months to a year and a half. Five years after the trials, two of the men who had pleaded guilty were still members of the Corps.

The Haditha case was even more striking. Mattis charged four marines with murder and four officers with dereliction of duty; he recommended letters of censure for three other officers, essentially ending their careers. But he granted immunity to several marines—including Dela Cruz, who later admitted lying to investigators—and dropped charges against three others. He also backed the prosecution, even as it declined to charge a soldier who admitted to shooting an unarmed civilian seven times. In the end, only one of the eight men Mattis charged, Staff Sergeant Frank Wuterich, was convicted, and then only of dereliction of duty, a relatively minor crime. As in the Hamdania case, many of the marines involved in the killings remained in the Corps for years afterward.

In 2010, the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, reprimanded the Corps for not dealing more harshly with some of the men involved. “I was stunned to learn these guys were still in the Marines,” Mabus told me. “They had taken part in the murder, and nothing had been done.” Mabus, a civilian appointee, ordered them discharged. “What happened in Hamdania and Haditha was part of a pattern,” he said.

Mattis suggested that, with young fighters in difficult circumstances, moral

concerns had to be balanced against the viability of the mission. “You can’t criminalize every mistake,” he said. “Bad things happen in war. Don’t get me wrong—discipline is discipline,” he added. “I sent two generals home over it. I ended a lieutenant colonel’s career over it. And, as it went down lower, I was not as harsh.” He went on, “You have to have a degree of humanity when you’re given the authority to lock your own troops up in jail for the rest of their life because they have the guts to volunteer to go into that situation.”

Ultimately, Mattis had an advantage in Anbar: the enemy proved considerably more brutal than the Marines. In late 2006, a small number of Iraqi tribal leaders—more fearful of Al Qaeda in Iraq than of the Americans—approached a group of U.S. officers and offered to team up against the extremists. The Americans seized the opportunity, and, within a year, violence across the province had dropped dramatically. Soon the Marines and the Iraqis were staging bicycle races in towns that had once been battlegrounds.

**I**n August, 2010, President Obama summoned Mattis to the Oval Office. He had just become the head of Central Command, which oversees American forces in the Middle East and South Asia, and Obama wanted to know what his priorities were.

“I have three,” Mattis said, according

to the former senior White House official, who witnessed the conversation. “Iran, Iran, and Iran.”

Mattis had a dark view of Iran, nurtured during his years in Iraq. Throughout the war, the Iranian regime had directed Shiite militias inside the country, at times arming them with an especially lethal device known as an “explosively formed penetrator,” which fired a molten bullet that could pierce armor. Iranian-made E.F.P.s killed hundreds of American soldiers.

As CENTCOM commander, Mattis moved aggressively to confront Iran. In 2011, as generals and diplomats negotiated to leave thousands of American troops in Iraq, Iran increased the pressure to push them out. Its agents began providing insurgents with not just E.F.P.s but also improvised rockets—essentially, cannisters of explosives fired from makeshift tubes. That summer, the rockets killed more than two dozen American soldiers.

Mattis, along with other American officials, devised a plan to strike back by destroying training camps in Iran, across the Iraqi border. “The feeling was, the only thing that would get the Iranians’ attention would be to hit them in Iran,” a former senior American diplomat told me. But, when the idea reached the White House, Obama rejected it. Instead, he authorized the Americans to respond in Iraq, with a series of clandestine measures. The



*“No, you hang up first. No, you hang up first. No, you . . .”*



*"Impressive, but I meant accounting tricks."*

attacks stopped, but Iran stayed off limits.

As Mattis argued for a more assertive stance, he found himself at the limit of his diplomatic skills. (In an interview with the journalist R. Manning Ancell, Mattis recently lamented the difficulty of reconciling his perspective with that of politicians who wished for "a much better world than the primitive, atavistic one of the battlefield.") Late in 2011, the Obama White House was worried about Iran's nuclear-weapons program and concerned that the Israeli military might launch a preemptive strike. At a briefing for American diplomats in Qatar, Mattis was asked to discuss the possibility of a confrontation in the waters of the Persian Gulf. According to a senior American diplomat who attended the briefing, Mattis declared that, if the Iranians attacked American forces, he was authorized to defend them—and that he expected retaliation. "Mattis was basically saying, 'I'm ready. If I respond, Iran will respond in an escalatory fashion—and I will be rocking and rolling,'" the diplomat told me. "It wasn't what they wanted to hear. It scared them. Mattis was not reckless—he was the straightest guy in the room. He's just way more

honest than most people would be in a situation like that."

By this time, the Obama Administration had opened secret negotiations with the Iranian regime to explore the possibility of limiting its nuclear program. Obama's advisers believed that a nuclear deal could prompt Iran to begin working more forthrightly with the West, after years of sponsoring terrorism. "There is no question that the White House saw the deal as transformative," James Jeffrey told me. "They wanted it very badly." But they worried that a military confrontation with Iran could ruin the chances for a deal.

In the summer of 2012, Mattis began to press for authority to strike the Iranians if they were spotted preparing to disperse mines in the Persian Gulf, which is a transit route for much of the world's oil. "The idea was to stop a war before it broke out," Leon Panetta, who was then the Secretary of Defense, told me. "But some people didn't see it that way." After much internal discussion, President Obama decided that only he could authorize such a strike.

Former Obama aides told me that although they liked and admired Mattis,

the relationship started to sour. According to two former senior officials, Mattis was no longer regularly invited to meetings of the National Security Council. He was shut out of other foreign-policy efforts in the Middle East, including the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound and an attempt to engage the Taliban in peace talks.

Still, Obama's aides told me, Mattis continued to present the White House with aggressive options, many of them designed to thwart Iranian support for terrorism in the region. A debate grew inside the Administration over whether a conflict with Iran would more likely be averted by the threat of force or by displays of flexibility.

Around that time, an Iranian Air Force jet fired on an American drone flying above the Persian Gulf, in international airspace. Mattis proposed sending up a jet fighter to escort the next drone; the White House approved, and when an Iranian Air Force jet approached the drone the American fighter nearly shot it down. Even though the White House had signed off on the initiative, aides were displeased. "They blamed that incident on Mattis—they thought he was trying to start a war with the Iranians," a former senior American commander told me. "The White House didn't trust anyone in a uniform."

In early 2013, as Mattis neared the end of his term, Obama announced that he would be retiring five months ahead of schedule. Mattis was not informed directly; he found out from a friend inside the Administration. "There was a perception among senior people that Mattis was particularly hard on the Iranians, that he didn't necessarily see the need to engage them diplomatically," a former senior White House official said. "There was a sense that things would be easier without his presence."

Speaking to a group of reporters recently, Mattis said that he remained critical of the nuclear deal, mainly because it did not constrain Iran's aggressive activities in the region, but that he considered it binding. "I would not have signed the Iran deal, but it's signed—we gave our word and we have to play the ball where it lies," he said. It is difficult to know whether the deal will hold. Trump spoke against it frequently

during the campaign, calling it “disastrous” and pledging to renegotiate it, but he has since tempered his rhetoric. Mattis remains suspicious of Iran, which he describes as the most dangerous actor in the region—“more of a revolutionary movement than a country.” The potential threats include nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, mines, and a cyber program that he has likened to “children juggling light bulbs filled with nitroglycerine.” He speaks urgently about the need to contain Iran, but he doesn’t make it sound easy. In a speech last year, he described America’s prospects in dealing with Iran and the Middle East. “The future is going to be ghastly,” he said. “It is not going to be pleasant for any of us.”

Soon after Trump’s Inauguration, Mattis got a telephone call from Ursula von der Leyen, the German Defense Minister. Among other things, she wanted to talk about NATO, which Trump had declared “obsolete.” Throughout the West, a wave of anti-establishment fervor was rising, and Germany had become the alliance’s stalwart.

Along NATO’s eastern frontier, the Russian military maintained tens of thousands of troops, many of them on high alert. In February, Russia deployed a newly developed cruise missile within striking distance of Western Europe, in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which has been in force since the Cold War. At the same time, German officials believed, Russia had begun to flood NATO countries with propaganda and with funding for extremist political groups. In Germany, a news story about an Afghan refugee who had attempted to rape a fifteen-year-old girl appeared on Web sites across the country, then turned out to be fabricated. A similar case had arisen in Lithuania. All indications, von der Leyen told me, pointed to Russian intelligence as the source of the fake stories, which were intended to undermine Chancellor Angela Merkel, who had welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East. Russia’s increasing aggression was discomfiting. “We are nervous,” von der Leyen told me. “The Baltics are terrified.” When she called Mattis, she was seeking an unusual kind of reassurance: that Pres-

ident Trump hadn’t meant what he’d said about NATO.

During the call, Mattis reminded von der Leyen that he’d had nothing to do with Trump’s campaign; he was an apolitical man, he said. Without explicitly criticizing Trump, Mattis told her that NATO would remain the central pillar of American foreign policy, and that he intended to do his best to maintain the post-Second World War order, which formed the security and the financial foundations of the modern world. “He managed to distance himself from everything President Trump had said without appearing disloyal,” von der Leyen said. “I was impressed.” When Mattis arrived in Brussels a few weeks later for a NATO gathering, he implored U.S. allies to spend more on defense—but he never threatened to pull out of the alliance if they didn’t. Mattis flew on to Baghdad, where he told Iraq’s leaders that the United States had no intention of stealing the country’s oil, as Trump had threatened to do. “He’s walking a very fine line,” the former defense official told me.

Before Mattis spoke to the NATO ministers, he told me, the White House vetted his speech and approved it, despite the ways in which it contradicted Trump’s statements. Indeed, Trump seemed to be coming around to the views of Mattis and of his other mainstream foreign-policy advisers, among them H. R. McMaster, the national-security adviser. In less than three months in office,



Trump denounced Russia’s support of Syria, reaffirmed the American commitment to NATO, and embraced China, which he had previously accused of manipulating its currency.

Trump appears to be giving Mattis everything he asks for. The budget director, Mick Mulvaney, pledged fifty-four billion dollars in additional spending for the Pentagon, three per cent more than Obama had proposed the previous year. The boost was intended to address

what experts in both parties said was the degraded state of the military’s hardware after sixteen years of war and half a decade of tight budgets, in which the imperatives of fighting have allowed programs in “training and readiness” to be neglected. “Pilots are leaving because they’re not getting time in the air, ships are staying in port because they are not being maintained,” Leon Panetta told me. “It’s pretty dire.”

But the new hardware will have few experienced people to direct it. Four months after Mattis took over the Pentagon, only two of the top civilian jobs—there are fifty-seven in all—have been filled. While Mattis was inclined to bring in people from across the political spectrum, the Trump White House was determined to appoint loyalists. In practice, that excluded nearly all the main-line Republican national-security experts, dozens of whom had signed letters during the campaign declaring that Trump was unqualified for office.

When Mattis asked Michèle Flournoy, the former Under-Secretary of Defense under Obama, to consider becoming his deputy, she was torn between her admiration for Mattis and her discomfort with the Trump Administration. “I lost a lot of sleep and felt sick to my stomach,” she told me. At Trump Tower, she was interviewed by a group of aides with no national-security experience. Among their first questions was “What would it take for you to resign?” Flournoy, alarmed, told Mattis that she couldn’t take the job.

Three months into the new Administration, the Pentagon is being run by a skeleton crew; career officers and civil servants are doing jobs that are supposed to be performed by political appointees. “It’s like going to work on a Sunday—there’s no one there,” the former defense official told me. “If my printer doesn’t work on Sunday, I’m screwed. That’s what the Pentagon’s like every day.”

Leon Panetta said that in normal times the Pentagon could probably carry on without a full complement of senior leaders—but, if there was a prolonged international incident, it would come under severe strain. “I’m worried about a crisis,” he said. “Whenever I had a crisis, I would gather my senior people together. If you recommend military action, you’ve got to think, What forces, what targets,

what consequences? That requires a lot of thinking and a lot of smart people. Mattis is basically by himself.”

For Mattis, the challenges are daunting. Russia is sowing confusion in Europe. Yemen and Somalia, which harbor large numbers of Al Qaeda fighters, are collapsing. China is threatening to impede access to the sea-lanes off its coast. The United States is reeling from a cyberattack on its Presidential election. “He’s facing the most chaotic international environment we’ve ever seen,” Panetta said, of Mattis.

Trump’s aides blame the situation on Obama’s hesitancy, which they say encouraged enemies to take advantage of the United States. When Obama took office, he was determined to reduce America’s foreign commitments, particularly in the Middle East. The result, his critics say, is that a vacuum opened up. “The Obama Administration was overly cautious and risk-averse,” a senior Trump national-security official told me. “There was an assumption that the way to avert war was to constrain ourselves, instead of having a healthy deterrent.”

Mattis has expressed broad disagreement with the Obama Administration’s foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. In 2011, Obama reduced the number of American troops in Iraq to zero; this total withdrawal, Mattis said, destabilized Iraq and allowed ISIS to occupy large parts of the country. He recounted a briefing that he had received from a senior intelligence analyst in November, 2011, a month before the last American troops departed. “I asked, ‘What happens if we pull our troops out?’” Mattis said. “The analyst told us that another group would appear. And, when it appears, it will be more vicious than any you’ve seen yet. She finally blurted out, ‘General, if you pull all our troops out, then, by the summer of 2014, all hell’s going to break loose.’”

Mattis also criticized Obama’s decisions on Afghanistan. In 2009, the President substantially increased the number of troops there, but set a limit on how long they would stay in the coun-

try. That undermined the plan, Mattis said: “Literally, when the President said, ‘We’re going to reinforce,’ he also said, ‘They’re coming out.’” Obama’s foreign policy effectively relinquished the United States’ role as the steward of the international order, Mattis told me, and that encouraged enemies. “You can call it disentanglement,” he said. “From the enemy’s point of view, the U.S. is inclined to lose.”

Mattis believes that it’s his job to assure allies around the world of America’s commitment. “We are having to affirm our bona fides as a reliable security partner—from Brussels and Europe to Abu Dhabi and Cairo, from Tel Aviv to Tokyo,” he said. “There is not one of them that believed us anymore when we said, ‘We’re with you.’” Mattis mentioned Lithuania, where a small contingent of American soldiers has served for decades as a trip wire against Russian aggression. “That’s a demonstration of American will,” he said. “In an age when American will meant something, they wouldn’t be tested. Today, we are going to have to put enough forces in there to fight. That’s the only way to deter it.”

In that effort, Trump has given commanders considerably greater autonomy. “We are delegating more authority to give us the ability to take advantage of opportunities as they emerge,” a senior Administration official said. Trump has given Mattis license to determine the number of American troops in Syria and Iraq. At Mattis’s request, theatre commanders in Yemen and Somalia are now empowered to launch some strikes without permission from the White House. In Syria and Iraq, where the fight against ISIS is most intense, the White House has similarly pushed authority down the chain of command.

The United States has also stepped up air strikes on militants in Afghanistan; commanders say that the new rules allow them to respond to attacks more quickly.

The Trump national-security official I spoke to said that the more aggressive approach would lead to greater global stability, because America’s enemies are more likely to be deterred by a credible threat of force than by conciliation. In

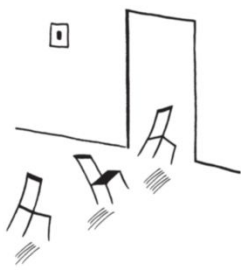
Obama’s two terms, the official told me, the Assad regime used chemical weapons scores of times. Since Trump ordered the strike against the Syrian airbase, there have been no more attacks, the official said. When I asked Mattis what effect the American missile strike had, he said, “It worked.”

But looser rules also increase the likelihood of unintended consequences. When the Air Force dropped the enormous bomb on the ISIS bunker, Mattis was taken by surprise; the decision was made by General John Nicholson, the lead commander in Afghanistan. “Mattis was frustrated by that,” the senior government official told me. The more aggressive posture has also led to an increase in civilian casualties. In March, American air strikes on Mosul killed as many as two hundred civilians; in another incident, an American bomb killed eighteen anti-Assad rebels who had been trained by the West.

The bigger question—for Trump as well as for Mattis—is what purpose the military force is ultimately meant to serve. In the Middle East, Americans are fighting in five countries. The war in Iraq, but for a brief pause, is fourteen years old; the war in Afghanistan, sixteen. Drones have been striking targets in Yemen and Somalia for nearly a decade. The civil war in Syria is at a bloody stalemate. During the campaign, Trump promised to produce a new plan to defeat ISIS within a month of taking office; no plan has yet materialized.

Mattis told me that the flaw in both Iraq and Afghanistan was that there was no “end-state”—the United States never knew exactly what it was fighting for. As a counterexample, he offered President George H. W. Bush, whose campaign to expel the Iraqi Army from Kuwait ended successfully, in 1991. “Bush said, ‘This will not stand,’” Mattis said. “We attacked. We overwhelmed them. And then when the right wing said, ‘March on Baghdad,’ he said, ‘Nope. No mission creep. We’re not going to change the strategy. We’ll lose the coalition. We have the whole world with us.’ Even Russia helped us on that.”

Military force, Mattis said, works only when it’s part of a broader political strategy—a view that he shares with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Mattis and Tillerson talk three or four times a



week and have lunch at least once. Mattis tried to sketch out an end-state to the Middle Eastern wars. In terror-prone areas like Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Somalia and Yemen, his goal is to reduce the violence to manageable levels. "I want to get to a point where the casualties are very low," he said. At that point, he said, it would probably suffice for the United States to intervene only sporadically, in order to contain outbreaks of violence.

But, in all those places, that prospect seems years away. Ultimately, the wars of the Middle East will be pacified only by political solutions, backed by strong governments. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States, despite years of effort and the expense of trillions of dollars, has failed to bring about such solutions. Military force alone promises only more military force. In congressional testimony from 2013, Mattis said as much, when asked about the role of diplomacy in foreign affairs. "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately," he said. "The more that we put into the State Department's diplomacy, hopefully the less we have to put into a military budget." Trump's proposed budget would cut State Department funding by more than a quarter. At present, forty-six U.S. Embassies remain without an Ambassador.

On April 28th, North Korea test-fired a medium-range ballistic missile, called a KN-17, designed to carry a nuclear warhead more than two thousand miles. The missile blew up soon after takeoff, but experts were concerned. It was the fifth such launch since Trump had taken office, suggesting that the North Korean regime was trying to test the new President.

The Administration's response has been both bellicose and scattered. After one test, Trump held a briefing in the dining room of Mar-a-Lago, prompting a club member to post photos on Facebook, with a delighted note about finding himself at the "center of the action." On Twitter, Trump declared, "North Korea is looking for trouble" and signed the tweet "U.S.A." Vice-President Pence, dressed in a bomber jacket, travelled to the DMZ to be photographed as he stared balefully across the



border, saying that he wanted the North Koreans to "see our resolve in my face." The regime responded with another missile test.

Mattis had told America's allies that a nuclear attack by North Korea would be met by an "overwhelming" response. But, as the weeks passed, he and his colleagues appeared to be orchestrating a more sophisticated approach, combining diplomatic and economic tools with military ones. He held joint exercises with the South Korean and Japanese Navies and accelerated the construction of a missile-defense system inside South Korea. If the U.S. wasn't leading the international order, it was at least cooperating. The Administration seemed to recognize that China had greater leverage with North Korea; Trump offered a "better trade deal" if China helped calm the situation. (At present, the U.S. has no trade deal with China.) McMaster praised Chinese leaders for taking a tougher stance. A senior American military official told me that, in trying to contain North Korea, military efforts in the region would be subordinated to diplomatic ones. The goal, as Mattis has said, is to "peacefully

denuclearize the Korean peninsula."

But the regime has resisted decades of efforts to shut down its nuclear program. Robert Carlin, a former U.S. negotiator in talks with North Korea, told me, "The North Koreans are convinced they need the ability to strike the American mainland—otherwise the Americans won't deal with them seriously." On May 14th, North Korea test-fired another missile, the Hwasong-12, which reached an altitude of more than thirteen hundred miles and sent a reentry vehicle back through the atmosphere, withstanding extremely high temperatures. Scientists said that the test brought the regime closer to perfecting a missile capable of hitting the United States.

Speaking to reporters earlier this year, Mattis took the measure of his adversaries. He said he believed that Vladimir Putin was a rational leader, and therefore could probably be deterred from aggression. I asked whether he thought that the North Korean premier was rational. "I've seen arguments that he's irrational and unpredictable, and I've seen arguments that he's very thoughtful about solidifying power," Mattis said. "I'll keep reading to see if I can come to a conclusion." ♦

In the spring of 2014, President Vladimir Putin delivered an address in St. George Hall, a chandeliered ballroom in the Kremlin, to celebrate the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. “Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia in the hearts and minds of our people,” he declared, to a standing ovation. Despite Putin’s triumphal language, the annexation presented Russia with a formidable logistical challenge: Crimea’s physical isolation. Crimea, which is roughly the size of Massachusetts, is a landscape of sandy beaches and verdant mountains that juts into the Black Sea. It’s connected to Ukraine by a narrow isthmus to the north but is separated from Russia by a stretch of water called the Kerch Strait. Ukraine, to which Crimea had belonged, viewed Russia’s occupation as illegal, and had sealed off access to the peninsula, closing the single road to commercial traffic and shutting down the rail lines.

In response, Putin convened a council of engineers, construction experts, and government officials to look at options for connecting Crimea to the Russian mainland. They considered more than ninety possibilities, including an undersea tunnel, before deciding to build a bridge. The Russian state is notoriously inefficient at following through on the quotidian details of government administration; its more natural mode is building projects of tremendous scale. In keeping with this tradition of expanse, and expense, the bridge would span nearly twelve miles, making it the longest in the country, and would cost more than three billion dollars. When completed, it would symbolically cement Russia’s control over the territory and demonstrate the country’s reemergence as a geopolitical power willing to challenge the post-Cold War order.

The bridge would be a demanding and technically complex project, however, and at first there were doubts about who would be willing to undertake it. Then, in January, 2015, the Russian government announced that Arkady Rotenberg, a sixty-three-year-old magnate with interests in construction, banking, transportation, and energy, would direct the project. In retrospect, the choice was obvious, almost inevitable. Rotenberg’s personal wealth is estimated at more than two and a half billion dollars, and



*The Crimean bridge, which is being built by Arkady Rotenberg, spans twelve miles and*





LETTER FROM RUSSIA

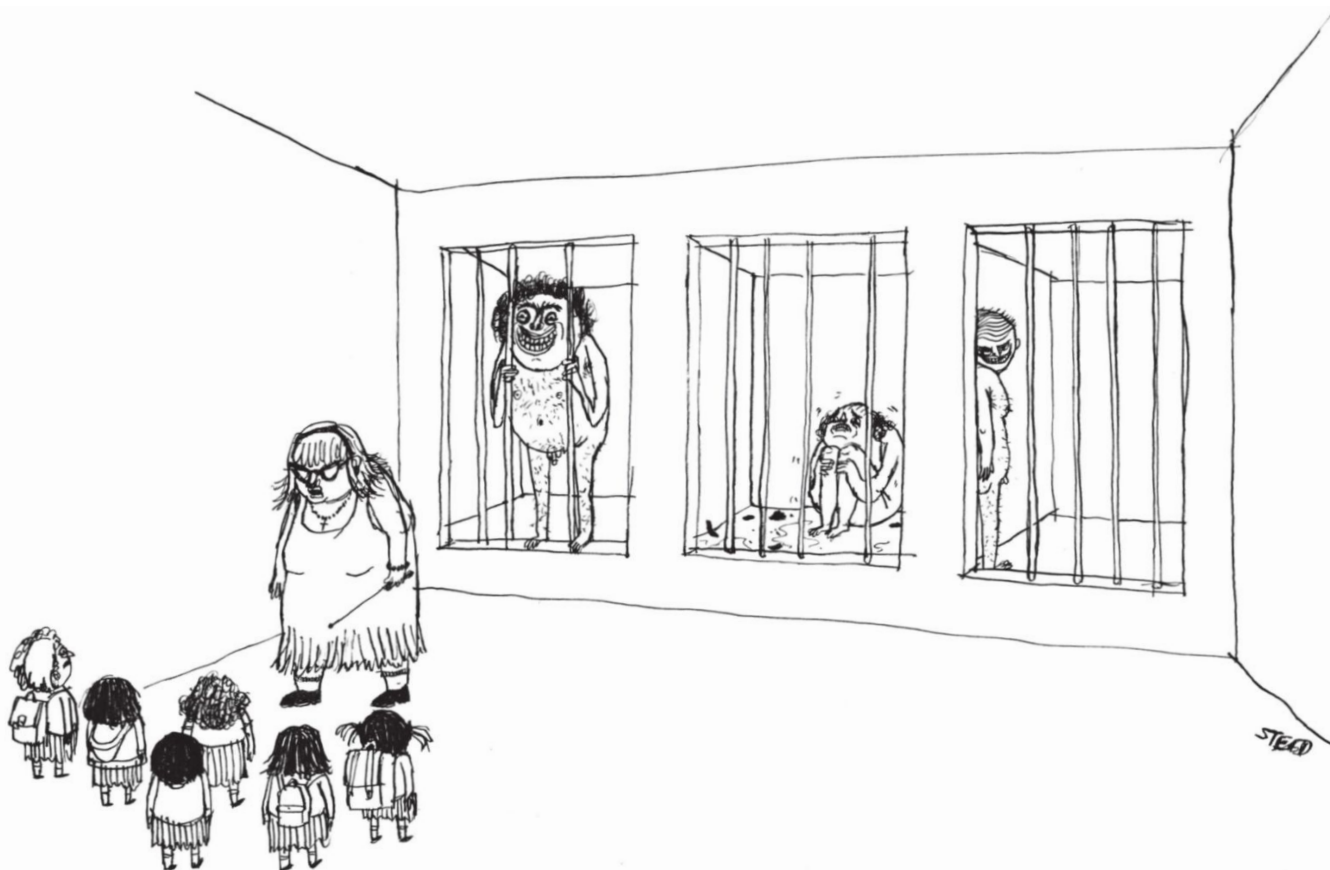
# OLIGARCHY 2.0

*Putin wanted a bridge to Crimea. To build it, he turned to an old friend.*

BY JOSHUA YAFFA

*will cost billions of dollars. Putin sees the project as a key marker of Russia's resurgence on the global stage.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER GRONSKY



*"There are three main types of husband to choose from."*

the bulk of his income derives from state contracts, mostly to build thousands of miles of roads and natural-gas pipelines and other infrastructure projects. Last year, the Russian edition of *Forbes* dubbed Rotenberg "the king of state orders" for winning nine billion dollars' worth of government contracts in 2015 alone, more than any other Russian businessman. But perhaps the most salient detail in Rotenberg's biography dates from childhood: in 1963, at the age of twelve, he joined the same judo club as Putin. The two became sparring partners and friends, and have remained close ever since.

Rotenberg's success is a prime example of a political and economic restructuring that has taken place during Putin's seventeen years in office: the defanging of one oligarchic class and the creation of another. In the nineties, a coterie of business figures built corporate empires that had little loyalty to the state. Under Putin, they were co-opted, marginalized, or strong-armed into obedience. The 2003 arrest, and subsequent

conviction, of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the head of the Yukos oil company, brought home the point. At the same time, a new caste of oligarchs emerged, many with close personal ties to Putin. These oligarchs have been allowed to extract vast wealth from the state, often through lucrative government contracts, while understanding that their ultimate duty is to serve the President and shore up the system over which he rules.

The Crimean bridge is different from many of Rotenberg's other state ventures, in that he is not expected to make much money from it. "This project is not about profits," one banker in Moscow, who specializes in transportation and infrastructure, told me. He was matter-of-fact about how Rotenberg ended up in charge: "The bridge had to be built, and everyone else was refusing. It was the only possible solution."

Construction began last year. Rotenberg, who has a reputation as an informed, hands-on manager, visits every few months, passing above the site in his he-

licopter before inspecting the project with a retinue of engineers and road-building specialists. Last fall, a correspondent from Russian state television filmed a fawning news segment about the bridge. Strolling with Rotenberg along one of the few completed sections, the host invoked the bridge's reputation as "the construction project of the century." The two put on hard hats and surveyed the jumble of cranes and excavators and drills in motion around them.

Rotenberg has the squat and powerful frame of a wrestler, and a round, impish face. His speech is clipped and straightforward, and he does not appear to enjoy introspection. But, when the television host pressed him to offer up platitudes on the bridge, Rotenberg did his best to oblige. "Besides financial profit—which, for a business, is a sign of success, of course—I also want the project to mean something for future generations," he said. What Russians make of the bridge will be clear soon enough; the first cars will pass over it

later this year. But its significance for Rotenberg already seems apparent. It is a totem of his service to the state and to its leader, Putin—and of their friendship, which has thrived at the intersection of state politics and big business.

Rotenberg was born in 1951 in Leningrad, a city deeply scarred by the Nazis' two-and-a-half-year blockade during the Second World War. Rotenberg's father, Roman, was a deputy director at the Red Dawn telephone factory, and his position gave the family a measure of stability and comfort. They lived in their own apartment, not a communal apartment like many families, including Putin's. When Arkady was twelve, against his initial protests, his father took him to train with Anatoly Rakhlin, one of Leningrad's better-known practitioners of sambo, a Soviet martial art that borrows from judo and was developed by Red Army officers in the nineteen-twenties. In a chaotic city, Rakhlin's class offered teen-agers a redoubt of discipline. Putin, who was also in the class, said, in "First Person," a book-length interview published during his first Presidential campaign, in 2000, that the training played a decisive role in his life. "Judo is not just a sport," Putin said. "It's a philosophy. It's respect for your elders and for your opponent. It's not for weaklings.... You come out onto the mat, you bow to one another, you follow ritual."

Rotenberg and Putin grew close travelling around Leningrad, and soon around the whole of the Soviet Union, for competitions. Nikolay Vaschilin, a retired K.G.B. officer who trained with them, remembers that the two were fond of pranks. (Putin later described himself during those years as "a troublemaker.") One time, Vaschilin told me, the boys ran out of an alleyway during a May Day parade and threw wire pellets at balloons carried by the marchers, surprising them with a fusillade of pops. Another friend from that time recalled that he and Rotenberg would pilfer candy and other food from younger children at sports camps by sneaking up on them in the toilets, where kids would go to hide their treats from other boys: "They were immediately frightened and would give us a little something," he said.

For fun, and a bit of spare cash, many of the young men in Rakhlin's class

worked as extras for a film studio in Leningrad, where they could earn ten rubles reëncacting battle scenes in patriotic Soviet films about the Second World War. "Arkady showed himself to be a real brigadier," Vaschilin recalled. "He was walking around and giving commands to everyone, even guys older than him. He was cocky, insolent, and mischievous—seventeen years old and already in charge."

Putin had his eye on the K.G.B.—as he was later fond of recounting, he first volunteered his services when he was in ninth grade—but Rotenberg's ambitions were in sports. He enrolled in the Lesgaft National State University of Physical Education, Sport, and Health, and graduated in 1978, after which he found work as a judo trainer. In 1990, Putin, after a K.G.B. posting in Dresden, took a job at the mayor's office in Leningrad, which, a year later, after the Soviet collapse, was renamed St. Petersburg. Putin and Rotenberg, along with a handful of others from Rakhlin's class, got together a few times a week to practice moves and stay in shape.

For Putin, who both by nature and by K.G.B. training is mistrustful of others, these early friendships seem to have been his only genuine, unguarded bonds. He would soon be surrounded by people who had something to offer, or something to ask. Rakhlin, who died in 2013, explained Putin's affection for his former judo partners to the state-run newspaper *Izvestia*. "They are friends, and Putin's character has maintained that healthy camaraderie," Rakhlin said. "He doesn't work with the St. Petersburg boys because they have pretty eyes, but because he trusts people who are proven." In "First Person," Putin said, "I have a lot of friends, but only a few people are really close to me. They have never gone away. They have never betrayed me, and I haven't betrayed them, either. In my view, that's what counts most."

Trying to earn money in the nineteen-nineties, which were lean years in Russia, Rotenberg started a cooperative that organized sporting competitions with Vasily Shestakov, another boyhood friend from Rakhlin's class. "We had worked in sports our whole lives," Shestakov told me. "And then, all of a sudden, just like that: 'perestroika,' 'business,' all these unfamiliar

words." Neither had a talent for running a company. "Each of us thought the other one would do something," Shestakov said. "And, as a result, no one did anything, and our cooperative fell apart." Later that decade, Arkady's younger brother, Boris, moved with his wife, Irina, to Finland. Before long, thanks to connections of Irina's in the Russian gas industry, the brothers were trading in petroleum products. Irina and Boris separated in 2001, but she remains fond of the Rotenberg family. (She now goes by the name Irène Lamber.) "They have a natural intellect, a reasonable relation to everything, with a deep study of questions," she told me. "All this was instilled in childhood." Lamber suggested that business was not a true calling for them but an accident of fate. "Where would they be if the Soviet Union had never collapsed?" Lamber asked. "Arkady would be in charge of a state sports organization. He is a natural manager. And Boris would be a successful trainer."

In the mid-nineties, Shestakov and a few others approached Putin, who was then the vice-mayor of St. Petersburg, with the idea of creating a professional judo club in the city. Putin gave his approval, and a number of wealthy businessmen—including the oil trader Genady Timchenko, who knew Putin from city government—provided the funds. Rotenberg was named general director of the club, which was called Yavara-Neva. In the club's second year, it came in second at the European Cup; the next year, in the German city of Abensberg,

it won outright. On the judo mat, Rotenberg seized the championship trophy and gave it a kiss. "It left a good impression," Shestakov told me. "I think that, of course, Putin was pleased."

Since then, Yavara-Neva has won nine Euro Cups and produced four Olympic champions. Rotenberg remains the club's general director. It is now building a new campus, which, in addition to a thousand-seat arena, will include a housing complex and a yacht club. Its cost is estimated at a hundred and eighty million dollars, paid for, in part, out of the St. Petersburg and federal budgets. When I met Alexey Zbruyev, the club's athletic director, I asked whether Yavara-Neva might enjoy



preferential treatment because of its connection to the President—for example, in financial donations from businessmen or in zoning approvals from bureaucrats. “We don’t brag about it anywhere,” Zbruyev said. “Everyone knows this perfectly well—why bring it up yet again? They know what Yavara-Neva is and who the club’s leaders are. Beyond that, no one asks any questions.”

In 2000, President Boris Yeltsin named Putin his successor, setting in motion a reorganization of the country’s political life. Putin believed that Russia had grown weak and ineffectual in the nineties, and during the first year of his Presidency he and a council of economic advisers carried out reforms meant to bolster the authority and the competency of the state. Some of those early reforms, such as the introduction of a flat tax, hewed to a pro-market, neoliberal framework. But one day Andrei Illarionov, a liberal-minded economist who was working closely with Putin, came across a Presidential order to create a state monopoly by combining more than a hundred liquor factories. No one had mentioned this new body, Rosspirtprom, at council meetings. Illarionov asked other Putin advisers if they knew about the plan, and none did.

“We had been discussing every issue related to the economy, so to come across a decree no one had heard of was quite a shock,” Illarionov told me. At best, Rosspirtprom would create another clunky bureaucracy at a time when Putin had promised to pursue the opposite course; at worst, Illarionov feared, it would be an opaque company that would allow for favoritism and corruption. “It was clear that there were other people, besides our economic council, from whom Putin was taking advice, and that he was making decisions for their benefit.”

In the case of Rosspirtprom, that person was Rotenberg. He had suggested that Sergey Zivenko, with whom he had done business in the nineties, be put in charge of the company. When I met Zivenko, last fall, he called the creation of Rosspirtprom “a joint initiative” with Rotenberg—“a business project with a political tinge.” Rosspirtprom eventually controlled thirty per cent of the country’s vodka market, making it a key source of income for the state in the years be-

fore global oil prices skyrocketed. The company was an early test of Putin’s model of state capitalism, and, because it returned financial resources, and thus political power, to the Kremlin, Putin considered it a success.

Rotenberg also profited from the centralization, likely with Putin’s blessing. According to the logic of the Putin era, corruption is stealing without actually doing anything. Personal enrichment is seen as the proper reward for a completed project. “A lot of people tried to use their closeness with Putin to make a lot of promises they never carried out,” Zivenko said. “But not Rotenberg. He used this trust and delivered tangible accomplishments.” Rotenberg began using the success of Rosspirtprom “like his business card,” Zivenko said. Russian officials, and other businessmen, “saw that he was able to lobby his interests with the President, and must really be close to him, and so we have to be friends with him, too. Arkady was able to capitalize on—monetize, really—this image.”

In 2001, just before oil prices began a historic surge, Putin replaced the top executives of Gazprom, the major Russian gas company, with close associates, effectively bringing the company under the Kremlin’s direct control. Mikhail Krutikhin, a partner at RusEnergy, a consultancy in Moscow, told me that Gazprom began functioning as “the personal company of the President—all decisions regarding Gazprom, whether launching big investment projects or naming top corporate officials, were made by the President’s office.” Around this time, Arkady and his brother, Boris, began investing in companies that serviced Gazprom. They founded SMP Bank in 2001, and used it to acquire stakes in construction, gas, and pipe companies; by the mid-aughts, the brothers had become one of Russia’s main suppliers of large-diameter gas pipes.

At nearly every turn, Gazprom spent more than seemed necessary or appropriate—and, in many cases, the Rotenberg brothers stood to benefit. To take just one example, in 2007, when Gazprom needed to deliver gas from a new field above the Arctic Circle, it decided against a plan, which had been circulating for years, that called for building a short link to an existing network three

hundred and fifty miles away. Instead, it built a brand-new pipeline fifteen hundred miles to the south, with a final price tag of forty-four billion dollars—three times what a pipeline of that length usually costs. “The only explanation was that this was a chance for contractors to make a lot of money,” Krutikhin said.

When Gazprom built pipelines inside Russia during the next decade, they were two to three times more expensive than equivalent projects in Europe, even when they were in temperate, accessible areas in southern Russia. Perhaps the most striking example of inefficiency occurred in 2013, when Gazprom announced that the cost of a pipeline that Rotenberg was building in Krasnodar—a warm, flat region near the Black Sea—had risen by forty-five per cent. No explanation was given; wages were relatively stable, as was the price of steel. That stretch of pipeline was meant to feed into a larger pipeline going through Bulgaria. After the Russian government suspended construction on the Bulgarian pipeline, Rotenberg’s project miraculously went on for another year. Mikhail Korchemkin, the head of East European Gas Analysis, said that it became clear that Gazprom had “switched from a principle of maximizing shareholder profits to one of maximizing contractor profits.” The company’s projects, he said, presented a “way of minting new billionaires in Russia: overpay for services and make them rich.”

Rotenberg’s greatest business achievement came in 2008, when Gazprom sold him five construction and maintenance companies, for which he paid three hundred and forty-eight million dollars. He merged the firms into a single company, Stroigazmontazh (or S.G.M.), which immediately became one of the chief contractors for Gazprom. In the company’s first year of operations, it earned more than two billion dollars in revenue, an amount that suggested that the sale price was many times lower than market value. A short time later, the Rotenberg brothers bought a brokerage firm called Northern European Pipe Project. The normal profit margin for such companies is around ten to fifteen per cent, but several people with knowledge of the industry said that, during the boom years, N.E.P.P. earned as much as thirty per cent. At the height of its operations, it

supplied ninety per cent of all large-diameter pipes purchased by Gazprom.

Before the Crimean bridge, no construction project was as personally important to Putin as the preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics, in Sochi. The city of Sochi, which is on the far-western edge of Russia, overlooking the Black Sea, was developed as a resort area under the tsars, and later became a favorite retreat of Soviet workers, but it had little in terms of modern athletic infrastructure. Nearly everything, from ski resorts to the mountain roads leading up to them, had to be built from scratch, and before long the 2014 Games had become the most expensive in history, with an estimated budget of fifty-one billion dollars. One company controlled by Rotenberg built a nearly two-billion-dollar highway along the coast. Another built an underwater gas pipeline leading to Sochi at a price well over three times the European average. In all, companies controlled by Rotenberg received contracts worth seven billion dollars—equivalent to the entire cost of the previous Winter Olympics, in Vancouver, in 2010.

It is impossible to identify the line between where the Rotenberg brothers have, thanks to their name and connections, pocketed outsized profits from state contracts and where they've merely had a knack for finding opportunities to make money. When I asked Irène Lamber, Boris's ex-wife, whether Putin actively assisted the Rotenberg brothers, she told me that she wouldn't rule it out. "They were friendly in childhood, and those relationships were never broken, so logically you can presume some sort of advice was given, at a minimum, and perhaps help here and there," she said. As Konstantin Simonov, the director of the National Energy Fund, put it to me, "The story is simple: with a company like Gazprom, not just anybody can show up off the street and say, 'I want to build a giant gas pipe.' It's clear that Rotenberg needed a serious degree of political support on the first step." But personal favors alone didn't make Rotenberg suc-

cessful. "Rotenberg proved himself to be a very tenacious guy, with real organizational skills and a willingness to take risks," Simonov said.

When I spoke with Bogdan Budzulyak, a former Gazprom board member, he was full of praise for the Rotenbergs, and told me that the ties between the brothers and Putin "were not raised or spoken about. But we understood, it goes without saying, that they had earned the trust they were given." Rotenberg has directly addressed the friendship in a few interviews. "I would never go to the President and ask him for some-



*Rotenberg and Putin were judo sparring partners.*

thing," he told one reporter. "That would mean depriving myself of the pleasure I get from our conversations." In the Russian edition of *Forbes*, he acknowledged that "knowing someone at that level has never hurt anyone," but argued that the bond only makes things harder for him. "Unlike a lot of other people, I don't have the right to make a mistake," he said. "Because it's not a question of just my reputation."

In the nineties, Russia's oligarchs appropriated state assets—industrial production, mining, and oil and gas deposits—and did what they wanted with them. The oligarchs of the Putin era, on the other hand, are themselves assets of the state, administering business fiefdoms

that also happen to pay handsomely. Many have a long-standing relationship with the President, and a particular sphere of responsibility. Rotenberg's is infrastructure. Gennady Timchenko, one of the initial supporters of Yavara-Neva, came to preside over the oil trade; at one point, a firm he controlled sold as much as thirty per cent of the country's oil exports. Yury Kovalchuk is the Kremlin's unofficial cashier and media minister; the U.S. Treasury Department called him "the personal banker for senior officials of the Russian Federation, including Putin." Bank Rossiya, which he chairs, is worth ten billion dollars, and Kovalchuk's personal wealth is estimated at one billion dollars.

"If oligarchy 1.0 tried to grab pieces of the economy from the state, and use them for themselves, then oligarchy 2.0 tries to build themselves into the state system, in order to gain access to state contracts and budget money," Ekaterina Schulmann, a political scientist and noted analyst of the Russian political system, explained. As Clifford Gaddy, an economist who studies Putin's economic strategy, put it, "His vision of the country's entire economy is 'Russia, Inc.,' where he personally works as the executive director" and the owners of nominally private firms are "mere divisional managers, operational managers of the big, real corporation."

A source close to the Kremlin insisted that the rise of Rotenberg and similar Putin-era nouveau oligarchs was not the result of a purposeful plan: "It wasn't Putin's strategy to create these people. That's a fantasy. He may have agreed to help them, and at a certain point, once they became large and successful, he realized that they might be useful, that it's not so bad to have a caste of very wealthy people who are obligated to you." In effect, Putin's oligarchs form a shadow cabinet. Evgeny Minchenko, a political scientist in Moscow, told me, "These are trusted people, who will stick with Putin until the end, to whom he can assign certain tasks, who won't get frightened by external pressure." They can take on

## I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU

Our friends are getting married in Duluth  
in July, a city I had always pictured  
in my mind's eye as ice in rivers, ice  
in lakes, months of frozen glitter in shades  
of the silver wedding invitation  
held in place on my refrigerator  
through my own cold months by a gift a child  
once made for me, magnet glued to paper  
with my name in pastel letters beneath  
a flat-bottomed clear glass "gem" stone, its strength  
not quite enough to keep the heavy cardstock  
from slipping a fraction of an inch each time  
I reached for milk or eggs, so by the time  
summer arrived in earnest the betrothed  
names were shimmering askew on a level  
with my shins and the vegetable crisper.

In the snap a winter back, the meteorologists  
breathlessly proclaimed the city colder  
than the surface of Mars as the temps dipped  
double digits before wind chill.

Of course,  
this factoid discounted Martian fluctuation  
and that Manitobans have it harder.

I must admit that I was more thrown off  
by the reality of Mars than of Minnesota,  
as the Red Planet's, well, *redness*, and namesake  
and dust storms left a fiery impression  
on my early imagination that no  
science could entirely revise.

We made a trip of it, drove from the coast,  
collected mosquito bites like merit badges  
in Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania,  
though not quite so alphabetically,  
and camped on the shores of Superior  
in a tent my boyfriend hadn't used for years,  
which, when unfurled, contained a scrap of paper  
with "I love you" from his home-town girlfriend,  
who I had just met with her husband  
for a drink or five on my part while passing  
through said home town.

I loved her for writing it,  
I loved him for saving it, I loved the tent  
for sheltering it and us, and I hate  
myself for that other kind of dwelling  
(on) in which nothing can live.

projects the Kremlin doesn't want to fund  
or manage, such as sports teams, media  
programs, and political initiatives.

A well-connected banker told me that  
many oligarchs finance the "black ledger,"  
which, as the banker explained, is  
"money that does not go through the  
budget but is needed by the state, to  
finance elections and support local political  
figures, for example." Funds leave the  
state budget as procurement orders,  
and come back as off-the-books cash, to  
be spent however the Kremlin sees fit.  
The Panama Papers, leaked last April,  
revealed that, between 2007 and 2013,  
nearly two billion dollars had been fun-  
nelled through offshore accounts linked  
to Putin associates. In 2013, companies  
affiliated with Rotenberg sent two hun-  
dred and thirty-one million dollars in  
loans, with no repayment schedule, to a  
company based in the British Virgin Is-  
lands. What happened to that money is  
a mystery. A spokesperson for Rotenberg  
said it was transferred for "specific trans-  
actions under commercial terms," with-  
out clarifying the nature of the deal. Sep-  
arately, tens of millions of dollars passed

through offshore companies registered  
to Sergey Roldugin, a cellist who be-  
friended Putin in the seventies and who  
is the godfather of Putin's eldest daugh-  
ter, Maria. Addressing the transactions  
last April, Putin said of Roldugin: "He  
spent almost all the money he earned ac-  
quiring musical instruments from abroad  
and bringing them to Russia." (Roldugin  
has denied any wrongdoing.) Putin's  
thinking seems to be that there is no need  
to own anything himself, at least on paper,  
when trusted allies can do it for him.

Putin's Russia has been given many  
labels, from kleptocracy to Mafia state,  
but the most analytically helpful may be  
among the oldest: feudalism. "It is not a  
metaphor but a very exact definition of  
the system," Andrey Movchan, a banker  
and finance expert in Moscow, said. If  
in the Middle Ages the chief feudal cur-  
rency was land, in today's Russia it is hy-  
drocarbon wealth. Movchan explained  
how, in the Middle Ages, feudal lords  
were often "one handshake away from  
the king: their post, and the size of the  
resource, was decided by the king alone."  
The land ultimately belonged to the king,

and was awarded to feudal lords on a  
provisional basis. The same is true in  
Russia today, he said.

The system that Putin has established  
suggests a degree of weakness, insecurity,  
and even fear. Putin has little faith in  
the effectiveness of his rule, which is  
why true responsibility in his state is  
shared by only a handful of intimately  
connected people. Schulmann told me  
that in Russia's political system "there  
are no such things as qualifications, tal-  
ent, skill, experience. None of that is im-  
portant." What is important, she said,  
parroting Putin, "is that I'm not afraid.  
And the only way I won't be afraid is if  
I see a familiar face next to me." She  
continued, "How can I protect myself? I  
grab my friend Arkady, one of the few  
people I can trust."

In November, 2013, a wave of pro-  
tests swept through the Ukrainian  
capital, Kiev. Initially sparked by Presi-  
dent Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign  
a trade deal with the European Union,  
they quickly grew to include objec-  
tions to the corruption of Yanukovich's

Clear water,  
skipped stones, embers, stars.

In the morning,  
stopping for gas-station coffee, a pamphlet  
in the spinning metal map rack on  
identifying agates: translucence, banding,  
heft, irregular fractures, and so on.

The pamphlet tempered expectations, warned  
the reader not to try to find the store-bought  
kind, which have been tumbled and polished  
“to bring out their beauty.”

Crumpled burger  
wrappers, windows down, radio hits.

We arrived  
in a sweltering Duluth of sweet flag, yarrow,  
hyssop, clover, and sweated our way on a winding  
walk before the evening’s festivities,  
up through the green of Enger Hill to see  
the city from the tower.

In the garden  
at the overlook, a replica,

presented by sister city Ohara,  
of its “peace bell,” taken by U.S.S. Duluth sailors,  
then returned to Japan a decade later.

The oldest bell in Ohara, it had been destined  
for wartime scrap, meant to melt, but spared.

For what reason was it never destroyed?

“For some reason it was never destroyed,”  
the sign explains.

The wooden beam hung to sound  
is wearing down, splintering edges and flat shine  
of use. Pull back the beam and ring the bell.

Across the garden, two children look to the noise  
that reaches them.

I was their age when  
I learned my planets poorly and only slightly  
older when I learned that sound is movement  
and now the air and I are moved not only  
by the knell itself but by the quiet commentary,  
as a footnote in a smaller font, of rust on chains.

—Dora Malech

administration and its violent response to the demonstrations. The movement reached a chaotic end in February, 2014, when Yanukovich fled the capital in the middle of the night. Putin, fearing that Ukraine was turning toward Europe, secretly ordered Russian forces to enter the Crimean Peninsula. Crimea had been a part of the Russian Empire from the eighteenth century until 1954, when Nikita Khrushchev gave it to Soviet Ukraine as a gesture of friendship. Much of the Crimean population still had great affection for and close cultural ties to Russia, which many locals call their “big brother.” It wasn’t difficult for Putin to whip up a pro-Moscow campaign, fuelled by propaganda and backed by Russian special forces. In a stage-managed referendum, ninety-seven per cent of Crimeans voted to join Russia. Russian-backed separatists were soon battling the Ukrainian military in Eastern Ukraine; at several key points, Russian forces intervened to shift the momentum in the fighting.

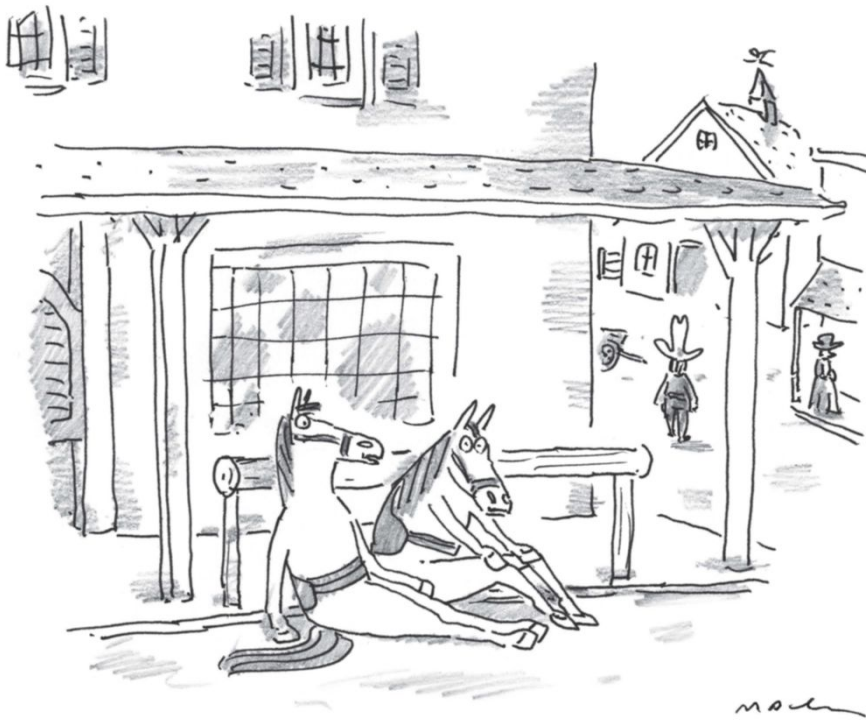
In March, 2014, the Obama Administration imposed sanctions on Russia for its interference in Ukraine; it included

Arkady and Boris Rotenberg on its list of sanctioned individuals. The Treasury Department identified the brothers as “members of the Russian leadership’s inner circle,” who “provided support to Putin’s pet projects by receiving and executing high-price contracts for the Sochi Olympic Games and state-controlled Gazprom.” (Arkady, but not Boris, was added to the E.U.’s sanctions list that July.) It is unclear what role, if any, Arkady played in the Kremlin’s Ukraine policy, but that wasn’t the point. “We wanted to make clear to the inner circle that Putin can’t protect them, that he can’t shield his cronies,” Daniel Fried, who was in charge of the sanctions policy in the State Department during the Obama Administration, told me. The theory was that sanctions would make the lives of rich and powerful individuals close to Putin more difficult, and certainly less profitable, and that their material suffering might deter further aggression.

Rotenberg did experience some inconveniences. Visa and MasterCard stopped servicing cards issued by SMP Bank, but the bank is as much a hub for

Rotenberg’s personal businesses as it is a commercial project. In September, 2014, Italian authorities seized a number of Rotenberg’s properties in Italy: among them, three villas on the island of Sardinia, one in the city of Tarquinia, and a luxury hotel in Rome. The newspaper *Corriere della Sera* estimated the combined value of the real estate at thirty million euros. Rotenberg admitted that the sanctions have forced some adjustments in his life: “Before, I used to wonder whether I should go to France or Italy—I loved to vacation in Italy—but now there is no such question. There are plenty of beautiful places in Russia.” After Rotenberg’s properties in Italy were taken, Russia’s parliament considered what came to be known as “the Rotenberg law,” which proposed that the state compensate Russian citizens for assets seized by foreign governments. (The bill was never passed; Rotenberg said that he had nothing to do with it.)

Contrary to the Obama Administration’s hopes, however, Rotenberg drew even closer to Putin. So did Timchenko and Kovalchuk, who were also on the



*"You're right—it does feel good to sit."*

sanctions list. Their response was partly about personal loyalty. "I have great respect for Putin and I consider him sent to our country from God," Rotenberg told the *Financial Times*. But it also made rational sense: the Russian state is Rotenberg's main client and source of wealth, so it would be far costlier to turn against Putin than to bear the burden of sanctions.

In fact, Western sanctions may have been a boon for Rotenberg, giving him a chance to show Putin that he had suffered for the country and was owed some payback. "It's now quite obvious that whoever ended up under sanctions found himself in a more privileged position," Minchenko, the political scientist, said. In a roundabout way, he told me, the United States and the E.U. "made a contribution to the increased influence of these people." Indeed, after the sanctions, Rotenberg's state orders grew: in 2015, he received nine billion dollars in government contracts, compared with three and a half billion dollars the year before.

In November, 2015, Russia began charging long-distance truck drivers a per-kilometre toll for travelling on federal roads. One of the co-owners of the company awarded the contract for the

toll system was Igor Rotenberg, Arkady's forty-two-year-old son, who has taken over major shares in several businesses once held by his father. Documents later showed that Igor's company, which had no competition for the contract, would be paid a hundred and fifty million dollars each year until 2027, according to the exchange rate at the time. In a rare flash of unrest, hundreds of truck drivers protested the measure, blocking highways leading into Moscow and posting signs in their windshields that read "Russia Without Rotenberg" and "Rotenberg Is Worse Than ISIS." When, this spring, the toll was further increased, demonstrations erupted again, especially in the North Caucasus, where drivers formed protest encampments.

Any enterprise to which Rotenberg lends his name now seems to succeed. In 2014, as the *Times* reported, after Rotenberg became the chairman of a Russian textbook publisher, Enlightenment, the Ministry of Education and Science eliminated more than half the titles in the country's schools, often for flimsy technical reasons. Enlightenment, whose books were largely untouched, was left with an outsized share of a market worth hundreds of millions of dol-

lars a year. This past winter, the Moscow city government decorated the center of town for the New Year; as an investigation by the independent Russian news site Meduza found, a company affiliated with the Rotenberg brothers was awarded a contract to install the decorations. According to Meduza, the company charged the city nearly five times the actual cost for dozens of illuminated garlands in the shape of champagne flutes: about thirty-seven thousand dollars instead of eight thousand dollars for each light fixture. (A spokesperson for Rotenberg denied any affiliation with the firm.)

Ilya Shumanov, the deputy director of the Moscow office of Transparency International, said that, although many of these deals seem suspect, it would be difficult to catch Rotenberg "red-handed breaking the law," not only because of his robust legal staff, but because the various arms of the Russian state, from parliament to government auditors, work together to create a "legal window" for his business. For example, although Russian law requires that state procurement contracts be awarded through open bidding, it also allows them to be granted in a closed, no-bid process if the projects are deemed strategically important—a category that the state itself determines, and doesn't have to explain or justify. A 2015 report prepared for the Russian government showed that ninety-five per cent of state purchases were uncompetitive, and forty per cent were made with a single supplier. Many of Rotenberg's largest and most lucrative orders have been awarded without open bidding. One gas-industry expert told me that in some cases fake companies were even set up to pose as bidders. As Shumanov put it, "You could call it an imitation of legality. The letter of the law is observed, even if it is broken in spirit."

The idea of building a bridge to Crimea was first raised by a British imperial consortium in the late nineteenth century, when engineers briefly considered a rail line that would run from London to New Delhi, via the peninsula. In the nineteen-thirties, under Stalin, Soviet railway planners revived the proposal as part of the country's industrialization drive, but the project went nowhere. During the Nazi campaign to seize the Caucasus, in 1942, German



soldiers took the first steps to construct a bridge. Before they could complete the project, Soviet soldiers captured the area. Within a few months, Red Army engineers had built a one-track rail bridge, but in February, 1945, four months after the first freight train passed over it, an ice floe hit the bridge and it collapsed.

Soviet officials returned to the idea of a bridge from time to time in the following decades, but the proposals were always rejected as too expensive. The Kerch Strait is a challenging place to build, with complicated geology, high seismic activity, and stormy weather. The seafloor is covered in a layer of crumbly silt that reaches as deep as two hundred feet. Freshwater from the Don River flows into the sea, which means that the surface often freezes in winter; high winds create cracks in the ice, and as the ice floes break apart they put pressure on anything standing in the water.

Oleg Skvortsov, an engineer with a long career overseeing bridge construction, was the chairman of the council of experts that advised the Russian government on the Crimea project. He said that, in the nineties, when it was a kind of fantasy, he opposed the idea of a bridge. "But the situation changed," he said, with Ukraine's blockade. Crimea has to find a way to transport its fish, wine, fruit, and other goods to Russia. "I love Crimean peaches, for example," he said. "You can only find such peaches in Italy." Skvortsov told me that he "wouldn't consider Rotenberg a builder," and then began to talk about his father, an engineer who worked under Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the chief commissar for railway construction in the twenties—and also a notorious and feared Bolshevik and the founding head of the Soviet secret police, which later became the K.G.B. "He rebuilt all the rail lines in a ruined country," Skvortsov said of Dzerzhinsky. "My father said he was a brilliant supervisor, largely because he never got too involved in technical details. I think Rotenberg is the same way."

Like most economic activity connected to Crimea, the bridge is a target of U.S. sanctions. Fried, the former State Department official, told me, "We never thought we could prevent the bridge, but we could try and make it massively costly and radioactive, so that Crimea never pays for itself, that it turns out not to be a war prize but a liability." The sanctions

do not seem to have affected construction or greatly raised costs, but they have created a few complications. It initially proved impossible to find an established insurance company to underwrite the project, and so an obscure insurance company in Crimea took on more than three billion dollars in potential risk.

As Russia began to slide into recession, the bridge started to look more and more like an extravagance. In the past several years, the Kremlin has cut budget expenditures in nearly every category. In February, an official with Russia's roadways agency let slip, perhaps accidentally, how many resources the bridge was using. "On account of this bridge, the building of new automobile roads in Russia has been practically suspended," he said. "The country does not have enough money. Therefore, we cannot implement everything we want."

Still, if the Kremlin considers a project a priority, it can successfully mobilize the country's resources. Mikhail Blinkin, the director of the transportation institute at the Higher School of Economics, in Moscow, told me that big infrastructure projects in Russia are often held up by piecemeal financing and bureaucratic roadblocks. "But in the Kerch case," Blinkin said, "the funding was sufficient, and all the usual obstacles were eliminated on the political level." It now appears likely that the bridge will be fully operational, to train and car traffic, a year ahead of schedule—in time for the next Presidential election, Putin's fourth. In an attempt to boost turnout by appealing to patriotic sentiment, the vote may be held on the anniversary of Crimea's annexation.

Blinkin told me that the bridge wasn't strictly necessary; Crimea could accommodate travellers to and from the peninsula by simply increasing the number of ferries between the city of Kerch and the Russian mainland. He noted that far more passengers travel between Helsinki and Stockholm, for example, exclusively by ferry. But an expansion in ferry service is not as grand as a bridge, and doesn't send a message about Russia's status as a world power. "Is that worth such gigantic expense?" Blinkin asked. "In a strict economic sense, no. But, if you fac-

tor in the political component, then yes."

I visited the bridge in January. It is being built not in a line, from one end to the other, but in eight separate parts at once, and for the moment it resembles a concrete-and-steel archipelago rising from the sea. On the mainland side, construction is centered in the town of Taman, which was settled by Cossacks in the eighteenth century, and which Mikhail Lermontov, in his novel "A Hero of Our Time," called "the nastiest little hole of all the seaports of Russia." When I arrived in Taman, the streets, quiet save for a few construction workers, were covered in a dusting of snow, and a freezing wind snapped through town.

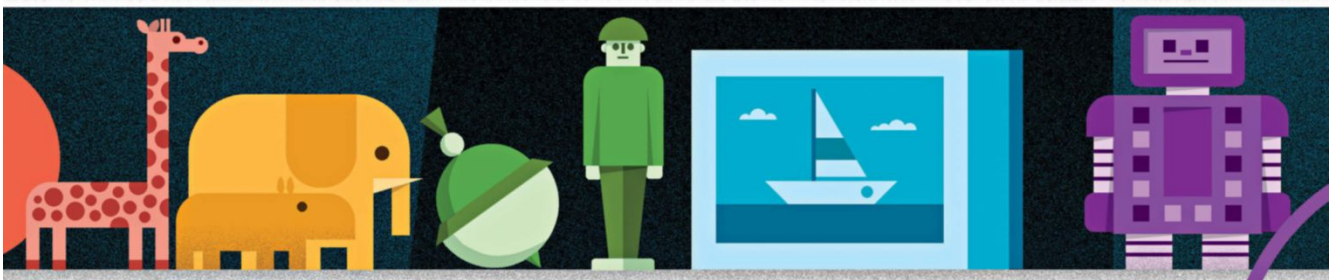
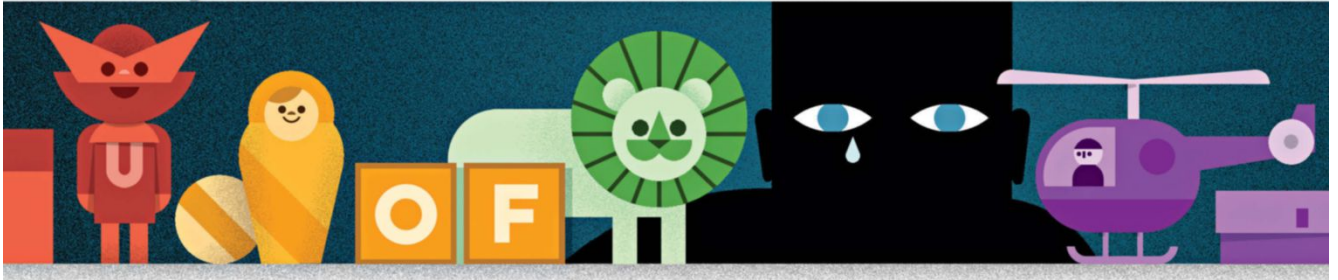
At the bridge site, teams of workers watched over drills the size of redwood trees, which rammed steel piles into the seafloor. The scale of construction was almost too immense to comprehend. As the foundation of the bridge curved toward Crimea, it disappeared on the horizon. In a trailer, I sat down with Leonid Ryzhenkin, an official from Rotenberg's construction company who is in charge of the site and its five thousand workers. Ryzhenkin's wife's family is from Sevastopol, a storied naval port in Crimea, and in the tense days before the referendum, one of his in-laws joined a pro-Russian militia. He told me about spending five hours taking a ferry and then a taxi to visit his in-laws. "My elderly mother-in-law calls all the time and asks, 'So, Lenya, how's it going? When are we going to drive across the bridge?'" he said. "And I tell her not to worry, we'll make it in time." He told me that Crimea is home

to "native Russian people," and that the bridge will "allow us all to be reunited."

Roman Novikov, an official from Russia's state road agency, joined us, and when I asked his assessment of Rotenberg he was eager to respond with praise. "I have the sense that he is deeply immersed in the project,"

Novikov said. He offered an explanation for Rotenberg's interest. "It's no secret that he talks with his childhood friend, from when they were young, who is also interested, of course, in this object," he said. Just in case there was any confusion, Novikov clarified: "I am speaking of the President of the Russian Federation." ♦





SAMANTA SCHWEBLIN



I knew that Enrique Duvel had inherited a lot of money, and also that, though he was sometimes spotted with women, he still lived with his mother. On Sundays, he cruised around the plaza in his convertible, self-absorbed, never looking at or greeting any of his neighbors, and then he'd disappear until the following weekend. I'd kept the toy store I'd inherited from my father, and one day I caught Duvel in the street, peering dubiously in through the display window of my shop. I mentioned this to Mirta, my wife, who said that maybe I'd got him confused with someone else. But then she saw him herself. Yes, on some afternoons, Duvel stood outside the toy store for a while, looking in through the window.

The first time he came inside, he seemed irresolute, as though he were ashamed and not at all sure what he was looking for. He stood by the counter and scanned the shelves from there. I waited for him to speak. He played with his car keys for a bit, and finally he asked for a model-plane kit. I asked him if he wanted me to gift wrap it, but he said no.

He came back several days later. Again, he looked in the window for a while, then he came inside and asked for the next model plane in the series. I asked him if he was a collector, but he said no.

On successive visits, he bought model cars, ships, and trains. He came almost every week, leaving with something each time. One night, I went outside to close the store's shutters and there he was, alone in front of the window. It took me a minute to recognize him, to understand that this trembling man with a red face and weepy eyes could really be Enrique Duvel. He seemed scared. I didn't see his car, and for a moment I thought it had been stolen.

"Duvel? Are you all right?"

He made a confused gesture.

"It's best if I stay here," he said.

"Here? What about your mother?"

I instantly regretted my question, afraid I'd offended him, but he said, "She locked herself in the house with all the keys. She says she doesn't want to see me again."

We stood there looking at each other, not quite knowing what to say.

"I'd best stay here," he repeated.

I knew that Mirta would never agree, but by that point I owed the man almost twenty per cent of my monthly earnings, and I couldn't just turn him away.

"But, you see, Duvel . . . there's nowhere to sleep here."

"I'll pay for the night," he said. He went through his pockets. "I don't have any money on me. . . . But I can work. I'm sure there's something I can do."

Though I knew it wasn't a good idea, I brought him inside. It was dark when we entered. When I turned the display lights on, their reflection gleamed in his eyes. Something told me Duvel wouldn't sleep that night, and I was afraid to leave him alone with nothing to do. I saw a towering stack of boxes full of toys that I hadn't had time to sort through, and I imagined the rich and refined Duvel—the sometime subject of Mirta's girlfriends' gossip—stocking my empty shelves overnight. Giving him the task could create problems for me, I thought, but at least it would keep him busy.

"Could you deal with those boxes?"

He nodded.

"I'll arrange everything tomorrow. You just have to organize the items by type." I went over to the merchandise. "The puzzles with the puzzles, for example. You can see where they go, and just put everything together, there, on the shelves. And if—"

"I understand perfectly," Duvel said, interrupting me.

He walked away from me with his eyes fixed on the floor, making a slight movement with his index finger, as if he wanted to shush me, but the humiliation held him back. I was going to tell him that there was only an old armchair in the storage room to sleep on, and to give him some advice about the handle on the toilet, but I didn't want to bother him anymore. I let him be and left without saying goodbye.

The next day, I got to the store a few minutes early; I was relieved to see that the shop's shutters were up. Only once I was inside did I realize that leaving Duvel there alone had been a tremendous mistake. Nothing was where it belonged. If at that moment a customer had come in and asked for a particular superhero figure, it would have

taken me all morning to find it. I remember thinking about Mirta and how I would explain this to her, and also the sudden exhaustion I felt as I calculated the hours it would take me to reorganize everything. Then I realized something else, something so strange that, for a moment, I couldn't take it in: Duvel had reorganized the store chromatically. Modelling clay, decks of cards, crawling baby dolls, pedal cars—all were mixed together and arranged by color. In the display cases, along the aisles, on the shelves: a subtly shifting rainbow stretched from one end of the store to the other. I still remember that sight as the beginning of disaster. He has to go, I thought. I have to get this man out of the store right now.

Duvel was looking at me. He was very serious, standing there in front of his great rainbow. I was trying to find the words to say what I wanted when his eyes lit on something behind me. I turned toward the street to see what it was. Outside the window, a woman and her two children were looking into the store. Their hands were pressed to the glass like visors as they talked excitedly about what they saw inside, as if something marvellous were moving through the aisles. It was the start of the school day, and at that hour the block was full of children and parents in a hurry. But they couldn't help stopping in front of the windows, and a crowd grew. By noon, the store was full: never had business been as good as it was that morning. It was hard to find the things that people asked for, but soon I discovered that I had only to name an item and Duvel would nod and run to get it. He located things with an efficient ease I found disconcerting.

"Call me by my first name," he told me at the end of that long day of work, "if that's all right with you."

The color arrangement drew attention to items that had never stood out before. For example, the green swimming flippers followed the squeaky frogs that occupied the final ranks of turquoise, while the puzzles depicting glaciers—maroon at the earthen base of the photograph—brought the rainbow full circle by joining their snowy peaks with volleyballs and stuffed white lions.

The store didn't close for siesta that

day, or any of the following days, and, little by little, we started pushing back our closing time. Enrique slept in the store from then on. Mirta agreed that we should set up a space for him in the storage room. At first he had to make do with a mattress on the floor, but soon we found a bed. And once or twice a week, during the night, Enrique reorganized the store. He set up scenes with the giant building blocks; he modified the interior light by constructing intricate walls of toys against the windows; he built castles that stretched across the aisles. It was useless to offer him a salary; he wasn't interested. "It's best if I stay here," he'd say, "better than a salary."

He didn't leave the store, or, at least, not that I ever saw. He ate what Mirta sent him: packed meals that started out as slices of bread with cold cuts in the evenings, and later became elaborate lunches and dinners.

Enrique never touched the model

kits anymore. They occupied the store's highest shelves and there they stayed, always. They were the only things that remained in one spot. Now he preferred the puzzles and board games. In the mornings, if I arrived early, I'd find him sitting at the table with a glass of milk, playing with two colors of Chinese checkers or fitting the last pieces of a large fall landscape into place. He'd grown silent, but he never lost his attentiveness toward the customers. He got into the habit of making his bed in the mornings and cleaning the table and sweeping the floor after he ate. When he was done, he came over to me or to Mirta—who, because of the extra business, had started working behind the counter—and said, "I made my bed," or, "I finished sweeping," or even, "I finished what I had to do." And it was that manner of his—obsequious, as Mirta called it—that made us start to worry, somehow.

One morning, I found that he had built a small zoo on the table, using articulated dolls, farm animals, and Legos. He was drinking his glass of milk while he opened the gate for the horses and made them gallop, one by one, over to a dark sweater that served as a mountain. I greeted him and went to the counter to start working. When he came over to me he seemed embarrassed.

"I already made the bed," he said, "and I finished what—"

"It's O.K.," I said. "I mean, it doesn't matter if you make the bed or not. It's your room, Enrique."

I thought we were understanding each other, but he looked down at the floor, even more embarrassed, and said, "Sorry, it won't happen again. Thank you."

After a while, Enrique also stopped reorganizing the puzzles and board games. He placed the boxes on the upper shelves alongside the model kits, and retrieved them only if a customer specifically asked for them.

"You have to talk to him," Mirta said. "People are going to think we don't have puzzles anymore. Just because he doesn't use them doesn't mean they're not for sale."

But I didn't say anything. Things were going well with the business, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

Over time, he started to reject certain foods. He would eat only meat, mashed potatoes, and pasta with simple sauces. If we gave him anything else, he would push it away, so Mirta started cooking only the things that he liked.

Every once in a while, the customers would give him coins, and when he had saved enough he bought a blue plastic cup with a convertible car in relief that he picked out in the store. He used it at breakfast, and in the morning, when reporting the state of his bed and his room, he began to add, "I also washed my cup."

Mirta was worried when she told me about one afternoon in particular: she'd been watching Enrique play with a boy who'd come into the store, and he suddenly grabbed a superhero figure and refused to share it. When the boy started to cry, Enrique stomped off and locked himself in the storage room.

"You know how much I care about

# AUTOCORRECT SPELLING BEE



*"Schadenfreude. S-C-A-R-F. Schadenfreude."*

Enrique,” my wife said that night, “but we can’t let him get away with things like that.”

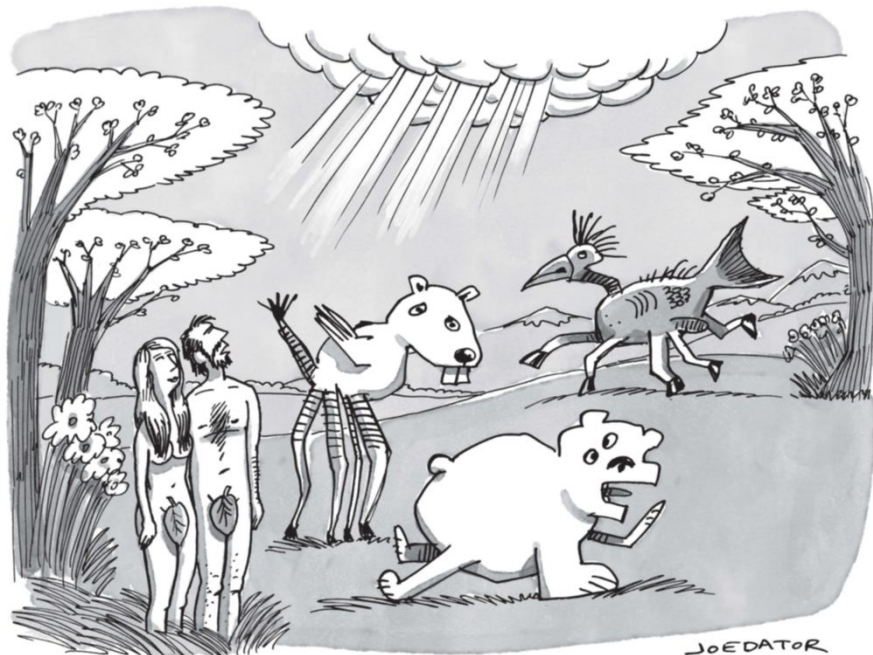
Although he still had his genius when it came to reorganizing the merchandise, over time he also stopped playing with the little articulated dolls and the Legos, and he archived them, along with the board games and the model kits, on the now overcrowded upper shelves. The range of toys that he still reorganized and kept within the customers’ reach was so small and monotonous that it barely attracted the youngest children.

“Why do you put those things up so high, Enrique?” I asked him.

He looked disconsolately at the shelves, as if, in effect, they were too high for him as well. But he didn’t answer; he was quieter all the time.

Little by little, sales went back down. Enrique’s rainbows, displays, and castles lost the splendor of those first days, when almost all the toys participated in his radical remodelling. Now everything happened at knee-level and below. Enrique was almost always hunched over or kneeling in front of a new pile of toys that was ever smaller and more amorphous. The place had started to empty of customers. Soon we didn’t need Mirta’s help anymore, and Enrique and I were left alone.

I remember the last afternoon I saw Enrique. He hadn’t wanted his lunch, and he was wandering up and down the aisles. He looked sad and lonely. I felt, in spite of everything, that Mirta and I owed him a lot. I wanted to cheer him up, so I climbed the moving ladder—which I hadn’t used since Enrique had started helping me in the store—to reach the highest shelves. I chose a model kit for him, an imported one of an old-fashioned train. The box said that it had more than a thousand pieces, and, if you added batteries, its lights worked. It was the best miniature I had, and it cost a fortune. But Enrique deserved it, and I wanted to give it to him. I climbed down with the gift and called to him from the counter. He was coming back from the farthest shelves, a violet stuffed animal—I think it was a rabbit—hanging from his right hand. I called to him again, but he crouched down sud-



*“We tried making some of our own animals.”*

denly, as though startled, and stayed there. It was a strange movement that I didn’t understand. I left the train on the counter and approached him slowly to see if something was wrong.

“Enrique, are you all right?”

He was crying, hugging his knees. The rabbit had fallen to one side, face down on the floor.

“Enrique, I want to give you—”

“I don’t want anyone to hit me anymore,” he said.

I wondered if something had happened that I hadn’t seen—if some customer had given him trouble or if he’d fought with another child.

“But, Enrique, no one . . .”

I knelt beside him. I wished I had the model train right there; it hurt me to see him so upset. Mirta would have known what to do, how to soothe him. Then the door to the street opened violently, almost slamming against the wall, and both of us froze. From the floor, we saw, under the shelves, two high heels advancing down the next aisle.

“Enrique!” It was a strong, authoritative voice.

The high heels stopped and Enrique looked at me in fear. He seemed to want to tell me something, and he grabbed my arm.

“Enrique!”

The heels started moving again, this time in our direction, and a woman appeared at the end of the aisle.

“Enrique!” She stormed toward us. “All this time I’ve been looking for you,” she yelled, as she stopped very close to him. “Where the hell have you been?”

She slapped him so hard that he lost his balance. Then she grabbed his hand and yanked him up. The woman cursed me, kicked the stuffed rabbit, and practically dragged Enrique away. I followed them for a couple of steps. They passed the counter, and headed for the door. When they’d almost reached it, Enrique tripped and fell to the floor. On his knees, he turned to look at me. Then his face crumpled. She grabbed his hand again, yelling, “Enrique, come on!”

I stayed where I was, watching and doing nothing. Just before the door closed, I saw his little fingers trying to pull away from his mother’s, as she, furious, leaned down to pick him up. ♦

*(Translated, from the Spanish,  
by Megan McDowell.)*

NEWYORKER.COM

Samanta Schweblin on her short story.

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# THE CRITICS



THE ART WORLD

## THE WAVE OF HISTORY

*Robert Rauschenberg's ceaseless activity.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

While creating the universe, did God have in mind that, at a certain point, a stuffed goat with a car tire around its middle would materialize to round out the scheme? It came to pass, in New York, with “Monogram” (1955-59)—goat, tire, and also paint, paper, fabric, printed matter, metal, wood, shoe heel, and tennis ball—which is now on view at the Museum of Modern Art, in “Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends,” an immense retrospective of the protean artist, who died in 2008, at the age of eighty-two. Of course, anything may feel inevitable after it has happened, but some things feel more consequentially so than others.

Early in his career, Rauschenberg specialized in talismans of destiny, such as, in 1951, a series of uninflected all-white paintings that inspired the composer John Cage, a friend, to create “4'33””: a pianist not playing a piano for exactly four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Once done, things like that needn’t—mustn’t, really—ever be done again, but they register. Eschewing taste, they are neither good nor bad, as art. They complicate what art has been, is, and can be, for people who are inclined to ponder those matters—in this case, most of the innovative artists of the past sixty years. Rauschenberg’s work, in mediums that range from painting and photography to a big vat of bubbling gray mud (“Mud Muse,” 1968-71), is uneven, and it lost pertinence and drama in his later decades. For a great artist, he made remarkably little good art. But the example of his nimble intelligence and

zestful audacity affected the sense of vocation—thoughts and motives, doubts and dreams—of subsequent generations, to this day.

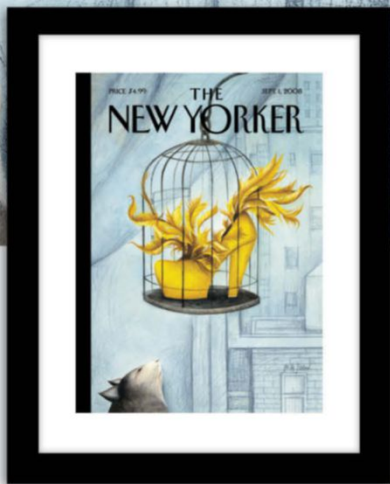
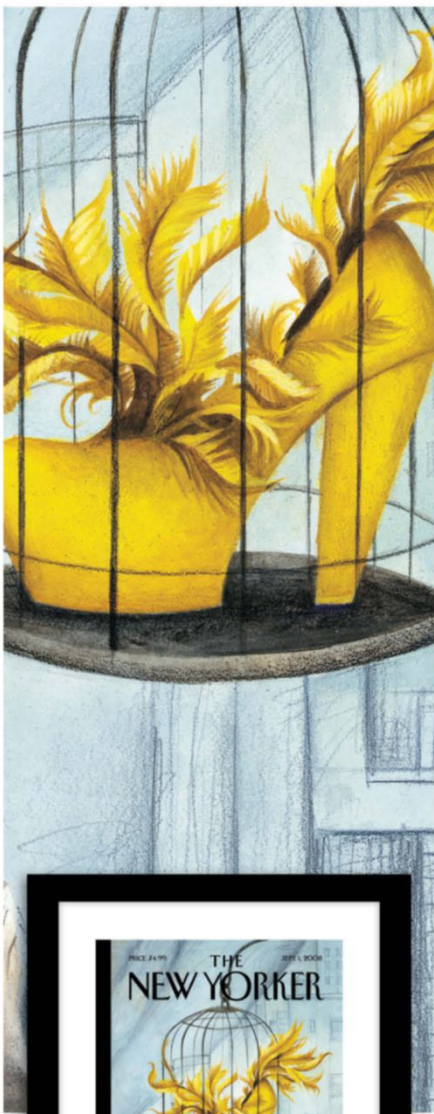
He was a dyslexic son of evangelical parents in Port Arthur, Texas (a place whose other escapees include Janis Joplin). He was seventeen when he enrolled at the University of Texas to study pharmacology. In 1944, he became a neuropsychiatric technician in the Naval Hospital Corps, in San Diego. Then the G.I. Bill staked him to art studies in Kansas City and in Paris, where he met the painter Susan Weil. In 1948, he and Weil entered the creative crucible of Black Mountain College, near Asheville, North Carolina—just missing the presence there of Willem de Kooning, Cage, the dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham, and Buckminster Fuller, who had erected a geodesic dome on the campus. The head of the art program was the German Bauhaus émigré Josef Albers, whose rigorous lessons in the aesthetic effects of combined materials and juxtaposed colors were imprinted on Rauschenberg, though to ends hardly orthodox. The uses to which he put them included light impressions, on blueprint paper, of Weil and himself in the nude, and black paintings on crinkly newspaper glued to screen doors. Having moved to New York in 1949, Rauschenberg and Weil married in 1950, had a son the next year, and divorced in 1952. Rauschenberg had fallen in love with the painter Cy Twombly and, in 1951, leaving Weil and the baby, returned with him to Black Mountain. Cage and Cunning-

ham came back, too. In 1953, Rauschenberg employed Cage’s Model A Ford to produce an inky tire track, about twenty-three feet long, on joined sheets of typing paper—another item that feels as if it had been fated since the beginning of time.

Spasms of creative collaboration distinguished Black Mountain. A “concert,” in August, 1952, conceived by Cage, had artists, dancers, and poets performing simultaneously, around and amid the audience, while films and slides were projected. Rauschenberg had mounted white paintings on the ceiling, and he played what one audience member recalled as “old hokey records” on an antique gramophone. Amusingly, in the MOMA show, slide-projected quotes from veterans of the event differ in matters of fact. You had to have been there. Collaboration was a regular elixir for Rauschenberg. Occasions of it, documented with abundant videos over the whole course of his career, include mesmerizing dance works that he performed himself or for which he provided sets, props, and costumes. (You will be made happy if you can spare the nearly twenty-two ravishing minutes of “Set and Reset,” a 1983 dance choreographed by Trisha Brown.) Most legendary is “9 Evenings” (1966), a series of ten determinedly high-tech collaborations with several artists and a team of engineers in the cavernous 69th Regiment Armory, on Lexington Avenue. I attended and can assure you that, contrary to the glamorously edited videos in the show, they were malfunctioning, formless, benumbing ordeals. To appreciate



*For a great artist, Rauschenberg made remarkably little good art, but he affected the sense of vocation of subsequent generations.*



"Object of Desire"  
Ana Juan, September 1, 2008

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THE  
NEW YORKER

"9 Evenings," you had to have *not* been there.

At the beating heart of the show is the revolutionary period of the mid- to late fifties, when Rauschenberg, in league with Twombly and, especially, with his subsequent lover, Jasper Johns, took the measure of an art world dominated by the recent international triumph of Abstract Expressionism. His Combines—kitchen-sink *mélanges* of painting, sculpture, collage, and assemblage, including "Monogram"—absorbed that movement's aesthetic breakthroughs, in dispersed composition and eloquent paint-handling, while subverting its frequently macho pathos. So, too, did Johns's tenderly brushed "Flags" and Twombly's laconic scribbles. The MOMA show's lead curator, Leah Dickerman, has incorporated first-rate works by those artists, and others, to augment a sense of the tumultuous change, which in Rauschenberg's case entailed irreverence brought to the point of malice. Permanently stunning are his "Factum I" and "Factum II" (1957): painted and collaged canvases that lampoon the ostensible spontaneity of Action painting by appearing, except on close inspection, to be identical twins, down to every last drip and splash. But the work that might be his most iconic involves an anecdote. In 1953, bearing a bottle of Jack Daniel's, Rauschenberg visited de Kooning, who was then at the peak of his influence in New York, and asked for a drawing in order to erase it. The relic, with ghostly, ineffaceable traces of the original handiwork, is in the show. Rauschenberg revered de Kooning's genius but plainly had it in for his reputation, as it seems de Kooning wryly understood. The gesture proved prophetic: within a decade, surging Pop art and minimalism had rendered de Kooning and his many followers, in the eyes of art-world cognoscenti, pitifully passé.

Rauschenberg, too, was challenged by the shift in fashions, which was attended by a market suddenly avid for radically new paintings. He mastered the use of solvents to transfer images from printed sources to paper or canvas. The show convenes a suite of drawings employing that technique, made between 1958 and 1960: putative illustrations of the thirty-four cantos of

Dante's *Inferno*. They are lyrically filmy and very lovely, though only by a willing stretch do they relate much to the poem. Then, in 1962, Rauschenberg struck gold when Andy Warhol schooled him in the craft of silk-screening photographs onto canvas. He had a hundred and fifty screens made from pictures of Old Master paintings, urban scenes, astronauts, President Kennedy, birds, and other allurements. He mixed and matched them with freehand brushwork, in eye-popping colors. In 1964, the results—which today impress me as more facile than felt—made him the first American to win the top prize at the Venice Biennale, and, at thirty-nine, the youngest artist. To his lasting credit, he recoiled from the razzmatazz of the success. Lest he be tempted to cash in on the vogue of his silk-screen style, he immediately phoned a friend in New York and ordered him to destroy all the screens. He got plenty rich, and he hardly minded that, but his freedom from outside pressures mattered more to him.

Rauschenberg's integrity, while unimpeachable, never had much to do with high standards of art. (Johns and Twombly far outshine him in that regard.) It was a commitment to sheer activity, with friends at hand, if not involved. His later career, following a move, in 1970, to Captiva Island, in Florida, was consumed by fetching but rather nerveless experimentation—with print mediums, cardboard reliefs, exotic fabrics, reflective surfaces, and incessant photography—and by collaborative projects, at times in politically minded causes, around the globe. Many of the late works are snappy, and some are beautiful, but none deliver the jolt of even the silk-screen paintings. He was a performance artist, first and last. You respond to his works not with an absorption in their quality but with a vicarious share in his brainstorming excitement while making them. For a time, momentarily, what he did caught a wave of history and drove it farther inland than could otherwise have been the case. But even when he was reduced to being a beachcomber of his own legacy, the world was a better place with him in it than it is without him, now. ♦



# A WOMAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE

*Did Diana Trilling get her due?*

BY TOBI HASLETT



*“People will celebrate one member of a household but not two,” Trilling wrote.*

In the winter of 1967, the cover of *Partisan Review* was dominated by a single question: “WHAT’S HAPPENING TO AMERICA?” It blared the era’s sense of alarm. The magazine had sent a questionnaire to its most famous affiliates—novelists, critics, socialists, a poet—who weighed in on the “moral and political crisis” that had seized the country and left the intelligentsia in a state of baffled horror. The horror was humiliating. Reality seemed to have roared past logic, invalidating the kind of delicately calibrated opinion that had given intellectuals prestige and purpose. What was to be done about poverty? About the youth? What about that insistent crisis of national conscience “the American Negro”? And was all this due to something lodged deep in the system, something intrinsically American—or was it the singular malignity of Lyndon Johnson?

Susan Sontag’s blazing contribution to the *Partisan Review* symposium gave a dire verdict on an America that held

“man’s biological as well as his historical future in its King Kong paws,” an “arch-imperium” whose power was “indecent in its scale.” Americans themselves were merely feeling the effects of a coarsened consciousness: a life so clogged with “gadgetry and cars and TV and box architecture” that the population had been cleaved in two, “making grey neurotics of most of us, and perverse spiritual athletes and strident self-transcenders of the best of us.” The following year, she flew to Hanoi.

But the symposium’s final response, which came right after Sontag’s, was rather moderate. In fact, it seemed to raise moderation itself to the status of moral principle, as the author displayed—in a time of campus protest and sharp, flashing rhetoric—a kind of scornful maturity:

The fact is that the American intellectual has always lived at such a far remove from power that he has developed a peculiarly grim imagination of power, to which he can relate himself only in angry passivity. This hostile

separation from government has no doubt played its part in creating our famed American rigorouslyness in matters of culture. . . . We reserve for culture and deny to politics our best energies of discrimination, now more than ever needed in our political judgments.

Diana Trilling, the only female respondent besides Sontag, knew a lot about the habits and styles of the “American intellectual.” She was one, after all: she had published a collection of essays and would go on to publish two others, along with a memoir and a book-length work of reportage. She was married to the illustrious literary critic Lionel Trilling, and both were members of the loose, largely Jewish group known as the New York Intellectuals. But Diana’s response to the questionnaire reveals instincts and impulses that shot straight from her own soul: the determination to pit “fact” against “imagination,” to hook “politics” to “culture,” to put the “best energies of discrimination” toward reliable judgment.

She was perhaps too reliable. She was suspicious of virtually every social movement of her day: the New Left, multiculturalism, women’s liberation. True, she and Lionel were part of a milieu that, in the nineteen-thirties, had looked to the theories of Marx and Freud for insights into human character and the fate of society—but, save for a brief flirtation, she had little use for Marx. Instead, she immersed herself in the Freudian universe of deep, growling desires, her mind pitched at the ego’s involutions and attachments.

Freud was, in her view, a suitably “tragic” thinker: he grasped the limitations, the fatal flaws, that cut through psychic life. Humans were hamstrung by their imperfect natures, and human institutions could apparently do no better—so she was never a revolutionary, or, à la Sontag, a “spiritual athlete” or a “strident self-transcender.” Trilling stood with the “grey neurotics”: politically, she balked at large, dramatic solutions and sweeping visions, hoping at most to poke little liberal openings in the status quo. Yet the fervor of her pessimism, like the extremity of her moderation, made her a forceful, imperious presence.

It was either apt or ironic, then, that she spent much of her life deferring to and excusing the man she married. “I wanted as much for him as he wanted

for himself and more than I wanted for myself," she once wrote. Throughout their life together, she was his interlocutor, editor, domestic ballast, and emotional scapegoat. She was the key to his literary triumph. And she would attempt—with delayed, complicated success—to triumph herself.

Natalie Robins's new biography, "The Untold Journey: The Life of Diana Trilling" (Columbia), opens with its subject in her nineties, suffering the final stages of lymphoma and lying on a metal hospital bed in the middle of the bedroom she once shared with her husband. Robins comes in and kisses her forehead. So it's instantly clear that this book will be a tribute, a scrupulously researched study of a figure the biographer knew well and regarded with admiring warmth. But admiration can anesthetize: Robins tends to numb and slacken the story of Trilling's life, the better to cut and separate its layers without causing any pain. This appraisal of a contentious woman, a woman in danger of being forgotten, attends closely to her personal sensibility but shrinks from her intellectual life.

It wasn't always obvious that she would have one. Diana Rubin was born in 1905, the youngest of three children. She was full of nervous intelligence. Her family was middle class, and lived in

and around New York: the East Bronx, Larchmont, New Rochelle, Brooklyn. Until the stock-market crash of 1929, her father, Joseph—who had landed at Ellis Island after a childhood in Warsaw—ran a booming women's-hosiery business on Long Island, which doubled as proof of his advanced taste: his plant was one of the first to be all glass. Diana was the brightest of his children, and, she presumed, his favorite; he sent her to Radcliffe, where she studied art history. The college's strict sexual mores were enforced by the era's vaporous fears of disease and social exclusion. Those fears were exacerbated when a friend of her father's assaulted her, and intensified her developing anxieties, overwhelming her twitching mind. Robins writes that "Radcliffe turned her into a prude," not into an intellectual.

On Christmas Eve, 1927, Diana went on a blind date with Lionel Trilling, an instructor at Hunter College who had recently received his master's from Columbia. His education dwarfed hers—she'd never read Stendhal until he gave her "The Charterhouse of Parma" as a gift—but that night she dazzled him with what he described in his journal as "the mechanical trick of being able to talk about anything." Diana's mother had died the previous year, forcing her to grow up rather fast; Lionel noticed her "risqué jokes." The attraction was instant, leading to

a courtship that established their respective roles, with Diana the hyperactive conversationalist, the snappy, insatiable arguer. Lionel, of course, was the great mind. As he later wrote in his journal:

Note on D after seeing her at dinner: she is still desirable, simply, and a splendid woman; also I suppose is a more or less educated and sophisticated woman, idiosyncratic etc. But evidently not much beyond that. Her body is lovely to touch but her laugh and her voice irritate me and her talk does not stimulate but rather represses, although I do not think her stupid but rather lazy.

That glib, relaxed condescension, ratified by the sexual politics of the day, trickled through the Trillings' nearly five decades of marriage. It's one of Robins's virtues that her book is full of these withering perspectives: the text swivels to sample Lionel's often patronizing opinion before going back to Diana. The technique dramatizes a quandary of Diana's life, as her existence seemed to both clutch at and strain away from his. Even her career as a critic began only when an editor at *The Nation* called Lionel, in 1941, to see if he could suggest anyone to write the magazine's unsigned reviews of new fiction. Diana boldly requested that he give the editor her name.

The boldness was justified. She had become an expert judge of prose after laboring studiously over her husband's. His thoughts were always mighty and complex, possessed as he was of a worldly, paradigm-shifting critical intelligence. But he often couldn't express himself with grace; the large ideas tended to loll and collapse on the page. Diana raked through every line of his first book, on Matthew Arnold, chastening each awkward phrase and disciplining Lionel's clauses and rhythms. Whole pages would come back rewritten. He would fret and moan, they would haggle and fight—while the language grew richer, stronger. As she later wrote, "Lionel taught me to think; I taught him to write."

This was not an equal exchange. The persistent difficulty of her intellectual life—the fact that gripped and transfixed her, and that prompted her most pained, scrambled responses—was her status as a woman. As the wife of a famous intellectual, she was often seen as Lionel's acolyte or appendage. Though she disdained second-wave feminism,



*"Enter the journey, not the destination."*

she was not an anti-feminist; there is no ignoring the confident ferocity of her mind. She took a radical pleasure in self-assertion, but she asserted herself against radicalism. Her idea of liberation was a willed but gracious enlargement of women's roles, a process that somehow needn't bother with the so-called privileges of men. (Robins dubs her a "family feminist.") Norman Mailer, at the dinner party where they met, called her a "smart cunt"; she laughed, and a friendship was born. When she and Lionel had a son, James, it was understood that *she* would have to devote less time to her own work, *she* would have to care for the child, *she* would have to rearrange her whole life with minimal help from Lionel. And she did. She wanted to be a great writer, but her husband retained a lordly prominence that she never challenged.

When Diana Trilling started reviewing books for *The Nation*, at the age of thirty-six, she brought a gimlet-eyed assurance that has not always aged well. In the era of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Jean Stafford, and Christopher Isherwood, she announced the "emptiness of current fiction." Saul Bellow, she said, "is talented and clever and writes with control and precision," but she dismissed "Dangling Man" as one of those "small novels of sterility." (Bellow fumed to his publisher that his book "is probably not great, but it is not 'small.'") Elizabeth Hardwick's first novel "lacks drama or even a coherent story, few of the characters are given their narrative due, there is no unity of rhythm in the prose, and much of the book is dull reading." Still, Trilling could spot genius, even in larval form: "Scattered through Miss Hardwick's book are perhaps twenty or thirty pages that would be remarkable from the most mature writer."

Her literary judgments folded into a social and political vision. She decried the coziness of assumed class privilege in Virginia Woolf, and the irony of Woolf's having titled her literary essays "The Common Reader." Later, she compared Philip Roth's "Portnoy's Complaint" (faulted because, having indicted a guilt-purveying upbringing, it issues "what is actually a call to Mental Health") and J. R. Ackerley's "My Father and Myself" (praised because it has "no such fashionable anti-societal doctrine to im-

part"), and concluded that "Ackerley's homosexual memoir is the more masculine—if that word still has meaning—of the two books."

Lionel needed and loved her—but he shuddered at the love and revolted against the need, as both were tokens of his dependency and his permeable, precarious life. He hungered for virility, but was meek and sexually dysfunctional. As a breadwinner, he was never quite adequate; the couple spent most of their lives in debt. He wanted to be a novelist, but was known only as a critic. So Diana wondered if she'd sometimes mutated, in his imagination, into the conflation and the cause of all his little castrations, the leering source of everything that smote and failed him. He was known as a melancholic, an aloof intellect that hovered resignedly above real life. But at home he could break into screaming rages, terrorizing his wife with unhinged, thrashing fits. She was already phobic, pathologically afraid of heights and travel—and abandonment. His episodes only worsened her neurotic tendencies, making the couple's attachment feel desperate and raw, but also, strangely, transparent. Shared intensity forced them into a certain marital frankness. They could talk to one another.

Yet glinting throughout Diana's writings—especially "The Beginning of the Journey," a memoir of her marriage—are hints at the mutual bitterness that struggled for expression and was continually deferred and displaced by the couple's strenuous attempts to be proper and functional. Diana always dismissed the possibility of literary competition between her and her husband. About her career as a critic, she wrote, "Lionel took the greatest pleasure in it; it obviously posed no threat to him." She spent much of her adult life swatting down the claims of women's liberation with such haughty, willful intolerance that one discerns a note of fear: fear of her own discontent, of her own unconscious, of the wrathful righteousness of a new movement that tilted against and exposed all that the patriarchy was happy to leave unsaid. When Lionel finished his first book, he thanked Diana in the preface for her assistance. ("I cannot calculate its full sum.") Then, perhaps in a fit of bitter pride, he destroyed the pages she had filigreed with her edits, blotting her from the lit-

erary record. She was crushed. Nearly a decade later, the same fate befell drafts of his only novel, "The Middle of the Journey" (1947). But Diana clung to the belief that Lionel was "unique in his lack of resentment for the work I did for him." Curiously, Robins concurs: that preface of Lionel's "attests to that conviction."

This is but one contradiction among many that Robins must parse. Diana cut an odd figure in literary-bohemian New York: a queenly Cold Warrior with a temperamental aversion to revolt. The New York Intellectuals were their own planet, locked in a tight orbit around *Partisan Review*, then *Commentary*, and then *The New York Review of Books*. The group bristled with singular personalities—Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, Dwight Macdonald, Philip Rahv, Irving Howe, Norman Podhoretz—all with clashing views on socialism, violence, modernist literature, and the responsibility of the intellectual within a society in flux. The Trillings were among the moderates. Lionel's most influential work, the essay collection "The Liberal Imagination" (1950), launched a patient, careful assault on political radicalism and its literary complements. Diana was more aggressive, the clamorous defender of quietism. In the nineteen-fifties, as what was then called a "liberal anti-Communist," she had acute contempt for the *anti-anti-Communism* that had sprung up as a response to Senator Joseph McCarthy. Indeed, she eventually became the chair of the board of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, which sought to combat the Russians in the arena of the arts. The revelation that the C.I.A. had funded the committee didn't give her the slightest pause. Anti-Americanism had always maddened her, especially in white radicals: it made "poor sense, it seems to me, to be bitter over the fact that Negroes are deprived of rights which we ourselves hold cheap." During the Vietnam War, she was aghast at the protests.

Politics, for her, was more than a test of principles; political questions drilled deep into her intimate life, smashing alliances and releasing caustic resentments. Her anti-Communism pitted her against the writer Lillian Hellman; *their* Cold War would never quite end. (It wound up on the front page of the *Times*, in 1976, after Trilling's publisher, which was also Hellman's,

refused to publish a collection of hers unless its chastisements of Hellman were deleted.) She ridiculed Allen Ginsberg, her husband's former student, for his "shabby gentility" and "talent for self-promotion." And she was appalled by the 1968 demonstrations at Columbia, where Lionel had become a full professor twenty years earlier. Unable to work up even a distant sympathy for the restive students, she published an agitated lament for *Commentary*, in which she maintained that universities, like America itself, were clinging childishly to their "dream of progress," and declared that "any student uprising is not so much a rebellion against the particular institution as against modernity itself."

Her polemical energies prompted the sort of hostility her husband largely escaped. Alfred Kazin, she recounts in her memoir, once accosted Lionel at a *Partisan Review* party and demanded, "When are you going to dissociate yourself from that wife of yours?" At a 1971 Town Hall event that found Norman Mailer onstage with a panel of feminists that included Diana Trilling, he referred to her as "our foremost lady critic." Susan Sontag rose to voice her objection to the term "lady." The word "foremost" may have rankled even more.

Trilling can seem an unlikely candidate for remembrance; she's known mostly for remembering things herself. Her most celebrated literary achievement is her memoir, "The Beginning of the Journey," a work so monumentally complete that any biography of Trilling is forced to bob in its wake. Robins knows this, as her title plays on Diana's—but Diana's title plays on Lionel's "The Middle of the Journey." It's a nod to the couple's linked fates, the way her intellect was forged in the fires of his influence. Diana was a chronicler and an observer, prone to sharp personal criticisms and a punishing attention to social codes. She was the great memoirist of her milieu, the "strange difficult ungenerous unreliable unkind and not always honest people who created the world in which Lionel and I shared."

But this was a world of argument and opinion—of what Diana liked to call "cultural politics"—and Robins ex-

hibits a polite boredom with the intellectual passions that bound and broke a whole mythic coterie. Diana's positions are merely described, not deeply considered, and almost never disputed. Nor is there any discussion of the development of Trilling's prose. In her early criticism, she is clipped and biting. But her later works—the collection "We Must March My Darlings" (1977); "Mrs. Harris" (1981), a book about a famous murder trial; and "The Beginning of the Journey" (1993)—display a freer, brighter, more smilingly elegant stylist, one who had been loosened by the unconventional conventions of the so-called New Journalism. Robins instead directs her attention to Trilling's marriage, zooming in on its troubles and quirks.

Look at something closely enough and your eyes will cross. Instead of drawing out and elaborating on the sexual politics of the Trillings' marriage—how the betrayals slotted into their time and place—Robins gives us a traipsing, chattily neutral catalogue of facts. The facts, especially about Lionel's behavior toward Diana, are not self-sufficient. They cry out for analysis. But, just as Trilling recoiled from grandiloquent radical gesture, Robins seems to have renounced the biographer's task to come to some sustained conclusion about her subject. This is perhaps an act of mercy.

Or of obedience. In Trilling's old age, she had foreseen a biography, and prepared for it with touching pomp. In the preface to "The Beginning of the Journey," she wrote, "Not long after Lionel's death, as I pondered the disposition of his papers, it occurred to me that in our current spate of biographical writing, I, too, might be discovered as a subject." Yet the Trillings, despite their public stature, were in many ways furred, inward-turning personalities: "We did not have eventful lives, as this would perhaps now be understood, but our private drama had its intensity." She hoped to capture that intensity by talking about it, so in the early nineteen-eighties she taped some thirty interviews, hoping that "these in themselves might make a publishable volume." They didn't. But those tapes are the basis for Robins's book; the text is punctuated regularly, dutifully,

tellingly, by the words "Diana said."

It's easy, perhaps even just, to muster compassion for a woman placed so squarely in the shadow of her husband that she refuses to dwell on her humiliations. At stake is her trembling, hard-won pride. ("People will celebrate one member of a household but not two," Trilling wrote in her memoir, explaining how her marriage detracted from her reputation.) Perhaps Trilling is in need of posthumous allies, tenders to the flame, someone to agree with and believe in her. But that is only one view of justice. What if Trilling had a biographer who sought to reclaim her by grappling with—and even contesting—the opinions that established her as an urgent voice? In aligning herself so firmly with Trilling's perspective, Robins repeats her subject's mistakes, neglecting to address the psyche's calculated oversights and necessary errors, the desperate little contradictions that made and unmade her.

The great anomaly of Diana Trilling's career was the best-selling "Mrs. Harris" (1981), her penultimate book. It focussed on the trial of Jean Harris, the headmistress of a posh girls' school in Virginia, who, in 1980, killed her tyrannical lover, a cardiologist and the creator of the celebrated "Scarsdale medical diet." The doctor had jilted her, so Harris had driven up to New York from Virginia and shot him four times. The story was lurid; the press was ablaze. And the murderer became, in Trilling's grumbling opinion, an object of popular sympathy to women "newly sensitized by doctrinaire women's liberation to the mistreatment of women not merely in public life but in all relations of the sexes."

Trilling wondered how "this unprepossessing woman" could "create around her such an air of superbness." Harris was a condensation, it appeared, of the aimlessness, the histrionics, and the monstrous, violent liberties of a younger generation with a fatal taste for extremes. Yet something about the killer seemed approachable to Trilling—common, drably real. Lodged within her skepticism lay a tart, Freudian quip: "I still saw her as a woman who thought she loved a man whom she deeply hated—it's not an unfamiliar phenomenon." ♦

## POLE APART

*The struggles of Czesław Miłosz.*

BY ADAM KIRSCH



In July, 1950, Czesław Miłosz, the cultural attaché at the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C., received a letter from Jerzy Putrament, the general secretary of the Polish Writers' Union. The two men had known each other for many years—they had been contributors to the same student magazine in college, in the early nineteen-thirties—but their paths had diverged widely. Now the arch-commissar of Polish literature told the poet, "I heard that you are to be moved to Paris. . . . I am happy that you will be coming here, because I have been worried about you a little: whether the splendor of material goods in America has overshadowed poverty in other aspects of life."

The language was polite, even confiding, but the message could not have been clearer. Miłosz, who had been working as a diplomat in the United States for four years, was no longer considered trustworthy by his superiors. He was being transferred to Paris so that he would be within reach of Warsaw. Sure enough, a few days before Christmas, Miłosz was summoned back to Poland, and his passport was confiscated. "He is deeply detached from us," Putrament observed, after meeting with Miłosz in person. There was "no other option" than to keep him in the country, lest he end up defecting to the West.

This scenario had played out count-

*Miłosz wrote that creativity came from an "inner command" to express the truth.*

less times in Communist countries. In the Soviet Union, under Stalin, it often ended with the summoned party being sent to prison or shot. And the Communist regime in Poland, which had been installed by Stalin at the end of the Second World War, had reasons to be concerned about Miłosz. For one thing, he had left his pregnant wife and their son in the United States, giving him a strong incentive to return. For another, he had never joined the Communist Party. He was allowed to serve the Polish government without a Party card, largely because his reputation—he had been a leading light of Polish poetry since the mid-thirties—was considered valuable to the new regime.

Far more damning evidence of Miłosz's disaffection with the regime lay in notebooks, full of poems that were not published until years later. What would Putrament have thought if he had read "Child of Europe," written in New York in 1946?

Do not mention force, or you will be accused  
Of upholding fallen doctrines in secret.

He who has power, has it by historical logic.  
Respectfully bow to that logic . . .

Learn to predict a fire with unerring  
precision.  
Then burn the house down to fulfill  
the prediction.

These lines mocked the Communist claim to rule, which was based on the theory of history as formulated by Marx. According to the concept of dialectical materialism—"diamat," as its adherents often abbreviated it—the triumph of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin was not a contingent event but the necessary result of an age-old process of class conflict. Miłosz turned this presumption of "historical logic" upside down: if Communism now ruled Eastern Europe, it was not because of the laws of history but because the Russians had burned the house down. "Diamat is a tank," Miłosz confided to a friend in 1951. "I feel like a fly which wants to stand up against that tank."

Andrzej Franaszek's "Miłosz: A Biography" (Harvard), edited and translated by Aleksandra and Michael Parker—a longer version appeared in Polish in 2011—tells the story of what happened next. Stuck in Warsaw, unsure if he would

ever be allowed to leave or to see his family again, Milosz was despondent. A friend, Natalia Modzelewska, recalled that he “became mentally unstable [and] suffered from bouts of depression, which gradually got worse. . . . It was easy to discern that he was close to a nervous breakdown.” It wasn’t just his own fate that frightened him. Milosz had mostly been away from Poland since 1946, and had not witnessed the worsening climate of repression in the country. Now he could see. “I came across astronomical changes,” he wrote in a letter to another exile. “Peasants go mad with despair, and in the intellectual world state control is deeply entrenched and it is necessary to be a 100% Stalinist, or not at all. The so-called Marxists are highly depressed.”

It was thanks to Modzelewska that he had the chance to leave Poland and save himself. Her husband was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and she urged him to take up Milosz’s case with the President of Poland, Boleslaw Bierut. “Can you vouch that he will return?” Bierut asked. The minister could not, but replied, “I am deeply convinced that he ought to be allowed to go.” Whether this was a gesture of mercy, or of respect for a great writer, or even of contempt—if Milosz couldn’t serve the state, why should the state keep him?—it meant freedom. On January 15, 1951, Milosz was back in Paris. On February 1st, he slipped out of the Polish Embassy and headed for the offices of *Kultura*, an émigré publishing house, where he remained in hiding for the next three and a half months. He did not return to Poland until 1981, the year after he won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The summons to Warsaw in 1950 was one of many hinges of fate in Milosz’s life—moments when he could have become an entirely different person, or simply disappeared. Franaszek’s richly detailed, dramatic, and melancholy book is full of such close calls. Born in 1911 to an aristocratic Polish family in Lithuania, which was part of the Russian Empire at the time, Milosz was swept up in the maelstrom of the twentieth century from the beginning. When he was three, the First World War made him a refugee, as his family fled the advancing German Army. His father, an engineer, served first the tsarist and then the Bolshevik

government, and the family spent the war years crisscrossing the region—Belarus, Russia, Latvia, Estonia. In a late poem, Milosz recalled an episode from 1918, when they were trying to get home to Lithuania during the chaos of the Russian Revolution. At one train station, he was separated from his parents:

. . . the repatriation train was starting, about  
to leave me behind,  
Forever. As if I grasped that I would have  
been somebody else,  
A poet of another language, of a different  
fate.

At the last minute, a stranger reunited them. But a sense of the caprice of fate never left Milosz. “The things that surround us in childhood need no justification, they are self-evident,” he wrote in “Native Realm,” a memoir. “If, however, they whirl about like particles in a kaleidoscope, ceaselessly changing position, it takes no small amount of energy simply to plant one’s feet on solid ground without falling.”

After the war, the family settled in Wilno—now Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, but at the time a majority-Polish city. Even as a boy, Milosz was passionate and ambitious, with an intense seriousness that made it hard for him to accept the conventional routines of church and school. A childhood friend compared him to “a tomcat, constantly tense and grumpy”; later in life he acquired the nickname *Gniewosz*, which blended his name with the Polish word for “anger.” In his teens, he was capable of gestures of melodramatic despair. On one occasion, edged out in a romantic rivalry, he put a single bullet into a revolver and, Franaszek writes, “spun the barrel, put it against his head and pulled the trigger.” He lost—or maybe won—this game of Russian roulette; but, in Franaszek’s telling, it’s clear that any kind of calm or satisfaction remained elusive to the end of his life.

Such a condition is hardly surprising for anyone of Milosz’s generation, in that part of the world. Millions of his contemporaries lived through, or died in, the First World War; the Lithuanian Wars of Independence; the Polish-Soviet War; the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the U.S.S.R., in 1939; the Holocaust; the Eastern Front of the Second World War, which passed back and forth across the country from 1941 to 1945; and the

postwar occupation by the Soviet Union. Milosz’s course was complicated by the fact that his class and national allegiances were anything but straightforward. He grew up speaking at least four languages, and, although his family belonged to the Polish gentry—and still owned a country estate in Lithuania, where he spent the happiest days of his childhood—they were, like most of their class at the time, quite poor. “My material existence was so primitive that it would have startled proletarians in Western countries,” Milosz reflected later.

As an aristocrat without money, and a Pole whose homeland was Lithuania, Milosz could not wholeheartedly embrace any of the political identities swirling around him. Postwar Poland, newly independent after more than a century of tsarist rule, experienced a sudden surge of chauvinist pride and annexed much of Lithuania, including Wilno. Milosz was repelled by the Poles’ religiosity and nationalism—their growing hostility to Lithuanian, Jewish, and Belarusian minorities. In 1931, Wilno University, where he was a student, was convulsed by anti-Jewish riots. Milosz, Franaszek writes, was “among the few defending the Jewish students.” (Jerzy Putrament, not yet a Communist, took part in the riots, beating Jews with a heavy cane.)

Milosz was at the university from 1929 to 1934, and he published his first collection of poems in 1933. He drew close to several left-wing student groups, but, although his anti-nationalism made the left a natural home for him, he could never bring himself to become a full-fledged Marxist, much less a member of the Communist Party. His sense of truth was too individual, too much a matter of poetic perception, to submit to the dictates of a party, even one that claimed to be acting according to the laws of history. “Reading articles by young Polish Marxists, one suspects that they really wish for this period to herald a future which sees the total demise of art and artistry,” Milosz observed in a 1936 essay. “They are preoccupied solely with sniffing out betrayal and class desertion.”

In 1937, Milosz moved to Warsaw to work for Polish Radio. There he fell in love with a colleague, Janina Ciekalska. Janka, as she was known, was unhappily married to another man, a film director. She aspired to become a director herself,

and had founded an organization to promote leftist filmmaking. But she soon put her ambitions aside, seeing her mission as the development of Milosz's talent, and she became a crucial reader of his work. Milosz, who had already been through several stormy and bruising love affairs, worried that committing himself to Janka might compromise his artistic calling, but they soon started living together, and they married some years later. It proved to be a difficult marriage. "She was a rational person, but made a mistake choosing me," he said late in life. He was, he realized, "not at all material to be a husband and father."

By the end of the thirties, Milosz's intellectual position was becoming intolerable. He was opposed to everything the Communists opposed, yet he suspected that a Communist takeover would be disastrous. At the same time, anyone could see that Poland's future held war or revolution, or both. Contemplating the fate of his country, he wrote, years later, "I had a kind of horror, some basic dread."

It is only against this background that one can make sense of the decisions Milosz made after Germany's invasion of Poland, in September, 1939. In the initial chaos, he fled Warsaw and took a circuitous route back to Wilno, which was momentarily free, because Lithuania was still independent. But, in 1940, Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union, leaving Milosz with two equally dire choices: remain, and live under Stalinism; or return to Warsaw, and live under Nazism. Either path would be extremely dangerous. The Soviets were purging and deporting Polish intellectuals; the Nazis were indiscriminately killing Poles, and herding Jews into the Warsaw Ghetto. In July, 1940, Milosz decided that Warsaw was the better choice, and he managed to smuggle himself across the border and into the General Government, as Nazi-occupied Poland was called.

Recounting this episode, Franaszek emphasizes Milosz's desire to return to Janka, who had remained in Warsaw. But Milosz, in "Native Realm," dwells less on love and more on his political and intellectual motives. "I had run from Stalin's state to be able to think things over for myself instead of succumbing to a world view imposed from without," he explains. "There was complete freedom here, precisely because National Socialism was an



*"I see by your résumé that you're a billionaire."*

intellectual zero." Communism, by contrast, exerted a terrible moral pressure, because it claimed to embody historical truth and justice, so that dissenting from it turned one into a sinner or a heretic. Nazism threatened the body, whereas Communism demanded the surrender of the soul. For a poet like Milosz, the latter seemed like the greater sacrifice.

**I**ronically, as Franaszek writes, the war years were a time of flourishing for Milosz. Although, like all Poles under Nazi rule, he faced grave risks—on several occasions, he narrowly escaped German patrols and roundups—the arrival of the apocalypse he had long dreaded also set something free within him. He was active in the underground literary scene, compiling an anthology of wartime poetry and translating Shakespeare into Polish. His poetry acquired a new simplicity, directness, and pathos—several of his masterworks date from these years—and his stature among Polish readers grew.

Still, the horrors that he witnessed and experienced permanently shaped his view of humanity and history. Living in proximity to the Warsaw Ghetto, he wrote two of the earliest poems about the Holocaust, "Campo dei Fiori" and "A Poor Christian Looks at the Ghetto."

After the war, Milosz tried to describe the effect of disaster on his world view:

When gold paint flakes from the arms of sculptures,  
When the letter falls out of the book of laws,  
Then consciousness is naked as an eye.

When the pages of books fall in fiery scraps  
Onto smashed leaves and twisted metal,  
The tree of good and evil is stripped bare.

These lines capture one of the central characteristics of Milosz's art: the instinct to strip away the inessential, to zero in on the heart of the matter. He could see "the skull beneath the skin," in the words of T. S. Eliot, whose work he knew well. But, where Eliot often used this kind of moral X-ray vision to express contempt and disgust for the world, Milosz had seen too much death to find skulls profound. Instead, he sought a poetry that was truthful and perceptive enough to be trustworthy even when annihilation seemed imminent. In "The Captive Mind," a prose work written in 1953, just after his defection, in which he tried to make sense of his experience of Communism, Milosz recalled a moment from Nazi-occupied Warsaw that became a touchstone:

A man is lying under machine-gun fire on a street in an embattled city. He looks at the

pavement and sees a very amusing sight: the cobblestones are standing upright like the quills of a porcupine. The bullets hitting against their edges displace and tilt them. Such moments in the consciousness of a man *judge* all poets and philosophers.

Milosz wanted to write poems that could survive such a judgment. Even before 1939, Franaszek shows, he was obsessed with the idea of the poet's responsibility—his duty to write in a way that not only was beautiful and true but also offered sustenance. "Before you print a poem, you should reflect on whether this verse could be of use to at least one person in the struggle with himself and the world," he wrote in a 1938 essay. Nothing disgusted him more than aestheticism, which he associated with the Polish poets popular in his youth, who produced wan imitations of French fin-de-siècle poetry. Their "transformed choir did not much resemble/The disorderly choir of ordinary things," Milosz complains in "A Treatise on Poetry," his 1957 sequence, which combines personal memoir with ethical reflection to create an *ars poetica*. "At least poetry, philosophy, action were not,/For us, separated," he writes of his own generation. "We needed to be of use."

The need to be of use guided Milosz's choices after the war, when he agreed to take up a diplomatic post under the new Communist government of Poland. In "The Captive Mind," the book that first made Milosz's name known to Western readers, he emphasizes that he and most other Polish intellectuals thought that the Communists were right about many things: the injustice of feudal and capitalist Poland, the rottenness of Polish nationalism, the need to modernize society and politics. All of this made it very easy to conclude that Communism was, as it claimed to be, the philosophy—even the religion—of the future, to which everyone had to bow down.

Milosz offers four case studies of writers he knew, showing how each had reasoned himself into submission. One of these was Putrament, whom Milosz writes about in the chapter titled "Gamma, the Slave of History." Gamma rose to become one of the rulers of Poland because of his fanatical devotion to Communist doctrine: "This was the

reward for those who knew how to think correctly, who understood the logic of History, who did not surrender to senseless sentimentality!"

But Gamma could make this submission, Milosz suggests, only because he was not truly a poet. To be a poet involves hearing the voice of conscience, which precludes lying, even in the service of a good cause. "The creative act is associated with a feeling of freedom that is, in its turn, born in the struggle against an apparently invisible resistance. Whoever truly creates is alone.... The creative man has no choice but to trust his inner command and place everything at stake in order to express what seems to him to be true," Milosz writes. The people around him in the twentieth century worshipped history, which is to say, power; but the artist worships truth, which is what allows him to save his soul.

This statement has a lofty sound, and it would be easy to be scornful of it if Milosz's life and work didn't so clearly demonstrate the utter sincerity of his belief. Few intellectuals today speak of "the truth" without a certain embarrassment. Isn't the truth merely an ideological construction, always determined by the power relations prevailing in a given time and place? When truth is invoked, we always have to ask, Whose truth? Milosz knew the reasons for skepticism as well as anyone. One of his poems begins:

Human reason is beautiful and invincible.  
No bars, no barbed wire, no pulping of  
books,  
No sentence of banishment can prevail  
against it.

But the title of the poem is "Incantation." In other words, these humane formulas are a spell, a chant we utter to give ourselves the illusion of potency. The belief in reason, the title implies, is unreasonable, and Milosz's experiences gave ample support for this idea.

Certainly, there is no ground for believing that truth or reason will ultimately prevail in human life. As Franaszek shows, they never quite did for Milosz. Though his biography seems, in retrospect, to follow a redemptive arc, his life from year to year was bitter. After escaping from Poland, in 1951, he was a penniless, friendless exile, and faced the arduous task of rebuilding his world. There was a prolonged conflict with Janka over whether she and their sons should join him in

France, as Milosz wanted, or remain in the United States, where she felt safer. In the end, he persuaded her, but their marriage continued to be marked by numerous separations and trials, including chronic infidelities on his part.

For the rest of the nineteen-fifties, Milosz supported his family by working as a journalist; among other things, he wrote scripts for the Polish service of the BBC. By 1960, his reputation had spread widely enough that he was offered a position teaching Polish literature at Berkeley, and he remained there until he retired, in 1978. The university was a needed refuge, and Milosz wrote some of his most important work in these years. But, in Franaszek's telling, he mostly hated life in California; the pleasure he found in the natural setting was offset by his feelings of alienation and disdain for the culture. "The only entertainment of the locals is to stare at passing cars for hours on end, drinking or shooting from their cars at road signs they pass by," he observed in a 1964 letter.

The fundamental source of his anger was the feeling of being cut off from his language and his readers, without which his life as a poet made no sense. Poland's Communist government banned his works after his defection, and, though *Kultura* faithfully published his books in Polish, some of which circulated secretly in Poland, the editions were small: of his 1953 volume "Daylight," Franaszek writes, "a thousand copies were printed, but four years later . . . 320 remained unsold." It wasn't until 1973 that the first volume of his poems in English translation appeared. Until shortly before he won the Nobel Prize, he had barely any readers in the United States, where, if he was known at all, it was as the translator of the poet Zbigniew Herbert. Having enjoyed early fame as a poet, he spent his best years in near-total eclipse.

Even when recognition finally came, personal sorrows made it impossible for Milosz to enjoy it. In the mid-seventies, Janka became bedridden with what was eventually diagnosed as A.L.S., and Milosz became her caretaker until her death, in 1986. In a poem written after she died, "On Parting with My Wife, Janina," he wrote:

I loved her, without knowing who she  
really was.  
I inflicted pain on her, chasing my illusion.

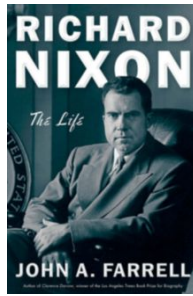


## BRIEFLY NOTED

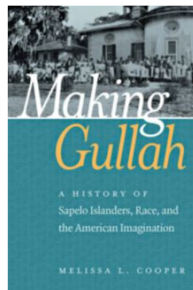
During the same period, his younger son, Piotr, developed severe manic depression and paranoia, and spent time in prison after firing a gun out of a motel window at an imaginary persecutor. Milosz blamed himself for not having been a better parent and described feeling “a terrible guilt about my existence, partly justified, partly pathological.” When it was clear that he was in contention to win the Nobel Prize, he told a close friend, a Catholic priest, that he was praying for the restoration of Piotr’s sanity instead. This section of Franaszek’s biography is titled “Job.” “I only bow and smile like a puppet, maintain a mask, while inside me there is suffering and great distress,” Milosz wrote in 1978. “I can’t say whether there are any people who would know what I feel and realize how much it costs to press this button, to shut away the pain, when I begin a lecture or a talk.”

The last phase of Milosz’s life brought new sources of happiness. Poland’s ban on his work began to lift, and his triumphal visit, in 1981, made him realize that, to many Poles, he had become a national hero, a symbol of cultural resistance. Lech Walesa, the leader of Solidarity, told Milosz that the poet had inspired his own work: “I think I went to prison twice for what you wrote!” In 1993, Milosz moved back, settling in Kraków, with his second wife, Carol Thigpen, an American; it was a homecoming that, for half his life, had seemed like an impossibility. He kept writing right up to his death, in 2004, at the age of ninety-three.

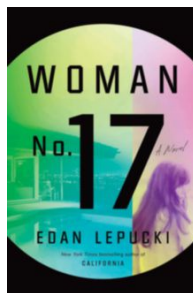
Yet it was his lifelong, intimate knowledge of suffering, both private and public, that did the most to shape Milosz’s work. Unlike many great twentieth-century writers, who saw truth in despair, Milosz’s experiences convinced him that poetry must not darken the world but illuminate it: “Poems should be written rarely and reluctantly, / under unbearable duress and only with the hope / that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instrument.” That decision for goodness is what makes Milosz a figure of such rare literary and moral authority. As we enter what looks like our own time of troubles, his poetry and his life offer a reminder of what it meant, and what it took, to survive the twentieth century. ♦



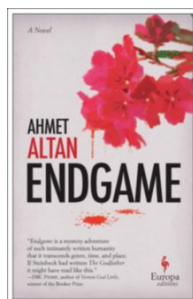
**Richard Nixon**, by John A. Farrell (*Doubleday*). Nixon’s reputation as an insecure upstart from a poor background in Southern California is well documented. But this balanced biography emphasizes aspects of his character which led to assessments like that of Martin Luther King, Jr., who called him “one of the most magnetic personalities I have ever confronted.” Nixon was an actor and a musician, a romantic whose tough childhood and distant mother left him yearning for approval. Perhaps the greatest victim of his megalomania, Farrell suggests, was his wife Pat, who stood by his side as he refined his gift for political devilry. When a friend asked her about her newfound fame in the White House, she replied, “I just hate it.”



**Making Gullah**, by Melissa L. Cooper (*North Carolina*). The Gullah—a coastal population descended from South Carolina and Georgia slaves—have long fascinated writers and ethnographers as a link between West Africa and African-Americans. This incisive history shows how that fascination has often shaded into exoticist mythmaking. Cooper examines the novels of Julia Peterkin, and highlights sociological issues underlying Mary Granger’s landmark folklore study “Drums and Shadows.” More recently, Cooper notes, black female artists have reclaimed Gullah mystique as an act of self-affirmation. Highlighting the land battles, bigotry, and poverty that beset the Gullah, Cooper sees them not as “Africans in an American setting” but as a dwindling community of rural black people who “just want to be American citizens like everyone else.”



**Woman No. 17**, by Edan Lepucki (*Hogarth*). In this chatty novel, an aspiring memoirist has a seemingly perfect life—the wife of a wealthy, adoring TV producer and mother of a cheerful toddler. But remnants of a less charmed life linger, in the form of her eighteen-year-old son, Seth, who hasn’t spoken since infancy, and in the rage she harbors toward his father, her own mother, and pretty much everyone else. She befriends her new nanny, S, unaware that S has taken the job as part of a conceptual-art project. Meanwhile, Seth begins visiting S’s room late at night. The book is over-reliant on wisecracks, but draws substance from an absorbing exploration of how, through art, one can create and reveal layers of identity.



**Endgame**, by Ahmet Altan, translated from the Turkish by Alexander Dawe (*Europa*). The protagonist of this noir novel is a crime writer who has just moved to a small Turkish village that is veering toward violence. He has a habit—risky, in the context—of forging conflicting allegiances; having begun a love affair with the ex-girlfriend of the local demagogue, he then befriends the demagogue and begins another ill-advised romance. The novel makes too much use of shopworn archetypes—a seductive housekeeper, a self-sacrificing prostitute—but Altan deftly pushes the tropes of detective fiction into existentialist territory. He also carries off a striking narrative trick: we learn on page 1 that his protagonist is driven to commit murder. It is the identity of the victim that comes as a surprise.

## GETTING TO YES

*Lil Yachty's relentless optimism pays off.*

BY CARRIE BATTAN



The true breakout moment for Lil Yachty, the Atlanta hip-hop artist, didn't come in the form of a hit single. Instead, it occurred when he modeled for Kanye West in his marathon fashion show at Madison Square Garden, in 2016, which doubled as a release party for his album "The Life of Pablo." Yachty, whose playful songs like "1 Night" and "Minnesota" had achieved modest success online, remained standing for hours, dressed in an oversized red sweatshirt, even as other models, exhausted, began to sit. As he stood, a captive audience got a good look at his trademark: a mop of short, fire-engine-red braids, coated in clear plastic beads.

Since then, Yachty has become a high-velocity crossover star in hip-hop. He could teach a workshop on the art of simple yet effective first impressions.

Yachty's music is not incidental to his image, but it is only one aspect of his brand. His songs have always been an entry to his meticulously crafted persona, not the other way around. At nineteen, he is a torchbearer for a class of rappers—and that's a loose designation—for whom a career represents a tangle of musical innovation and character-crafting strategies. Yachty's tracks, as showcased on two whimsical mixtapes, "Lil Boat" and "Summer Songs 2," have a proudly childlike quality, built around

beats as catchy and as slight as jingles. Instead of structured verses and gymnastic wordplay, Yachty typically prefers a digitally filtered singsong style. (A representative lyric from "Minnesota": "It get cold like Minnesota/Cold like Minnesota/Cold like Minnesota/Cold like Minnesota.") To the extent that he does rap, he often does so over samples such as the theme song from the animated TV show "Rugrats." What Yachty lacks in lyrical prowess he makes up for with an ear for melody and a knack for catchphrases. It's impossible to listen to his new single, "Peek-a-Boo," without getting the title lodged in your consciousness. In a genre whose default sound tends toward minor-chord claustrophobia, Yachty has planted his flag on a hill of exuberance and lightheartedness.

This style has captivated casual hip-hop fans while infuriating the genre's diehards. In the past year, Yachty has participated in a number of verbal cage matches with members of the hip-hop establishment, who see him as a sacrilegious figure—a symbol of decay. "I am happy every day because life is moving in such a positive way," Yachty told the rapper and professional instigator Joe Budden on his online talk show, "Everyday Struggle." "That is a lie. That's bullshit!" Budden replied, seething so visibly that photographs of his facial expressions instantly entered the meme-stream. For Budden, whose music was most popular in the early aughts, Yachty, in making such statements, showed a flip disregard for the struggles that have shaped hip-hop's history. (And his own—Yachty is a college dropout who, in 2015, was arrested on credit-card-fraud charges.) But Yachty understands that these spats, like his songs, are yet another form of entertainment. Whether you see him as an affront to hip-hop's legacy or a testament to the genre's vitality likely says more about you than it does about Yachty.

His comment to Budden reflects a relentless optimism. "If you had seen half the shit I'd seen/You would probably fiend for a taste of the cloud," he says on "Say My Name," from his debut album, "Teenage Emotions," which comes out this week. Here he turns hip-hop's came-from-the-bottom trope on its head: Yachty launched his rap career in the cloud and has no plans of coming down. Why would he? What he's experienced

*To Yachty's elders, his positivity ignores the struggles that have shaped hip-hop.*

there is bliss: money, fame, and abundant freedom. This energy permeates “Teenage Emotions,” a fitting soundtrack for a generation enthralled by the utopian promises of inclusivity and self-acceptance. Even the album’s cover art explicitly channels the mind-set of teenagers and twentysomethings who, liberated by the Internet, spurn labels and celebrate eccentricity. It features Yachty surrounded by a number of people who might be regarded as outcasts, among them a girl with the skin disease vitiligo and a pair of young men kissing.

Women, however, do not benefit from Yachty’s overwhelming positivity. Throughout his catalogue, they’re presented primarily as objects of sexual tomfoolery or bitter scorn. “Teenage Emotions” takes an unexpected turn toward the morose on its too-long back half, in which Yachty laments failed romances and condemns the women he’s been with.

Romantic turbulence aside, most songs on the album could be part of some motivational public-education curriculum. “Everything in life could always be better/Don’t settle for less because you’ll miss out on more,” Yachty warbles on “Better,” a soft-pop song with Caribbean undertones. On “Forever Young,” he prompts listeners to “come dance along with the golden child.” Unlike many of his peers, Yachty is unabashedly drug- and alcohol-free. In the first moments of “Teenage Emotions,” he announces, “I done did a lot this year/Made a lot of friends/Some Ks, some gold/And I still never took a sip of beer.” So much for teen-age angst.

Yachty is at the center of a groundswell of joyousness in hip-hop. Two of his collaborators are D.R.A.M. and Kyle, both of whom deliver a happy-go-lucky world view over candy-coated beats and sunny melodies. D.R.A.M.’s 2016 hit “Broccoli” featured Yachty and a plastic recorder; the song’s simple, bright melody and flimsy instrumentals sound as if they had wafted from an elementary-school classroom. D.R.A.M., whose pet poodle often appears in his visuals, also has a hit song called “Cute.” This year, Kyle teamed up with Yachty for a song called “iSpy.” In the video, the pair lean into their exaggerated innocence: their adult heads are superimposed on child-size bodies,

and the two men sit in a sandbox, surrounded by plastic toys. In an earlier era, the song might have been overlooked as a curiosity; in the streaming era, where online enthusiasm can give an artist a nitro-boost, it has become a *Billboard*-chart-topping anthem.

This tendency toward the cheerful is grounded in aesthetic choices, certainly. Yachty is a disciple of Lil B, the irreverent and cultish Bay Area rapper whose ethos of self-love and hyperpositivity continues to influence each new micro-generation of rap. But these choices also have commercial implications. There is a growing squeaky-clean streak in hip-hop which has emerged in the wake of Chance the Rapper, who demonstrated just how profitable sheer good-naturedness could be. Chance has always been held up as the model of an independent artist, but he also has partnerships with brands like Apple, H & M, and Nestlé. While Yachty is stylistically different from Chance, he follows in this mold: after barely a year of mainstream exposure, he has become hip-hop’s ambassador to a corporate world desperate to capture the *Zeitgeist*. He has worked with Sprite and Target on major campaigns, and helped the clothing company Nautica revamp its image to cater to a young, digital-native audience. Yachty has achieved the strange and impressive feat of making oddballism synonymous with commercial success.

Meanwhile, Yachty has become the go-to hip-hop artist for pop stars looking to spike a single with innocent fun and zany swagger. He’s collaborated with Katy Perry, Charli XCX, and Carly Rae Jepsen. In “Teenage Emotions,” Yachty seizes on this commercial potential, discarding the more lightweight, outré songwriting of his earlier releases in favor of an ambitious, wide-reaching sound, delivered by Diplo and other big-name producers. Several of the songs, like the single “Bring It Back,” are steeped in eighties synth-pop. It shouldn’t come as a surprise that these songs are some of Yachty’s best. It’s commonplace for young rap stars to claim that they’ve transcended hip-hop; it’s rarer for them to actually do it. Yachty does. For the rankled hip-hop veterans who decry his success, this accomplishment might come as a relief. He’s not long for their world. ♦

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not a destiny.**

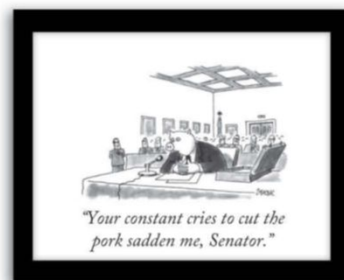
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## MONSTERS' BALL

*"Alien: Covenant."*

BY ANTHONY LANE



*In Ridley Scott's new movie, Michael Fassbender plays not one but two androids.*

Thirty-eight years ago, in Ridley Scott's "Alien," we met the crew of the *Nostromo*, a spaceship that, having picked up a signal of mysterious origin, was diverted to an uncharted planet. Lurking there was a thing that knew no mercy. Now we have Scott's "Alien: Covenant," in which the crew of another spaceship, the *Covenant*, go through the same experience, and make the same mistake of importing the thing in question onto their craft. Trust humans to screw up.

In between these two works, a franchise has unfurled. We have had James Cameron's "Aliens" (1986), David Fincher's "Alien 3" (1992), and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's "Alien: Resurrection" (1997)—a downward curve, from masterpiece to mess. Yet there is no denying the lure of the basic hook; the first four films pitched Sigourney Weaver, as the indefatigable Ripley, against her opposite number, a silvery beast with a bio-mechanical edge. For fun, it liked to lodge in the human host, spawning beastlets as if they were sequels. These were action movies, aimed at the mass market, yet they writhed with Boschian

details of ingress and engulfing, and seethed with sexual dread. Then, in 2012, Scott returned to the fray, unable to stay away, with a prequel to "Alien" entitled "Prometheus." Intended to illuminate, it left many of us in a state of baffled gloom. The new film is a follow-up to the prequel. Got that?

The noble task of the *Covenant* is to ferry thousands of people—most of them in suspended animation, or in embryo—to a new world, ripe for colonizing. Along the way, the captain dies in an accident, leaving his wife, Daniels (Katherine Waterston), in tearful shock and his deputy, Oram (Billy Crudup), who looks barely less stricken, in charge. Calm is in short supply, unless you count Walter (Michael Fassbender), the resident android, who is programmed to be unflappable.

The role of the planet on which the crew lands is taken by an especially dramatic patch of New Zealand, the country that played host to "The Lord of the Rings," and I could swear I saw a stray hobbit pottering about. Needless to say, the place is stiff with monsters. Some hatch from eggs the size of trash

cans, as they did in "Alien," but others are more subtle. Tread on a puffball, for instance, and you release a mist of tiny spores. These can slip into your ear like a whisper, burrow into the tender flesh, and, in less time than it takes to roast a chicken, multiply in size and sally forth from an orifice of their choice. One poor fellow is turned into an involuntary stickleback.

All of which is quite charming, and, as folks flounder in spilt blood in the sick bay, you wonder if Scott, who will be eighty this year, is deliberately mocking the maxim that old age should be the era of gentle tastes. But there are problems here. First, such full-frontal nastiness feels like a snub to "Alien," which, with its flurry of sly glimpses, was a triumph of the peekaboo. Second, once the fiend assumes myriad forms—there's a baby one that stands up on spindly legs, as if attempting its first-ever jive, and some sort of cross-breed with a milk-white head—it loses the monomaniacal thrust that made the original critter, designed by H. R. Giger, so forbidding. There are plenty of reasons to shut your eyes and cross your legs while watching this film, but is that the same as being scared?

This blurring of intensity extends to the cast. Decades on, the faces of the men and women aboard the *Nostromo*—many of them wearied and worn, played by actors as distinctive as Harry Dean Stanton and Yaphet Kotto—are stamped on the memory, and the same goes for the grunts in "Aliens," among them the late Bill Paxton. Three days after seeing the new movie, however, I've already forgotten who stayed on the *Covenant* and who disembarked to scout the strange terrain. At one point, two crew members make out in the ship's shower, only to be joined by an uninvited guest, but it was news to me that they were even an item. The film keeps having to catch up with itself, defining the characters by their doom before we've had a chance to grasp who they are, or were, and amid the haste we're left to ask who the hero is supposed to be. Is it the spunky Daniels, her courage displayed by a haircut that only a Monkee would dare to request, or might it be Walter, assigned to save mortals from their follies and other foes?

You can see the temptation. Consider the major robots of the “Alien” saga: Ash (Ian Holm), in the first film; Bishop (Lance Henriksen), in the second; and the lordly David (Fassbender), in “Prometheus,” who rolls up again in “Alien: Covenant.” All three are extraordinary: too human to be true, there but not quite there, and gazing with forensic stillness, plus a glint of professional awe, at the workings of the lethal brute that confronts them. So why not promote the robot to top dog? Though all that remained of Fassbender, at the conclusion of “Prometheus,” was a handsome head in a bag, he is now restored to full bodily function, with two roles—David *and* Walter—at his disposal. He even gets to sing “The Man Who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo,” thus renewing David’s obsession with “Lawrence of Arabia,” in which Peter O’Toole belted out the same tune on the back of a camel. And yet, alas, what the movie proves is that androids are meant to be servants. Give them mastery, and the unthinkable happens: they become a bit of a dragoid.

All of which makes you long for Sigourney Weaver. No dog has ever been more top. Holding sway, proud and uncontested, she even allowed a warped romance to bloom in the cranies of the plot: “You’ve been in my life so long, I can’t remember anything else,” she says, prowling a basement in “Alien 3,” and addressing the creature as you might an exhausting spouse. (Remember how she undressed before it, like a nervous bride, at the end of the first film?) Unable to exist without each other, they fought to the death, with a gusto that Elizabeth Taylor and

Richard Burton would have applauded, and the saddest thing about “Prometheus,” and now about “Alien: Covenant,” is how thoroughly Scott has junked that fertile theme, of a symbiosis between the hunter and the hunted, for the sake of a more ponderous idea: the creation myth. Ye Gods!

Hence the deep flashback at the start, when Weyland (Guy Pearce), the genius who invented David, refers to “the only question that matters: Where do we come from?” This is fine for a sixth-grade sex-education class, but less so for a hundred-million-dollar chunk of adult sci-fi, and the upshot is that, as in “Prometheus,” we are introduced to a glum tribe of extraterrestrials, statuesque and stone-faced, who allegedly lie at the root of something so cosmically important that it escapes me. What *does* interest me is how the man who directed “The Martian” (2015) could bracket that film, so wry and so fleet of foot, with a pair of such groaningly mirthless trips to yet more distant worlds. In space, I guess, no one should hear you laugh.

To be fair, there is one melodious gag, which pops up when Daniels and her comrades are trying to decipher the transmission, scratchy with static, that was received out of nowhere. Suddenly, one of them exclaims, “That’s fucking John Denver!” And it is—“Take Me Home, Country Roads,” strumming across the void. As often occurs with Scott, the cultural references are nicely scattershot; Shelley and Byron get a name-check, as does Piero della Francesca, while the ancient citadel of the tribe, darkly fenced by a stand of pines, is lifted straight from Arnold Böcklin’s “Island of the Dead,” which he painted several times in the

eighteen-eighties. All of this tallies with Scott’s reliance on Francis Bacon—to be exact, on “Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion” (circa 1944)—for the look of the newborn alien, both screeching and phallic, in 1979. In short, if you want a cascade of visual wealth, Scott is still your man, and, when those riches are backed by the flow of a generous storyline, as they are in “Alien,” “Blade Runner” (1982), “Thelma & Louise” (1991), and “Gladiator” (2000), you feel happy to be overwhelmed. It’s when the narrative dries up or goes astray that the images, however wondrous, tend to get stranded and stuck.

Thus, in the later stages of “Alien: Covenant,” we are ushered into an alchemist’s lair, halfway between a laboratory and a hovel, and dedicated, as far as I can gather, to alienology. Nothing could be clammier, but, still, you can sense the film slithering toward a dead end. As if aware of the threat, Scott hauls us back to the ship for a final showdown, which would be a good deal punchier if it weren’t such a blatant retreat of the bout between Ripley and her tail-lashing pal at the close of “Aliens,” right down to the wrathful jaws that snap at protective bars, like a prisoner banging against his cage. There’s just time for a startling late twist that nobody, apart from absolutely everybody in the cinema, will have seen coming, and then we’re done and drained—and so, I reckon, is the franchise. This film is at once sumptuous with thrills and surplus to requirements. Let sleeping aliens lie. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Charlie Hankin, must be received by Sunday, May 28th. The finalists in the May 15th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 19th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

### THE FINALISTS

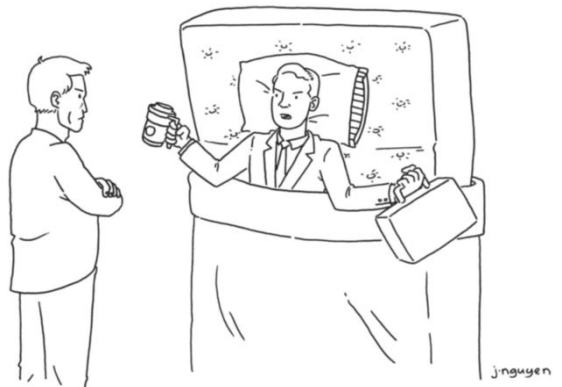


*“Carry on. I'll just be a fly on the wall.”*  
Jake Hays, New York City

*“Mind if I jump in?”*  
Daniel Ballen, New York City

*“I'm from the oversight committee.”*  
Kenny Moore, Rocklin, Calif.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*“Like I'm the first person who's tried  
sleeping their way to the top.”*  
Glen Donaldson, Brisbane, Australia

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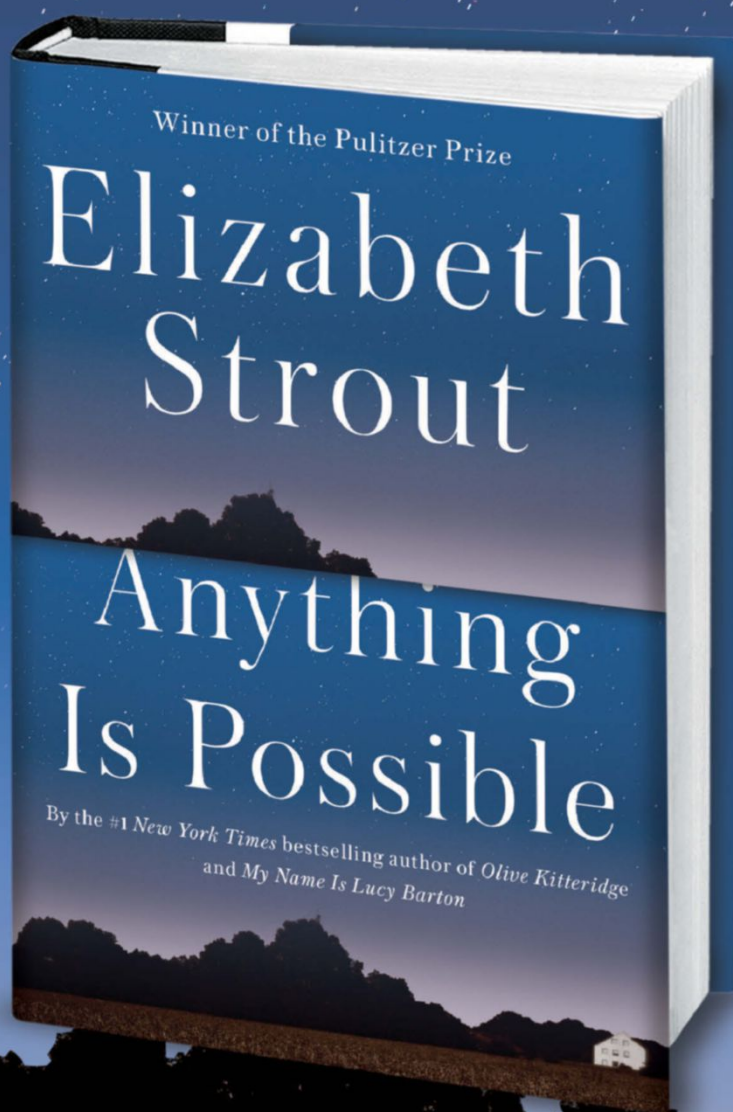
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