The AMERICAN SCHOLAR

PUBLISHED BY PHI BETA KAPPA

SUMMER 2017 / $9.95

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ELIZABETH D. SAMET

Thoreau at 200: Where's the Respect?
WILLIAM HOWARTH

LOOKING INTO THE ABYSS

IS NUCLEAR WAR STILL A POSSIBILITY?
JEFFREY LEWIS

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Present Tense
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A Role for Emily
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ON THE COVER Derrick Neill/Dreamstime; photo-illustration by David Herbick

EDITOR'S NOTE

Breach of Faith

THOSE OF US WHO live our lives without committing serious criminal acts would say we do so for ethical or religious reasons. And who would dispute that this is the firmament on which a law-abiding life rests? But isn't there a more visceral reason for not harming other people, stealing from them, or destroying their property? What normal person can imagine pulling the trigger, twisting the knife, battering the weak, or striking the match and not turn away in revulsion? Still, crime happens. Punishment is a major national industry, and the psychology of criminality is a fruitful intellectual enterprise.

But whatever clarity these matters might have for us in civilian life grows murkier in the context of the military. Traditions of duty, honor, country, of military discipline, of bands of brothers, and our more recent glib eagerness to call anyone who serves in the military a hero bang up against the primary function of the soldier, which is to kill, and the millennia-long tradition of seizing the spoils of war, including enslavement and rape. In the United States today, we demand more of our soldiers, preparing them for the chaos of war but expecting them to behave civilly in and out of combat, and after they return to civilian life. It's a lot to hope for. But one aspect of criminality in our military is impossible to understand or imagine: the sexual assault of one soldier by another. Sexual assault did not begin with the introduction of women into the military. Indeed, as Elizabeth D. Samet reminds us in "Dishonorable Behavior," her searching essay on the subject in this issue, many males are also victims of this heinous crime. The numbers are staggering: thanks to efforts to address the problem, only—only!—14,900 sexual assaults were estimated to have taken place last year on either male or female soldiers, mostly at the hands of their comrades. The numbers are estimated because victims are reluctant to report attacks—since many who do so are retaliated against. How can this be? It is easy enough to blame a military culture that looks the other way, but Samet, a literary critic who teaches English at West Point, explores the nuances of this culture in fresh and, I fervently hope, productive ways.

EDITORS ARE A NOBLE breed, unfairly maligned by writers and ignored by an ungrateful public. Ha! But in this issue, we have not one but two memoirs by distinguished writers about editors who really do deserve our admiration. The historian Garry Wills memorializes Robert B. Silvers, a founder and editor for more than half a century of *The New York Review of Books* until his death in March. And the novelist Susan Minot remembers her friend and mentor Ben Sonnenberg, who founded the literary journal *Grand Street.* Inspiring figures, both.

—ROBERT WILSON

The AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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Not So Fast, Golden State

In addressing the prospect of "Calexit" in "A Brief History of Secession" (Spring 2017), Richard Striner ignores California's pronounced geopolitical division. Twenty-five of its 58 counties, occupying nearly half its land area, went for Donald Trump in 2016 and would never willingly join the state's left-leaning majority in a separate nation. Calexit would surely spawn another state comprising these northern and eastern counties. Liberal California would depart with a much-reduced area and leave behind a new conservative state, augmenting the Republicans' national dominance.

BARRY MACKINTOSH
Lincoln, California

Richard Striner's piece suffers from an almost utopian sense of idealism coupled with a desperate dismissal of reality. The author—a historian, not a lawyer—brushes aside in a single sentence both the Civil War and the Supreme Court's postwar decision in *Texas v. White* without any meaningful analysis, after conceding that they cumulatively render his hypothesis "easy to deride." Indeed they do. So the author simply runs around, rather than attempting to clear, that first hurdle. He also concedes that the practical aspects of secession would be "considerable," an understatement of epic proportion in light of some simple realities. For example, how does Calexit address the fact that the United States owns nearly 46 percent of the land in California, measured by acreage? Carve all that land out of the existing boundaries and see what remains of a proposed independent nation. All that federal land is immune from state and local taxation, by the way. Under federal law, the United States pays the states certain monies in lieu of local taxes to help offset, to a degree, that lost tax revenue. But those payments only go to states, and post-Calexit, there is no state. There goes $45 million in revenue.

Yet Striner assures us that these matters can be addressed through "intelligent treaty negotiations," offering the non sequitur that American citizens living abroad can receive Social Security payments. Of course, if California were to secede, then its residents would no longer be citizens of the United States—another one of those stark, annoying realities that proponents of Calexit seem never to address with any seriousness. And why would the United States want to negotiate with a postsecession California? An independent California would have little that the federal government would want or need, which is the fundamental basis of any type of negotiation. On the other hand, an independent California would lose the benefits of statehood,

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not the least significant of which is all variety of federal funding and other kinds of assistance. Whom, pray tell, will the governor (president?) of this new independent sovereign entity call for disaster relief after the next major earthquake?

The essence of Striner's article is the argument that secession is, at least from a historical perspective, theoretically possible. Perhaps, although that proposition is not free from substantial doubt (see again, the Civil War and *Texas v. White*). The author's argument, however, misses the point. Discussions of that which may be theoretically possible yield nothing when those discussions are completely untethered from reality.

RICHARD A. HARRISON
Tampa, Florida

Free Speech on College Campuses

William Deresiewicz's "On Political Correctness" is as cogent a breakdown of the illiberal rot at the heart of the current "progressive" movement as I've ever read. Many people who still value intellectual rigor, coherence, and dialogue have noticed for some time that the social-justice left is the mirror image of the puritanical Christian moral majority that some of us remember in its more muscular form through the '80s, '90s, and early 2000s. The same unthinking dogmatism, the same moral certainty, the same obsession with purity, the same intellectual hollowness and fragility, the same fixation on feelings of personal offense, the same authoritarian impulses.

Today's campus left has indeed taken on the worst characteristics of the social group it could most clearly identify as its enemy, in the same way that colonized people mimic the worst traits of their colonizers when they finally achieve independence. And yes, the aim of the project (driven not by high ideals but the resentment and vindictiveness of the marginalized), is not to make society more universally just, but simply to invert the power pyramid. Power is all that matters.

What we need is a revitalized, tough, liberal center to oppose the toxic, destructive, extremists on both the left and the right. People who are sick of this seesaw of creeping authoritarianism need to speak up and stick up for each other. Without that, social discourse will continue to be hijacked by rigid ideologues, and reasonable people will remain hostages of the most aggressive "religious" activists seeking to reengineer society by force. We cannot capitulate to bullies and thought police. We can't shrink away and cede the public forum to these maniacs. The procedural liberalism that makes the maintenance of a free society possible has to be defended.

"EMBLEM14"
from our website

This is exactly the sort of article we need more of. If the left is to correct course, the criticisms need to come from the left. It's a sad state of affairs when the loudest voices on the left are illiberal thugs who would silence anyone who challenges their views. College should not be a safe space. If you went to college and were never made to feel uncomfortable by what you were hearing, you were denied one of the most valuable parts of the experience, the opportunity to have your beliefs challenged.

"TOOLMAN78"
from our website

Let me take this opportunity to tell you how refreshing it was to read William Deresiewicz's article, to see an apolitical approach to this issue. The thought at its core may not be universally recognized, yet it is central to liberty and democratic values.

HON. W. NEIL THOMAS, III
Hamilton County Circuit Court
Chattanooga, Tennessee

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Letter from
FONTAINE-DE-VAUCLUSE

Where the Waters Speak of Love

JEFFREY TAYLER

I SIT SLEEPILY ON a stone bench, lolling in a half-dreamy state, only dimly perceiving the limestone escarpments lightening above me. Gradually, though, I perk up: the predawn sky, a rich cobalt in the west, is paling to eggshell blue in the east. Beside me flow the dark bubbling currents of the Sorgue, the transalpine river that originates in the foothills of the Vaucluse Mountains, just outside Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, the Provençal hamlet where I'm staying. Soon, with daybreak, the waters acquire an almost otherworldly glow; I can imagine how the beautiful Sorgue, hallowed for millennia, would have inspired one of the seminal works of the Renaissance, the *Canzoniere* of the 14th-century Italian poet Francesco Petrarch.

Petrarch was a literary titan in his homeland, second only to Dante, and, with his 1345 discovery of Cicero's letters, is often credited with fostering the Renaissance. Consisting of 366 poems (mostly sonnets, but also canzoni, ballads, madrigals, and sestinas), the *Canzoniere,* born of Petrarch's sojourns along these banks, has drawn me to Fontaine-de-Vaucluse and serves as my vade mecum to its landscape of longing. In one of the book's most noted stanzas, Petrarch sang the Sorgue's praises as *chiare, fresche, et dolci* ("clear, cool, and sweet"). For him,

> The waters speak of love, and the breeze,
> the oars,
> the little birds, the fish, the flowers,
> and the grass
> all together beg me to love forever.

The *Canzoniere* is Petrarch's heartfelt, distinctly personal rendition of his suffering in unrequited love for the enigmatic Laura—the "loving" of whom the Sorgue's waters and wildlife urge him to continue. (Medieval European literature, before his day, was mostly fables, theological writings, and tales of chivalry.) The valley channeling the river, the Vaucluse, importuned him less; he called it a *refrigerio de' sospir miei lassi* ("comfort for [my] weary sighs"). He fantasized about admiring Laura's beauty as he rowed her across the Sorgue, with her spirit pervading everything he saw:

> Wherever I turn my eyes
> I find a serene sweetness,
> thinking that the wandering light [of
> Laura's gaze] fell upon this spot

The great Renaissance poet Francesco Petrarch came here for enduring inspiration—and respite from the world's woes.

Jeffrey Tayler is a contributing editor of *The Atlantic* and the author of seven books, including *Facing the Congo, Angry Wind,* and *River of No Reprieve.* The English translations here are his own.

I've come here to seek refuge from the world's woes and to immerse myself in the *Canzoniere,* long the consolation of my darkest hours and the joy of my brightest. Reading Petrarch's master opus by the Sorgue will, I hope, allow me to experience something of what he did, and help me better understand one of my favorite literary works.

Clutching my copy of the *Canzoniere,* I ascend the footpath, darkly named the Chemin du Gouffre (Path of the Abyss), that follows the eastern bank just above the Sorgue. It ends before an abrupt stony occlusion—a nearly sheer mountain face (*Vaucluse* comes from the Latin *vallis clausa,* or "closed valley") and the river's source, a deep, forbidding cave half filled with murky, blue-green water that at times brought Petrarch gloomy thoughts, and at least once *un dolce di morir desio* ("a sweet desire to die").

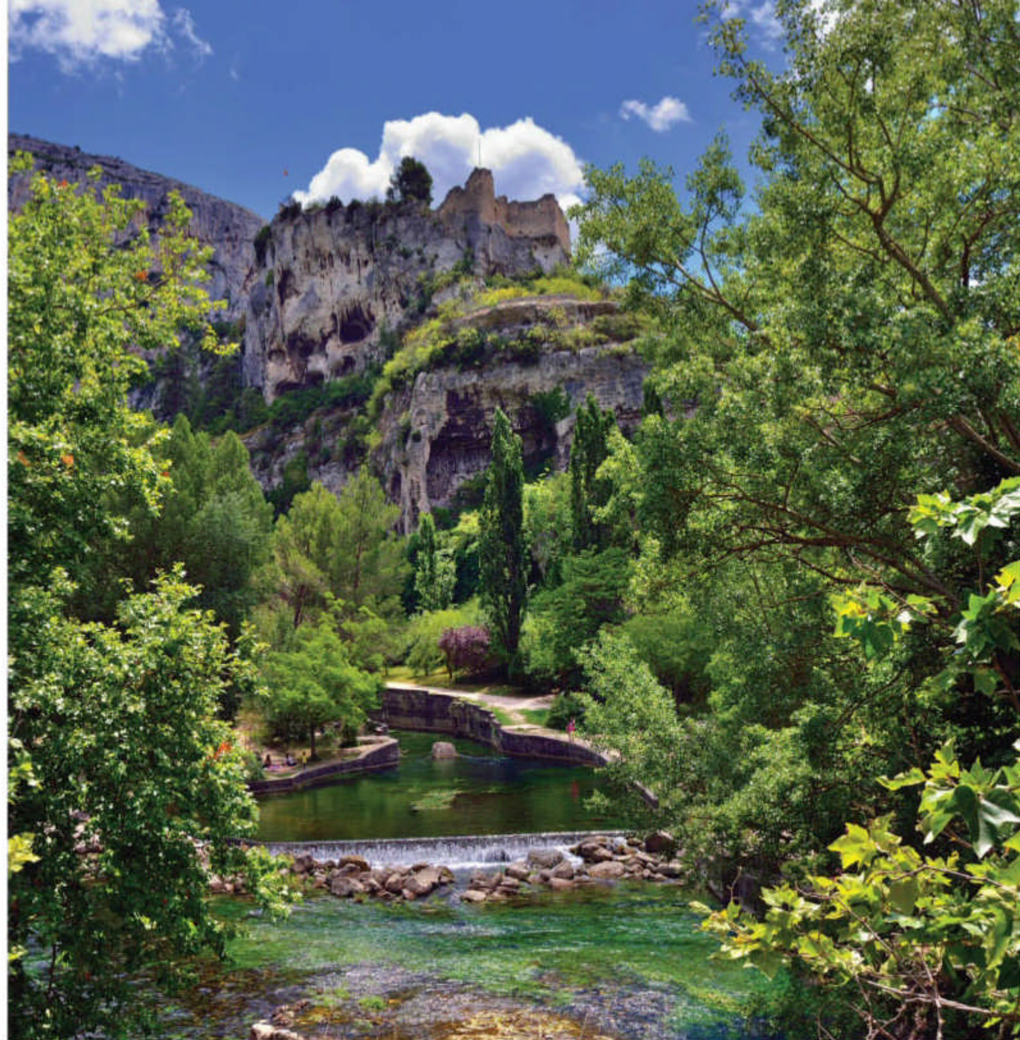
But I feel no such morbid inclination. For the Celts this was a sacred spot, as it was for the Romans. (Even in ancient times, people made wishes and tossed in coins.) The Sorgue passes from the underground cave to emerge, a short way down, from scrub brush and boulders to form a symphony of waters as enchanting as it is inescapable in this village. Wherever you go, the Sorgue serenades you, with its notes as *chiare, fresche, et dolci* as its currents.

As the sky brightens, the Sorgue glows emerald-green, the color of the aquatic vegetation swaying just beneath its surface, and rushes south, frothing with foam and tumbling over rocks, before pouring into Roman-era canals that once probably channeled water to Arles and Avignon. (Eventually it reaches the Rhône.) The air has a cool crispness, and soon, church bells chime seven, mallard ducks quack, and warblers flit through the trees overhanging the shores. The sun's warm rays bathe the crumbling ramparts of a 12th-century fortress, the Château des Evêques de Cavaillon, looming on a promontory high above the village.

Born in 1304 in Arezzo, Tuscany, Petrarch led a peripatetic life as a cleric, scholar, and bibliophile. Writing in both Italian and Latin, he put Fontaine-de-Vaucluse on the world's literary map. (Subsequent visiting men of letters include Alexandre Dumas, the critic Sainte-Beuve, and the poet Frédéric Mistral.) The area, mostly wild in his time, perfectly suited Petrarch's desire for an inspiring place to write, and was an ideal spot for him to lead a life of religious austerity and recover his health. In a letter to a friend, he announced that he had retreated to Fontaine-de-Vaucluse so that his eyes would see nothing but "sky, mountains, and the source [of the Sorgue]" and his ears hear only the "bellowing of cattle … the bleating of sheep … the singing of birds, the continual murmuring of the waters." In *Trionfi,* his last major work, unfinished at the time of his death in 1374, he lauded Fontaine-de-Vaucluse as the "the closed place where everything restores the weary heart." All in all, it was the *locus aptissimus* ("most suitable place") on earth for him.

Shepherds, sheep, and cows were just about Petrarch's only company here, save for an ancient, hardworking servant whose sun-withered visage put him in mind of the parched wastes of Libya. Today, with only some 650 inhabitants, the village still offers relative isolation, at least if you come at the right time of year. Avoiding the horde of summer tourists, I'm here in late September, and I've pretty much got the place to myself. A transcendental peace prevails, manifest in the ubiquitous, calming murmur of the Sorgue and the stillness of the giant ferns, oaks, and plane trees along its banks. I can't help thinking that this scene resembles a real-life *locus amoenus,* the pastoral idyll figuring in literature from antiquity onward as Elysium, Eden, and even Heaven.

Noon is drawing near. I cross the Sorgue by a low, double-arched stone bridge flanked by a churning, algae-mottled watermill, and take a short tunnel through a limestone hillock to reach a 19th-century house, now the Petrarch Museum and Library. Abutting the rock wall,



The emerald waters of the Sorgue beneath the crumbling remains of a 14th-century castle near Fontaine-de-Vaucluse

ZNM/ISTOCKPHOTO

stucco-sided, gable-roofed, and skirted by spearlike cypresses, the museum-library occupies land Petrarch once owned. Inside, I contemplate the portraits and etchings of Laura, entitled *La Belle Laure, Laure de Pétrarque, Madonna Laura.* In 1327, in a church in nearby Avignon, Petrarch fatefully encountered Laura—probably Laure de Noves, a young, married Frenchwoman wed into the de Sade (as in the Marquis de Sade) family. She ignored his advances, causing him much distress. But her death 21 years later left him even worse off and occasioned the *Canzoniere*'s division into two parts, pre- and postmortem: *Rime in Vita* and *Rime in Morte.*

The portraits here in the museum mostly depict her coiffed in a bonnet or a hairnet, with eyes downcast—the very image of chastity. Stung by her rejection, Petrarch called her a *viva petra* ("living rock") who drove him to despair, leaving him defenseless ("I find no peace, nor do I have the means to wage war"), as if imprisoned, wondering whether death was better than life. He wailed, "Harsh Love, … you press me to follow a beast that destroys me." His verse describes the tumultuous amours we so often know in youth:

> Love at times goads me on and stops me,
> reassures me and frightens me, burns me
> and turns me cold,
> pleases and condescends to me, calls me to
> itself and drives me away,
> keeps me in hope one minute and pain the
> next

As time passed, his love for Laura appeared to wane, but then:

> That flame I thought had died out

from the cold and my age, no longer
 youthful,
the flames that in my martyred soul
 refresh

After her death, he endured even more unbearable sorrow:

I see, think, burn, weep; and the one who
 undoes me
is ever before me thanks to my sweet pain:
a war, my condition, filled with ire and
 pain;
and only thinking of her do I have some
 peace

The Monteverdi opera *L'Orfeo* playing through the speakers imparts a fitting air of tragedy to the exhibits: Orpheus, as the Greeks had it, descended into Hades to retrieve his perished love, Eurydice. He failed, of course.

A couple of hours later, beneath the cypresses outside the museum, by a bend in the Sorgue, I stand amid the manicured remnants of Petrarch's beloved garden, which motivated him to study. He believed it would suit Apollo, the Greek god of poetry, music, and light, and even called it his own "Transalpine Helicon," in reference to the mountain in Greece whose springs were sacred to the Muses. The sun—mild now, even just past the meridian, and so unlike the fireball bleaching Provence in summer—enriches the pastel colors of the olive trees and grotto-pocked bluffs across the water. Passions at life's noon make for great literature, but their lessening is a good thing. We do, eventually, need some peace.

I head back through the tunnel and across the bridge, passing by the old stone houses and cafés with terraces lining the banks, and soon find myself beneath a plane tree with an immense canopy shading the village's sole roundabout. In its midst stands a monument to Petrarch, the Colonne de Pétrarque. Cars are few, and one can walk in the street without much concern.

A fanciful meeting of Petrarch and his beloved Laura. She was already married and ignored his advances.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

I follow the Chemin du Gouffre along the Sorgue up toward its source, past crêpe stands and bistros and ice-cream vendors, some already shuttered. The sun filters through the leaves, dappling the scene with a kaleidoscope of light and shadow. Tough to imagine that a grim legend could be associated with this river: people once believed that a foul dragon known as the Coulobre lurked below its surface until it was slain by a certain Saint Véran. Downstream, the crude stony bulk of the 10th-century Church of Saint Véran—complete with a rough-hewn statue of the mythical beast at its entrance—harkens back to the less-refined architecture of the centuries preceding the Renaissance.

Late in the afternoon, I am at Restaurant Philip, high above the Sorgue, sitting at a table on a gravelly terrace embowered by plane trees whose branches reach all the way down to the water. Now and then, yellow leaves flutter to the ground, landing with a rustle. The waiter tells me they're just about to close for the season, so I'm one of the last customers of the year. Soon, the sun slips behind the overhanging crags, the birds fall silent, and a chill sets in.

Petrarch's Laura died as the Black Death was ravaging Europe. Her demise sent him into paroxysms of anguish. The "Petrarchan conceit"—in poetry, hyperbolic comparisons of the emotions of the love-stricken to the physical world—found full

expression in such lines from the *Canzoniere* as these:

> Death, you have left the world without
> a sun, dark and cold ... the Earth and the
> sea should mourn for the human lineage
> [Laura], without which the meadow has no
> flower, the ring no gem.

In Fontaine-de-Vaucluse, Petrarch took at least figurative refuge at the Sorgue's source, "beneath a big rock, in a closed valley, whence the Sorgue emerges," accompanied only by Love, which will never abandon him. He depicted Vaucluse and the river as manifesting his grief:

> Valley, that is filled with my weeping,
> river that often rises with my tears

The Sorgue in spate from Petrarch's tears! This conceit aside, we see that his love for Laura, one-sided though it may have been, actually served as consolation of a sort: it, unlike her, would never abandon him.

I understand him. After my mother's death in 2005, I found my grief in some way reunited me with her, allowed me, in a way, to keep her alive. As long as I missed her, she was not really gone. With the passing years, however, grief has lessened, and my memories of her are fading. Which leads me to think: What of all those feelings for those whom we have known and loved, for all we have lived, for all the experiences that make up who we are, all our moments of seemingly consequential success and failure, pleasure and pain? A pioneer of individualism, Petrarch validated sentiments and perceptions like these by making them subjects for his poetry and turning our interior lives into the stuff of art. My impressions of the Sorgue, powerful as they are, are fleeting, and mine alone. But thanks largely to Petrarch, I'm recording them for others now.

IN ONE OF THE *Canzoniere*'s sestinas, Petrarch alludes to the Platonic idea that our souls are born of and later return to the stars. Night finds me seated at a café along the Chemin du Gouffre, sipping a glass of Côtes du Rhône red, and witness to, above the cliffs, a celestial tableau of stardust unimaginable in a town or a city. The breeze hints at the cool autumn to come while below, the Sorgue burbles in the dark. Still, there's a sense of melancholy here. In a month or so, the hotels will close, the few remaining tourists will depart. Rains and winds will begin, perhaps followed later on by dustings of snow. The stars will shine, but more rarely.

Petrarch managed to transmute his love for Laura into reverence for a quasi-saintly Madonna Laura; in doing so, he reverted to Christian notions of virginal purity—even though Laura was married. In the *Canzoniere*'s final poem, he addresses her as *vergine* ("virgin") *bella, vergine saggia* ("wise"), *vergine pura,* even *vergine santa,* and lastly, *vergine humana.* It concludes with an entreaty:

> Commend me to Your Son
> a true man and the true God,
> that he may receive my soul in peace.

With this turn toward the religious, Petrarch, I confess, loses me. I prefer to dwell on another of the *Canzoniere*'s later poems, Sonnet CCLXXII. Here he tells us of the "war" between his remembrances of things past, present, and future; exhausted, he awaits arrival at his final port. The sonnet opens with a sage, incontrovertible pronouncement:

> Life flees and never stops for a moment,
> and death advances upon us, taking grand
> strides

There is no truer line in all the *Canzoniere*. Sitting here by the Sorgue, I resolve to take it to heart.

"I fear nothing but returning to the cities," Petrarch once wrote to a friend, reluctant to leave Fontaine-de-Vaucluse. But I, having been ministered to by the Sorgue's healing waters, feel just the opposite, newly inspired to head back to the city and resume my life.

Industrial Evolution

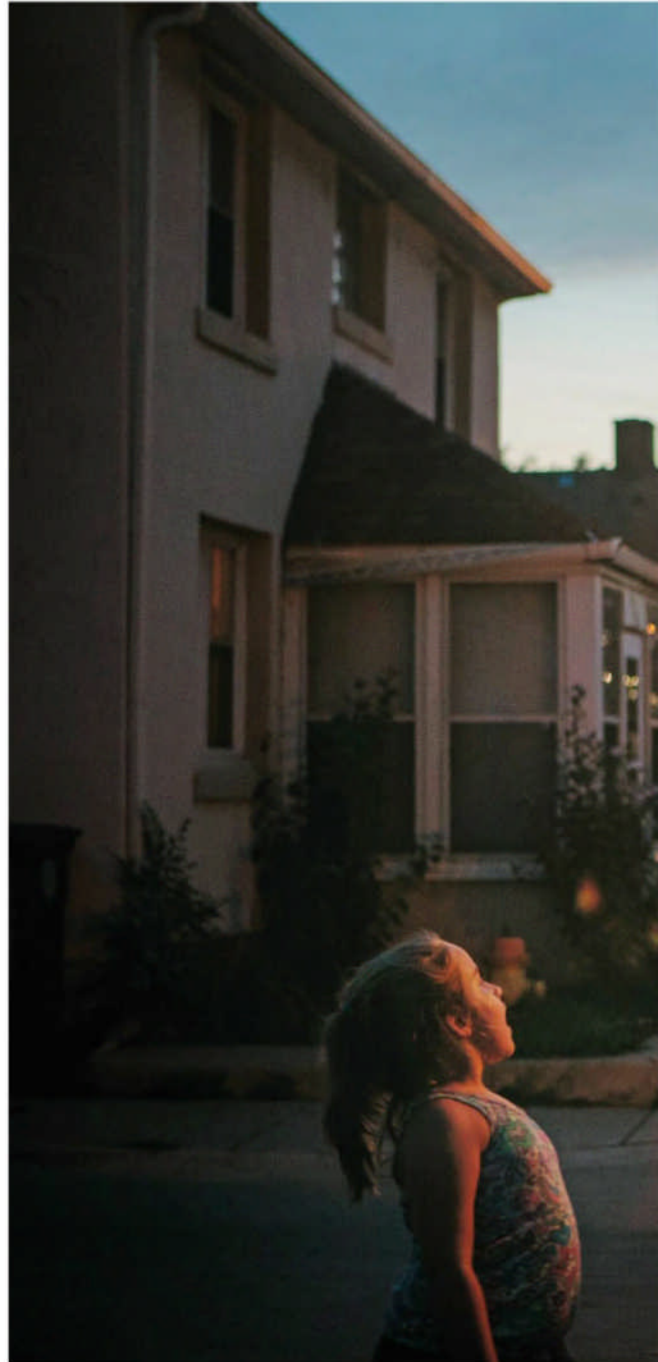
Freelance photographer **ALYSSA SCHUKAR** teaches at Columbia College in Chicago. For the past two years, she has documented environmental problems caused by big industry throughout the Rust Belt.

"The project that I'm working on is a look at life in East Chicago, Indiana, which is zoned 80 percent heavy industrial. It's about strong, tight-knit communities that live with all this pollution and industry surrounding them.

The Marktown neighborhood was created to service the steel mills. And then as the steel industry modernized and shifted overseas, those jobs disappeared. The work moved toward the oil refinery; BP's East Chicago refinery is the largest inland refinery in North America. But no one who lives in Marktown actually works there. The community is well within the disaster blast zone; a couple of years ago, some misfiring at the plant caused the whole area to be covered in plumes of smoke. There's a health risk for them but also a kind of comfort with the familiarity of industry.

What I've seen with Marktown is a loss of identity—these communities are being broken apart. In the past two years, BP has probably bought and demolished 50 homes. Most people who live in East Chicago have been there their whole lives; the people in Marktown are third- or fourth-generation families. The idea of being pushed out by industry is hard for them to understand.

Just before capturing this scene, I heard the ice cream truck music, so I ran outside. Dusk is always my favorite time of the day to photograph; the light is beautiful and matches the sky in intensity. I was looking for a way to introduce the stacks from the refinery in the background without being obvious about it. It was a sweet, all-American scene, especially because the ice cream truck is such a summer icon, a symbol of family, community, and happiness."



"The people in Marktown are third- or fourth-generation families. The idea of being pushed out by industry is hard for them to understand."

Digging Into the Future

ERIC H. CLINE is a professor of classics and anthropology and the director of the Capital Archaeological Institute at George Washington University. He is the author of numerous books, most recently *Three Stones Make a Wall: The Story of Archaeology,* and has excavated in Europe, the Middle East, and North America. We asked him to pose three questions on the future of archaeology.

1. In 2009, a team of archaeologists mapped the sprawling, ancient Maya city of Caracol, a site in Belize that had been long obscured by dense jungle. The archaeologists had mounted a device called LiDAR—light detection and ranging—onto a twin-engine airplane. LiDAR is a type of remote sensing technology: laser beams are used to penetrate jungle or rainforests, bouncing off the ground to create complex three-dimensional images.

Last June, Australian archaeologist Damian Evans, using LiDAR in Cambodia, announced the discovery of medieval cities near Angkor Wat—possibly the most significant Southeast Asian archaeological find in the past century. Fluxgate gradiometers and cesium magnetometers can also help archaeologists do considerable work before ever picking up a shovel or a pick—meaning less damage to a site and its artifacts. So what technological advances can we expect in the future? Biology and chemistry, particularly DNA studies, should provide us with new analytical techniques. But could some of the techniques employed by Transportation Security Administration officers in airports help search for certain chemical compounds beneath the surface of the earth? Would partnerships with oil and gas exploration companies allow us to peer beneath a mound, to look at strata at specific depths?

2. In 1979, the British-American writer and illustrator David Macaulay published a satirical book called *Motel of the Mysteries* that imagined that life in North America had ceased to exist one day in 1985. Enter an amateur archaeologist named Howard Carson in the year 4022, who happens upon a site that he believes to be a tomb. What Carson (an obvious nod to Howard Carter, the excavator of King Tutankhamun's tomb) has stumbled upon, however, is a motel room. It's a wonderful sendup full of jokes sure to make an archaeologist laugh. Yet Macaulay is addressing a very real problem: the potential for misinterpretation.

When future archaeologists excavate the same structure on so many city street corners and find the same iconography associated with them—a crowned goddess with flowing locks—will they conclude that this mysterious Starbucks was an ancient religion? Will they come to the same conclusion about McDonald's? Or will they, in the event that written records have not survived, interpret Ronald McDonald and the Starbucks goddess as the Zeus and Hera of our own age—that is, deities at the forefront of a grand pantheon? Yes, I'm joking, but archaeologists often assume that an unidentifiable object is associated with a religion or a cult.

With so much of our communication taking place online—a record that will either disappear or be impossible to read—will archaeologists conclude that ours was a largely illiterate society? If everything comes to a sudden, catastrophic end, à la Pompeii, what will excavators make of the strange devices made of plastic, metal, glass, and electronic circuitry gripped by every skeleton they find?

3. Driven almost certainly by the demand created by private

TOP: BLINK MEDIA; BOTTOM: THE TEMPLE OF KUKULKÁN IN MEXICO/OKSANAVG/ISTOCKPHOTO

collectors, the assault on the world's archaeological sites and museums is proceeding at a level and pace previously unseen. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, recent wars and uprisings have resulted in the destruction of artifacts and "looting on an industrial scale," as the head of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, described the situation in Syria in 2015.

Looting dates back at least to the age of the Egyptian pharaohs. The problem today isn't restricted to war-torn regions: Greece and Peru have witnessed instances of looting, as has the United States. What's at stake isn't just the history and archaeological record of a particular site or region, but the remnants of our common human heritage.

The problem is that illegal digging for antiquities has been, in some parts of the world, a perfectly acceptable way to make a living. How can we fault an impoverished Syrian villager who sells a tablet or cylinder seal or figurine of a deity to some middleman so that his family can eat? This small-scale problem, however, has now gone wholesale. In Syria, ISIS has become an active player in the antiquities business, committing widespread acts of looting and destruction, for example, at Nimrud and the Mosul Museum [see our story on page 99]. The damage in Iraq is no less widespread, with hundreds of men carrying machine guns as well as shovels digging up sites all over the country. Recent photographs of the ancient city of Umma show no buildings, only the pits left by looters.

In 2015, President Obama signed the Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act, making it illegal in this country to sell looted Syrian artifacts. A memorandum of understanding between the United States and Egypt was signed late last year, restricting antiquities imported from Egypt. But what else can be done to protect our common cultural heritage and support careful, methodical archaeology? Legislation to guard excavated sites and protect known but unexcavated remains must also be passed. As individuals, we must resist the urge to buy an ancient artifact we find in some Middle Eastern market or on eBay. A lack of demand is the sure way to reduce supply. The one question that must concern us all is this: How can we stop the loss of knowledge of our collective human past before it's too late?

Virtual Vellum

Imagine wanting to examine a rare medieval Islamic manuscript housed deep within a library in Damascus. Now, with the launch of the Virtual Hill Museum & Manuscript Library Reading Room, you don't have to book a ticket to Syria in order to see it in high resolution. Eight scholars at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, have spent the past 13 years digitizing 10,000 manuscripts, from late antiquity to the present, placing them online for researchers. So far, 540 libraries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and India have been scoured, and the goal is to scan and upload hundreds of thousands of manuscripts while exchanging metadata with other libraries. Researchers can now compare multiple manuscripts side by side—a revolutionary tool. In the end, says Father Columba Stewart, who runs the digital repository, Virtual Hill will be the largest online collection of secular and religious manuscripts in the world.

HILL MUSEUM & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

Next steps involve updating the interface to improve search functions and public access. "The stuff we've been digitizing and putting online," Stewart says, "has been virtually unknown to scholars outside the Middle East. This is going to significantly shift or transform how people view the history of the region, and then we'll get a fuller picture of what the culture is actually like."

—NOELANI KIRSCHNER

FICTION EXCERPT

Chasing Henrietta

Henrietta Atkins is a recurring character in the fiction of **ANDREA BARRETT**, appearing first in two of the long stories, set in the 19th century, that composed the book *Archangel,* then in two further works, "Wonders of the Shore" and the recent "Open House." Henrietta figures prominently in Barrett's current work of fiction, an excerpt of which appears below. Why does Barrett keep returning to Henrietta, exploring various stages of the character's life? "Probably I wouldn't keep writing about her," she says, "if I knew the answer to that. Her mind intrigues me, and her independence. Also the many things she fails to understand, despite all she knows."

One of her jobs at the Deverells' was to gather up the letters, after they'd been read by the family and the neighbors whose sons had been mentioned, and file them in the special box. Each envelope smoothed and flattened. Each sheet unfolded, the creases pressed out under a stack of books and then gathered and tied with clean string, laid flat with the newest letter on the top.

She was 11, almost 12, that spring of 1863: sturdy and energetic, tall for her age, with her dark hair still hanging in two long plaits. An excellent speller with a tidy, legible hand and a curiosity that offended some of her neighbors but not, fortunately, her new employers. Henrietta knew, because she asked, that the letter-writers were Mr. Deverell's younger brothers Izzy and Vic, and that they'd enlisted in part because of the bounty. But what was a bounty? (Mrs. Deverell, who asked Henrietta to call her Aurie, explained.) And why were Vic's letters so short, while Izzy's went on and on? ("Brothers," Mr. Deverell said with a shrug.) She liked Izzy's letters better, both sides of five or six sheets filled with gossipy details, late additions and afterthoughts winding up the margins until he ran out of room entirely. But what was a company, what was a regiment, was a corps larger or smaller than a brigade?

"Larger," Mr. Deverell said (she couldn't seem to call him Maurice). A corps was made up of several divisions, a division made of several brigades; a brigade contained four or five regiments and a regiment like Vic and Izzy's began with 10 companies of roughly a hundred men each but shrank as men got sick, deserted, were wounded, were—he stopped there, he would not say *killed*. She was taking notes.

"That," he said, as she drew a box filled with boxes filled with boxes, "is enough of that. Now go help Aurie."

After the first week, Aurie gave her a pencil

Unstacking the Deck

Forget Pokémon: these scientists are reviving the trading-card game while also fighting gender inequality. Last spring, researchers from Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science and Technology and the Michael Smith Laboratories at The University of British Columbia (UBC) released a set of trading cards featuring notable women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

LEFT TO RIGHT: SHANNON WRIGHT (2); PING ZHU

WISE, short for Women in Science and Engineering, is a deck-building game where the main objective is to collect a set of cards. A starter deck, aimed at kids 10 and up, features 21 scientists and engineers. Players score points by collecting different achievement cards for each individual, thereby completing the CVs of various women.

With so many notable women contributing to STEM fields, selecting individuals for the starter pack was not easy. "We wanted to focus on women

and let her number the pages and, if the letters were dated vaguely or sited anecdotally—*Next day, early morning. On a log, at camp 1 mi from white church*—add a tentative calendar date and location. From the newspaper Henrietta had torn woodcuts of the camps and the hospitals. From a magazine, a map of northern Virginia showing the rivers and towns. No one minded if she read the earlier letters and tried to match newspaper accounts of events with what the letters reported, as long as she kept a close eye on Bernard.

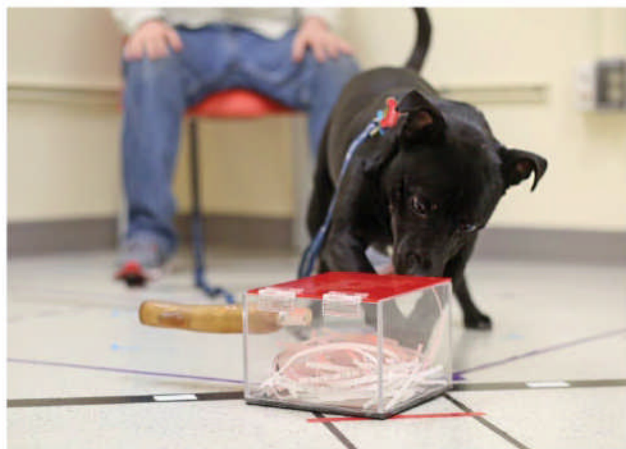
But Bernard was an easy baby, cheerful when awake and reliably sleepy at nap-time, and although he was beginning to walk and had to be watched every minute, Henrietta had no trouble tending to him, helping with the housework, and then delving into the letters and papers. It was like school but even more interesting, and when Izzy described an enormous shipment of mules or the bitterns he'd seen in a swamp, she felt the edges of her world expand. Her father had taken her to different places around Keuka Lake, also a few times to Corning and Bath and twice to Rochester, once to Syracuse: but that was it. So it wasn't just the bounty, then; Izzy and Vic might have enlisted last summer just to see something beyond this chunk of central New York.

who were not necessarily well known," said David Ng, a UBC faculty member working on the project, "and to include people whose profile reflected some of the challenges in gender culture."

Alice Hamilton, a pioneer in occupational health and medicine, made the first cut, as did Inge Lehmann, the Danish seismologist who discovered Earth's inner core. Ng and his colleagues are already working on expansion packs that include a wider range of women, as well as cards addressing sexual harassment and misogyny.

"We talk a lot about diversity and representation in STEM circles," Ng said, "but it's also clear that's where the structural and cultural challenges to gender equity are still very much with us." **—SARA GOUDARZI**

ALYSSA ARRE, YALE UNIVERSITY CANINE COGNITION CENTER



Canis Sapiens

At Yale University's Canine Cognition Center, psychology professor Laurie Santos has an unusual group of students: a classroom full of tail-wagging dogs. Scholars in her field, comparative cognition, study what other animals have to teach us about what makes human learning special. Dogs are a prime subject for comparison because, like us, they grow up surrounded by human activity.

Santos and her team are currently investigating whether dogs share our cognitive biases when learning new skills. Humans rely on teaching from other humans, but we tend to "overimitate" our instructors: if I see you performing an action that includes irrelevant steps, I am likely to copy even the irrelevant ones. But Santos has shown that when given a puzzle box to open alongside an unnecessary lever, the dog will skip the lever, even if its teacher doesn't.

"Dogs seem to have a better filter for human-given cues than even humans do," Santos said. They pick up on whether an instructor considers a step irrelevant, even when humans don't.

Santos and her team want to test for other human biases that dogs might lack. Children, for example, assuming that teachers provide comprehensive information on a given subject, might hold back from exploring on their own. Will dogs limit their own trial-and-error based on the information teachers provide, or not?

As yet, no university has a feline cognition center, so whoever wants to make history—and yes, herd cats—is welcome to it. **—ELYSE GRAHAM**

My Mentor

Grand Street editor Ben Sonnenberg was a great enthusiast

SUSAN MINOT

THE FIRST TIME I MET Ben Sonnenberg, he handed me a check with his teeth. He was in a wheelchair, so this did not reflect the refinement of the man; in fact, the gesture somehow accentuated it.

The year was 1981, when I was studying fiction at Columbia University and sending out my stories to magazines. A friend recommended I try a new journal called *Grand Street,* and I went to a bookstore and looked at the first issues with their thick creamy paper and old-fashioned layout. The journal was beautiful, the work inside intimidating. Only because I was told to, I sent my story off.

A square card with the *Grand Street* logo of a mangy goat arrived in the mail, signed by Sonnenberg, the magazine's editor. It was my first acceptance letter and it vibrated in my fingers. Later, he invited me to meet him. At the time, I was in graduate school, waitressing, living with my aunt on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. On that fall day, I jogged across Central Park in my sneakers and sweatpants to 50 Riverside Drive to meet Ben. What was I thinking? Trying for a casual note, I suppose, to make up for my shock at even being invited at all. (Six months later, I would never have dreamed of arriving without considering my outfit, which Ben would assess as appraisingly as he did manuscripts. "Okay," he'd say, when I walked in, "Let's see the shoes.")

That first day, Ben opened the door and greeted me. He was low down, in his wheelchair. I entered an apartment full of books and art and an atmosphere of artistic and literary magic. There were wooden spool bookshelves to the ceiling, oil paintings, Lord Byron's framed signature, Brassai photographs, and someone's mounted suspenders (Disraeli's, it turned out). This place was created by Ben and his wife, the writer Dorothy Gallagher, and would turn out to be more of a home to me over the next 30 years—constant, welcoming, stimulating—than any other I had.

Ben gave me tea and asked me about my circumstances. I think I had a date once with your aunt, he observed, unsurprised. Then he asked me about writing. Who were my favorite writers, who were my influences? I was astonished. No one had spoken to me in that way, as if I were, in fact, a writer. I felt it was my christening. Ben told me he was glad to be publishing my story, then excused himself and rolled into the other room. He returned with a piece of paper between his teeth. "Here," he said. "So you will show me more stories." It was a check for $1,000. I was then working evenings at a creepy restaurant on the Upper East Side, dividing quarters with the other waitresses. Did he think I had somewhere *else* I might show my stories?

Ben's kindness began then and never stopped.

Not long after, I started working part-time at *Grand Street* as an assistant editor alongside the only other employee, the designer Deborah Thomas. The "offices" were in Ben's dining room,

Susan Minot is a fiction writer, poet, and screenwriter. Among her books are the novels *Monkeys, Rapture,* and *Thirty Girls,* and *Lust & Other Stories.*

where Manila envelopes slid off wooden chairs and I received an artistic education more trenchant and various than the one I got up the street at Columbia. I combed through the slush pile and also showed Ben almost everything I wrote.

Ben was a connoisseur and a great enthusiast. I can think of few people who took as much joy as he in the accomplishments and creations of others. His eyes would glitter and he'd lift his chin, smiling without showing his teeth. To give Ben a piece of gossip, a sip of champagne, or simply to walk in the door was most gratifying; appreciation beamed from him. And he had a flip side: his dismissal could be withering.

Writers, I am not the first to note, cannot get enough encouragement. Ben's meant more because it came from a taskmaster. I can still feel the shock he could give while editing my stories. A flinching frown was ominous. His disdain was delivered unfiltered. He was a painstaking editor, working through my stories line by line as I sat at his elbow, noting every comment. On more than one occasion, he said, "This is some of the worst writing you've ever done." I learned to match his disdain for the indulgent and the obvious. "We all know grief is disorienting," he would say. No need to point it out. Clichés were a horror. He showed me the grace of understatement and clarity. I also learned not *always* to listen. He had no patience for nature descriptions and found weather references tedious. Despite his disapproval, I kept writing both.

His encouragement when it came was like armor. "Sue," he'd say, "you're better than this." "This whining doesn't become you." Or, "Show more of your bitchy side." When I was working on my first book and worrying what *they* might think, he said simply, "If you're going to worry about that, you don't have what it takes to be a writer."

Ten years after I met him, his multiple sclerosis forced him to stop publishing *Grand Street*. When he lost movement in his arms, he acquired a bigger motorized wheelchair he would steer with a sort of plastic hookah tube in his mouth. Mention of his paralysis was rare. Though he said about his beloved dog, Harry: "You can't know how much a dog means to a cripple."

He loved photography and music, literature and movies, but what interested him most was people. In his rooms, I met Edward Said, Anne Carson, James Salter, Saul Steinberg, Amy Wilentz, Dan Menaker, Christopher Hitchens, Vincent Canby, Penelope Gilliatt, Jean Strouse, Alexander Cockburn, Michael Train, Richard Howard, Javier Marías. I should have kept more notes—the witticisms and conversation were dizzying. Ben's knowledge was vast and traveled down many obscure tributaries. It was always surprising to me—not to him—when someone else knew the obscure French actress or had read the Greek memoir.

He was a critic and a poet, a grandfather and a rebellious son who wrote a memoir, *Lost Property*, about it all. He loved Doris Day and C. P. Cavafy, Luis Buñuel and Murray Kempton. And Dorothy.

Ben and Dorothy had a great love between them. They showed me that a beautiful marriage is full of humor, and it is a treasure of my life that they took me in as family. Whenever I would return from being away from New York, I went to Ben and Dorothy's. I brought a red-and-black Maasai blanket from Kenya to spread on Ben's bed. I lay my week-old daughter on it, between his legs. We would eat dinner from trays in Ben's room. Dorothy fed him, sitting on a stool, tipping an etched glass of wine to his mouth. They bantered and flirted with each other. "Remember when we had Harry?" Ben would say, looking at the scruffy black-and-white dog they adored. "And then we had to get married?"

When Ben caught his last cold in June 2010, Dorothy said she hadn't been worried. "I had forgotten he was ill," she said. Then she laughed. "I just thought he was being lazy."

For 20 years, Ben lived paralyzed from the neck down. I remain amazed by the courage and endurance he always exhibited. To the end, Ben did not let us think very much about his illness. Always the great editor, he took out what he would rather we not see.

COVER STORY

OUR NUCLEAR FUTURE

WE MAY THINK THE BOMB IS BACK, BUT IT NEVER REALLY WENT AWAY

JEFFREY LEWIS

This summer, for the first time, there will be a negotiation under the auspices of the United Nations on the convention banning the production, possession, and use of nuclear weapons. The United States and Russia, as well as other nuclear states, are expected to boycott the talks in the hope that they can delegitimize the effort. Instead, both countries are engaged in major modernization programs. The United States is committed to replacing its entire triad of nuclear-armed missiles, submarines, and bombers at a cost that may exceed a trillion

The French government detonated this thermonuclear bomb—an explosive force of 914 kilotons—on July 3, 1970, as part of a test conducted in Polynesia.

STOCKFOLIO/ALAMY

dollars over 30 years. Russia has announced the revival of myriad Soviet-era nuclear weapons programs, including new intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles, a new heavy intercontinental-range ballistic missile, nuclear-armed trains, and an underwater drone with a thermonuclear warhead that is designed to detonate in a port in a city like New York.

The U.N.-sponsored nuclear-weapons-ban treaty negotiations—convened under the leadership of Austria, Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa, and Sweden, and with the support of 120 countries worldwide and a host of disarmament groups—are deeply imperfect, having arisen in response to the hostility of the major nuclear-armed states to the idea of a nuclear weapons convention. Yet they also offer an opportunity, if we take it. Not, perhaps, to eliminate nuclear weapons in a single stroke, but to force a serious discussion about how to base our security on something other than the permanent threat of nuclear holocaust.

Indeed, the election of Donald Trump has triggered a renewed interest in the danger of nuclear war. As commander-in-chief, he has the unfettered authority to order a nuclear strike—contrary to the widespread folk wisdom, no second "vote" is required. During the campaign, this incredible power became shorthand for the awesome responsibility of the office, and the ground on which partisans battled over Trump's fitness to serve as president. Trump, too, has embraced nuclear weapons as the ultimate trapping of his status, frequently expressing the notion that the U.S. nuclear arsenal must remain, in his phrase, at the "top of the pack." But what does the rest of the pack look like? Where are we today? And what dangers might we head off?

These important questions go well beyond the politics of the moment, extending to the heart of how we think about security and the future of humankind. The dominant view has long been that nuclear weapons are just the latest in a series of armaments that human beings have created to wage war. Another view, also present from the beginning of the atomic age, is that nuclear weapons are not merely the most recent, but also a first—the first weapon that offers us the ability to destroy ourselves, a shared hazard for which our social institutions for managing large-scale violence are dangerously ill-suited.

These two competing views each saw new development after the dawn of atomic weapons and during the Cold War arms race—the invention of far more destructive thermonuclear weapons, the integration of computerized command-and-control systems, and so on—in radically different terms. Those who favored nuclear primacy saw another step in an endless competition for national superiority. Those who opposed it saw an increasingly elaborate machinery for destruction that was growing too complex for existing human systems to control or even for a single human being to fully comprehend.

So far, we have built our security on nuclear deterrence, calculating that discourag-

Jeffrey Lewis is a scholar at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey and the host of the Arms Control Wonk podcast.

ing war among the great powers is worth the long-term risks, and thus we have sought to stay ahead in an ongoing arms race. In this regard, Trump's comments about the bomb are in keeping with a commonplace view that U.S. nuclear weapons should be "second to none." At the same time, other voices have cautioned against the emptiness of such rhetoric, reminding us that there is no victory in an arms race or a nuclear war, and that we cannot expect nuclear deterrence to work perfectly forever. Human beings are frail, and our leaders are imperfect. Over time the risks continue to accumulate: the complexity of the enterprise of nuclear deterrence is steadily deepening as rapid technological advancements entangle new states and make possible new weapons with unpredictable consequences.

We are, today, living through a momentous era of technological disruption that has deeply altered our economic and social patterns of life. Imagine explaining to a colleague, even two decades ago, the ubiquitous presence of smartphones, social media, and Uber, plus the prospect of driverless cars. Yet some people, apparently including the president, believe that nuclear deterrence can continue to muddle along as it always has, without succumbing to the forces that have imperiled landline telephones, print newspapers, taxicabs, and human drivers. This seems unlikely. Technology is certain to disrupt nuclear deterrence. The only question is whether that means the end of nuclear weapons or the end of us.

THE BIG TWO: THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA

Today, nine countries have nuclear weapons. They are, in the approximate order in which they acquired the bomb, the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea.

Collectively, these countries possess more than 10,000 nuclear weapons, most of them of the thermonuclear variety, many times more destructive than the simple fission bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. To put this in perspective, the most common nuclear weapon in the U.S. stockpile, the W76, has an explosive force of about 100,000 tons of TNT (100 kilotons)—five times the size of the implosion device dropped on Nagasaki. The largest nuclear weapon ever tested, the Soviet Union's Tsar Bomba, exploded with a force of 57 million tons of TNT (57 megatons).

Talk of things such as stockpiles, megatonnage, and the throw-weight that missiles can carry are a regular feature of the discussion of nuclear danger. Such grim accounting may seem inadequate and antiseptic, but it represents a feeble human attempt to make some sense out of our nuclear predicament, to impose some order or pattern on this enormous capacity to commit collective suicide. The inadequacy of statistics to convey the full horror of nuclear weapons may actually be an advantage—it creates a kind of psychological distance that allows us to survey this current predicament without falling into hopelessness or despair.

The United States and Russia possess the bulk of the world's nuclear weapons, the warheads in their respective arsenals numbering in the thousands. Still, these numbers are much reduced from Cold War peaks, in which at different points each country had as many as 30,000 nuclear weapons in a bewildering array of options to arm bombers, missiles, and artillery pieces, and even to serve as landmines.

Under the Obama administration, the United States periodically disclosed the precise number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. stockpile—at the end of fiscal year 2015, that number was 4,571. Higher numbers are sometimes quoted, partly because the official figure does not include many thousands of American nuclear weapons that are nominally retired but that have not yet been dismantled. The Obama White House had hoped Russia would respond with its own accounting, but Moscow has remained silent. Nevertheless, most experts believe that Russia's overall stockpile is similar in size to that of the United States, numbering several thousand nuclear weapons.

The rough numerical parity hides, however, deep differences in the composition of those stockpiles. Nuclear weapons are categorized as "strategic" or "tactical"—although in practice there is very little difference between the two. For example, the U.S. B61 nuclear bomb has both strategic and tactical modifications that are now being replaced by a single design for all missions, the B61-12. Still, the distinction between strategic and tactical nuclear weapons is codified in arms reduction treaties, and helps explain the vastly dissimilar preparation that the United States and Russia make for nuclear war. Owing to arms limits negotiated in the 2010 New START treaty, the United States and Russia will reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons to no more than 1,550 deployed warheads—although in practice, treaties use a fair amount of accounting, meaning that the real number of nuclear weapons is higher than the limit. Bombers, for example, count as a single nuclear weapon under the New START treaty, even though the B-52 can carry as many as 20 nuclear-armed cruise missiles.

Both the United States and Russia have thousands more bombs and warheads that are not covered by these treaties, resulting in total nuclear stockpiles that are similar in size only. The United States holds its additional warheads as nondeployed, or spare, warheads for its strategic nuclear forces, placing emphasis on redundancy to ensure against any technical problems that might arise. The United States has only a few hundred "tactical" nuclear weapons. Russia, by contrast, keeps almost no spares (Moscow is far less worried about reliability) and between 3,000 and 5,000 tactical nuclear weapons. These are largely thermonuclear weapons, many with yields that are comparable to so-called strategic weapons.

Even with the great reduction in nuclear weapons since the Cold War, Russia and the United States maintain the same operational patterns for these systems. Both countries keep a significant portion of these forces on day-to-day alert, allowing each

side to launch a great number of nuclear weapons in the narrow window of about 30 minutes between the time a launch of enemy missiles is detected by satellites and the time those enemy missiles arrive.

Organizing for this mission—which the United States calls "launch under attack"—leaves almost no time for decision-making. President Trump, for example, would have between two and four minutes to decide that computerized reports of an attack are not a false alarm and to give the order to retaliate. President Vladimir Putin would face the same time constraint. Although discussions of arms control and stability have largely focused on limiting the number of nuclear weapons, the growing fear that one side might "decapitate" the other by killing its leadership in a precision strike or taking down its communications in a cyberattack creates considerable instability.

Achieving even this slender window for decision-making requires an enormously complex computerized system to detect missile launches, convey that information to the president, and then transmit and execute his order. Every minute that is lost to these processes reduces the time in which the president must decide. As a result, the pressure to automate much of the system is strong. This was especially true for the Soviet Union, which developed a semi-automated system called Perimeter that ensured retaliation even if everyone in the Kremlin were killed, earning it the dark nickname "The Dead Hand."

Computerization speeds communications, but it also introduces the risk of false alarms. There have been well-documented incidents in the U.S. warning system, including one that resulted from the failure of a 46-cent computer chip. Such problems have gotten worse, not better. In recent years, the U.S. Department of Defense has struggled with the growing problem of counterfeit computer chips making their way into sensitive systems. In 2011, for example, the head of the Missile Defense Agency admitted that a counterfeit Chinese computer chip had been installed into the mission computers for Thermal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense systems. Counterfeit chips might simply fail, or they might represent a possible infection vector for malware.

Many Americans have become aware of the so-called "Internet of things"—the vast but largely unnoticed number of smart appliances and objects that connect to the Internet. A few years ago, the National Security Agency discovered suspicious electronic emissions coming from a sensitive facility—a significant breach of security. After a long investigation, the culprit turned out to be a soda machine, communicating to its vendor over the Internet that it needed to be restocked. What happens when the Internet of things includes nuclear weapons? An odd question, perhaps, but one that the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board is asking. New nuclear weapons systems "will be much more like all systems today, network connected," the head of the board told reporters. "They'll be cyber-enabled"—suggesting that new systems will be as much a part of the Internet of things as thermostats and refrigerators.

THE REST OF THE PACK

The numbers held by the United States and Russia dwarf the arsenals of "second-tier" nuclear powers: Britain, France, and China. These arsenals total a few hundred weapons each. Britain maintains fewer than 200 nuclear weapons for its fleet of four ballistic missile submarines. France has approximately 300 nuclear weapons for both submarines and some aircraft.

Unlike Britain and France, the People's Republic of China is modestly expanding its nuclear arsenal by deploying new nuclear-armed, long-range missiles and new nuclear-armed submarines. Although the scope of this modernization is unclear, China may move from the smallest of the second-tier states to a category somewhere above Britain and France, but still well below the United States and Russia.

But numbers do not tell the entire story. China's nuclear forces have always been small, but more important, unlike Russia and the United States, it did not keep its nuclear weapons on alert. China's nuclear warheads were stored separately from the missiles that would deliver them. As a result, China avoided becoming entangled in the kind of tightly coupled relationship that drove the United States and Soviet Union to develop highly alert nuclear postures that were also susceptible to false alarms.

Now, however, China is introducing new nuclear systems, including mobile missiles that are transported by trucks and carried by submarines, some of which may be kept on alert during peacetime. In the event of a crisis, Chinese officials have talked about placing the other forces on alert to signal their resolve to resist what they would call nuclear blackmail by the United States. This risks creating precisely the sort of trap that has ensnared the United States and Russia. To make matters worse, many of the new weapons in which China is investing can be armed with both conventional warheads and nuclear warheads. The Chinese appear to be placing a dangerously dubious bet that the United States will be able to tell the difference.

For many years, Israel, India, and Pakistan were called "opaque" proliferators—meaning they did not openly acknowledge their nuclear status—although few experts had any doubts about it. Israel maintains this position to the present day, unconvincingly, but both India and Pakistan moved to overt deployment of nuclear weapons following the 1998 nuclear tests conducted by both countries.

The nuclear standoff in South Asia is especially disconcerting because India and Pakistan have moved to replicate the nuclear postures of the United States and Russia in miniature, including tactical nuclear weapons, cruise missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and missile defenses. An alarming difference is the two countries' proximity. If the 30 minutes that it would take for an intercontinental ballistic missile to fly from Russia to the United States imposes crushing time pressures, consider that flight times in South Asia will be five to 10 minutes, depending on the missile and the target. India and Pakistan are re-creating a Cold War deter-

rence framework under much more demanding conditions.

Finally there is North Korea. Despite openly flaunting its nuclear status with five nuclear explosions since 2006, Pyongyang has maintained a curious silence about its growing nuclear capabilities. Yet during the past two years, North Korea openly displayed a model of its "standardized" nuclear warhead for arming its ballistic missiles, conducted a nuclear test of that warhead, and shifted missile testing to the units that would be required to use nuclear weapons in any conflict. These steps are totally consistent with the warnings of North Korean defectors that Pyongyang is now in the process of deploying nuclear weapons to its missile units for use if a conflict were to break out. North Korea's nuclear strategy, as indicated by official documents, defector reports, and launch exercises, is to use nuclear weapons early in any conflict to destroy U.S. forces at bases and ports in South Korea and Japan to repel an invasion, while holding a small number of nuclear-armed ICBMs in reserve to deter the United States from responding in kind. This spring, the United States conducted large-scale military exercises with South Korea. North Korea responded with its own exercise, launching four missiles into the ocean in a simulated nuclear strike on a U.S. air station supporting the exercise.

NEW PROBLEMS

South Korea's response to North Korea illustrates a significant complication in how we think about nuclear deterrence. In the past, conventionally armed missiles were too inaccurate to play a strategic role, and missile defenses offered too little chance of protection. But today, South Korea and other countries facing nuclear threats have increasingly invested in ballistic and cruise missiles with conventional warheads, aiming to kill the leaders of their adversaries before an order to use nuclear weapons can be given, and advanced missile defenses to mop up any missiles that might be missed. Not only South Korea, but also India, Taiwan, and a number of Middle Eastern countries have sought to develop advanced conventional missile and missile defense capabilities, dramatically complicating how we think about deterrence. Russian officials, too, frequently complain about the destabilizing effects of such systems. After all, such a strategy places an enormous premium on going first.

Yet this problem pales in comparison to the uncertainty generated by the emerging possibility of disarming cyberattacks that could take down command-and-control nodes. If in the past we counted the number of nuclear weapons on each side to determine a rough balance, how do we assess the possibility that there may be zero-day exploits in the systems used to launch missiles or operate missile defenses? As the term "zero day" suggests, such an attack would be a surprise using a previously unknown vulnerability. In a crisis, leaders contemplating the use of nuclear weapons might not be confident that their command-and-control systems were secure from hacking, since

zero-day exploits are by definition unexpected. Fearing a disabling cyberattack on nuclear command-and-control systems, those leaders might feel pressure either to use nuclear weapons early or to delegate launch authority to lower-level commanders.

It is tempting for those states now actively engaged in nuclear-deterrence relationships to look to the past for clues about how to muddle through. But the technological universe of the Cold War might as well be the era of the steamship. The number of states with advanced capabilities, and the challenges those capabilities pose to stability, present a world that looks very little like the simple models based on mutually assured destruction that dominated early discussions of deterrence.

Many experts still believe that technology will provide an escape from nuclear danger. At the beginning of the Cold War, many U.S. political and military leaders sought to preserve the American atomic monopoly. After the Soviets became a nuclear state, these same leaders believed thermonuclear weapons would provide a durable American advantage. A series of new technologies—missiles that could be carried by submarines or land-based vehicles, smaller warheads that could be packed in large numbers on a single missile, improved accuracy, unusual effects such as the so-called "neutron bomb"— all deepened the arms race, rather than providing an escape. Later came the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which by enabling the United States to destroy an incoming Soviet strike in flight, would finally provide the elusive solution to the nuclear nightmare. One after another, though, technological innovations proved fleeting, each offering a smaller and briefer advantage than the last.

Today, missile defenses and advanced conventional strike capabilities seem to offer hope for a technological escape. But even as these systems are growing in capability, the same underlying technologies that make them possible can also support the development of countermeasures to defeat them. The United States is testing a new hypersonic weapons system that can carry conventional payloads across the globe, offering a nonnuclear strike capability. China is testing the same kind of hypersonic system, but to carry its nuclear warheads past American missile defenses. The nuclear knot only tightens the more we grasp at each new technological marvel.

AN ESCAPE?

Any escape from the danger posed by nuclear weapons is going to take political, not technical, innovations—a fact recognized almost immediately by the scientists and engineers who brought the bomb into being. "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking," Albert Einstein wrote in an appeal to raise money for a public education effort, "and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe."

Having given humanity the technical capacity to destroy itself, many scientists sought a political solution, trying to bring about changes in human institutions and

behaviors that would allow us to adapt to the new, hostile technological environment. In the United States, this view led scientists to undertake public advocacy efforts. Einstein and Leo Szilard, among others, founded the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists "to carry to our fellow citizens an understanding of the simple facts of atomic energy and its implications for society." Other well-known scientists founded groups that evolved into the Federation of American Scientists and that published the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.*

Despite these efforts, the arms race between the United States and Soviet Union proceeded in earnest, producing decades of constant dread punctuated by deeply terrifying moments of crisis. Throughout that time, many Americans believed escape was just around the corner, with one more technological innovation that would provide superiority. But the Cold War ended through political accommodation, not technical wizardry. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev allowed the Berlin Wall to fall and the Warsaw Pact to disintegrate, then stood by helplessly as the Soviet Union itself succumbed to its own internal failures. Our escape from the arms race was a change in political orientation. Gorbachev called his approach to Soviet domestic and foreign policy "new thinking."

The arms race ended only because the Soviet Union ceased to be. Fairly quickly, though, a cottage industry arose to argue that the United States had outspent the Soviet Union, that the prospect of SDI had ended the arms race. This myth would prove costly, as afterward the United States allowed Russia's economy to collapse, fraying the country's social fabric and creating the conditions for the rise of Vladimir Putin, who promised to end the misery inflicted during Russia's brief experience with free-market democracy. The United States and Russia failed to alter their security relationship, leaving in place nuclear arsenals that continued to operate in the same fashion as during the Cold War. They likewise failed to create durable European security institutions. Although each side reduced numbers, both countries retained significant quantities of nuclear weapons vastly in excess of any conceivable purpose, embedded in an adversarial relationship in which an expanding NATO and far weaker Russia continued to base their security on the threat of nuclear war. Often, reductions were presented as having been enabled by new technologies—more accurate nuclear weapons or new conventional systems that could replace larger nuclear weapons. Simply put, smaller numbers merely masked a continuing belief that technology might offer more security from a resurgent Moscow than political solutions.

There is, of course, an alternative approach: the elimination of nuclear weapons altogether. The past decade has seen one of the periodic waves of enthusiasm for efforts at nuclear disarmament, beginning with the January 2007 publication of an unusual opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal,* signed by former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and

retired U.S. Senator Sam Nunn. The four men quite deliberately sought to use their reputations and gravitas as distinguished statesmen to create political space within Washington for a renewed discussion of disarmament.

Individuals and organizations embraced disarmament rhetoric for different reasons. Even among the four statesmen, there were apparent differences. For Shultz, the 1986 summit at Reykjavik where Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev nearly agreed to eliminate all nuclear weapons loomed large as a missed opportunity. For others, like Perry, elimination seemed more like an aspirational goal to create the necessary enthusiasm for other steps, such as the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. As Nunn observed in congressional testimony in 2007, "To me, the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons is like the peak of a very tall mountain. It's tempting and easy to say: 'We can't get there from here.' Today, we can't see the top of the mountain, but we can see that we're headed down instead of up." Yet others, including nongovernmental organizations like Global Zero, argued for complete disarmament as a near-term goal, proposing a time-bound convention on the elimination of nuclear weapons.

In 2008, Barack Obama, campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, saw that political space as an opportunity to distinguish himself from his primary opponent, Hillary Clinton. Obama pledged that, if elected, he would state clearly his desire to "set and seek the goal of a world with no nuclear weapons." Once in office, however, the Obama administration was forced to be explicit about how its disarmament rhetoric would be reflected in policy. During a speech in Prague in 2009, where the president made good on his pledge to state his support for disarmament, he felt compelled to add that he did not expect this to occur in his lifetime—an implicit rejection of those seeking a nuclear weapons convention. Later, in 2010, then–Undersecretary of State Ellen Tauscher told a summit convened by Global Zero, which was seeking the elimination of nuclear weapons within 20 years, that the president's commitment to disarmament was aspirational, and that efforts "likely will exceed 20 years and that it might not happen in his lifetime."

During the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, a quadrennial study of U.S. nuclear weapons and strategy, a group of distinguished experts, including Perry, pressed the president to pledge that the "sole purpose" of nuclear weapons was to deter an attack. The proposal was rejected, though with a promise to revisit it as more advanced conventional weapons increasingly replaced nuclear ones. Even President Obama seemed to place his hopes for disarmament in technology rather than political will.

This kind of thinking is not only harmful, but misguided—harmful because it makes the case that disarmament can only occur once we replace nuclear weapons with a fresh set of horrors. Russian experts, in particular, argued that the United States was merely promoting nuclear reductions to emphasize American conventional capabilities. They likewise warned that the very conventional capabilities that would allow the United States to

reduce the role of nuclear weapons would force Russia to increase its reliance on the bomb.

The contention that nuclear weapons can be eliminated only by introducing more robust conventional ones is misguided because it starts from the premise that nuclear weapons are essential for our security. In reality, though, they play less and less of a role, year after year. The United States has fought many wars in recent decades without ever seriously considering the use of nuclear weapons. Syria has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own civilians, prompting only a conventional military strike from the Trump administration.

Our nuclear arsenal increasingly exists solely to deter the nuclear weapons of other states. In any event, it is difficult to imagine the United States ever engaging in nuclear retaliation. Is it really plausible that the United States would further victimize innocent people in Pyongyang to punish Kim Jong Un for using nuclear weapons against Seoul or Tokyo? Is there any reason to think that Kim Jong Un cares for anyone other than himself and his immediate family? Do we really believe that Kim worries more about dying in a nuclear strike than he does about meeting the same mundane, brutal end as Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi?

If the world escapes the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, it will not do so because it has solved all of its political problems or because it has developed yet-more-destructive capabilities. It will do so because it has decided that basing our security on nuclear weapons is ultimately doomed to end in catastrophe and that the risks of living without the bomb are smaller than those of living with it. In this world, we will be no more likely to respond to nuclear weapons with our own than we would respond to a genocide by committing one ourselves.

The development of new conventional capabilities and missile defenses, rather than freeing us from these nuclear horrors, has only drawn its bounds tighter by reducing the time available to decision makers and rendering nuclear systems far too complex for any one person to understand. They have also allowed other countries to join in the nuclear fray, creating the possibility of local catastrophes and vastly complicating the dynamics of global deterrence. Advanced conventional weapons, missile defenses, and cyber-enabled weapons don't promise disarmament, except in trivial ways that leave in place the nuclear dangers.

The solution requires, above all, understanding that our fundamental problems are political—and that we are running out of time to change our institutions and our behavior. We can choose to adapt to new technology and devise other arrangements for our security, or we can simply wait, passively accepting our fate like so many societies throughout history that hoped they would survive the rapid technological changes around them—but did not. Technological solutions are a dangerous fantasy, a convenient excuse for our lack of will to take steps in line with the dangers we face. In the end, advances in technology won't save us; only advances in ourselves can do that. ●

Dishonorable Behavior

THE SCOURGE OF MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT AND THE WARRIOR'S MASCULINE CODE

ELIZABETH D. SAMET

"Crisis," "cancer," "silent epidemic," "stain [on] our force's honor"—these are among the ways senior Department of Defense officials over the past several years have described the incidence of sexual assault against women and men in the armed forces of the United States. Almost everyone thinks sexual assault in the military is a problem—and thinks about it as a problem linked to the presence of women in uniform, even though men are also victimized. Some Americans, however, including the current commander in chief, apparently believe it to be an inevitability. In the spring of 2013, when DOD leaders testified before Congress as it searched for solutions, Donald Trump tweeted: "26,000 unreported sexual assults [sic] in the military-only 238 convictions. What did these geniuses expect when they put men & women together?"

PJF MILITARY COLLECTION/ALAMY

In 2013, a U.S. Marine infantry training unit in North Carolina rests after a 20-kilometer march testing the performance of Marine women.

In early September 2016, in the midst of the presidential campaign, candidate Trump stood by his tweet as "correct." A month later, he defended more of his words, this time his boast about groping women at will, as "locker-room banter." It's worth quoting the relevant part of Trump's 2005 conversation with *Access Hollywood* host Billy Bush, as transcribed by *The Washington Post:* "And when you're a star, they let you do it. ... You can do anything. ... Grab them by the p---y. You can do anything." For these words, the nominee offered the quintessential non-apology: "I apologize if anyone was offended." The implication is that we ought to recognize such "banter" between men for what it is and not take it too seriously. Some observers dismiss scrutiny of such talk as symptomatic of an unwarranted political correctness. To them, it is a verbal performance that has no real import and no ultimate bearing on a speaker's behavior.

The Centers for Disease Control offers a different context for interpreting language that objectifies and denigrates. It lists the following attributes among communal and societal risk factors for the perpetration of sexual violence: "tolerance of sexual violence within the community," "societal norms that support male superiority and sexual entitlement," and "societal norms that maintain women's inferiority and sexual submissiveness." Among individual risk factors, the CDC includes "empathic

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deficits," "general aggressiveness and acceptance of violence," and "coercive sexual fantasies." These factors are demonstrated in what apologists call locker-room talk. It is naïve to think that certain people don't talk like that in certain places; it is something else to underwrite it—with a dismissive wave of the hand or with a vote.

My profession as a literary scholar consists in analyzing texts—in explicating a concatenation of words, meanings, and motives in the hopes of better understanding attitudes and values, capacities and limitations, kinship and difference. I have been trained to think that language, both the personal language of individuals and the corporate language of institutions, actually does bear a connection to who and what people and institutions really are—and aspire to be. Sometimes language also discloses obstacles that hamper progress. In the locker room, the classroom, the boardroom, or the recreational day room of a military unit, words reveal and conceal, protect and betray, refine and coarsen, sensitize and desensitize.

A good deal of the textual analysis I do occurs at West Point in the company of some of the military's newest members, college students and aspiring army officers who will lead formations of soldiers and who in that capacity may one day need to respond to a report of sexual assault in their command. No matter their good intentions in this regard—and I have long trusted to the good intentions of the young men and women I teach—these cadets are part of a culture that has, frankly, a great deal of difficulty thinking and talking about women and femininity. As sociologists, behavioral scientists, and cultural critics have observed, the military has long demanded the performance of masculinity. It is a subculture that finds strength in traditions that celebrate the superiority of men and a masculine ideal rooted in physical dominance, an ideal sustained by feminizing all those, in uniform and out, who fail to live up to it.

Especially at first, cadets cultivate the kind of solidarity often found among a hierarchy's most junior members. Such solidarity works to erase differences in sex, race, or ethnicity. In his memoir *Burning the Days,* James Salter describes his experiences at West Point in the 1940s: "The most urgent thing was to somehow fit in, to become unnoticed, the same." This impulse still prevails, and my students are more likely to define themselves against civilians than against one another, even though they have lived the bulk of their lives as civilians. Something else uniting them is the common language they learn—much of it technical and professional, some of it a kind of argot. The military trains service members as comprehensively in language as in marching or marksmanship. Part of any new recruit's socialization entails learning a new vocabulary for everyday items, for familiar and unfamiliar concepts alike, even for the hours of the day.

Among the linguistic tics cadets most quickly acquire is the use of the noun *female* in lieu of *woman*. They see it in formal briefings and official documents, and they hear it in everyday conversation. *Woman* is by far the more usual choice in civilian culture, where *female*

has at best a biological or zoological connotation and at worst a pejorative one. Yet *female* is ubiquitous in military culture. (The use of *male* as a noun is by no means commensurate.)

Perhaps the usage's strangeness is emphasized for me by the literary context in which I most often hear it. Lady Macbeth's summoning of deadly spirits to "unsex" her loses much of its force if we call her a female. Yet Lady Macbeth and Virgil's Dido and Jane Austen's Emma are routinely referred to as females in my classroom. And many, though not all, women there seem to be unduly anxious lest some comment of theirs be misconstrued as feminist: "Not that I'm a feminist," I have heard capable, otherwise confident women say, qualifying even the mildest assertion of a woman's rights.

To my ear, *female* carries a pejorative air in this setting, yet its speakers don't seem to hear the same thing. They've already been conditioned. Clinical, technical, bureaucratic—*female* ends up making a woman sound less like an individual human being and more like a participant in a laboratory experiment. Its frequency is an instance of the successful promulgation of an institutional term that is meant to defuse the presence of sexuality and sexual difference even, paradoxically, as it denotes biological identity. Women are as likely to use it as men. Indeed, while watching *The Invisible War,* a recent documentary about the sexual assault of women and men in the military, I noted with some sadness that even the victims, many of whom have been out of the service for years, tend to use it when speaking about themselves. Tellingly, one interviewee, Regina Vasquez, acknowledged that she was finally "learning how to appreciate being a woman again." Under what conditions, I wonder, might it be possible to appreciate being both a woman and a service member?

The military is a culture of uniformity and cohesion, its norms historically male even if often tacitly so. Whatever individuates—linguistically or otherwise—signals a threat to the viability of the system. Yet a sometimes embarrassing consciousness of difference persists. I recall that women in West Point's Corps of Cadets were among the most vocal opponents of a policy now long in place that cadets lock their doors at night to protect themselves from potential predators—a precaution entirely uncontroversial in civilian settings. At the time, opposition to the proposed policy rested on the existence of the honor code. To lock a door, the argument ran, was somehow to impugn the culture of honor. The most obvious appeal to the individual right of personal security tended to be eclipsed by a rhetoric of corporate honor. Over the years, the latter has also characterized the military's various campaigns against sexual harassment and assault, which have tended to emphasize the damage done to force readiness and mission capability by such crimes as much as they do the harm done to the individual.

The ubiquity of the word *female* betrays a lingering institutional confusion about how male culture should incorporate women without surrendering the elements of the historically masculine code of the warrior that are worth preserving. The persistence of a gendered understanding of military honor is nowhere more apparent than in the Uniform

Code of Military Justice, the law governing the conduct of all service members. Punitive Article 133 addresses "Conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman." The 2016 *Manual for Courts-Martial United States,* the guide for officers conducting such proceedings, offers a necessary clarification: "As used in this article, 'gentleman' includes both male and female commissioned officers, cadets, and midshipmen." It offers the following explanation:

> There are certain moral attributes common to the ideal officer and the perfect gentleman, a lack of which is indicated by acts of dishonesty, unfair dealing, indecency, indecorum, lawlessness, injustice, or cruelty. Not everyone is or can be expected to meet unrealistically high moral standards, but there is a limit of tolerance based on customs of the service and military necessity below which the personal standards of an officer, cadet, or midshipman cannot fall without seriously compromising the person's standing as an officer, cadet, or midshipman or the person's character as a gentleman.

This explanation is helpful as far as it goes, the attributes it enumerates laudable, but it remains silent about the rationale behind the application of an unambiguously restrictive term to women and men alike. It is as if the authors could not even conceive of appropriate conduct that wasn't also, at bottom, the conduct of a gentleman, the conduct of a man. Language has here been wrenched in a misguided attempt at inclusivity. The explanation fails to register the glaring fact that a woman, by definition, can never be a "perfect gentleman" and thus by extension never an "ideal officer." I'm reminded of Sam Spade's praise of his secretary, Effie, in Dashiell Hammett's novel *The Maltese Falcon:* "You're a damned good man, sister," Spade tells her. It is the highest praise of a woman his world knows: namely, that she acts like a man.

The Uniform Code of Military Justice is part of the United States Code. Amended as necessary by Congress as part of the annual National Defense Authorization Act, it is a living document that ostensibly evolves with the times. Its anachronisms are therefore suggestive, arguably the product of blind spots, resistance, or limited imaginations. At least to some degree, this particular anachronism was visible to those charged with interpreting the statute for the instruction manual. Yet they retained it.

The tenacity of the ideal of the "perfect gentleman," like another article's prohibition on dueling, reveals the archaic nature of the code that undergirds military law in the 21st century. Article 114 reads: "Any person subject to this chapter who fights or promotes, or is concerned in or connives at fighting a duel, or who, having knowledge of a challenge sent or about to be sent, fails to report the fact promptly to the proper authority, shall be punished as a court-martial may direct." The *Manual* goes on to define dueling as a fight with "deadly weapons" arranged for "private reasons" by "prior agreement." This article seems at once sensible—no one could deny that a duel subverts good order and discipline—and residual, a vestige of some lost age when

seconds arranged meetings in the misty dawn between aggrieved parties whose honor was at stake. We might think of the fatal meeting between Revolutionary War veterans Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton one summer morning in 1804.

It should come as no surprise that the American military prohibition on dueling dates all the way back to the first American Articles of War, established by the Continental Congress in 1775. It marks the Uniform Code of Military Justice as a code of honor, the product of a culture of honor, which, as the historian Joanne Freeman has shown in an elegant book on the subject, *Affairs of Honor* (2001), was essential to the early republic and to political actors like Burr and Hamilton: "In a nation lacking an established aristocracy, this culture of honor was a crucial proving ground for the elite." Honor was "entirely other-directed, determined before the eyes of the world." Resting in one's name and reputation for honesty in the public sphere, it was, moreover, the exclusive preserve of gentlemen: throughout most of recorded history, a woman's honor has depended primarily on her sexual conduct—namely, her chastity. And defending a woman's honor was theoretically part of a gentleman's portfolio.

The adultery narrative, and the obsession with civilian women's sexual fidelity in particular, has long occupied a central place in military culture, especially in the often-obscene cadences male military personnel used to sing while marching. Known as "Jody calls," these songs often featured a civilian man named Jody who stole a recruit's wife or girlfriend. Although cadences have been sanitized, the unofficial culture remains obsessed with adultery and saturated by misogyny, as suggested by the recent revelations that Marines and Marine veterans—the other services have also opened investigations—shared nude photos of female service members. According to *New York Times* reporter Dave Philipps, the sexual shaming of Marines was apparently "an evolution of a retaliatory practice called 'make her famous.' Marines would share nude photographs of girlfriends or spouses they believed were cheating through text messages to a broad swath of people, encouraging them to forward the photos." One former Marine, Alexander McCoy, provided an example in a *New York Times* op-ed: "My platoon even had a 'slut wall.' This drill-instructor-approved bulletin board was where recruits posted photos of girlfriends who broke up with them during training. The unspoken, but clearly understood, rule was that the raunchier these photos were, the better." The habitual suspicion of civilian women and the public humiliation of unchaste girlfriends and wives were thus extended to female Marines themselves.

THE USE OF WOMEN AND THEIR REPUTATIONS as a medium of exchange in a masculine commerce of honor has a long lineage. As Eugen Weber wrote in these pages years ago in an essay called "The Ups and Downs of Honor," it dates all the way back to the West's oldest war story, the *Iliad,* which "opens with a quarrel about honor." To

appease the gods and rid the Greeks of pestilence, Agamemnon is forced to surrender a concubine, and the only thing that will satisfy him is someone else's (here in Robert Fagles's translation): "But fetch me another prize, and straight off too, / else I alone of the Argives go without my honor." Possession of an enslaved woman is the only acceptable proof of honor's preservation, the only salvation from "disgrace." Weber argues, "The function of this tragedy, as of many others, is to glorify and heroicize ugly motives and ugly deeds. If we look at it afresh ... we will discover that the *Iliad* ... presents two gang-leading thugs, Achilles and Agamemnon, facing each other down, trading threats and insults over loot and women, and that the whole poem turns on plunder and pride and the sport of killing."

Weber analyzes the enduring appeal and destructive force of this kind of honor (in literature and in life), especially as it is expressed in military exploits: "So honor is renown, glory, riches, power; but these have to be won and preserved by *valiance*—valor, bravery." He draws a direct link between the "temerity" of the eponymous hero of the medieval French *Song of Roland* and the wild recklessness of the American West:

> No wonder that when George Armstrong Custer ... led a cavalry charge near the Little Bighorn River from which not one man came out alive, the *New York Herald* extolled the charge as "mad" and praised the catastrophic Custer's "strong impulses, great-hearted friendship and bitter enmities, nervous temperament, undaunted courage, will and determination."

Agamemnon and Achilles, Roland and Custer—all of these men express attributes of a figure the evolutionary biologists Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson call the "demonic male," who uses violence to achieve dominance. This figure, whom both men and women have proven "extraordinarily ready to admire, to love, and to reward," does not appear in all species, not even in all of the great apes. Although demonism is not limited to male animals—among hyenas, for example, female animals do the killing—female demons do rely "on male hormones to stimulate aggressiveness." Wrangham and Peterson conclude that it is especially frightening that humans match their demonic impulse with a "burning intelligence—and therefore a capacity for creation and destruction without precedent." The positive side is that our intelligence can, "through the acquisition of wisdom, draw us away from the 5-million-year stain of our ape past."

It is no accident that so many of Weber's examples are soldiers. Military culture is steeped in a tradition that defends honor and reputation by achieving dominance through destruction. Even when a war's cause is just and its actors infused with noble ideals, its means are always violent. The root of the soldier's appeal lies in the willingness, as Hamlet discerns in the Norwegian prince Fortinbras, to expose "what is

A fourth-century BC marble sarcophagus depicts a battle between a Greek hero and an Amazon warrior. In myth, Amazon women fought at Troy.

ERICH LESSING/ART RESOURCE, NY

mortal and unsure / To all that fortune, death and danger dare." As Samuel Johnson suggested in the 18th century, a military life "has the dignity of danger. Mankind reverence those who have got over fear, which is so general a weakness."

Historically, as should be clear by now, the dignity of danger—and therefore of the conquest and oppression daring frequently makes possible—has traditionally been associated with physical prowess and been achieved almost exclusively by men, and not necessarily by gentlemen. Women waited patiently at home for the end of war or, if their side lost, waited, like Agamemnon's human "prize," to be seized as part of the victors' spoils and then often to endure the murder of their children. An acceptance of this eventuality appears in Hector's vivid imagining of what will happen to his wife Andromache after his death:

> it is less the pain of the Trojans still to come
> that weighs me down ...
> That is nothing, nothing beside your agony
> when some brazen Argive hales you off in tears,
> wrenching away your day of light and freedom!

After the fall of Troy, Andromache will be enslaved, her son Astyanax, according to most versions of the myth, hurled from the walls by a Greek warrior. And thus the Trojan War ends where it began, in the rape of a woman. The modern English word *rape* is rooted in the Latin *rapere,* meaning to seize, snatch, tear away, or plunder. The rape of Helen of Troy—her abduction from the Spartan court of Menelaus by the Trojan prince Paris—is the casus belli; the enslavement of the Trojan women will be its consequence. And make no mistake: the abduction of those women would have entailed, among other things, sexual enslavement. As Homer tells it, the history of war is also a history of rape in the word's ancient and modern senses. As the several authors of the multidisciplinary study *Sex and World Peace* (2012) propose, societies in which women are the least secure are those that are also most likely to go to war.

The promise of rape has served as both threat and reward for soldiers. Shakespeare's villainous King Richard III motivates his troops before the Battle of Bosworth by demanding whether their enemies should be allowed to "enjoy our lands, lie with our wives, / Ravish our daughters?" In a speech tellingly omitted from many productions of *Henry V*, the eponymous hero of Agincourt tells the French governor of Harfleur to surrender while his troops are still within his control and thus prevent the "heady murder, spoil, and villany" that is their wont. "If not," Henry blusters,

> why, in a moment look to see
> The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
> Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;
> Your fathers taken by the silver beards
> And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;
> Your naked infants spitted upon pikes,
> While the mad mothers with their howls confused
> Do break the clouds.

This play is a favorite of soldiers because of its evocation of a "band of brothers," but this isn't the speech they remember or recite.

Lest we dismiss these threats of appalling violence as dramatic hyperbole, Paul Jorgensen reminds us in his thoughtful book *Shakespeare's Military World* (1956) that the historical chronicles substantiate Shakespeare's dramatizations. In *The Annales of England,* for example, John Stow records that after the 1586 surrender of Doesburg in the Low Countries, England's earl of Essex attempted in vain to stop his victorious army's continued violence. After the burghers surrendered and put themselves at the "mercy" of the English, the town's defenders attempted to pass through the breach in the wall with their wives: "It was a grievous thing to see how [the women] were ran-

sacked till the earle of Essex and divers other gentlemen came downe the breach, and by smiting and beating the soldiers made them leave off rifling them."

Rape is common in armies, like those of Elizabethan England, motivated largely by the promise of "spoils." Indeed, as the political scientist Tuba Inal argues in her book *Looting and Rape in Wartime* (2013), it was the apparent normality of rape in war that effectively delayed its prohibition by international law: "The fact that rape was thought to be inevitable because of the biological nature of men and women made it virtually impossible, in the eyes of the states, to prevent it, especially in war. Therefore, not wanting to commit to a prohibition that was bound to be violated by their armed forces, states made sure that they would not be accused of the violation of international laws." Although states accepted a "high obligation" to punish pillaging by signing on to The Hague Convention of 1907, Inal shows, it wasn't until the Rome Statute of 1998 that they accepted a corresponding obligation for rape. The 19th-century Lieber Code, adopted by the United States during the Civil War, was actually progressive among national codes of conduct in criminalizing rape, Inal notes.

THE EXAMPLES I'VE CITED have involved the rape of women regarded as belonging to the enemy. Two more recent examples, Russian soldiers' rape of German women on a massive scale during World War II and the programmatic use of rape as a weapon of war by Serb forces against captured Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, also fit this pattern. The legends most central to Western culture's founding mythology offer numerous examples of such behavior, perhaps most notably in the story of the Sabine women, who were lured along with their husbands to Rome under false pretenses and then abducted by the Romans, who were trying to increase their population and were short of women.

But many of the sexual assaults perpetrated by American military personnel today are directed at other service members: women and men who are internal rather than external targets for violent sexual predation. This is a particular act of betrayal. Some studies show that military sexual assault can produce greater negative consequences for victims than does civilian sexual assault. Legal scholar Rosa Brooks has noted that rates of sexual assault in the military are lower than those in certain civilian populations, such as college students. Some experts theorize that one of the reasons women who are victims of military sexual assault tend to suffer so intensely in the aftermath of the crime may be that the military places such a high premium on trust and cohesion. Assault violates the culture's elemental values.

The Roman historian Livy recounts a story of rape that offers a useful if imperfect parallel to such deep betrayal: the rape of the Roman matron Lucretia by the king's son Sextus Tarquinius. The story is fable posing as history; for that reason, it suggests the force

of literary narrative in exposing and shaping cultural expectations. Livy begins the story in a military camp. The Roman army, its initial assault on neighboring Ardea having failed, has "settled down into permanent quarters" to await the result of a long siege. The soldiers have a great deal of liberty, and the most senior of them gather in Sextus's quarters for a day of drinking and banter. Soon they start comparing the virtues of their wives. One of them, Collatinus, attempts to end the debate by suggesting that they go to Rome to see for themselves: "in a few hours we can prove beyond doubt the incomparable superiority of my Lucretia … There is no better evidence, I assure you, than what a man finds when he enters his wife's room unexpectedly." The men leave the siege for Rome, where they discover their wives "enjoying themselves with a group of young friends at a dinner-party, in the greatest luxury." Only Lucretia is absent, at home, "hard at work by lamplight upon her spinning."

This unequivocal triumph of "womanly virtue" and "proven chastity," Livy records, "kindled in Sextus Tarquinius the flame of lust, and determined him to debauch her." He steals back to Rome a few days later and presents himself as a friendly guest at Lucretia's house. He rapes her that night after telling her that if she does not consent, he will kill her and then destroy her reputation and that of her family by killing a slave and placing his naked body by her side. Lucretia subsequently summons her family to tell them what happened and then, over the protests of her relatives, kills herself after they vow to avenge the crime.

Livy turns the story into one of political liberation, as the tyrannical Tarquins, having violated every sacred bond with the people of Rome, are exiled so that the republic can be born. As the classicist James Arieti notes, rape consistently "precedes the major political developments" of Livy's first books. "Tarquin's ravishing strides," to borrow Shakespeare's phrase, become the emblem of tyranny. "My task from now on," Livy writes, "will be to trace the history in peace and of a free nation, governed by annually elected officers of state and subject not to the caprice of individual men, but to the overriding authority of law." Signally, it is the sight of Lucretia's corpse that awakens the wrath of the people. Alive, she believes herself to be defamed: "a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve." Her act preserves the only kind of honor her society permits her: sexual. And it simultaneously enables Rome to regain its political honor. Lucretia's shame dies with her, and she becomes an effective martyr to tyranny.

Steeling himself to murder Duncan, Macbeth conjures the image of the stalking Tarquin. In the same fevered soliloquy in which he imagines the dagger leading him on to the crime, Macbeth describes the night as the time of all that's sinister: "Witchcraft celebrates / pale Hecate's off'rings, and withered Murder, / Alarumed by his sentinel the wolf, / whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace, / With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design / Moves like a ghost."

As my students discovered this spring in a seminar on Shakespeare, rape and murder are linked in Shakespeare's imagination, both in *Macbeth* and in his own ver-

sion of Lucretia's story, the narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. In *Titus Andronicus,* a revenge tragedy written near the beginning of his career, "Rape and Murder" even appear as allegorical figures in a strange performance late in the play, in which they are impersonated by two actual rapists, Chiron and Demetrius, the sons of Tamora, queen of the Goths. Disguised as "Revenge," Tamora accompanies them to taunt Titus, the victorious general who originally brought them to Rome as defeated captives.

My students recognized immediately the ways in which sex and violence are intertwined on local and geopolitical levels in *Titus*. The play's criminal excesses move from the rape and mutilation of Titus's daughter Lavinia by Chiron and Demetrius to Titus's subsequent vengeance, which includes killing the rapists and baking their flesh into a pie he serves their mother before killing her, too. Lavinia's rape occurs in the second act, and it is referred to as rape by Titus and others. But the word is introduced in the play's opening scene, the first time we see Lavinia. She is the object of a quarrel between the new Roman emperor, Saturninus, and his brother Bassianus, to whom Lavinia has been betrothed in the past. Saturninus suddenly decides he wants to marry Lavinia, however, and Bassianus runs away with her. Their confrontation hinges on semantics, something at which the cadets became increasingly adept:

> SAT. Traitor, if Rome have law, or we have power,
> Thou and thy faction shall repent this rape.
> BASS. "Rape" call you it, my lord, to seize my own,
> My true betrothed love and now my wife?
> But let the laws of Rome determine all.
> Meanwhile am I possessed of that is mine.

This linguistic struggle between the two Roman brothers over the definition of *rape*—and over their respective rights to seize Lavinia—foreshadows Lavinia's actual rape. It also follows what one student called "the rape of the Goths": they are brought in chains to Rome by Titus, "laden with honor's spoils," who kills Tamora's eldest son as a "sacrifice of expiation" for the sons he lost in battle.

Lavinia is likened to Lucretia three times in the play, and after learning the identity of her rapists, Titus and Marcus swear to avenge her the way the Romans once avenged Lucretia. But in the end, Lavinia, who in a literal sense cannot die by her own hand—her rapists cut them off—is killed by Titus, whose sense of family honor, and of her shame, demands her death. She cannot live to serve as a reminder of his family's humiliation. The grotesque attack on Lavinia serves many purposes, not the least of which was a kind of crowd-pleasing sensationalism, but it also works to mark out this rape as unambiguous. Here can be no lingering suspicion of Lavinia's consent, as there is in the persistent cultural associations of rape with adultery, violated chastity,

and shame—associations that Lucretia's tale preserves and that predators, like Tarquinius, often use to their advantage in their crimes. Yet Lavinia, like Lucretia, must be sacrificed in the end to preserve honor among men.

THE CADETS WERE KEENLY ATTUNED to the ways in which vanquished enemies and women more generally are silenced in the play's exploration of male honor. They see all this so clearly in the strange and unfamiliar world of *Titus Andronicus*—a Renaissance Englishman's layered imagining of ancient Rome. But do they see the subtler suggestions of women's inferiority in their own culture: in the ideal of "the perfect gentleman" or the peculiar designation of "females" and the insidious sense of unworthiness that the term communicates?

In all sorts of official and unofficial ways, a preoccupation with male honor persists today in a force that is now in the process of integrating women into combat roles, the last bastions of male exclusivity within it. The most recent annual report on sexual assault in the military, released by the Department of Defense in May, estimates 14,900 victims, down from 20,300 in 2014. Reporting of incidents increased from 23 to 32 percent during the same period—37 percent of sexual assaults are reported to police nationally—while 32 percent of those responding asserted that the reporting process generated an outcome that met the department's definition of retaliation: "professional reprisal, ostracism, and/or maltreatment." In March 2017, Helene Cooper reported in *The New York Times* on the increase of sexual assault at West Point and at another of the nation's military academies, Annapolis. Cooper called particular attention to the problem of underreporting:

> The Defense Department acknowledged that even as reports of sexual assaults increased, many young men and women who are assaulted do not report it. "Results from this year's report demonstrate that estimated instances of sexual assault and sexual harassment greatly outnumber reports made to authorities," Anthony M. Kurta, who is performing the duties of the under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, said in a letter to Congress submitting the report.

Men and women are both victims of sexual assault in the military, but women are much more likely to speak out. Forms of retaliation, according to a 2015 Human Rights Watch report, include making charges of " 'collateral misconduct,' such as underage drinking or adultery," against women who report being victims of sexual assault. Consensual and nonconsensual sexual behavior are linked in the military in a way they are not in civilian society because of the inclusion of adultery in the Uniform Code of Military Justice's catchall Article 134, which prohibits "all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit

upon the armed forces, and crimes and offenses not capital." The act of threatening an adultery charge against a woman who claims to have been raped can happen only in a culture that understands a woman's honor in exclusively sexual terms. Moreover, officers who retaliate in this way and those who abet them clearly view the presence of victims rather than the perpetration of crimes as the greater insult to their honor.

Demonstrating the institution's capacity for change, the current definition of consent in the Uniform Code of Military Justice is extensive and clearly designed to afford maximum protection to the victim. Unlike the punitive articles on dueling and conduct unbecoming a gentleman, Article 120, "Rape and Sexual Assault Generally," has been extensively revised in recent years. Change in law is one thing, change in culture quite another. It has been the perceived failure of the military's response to reports of sexual assault that has prompted lawmakers, led by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), to sponsor the Military Justice Improvement Act, which would transfer "the decision whether to prosecute serious crimes" from the military chain of command to "independent, trained, professional military prosecutors."

I began by rehearsing the several ways that senior DOD officials have described sexual assault in their ranks: "Crisis," "cancer," "silent epidemic," "stain [on] our force's honor." Too often—and not only or even primarily in recent history—that stain has attached to the victim rather than the perpetrator of rape. To transcend its own history, today's military would do well to determine which aspects of its sense of honor are the vestiges of an ancient brutal code that cared more for dominance than the dignity of others, and which are worth the keeping.

The mission of DOD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office is "to enable military readiness and reduce—with a goal to eliminate—sexual assault from the military." This mission statement and the training materials DOD employees regularly receive tend to emphasize corporate rationales: sexual assault distracts from the mission, reduces combat effectiveness, and erodes unit cohesion. Successful prevention and response are in turn described as "force multipliers." But the strongest argument against sexual assault that the military can make isn't that the crime's existence makes it a less effective fighting force. If evidence suggested this or another crime made the military a more effective force, would we authorize those crimes?

Instead, the best argument rests on an acknowledgment of essential human dignity—the same acknowledgment that enabled President Lincoln and others to reimagine the nation's founding promise as extending to all Americans rather than to an original few. The roots of such an argument can be found in the military's own code—its repudiation of "acts of dishonesty, unfair dealing, indecency, indecorum, lawlessness, injustice, or cruelty." But first some future reviser of the code must acknowledge that the "moral attributes common to the ideal officer" do not belong exclusively to "the perfect gentleman," but might instead be embodied to an equal degree by anyone who elects to serve. ●

Reading Thoreau at 200

WHY IS THE SEMINAL WORK OF THE GREAT AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALIST HELD IN SUCH SCORN TODAY?

WILLIAM HOWARTH

One of the smaller ironies in my life has been teaching Henry David Thoreau at an Ivy League school for half a century. Asking young people to read Thoreau can make me feel like Victor Frankenstein, waiting for a bolt of lightning: look, it's moving, it's alive, it's ALIVE! Most students are indifferent—they memorize, regurgitate, and move serenely on, untouched. Those bound for Wall Street often yawn or snicker at his call to simplify, to refuse, to resist. Perhaps a third of them react with irritation, shading into hatred. How dare he question the point of property, the meaning of wealth? The smallest contingent, and the most gratifying, are those who wake to his message.

Late adolescence is a fine time to meet a work that jolts. These days, Ayn Rand's stock is stratospheric, J. D. Salinger's, once untouchable, in decline. WASPs of any gender continue to weep at *A River Runs Through It,* and first-generation collegians still thrill to *Gatsby,* even when I remind them that Jay is shot dead in his gaudy swimming pool. In truth, films move them far more; they talk about *The Matrix* the way my friends once discussed Hemingway or Kerouac. But *Walden* can still start a fight. The only other book that possesses this galvanizing quality is *Moby-Dick.*

Down the decades, more than a few students have told me that in bad times they return to Thoreau, hoping for comfort, or at least advice. After the electoral map bled red last fall, I went to him for counsel too, but found mostly controversy. In this bicen-

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tennial year of Thoreau's birth, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854) is still our most famous antebellum book, and in American history he is the figure who most speaks for nature. The cultural meme of the lone seeker in the woods has become Thoreau's chief public legacy: regrettable for him, dangerous for us.

The *Walden* we think we know offers an unnamed narrator, weary of town life, who builds a small house by a woodland pond. There he lives for a year in solitude, observing inner and outer weather. (Or possibly *she* lives, since we never learn the narrator's gender.) Early on, the author says these pages address "poor students," yet *Walden* is also a midlife dream of solitude, a daring act of therapy in which an older writer revisits a headstrong, often pompous early self. This doubled narrative, both memoir and spiritual journey, never ranges more than a few miles from the family home in Concord, Massachusetts, or costs more than 30 startup dollars—$28.12, to be exact (he kept accounts); in today's currency, about $730.

Who among us would not benefit from 12 bargain months of freedom? In real life, Thoreau never got that time. The small house by the pond—he always calls it a house, not a hut or cabin—was a literary lab for free days and weekends, intended from the first as a temporary structure, as its sand cellar and rough-laid foundation attest. Philosopher lairs were fashionable then, in England and America; antebellum Concord

PABLO SANCHEZ/FLICKR; PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID HERBICK

had several. In his front yard, Bronson Alcott reposed in a bower of branches, hoping for admirers. The chief local celebrity, Ralph Waldo Emerson, planned a retreat for the woodlot he owned on Walden. He hacked brush and imagined designs until he lost interest and let Thoreau use the site instead. For years Emerson had hired his serious young neighbor as handyman, editorial assistant, and au pair; his casual question when Thoreau finished college—"Do you keep a journal?"—altered the course of American letters. Privately, Emerson thought Thoreau had no thirst for success. Perhaps a pond sojourn, demonstrating Transcendentalist virtues, would prove a useful advertisement, for mentor and acolyte both.

Today, Walden and its woodlands form a state park in metro Boston, with nearly 500,000 annual visitors, but in July 1845, its shores were a dismal mix of stump-cut lots, old industrial sites, and squatter shacks. When the 28-year-old Thoreau sat reading in the doorway of his recycled chicken coop, the water views he loved were framed by telegraph poles. Wind singing in the wires delighted him, an upwelling of the life invisible. He called the wires his telegraph harp, seeing them as analogs to the Aeolian harps often placed in town windows. "I put my ear to one of the posts," he told his Journal in 1851, "… and it seemed to me as if every pore of the wood was filled with music, labored with the strain—as if every fibre was affected and being seasoned or timed, rearranged according to a new and more harmonious law."

At the opening of *Walden,* he writes, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Death was on his mind: he went to the pond planning to write an entirely different book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,* which recounts a trip with his beloved brother, John, who died in 1842 of lockjaw.

Walden is a literary accident. It began as a ragbag of recycled talks, scrapped bits of essays, and a great deal of personal venting. Many passages seem addressed to an invisible companion. Midway through his pond sojourn, Thoreau spent a night in the Concord jail for refusing to pay a poll tax that funded, in his view, a pro-slavery war with Mexico. After someone (possibly an aunt) paid his fine, he went to climb mountains in Maine. Caught in a storm high on Mount Katahdin, he took shelter near a patch of burnt forest, where the sight of regenerating foliage filled him with wonder: "The *solid* earth! The *actual* world! The *common* sense!" Thoreau rarely used italics or exclamations, but in this passage from *The Maine Woods,* he needed half a dozen to accept loss and seize life. "*Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *Where* are we?"

The two experiences, jail and mountain, became fodder for public lectures, but they also transmuted *Walden* from parochial rant into cosmic encounter. As literary historian J. Lyndon Shanley demonstrated in the early 1970s, that evolution required numerous distinct drafts, over nearly a decade. You can see the book's outline, rising

"I HAVE NOW A LIBRARY OF NEARLY NINE HUNDRED VOLUMES," HE CONFIDED TO HIS JOURNAL, "OVER SEVEN HUNDRED OF WHICH I WROTE MYSELF."

like a trout to the surface, in other early writings: his Journal entries on hoeing beans and plastering a house; a lecture on "getting a living" that argues for a simple life; a survey map of the pond, hinting at its unseen depths.

In autumn 1847, the year he turned 30, Thoreau left the pond house and never returned. *A Week* appeared in 1849. Its attempt to combine moral discourse with travel narrative was high-flown and digressive, and the book failed. Thoreau had to pay for unsold copies, hauling the loose sheets home from the railway in a wheelbarrow. ("I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes," he confided to his Journal, "over seven hundred of which I wrote myself.") To cover his publishing debts, he became a surveyor. Soon he was Concord's most trusted practitioner, an experience that helped him improve his family's manufacturing business and also understand his three-river town as an ecosystem, something quite new in Western thought.

The failure of *A Week* meant postponing his vague plans for *Walden*. Private Journal entries occupied more of his time and grew into a masterpiece of natural observation, often mined for the pond book. Yet as generations of irritated readers have discovered, *Walden* remains a bifurcated, even schizophrenic, text, with one of the worst openings in literature. Concord had many fine stylists—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott—but Thoreau seems to have shown the manuscript to no one, except perhaps his sister Sophia, and even the Journal holds few hints of the accreting book. Thus *Walden*'s initial chapter, "Economy," is overlong, dated, and harsh, a warmed-over early lecture barely hinting at a later self, as when he casts his life as a mystic search for a lost hound, a bay horse, and a turtledove. ("You will pardon some obscurities, for there are more secrets in my trade than in most men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from its very nature.")

Sometimes I urge students who detest "Economy" to skip to the book's second beginning, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For." From that point, his real theme, the life of secrets, of learning *from* writing, flows unimpeded, launched by the announcement that two years at the pond will appear as one, a signal that he has left literal history—and

entered the realm of fable. Thoreau's favorite narrative schemes are the journey and the calendar. *Walden* blends both, as time becomes a summer stream, its current sliding toward eternity.

Walden is also a relentlessly sociable narrative, crowded with encounter, incident, and remembered conversation. The chapter "Reading" prompts us to study every text "deliberately and reservedly," since words are "the work of art nearest to life itself." "Sounds" explores the language that "all things and events speak without metaphor," sensed in moments of revelation. "Solitude" brings an entirely new sense of self—"This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore"—and poses not commands but subversive questions: "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?"

In 1856, the date of this image, Thoreau wrote, "I am not worth seeing personally—the stuttering, blundering, clodhopper that I am."

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Fall chill awakens his sense of place as a crucial mystery. Visits to "The Village" mean walks home along dark paths, guided by instinct; the adventure of isolation makes him feel lost yet found, better able to "realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations," whether those neighbors are muskrats or barbershop gossips. "The Ponds" examines Walden's paradoxes. Both wild place and working waterscape, it is deep and pure, with no visible inlet or outlet; a shimmering, beguiling surface cloaks depths said to be bottomless. "It is Earth's eye," he decides, "looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature." The book turns on this discovery: that our identity is what we are able to behold.

In "Higher Laws" Thoreau questions our drive to kill and eat animals, and by extension our appetite for violence and possession. The only true America, he tells an immigrant neighbor, is one where we are at liberty to do *without*. By late fall he turns to "Brute Neighbors" to learn survival. As he rows on Walden's dark waters, a single loon teases him, diving and ducking, leading him always to the pond's enigmatic center.

Winter brings dormancy and reflection. In "House-Warming" Thoreau stocks his

woodpile; in "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors" he explores ruins and cellar-holes to recall Walden as a traditional refuge for town outcasts. Finding a barred owl asleep on a branch, he rouses it to fly away to a higher perch, "where he might in peace await the dawning of his day," like other "Winter Animals."

In the final cold month we reach the book's climax, as Thoreau turns to "The Pond in Winter." On icy mornings he wakes to ask of purpose and place, "as what—how—when—where?" He watches ice gangs, a hundred strong, harvest five tons in three weeks, for shipment to Bombay and Calcutta. He also conducts the first-ever formal survey of Walden, charting its length and breadth, then sounding its depths. As the loon foretold, the lines cross at the deepest point, 102 feet. He reasons that a great "law of average" prevails everywhere, just as the profile of hill and cove mirror the unseen bottom, the harmonies of fact and spirit again revealed.

As his year's circle closes, that balance repeats in the equinox of "Spring," when a day epitomizes a year, passing evenly through the cycle of light and dark. On a slope cut by the railway, least romantic of landscapes, he sees thawed and flowing mud shape complex patterns of "sand foliage," proof that the lowliest elements, patiently observed, evolve into thrilling creation, from leaves to bodies to words. "The very globe," he exclaims, "continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes winged in its orbit." To love the earth is a private and a public good, he sees at last, for in "our own recovered innocence we discern the innocence of our neighbors. ... Only that day dawns to which we are awake." The self-involved lecturer has evolved. He shuts his door and returns to town, saying only, "I had several more lives to live."

When published, *Walden* caused barely a ripple. One of its few reviews came from England, a nation with little use for American prose. The British reader praised *Walden*'s "great beauty" and its "deep poetic sensibility." That notice was signed "George Eliot."

Thoreau lived to write far more than *Walden*. His blueprint for radical reform, the 1848 essay "Resistance to Civil Government," commonly known as "Civil Disobedience," directly shaped world history, thanks to such admirers as Gandhi, King, and Mandela. His private labors as a philosophical naturalist are finally receiving their due as well. Concord friends dismissed his daily walks as eccentricity, especially when he tucked plant specimens inside his "botany box," a large floppy hat; half the town demanded that he organize their pleasure sails, picnics, and berry-picking parties. ("Ask me for a certain number of dollars if you will," Thoreau grumbled to his Journal, "but do not ask me for my afternoons.") What peers considered pointless rambles, climatologists now see as priceless research. Thoreau's detailed studies of Concord rivers, streams, and ponds have brought belated appreciation of his role as America's first limnologist, just as his scrupulous botanical records have become essential to the study of global warming.

Thoreau died of tuberculosis at 44, one year into the Civil War. He never saw Europe, or anywhere west of Minnesota or south of Philadelphia. We wonder what he might have done with more time; had Sam Clemens also died at that age, we would not have *Life on the Mississippi, Connecticut Yankee,* or *Huckleberry Finn*. Thoreau had no taste for fiction and was an indifferent poet, but he wrote sharp character studies, and his travel books about Canada, Maine, and Cape Cod show a gift for story structure, pinned to the ways that landforms shape journeys. He might have tackled Reconstruction and its effects on freed slaves and natural resources, or toured California, like Whitman and Emerson, or investigated Native American cultures (his last words were "Moose" and "Indian"). Most likely, he would have continued as a devoted observer of Concord and its natural history. His late-career speculations on the dispersal and succession of plants, if completed, could have rivaled Darwin's, for Thoreau was an early, avid reader of *Origin of Species,* and the first American to field-test its ideas.

Our times have never needed the shock of Thoreau more. We face a government eager to kill all measures of natural protection in the name of corporate profit. Elected officials openly bray that environmentalism "is the greatest threat to freedom." On federal, state, and local levels, civil liberties and free speech are under severe attack. Thoreau is too; the barriers to reading him as a voice of resistance—or reading him at all—are multiplying swiftly.

First, he is becoming an unperson. From the 1920s to the early 2000s, *Walden* was required reading in hundreds of thousands of U.S. high school and college survey courses. Today, Thoreau is taught far less widely. The intricate prose of *Walden* is a tough read in the age of tweets, so much so that several "plain English" translations are now marketed. "Civil Disobedience" was a major target of McCarthyite suppression in the 1950s, and may be again.

Second, as F. Scott Fitzgerald said, in the end authors write for professors, and the scholarly fate of Thoreau is clouded. Until the postwar era, Thoreau studies were largely left to enthusiasts. Academic criticism now argues for many versions of Thoreau (manic-depressive, gay, straight, misogynist, Marxist, Catholic, Buddhist, faerie-fixated). But other aspects still await full study: the family man, the man of spirituality, the man of science—and the man who wrote the Journal.

Those who study his peers, such as Emerson, Melville, or Dickinson, routinely examine each author's entire output. Thoreau scholars have yet to deal fully or consistently with the Journal, which runs longer than two million words (many still unpublished), and fills 47 manuscript volumes, or 7,000 pages. It is the great untold secret of American letters, and also the distorting lens of Thoreau studies.

I spent years reading manuscript pages of the Journal, watching Thoreau's insights take form, day upon day, as unmediated prose experiments. Unlike Emerson's volumes,

ALTHOUGH THE ENTRIES SEEM WRITTEN OFFHANDEDLY, IN FACT HE WORKED FROM FIELD NOTES, TURNING GROUND-TRUTH INTO LITERATURE.

arrayed in topical order, Thoreau's Journal follows time. Some notations arise from his surveying jobs, hiking through fields and pausing to note discoveries: a blooming plant, a foraging bird, the look of tree-shadows on water. His eye and mind are relentless. Although the entries are in present tense and seem written *currente calamo,* offhandedly, with the pen running on, in fact he worked from field notes, usually the next day, turning ground-truth into literature. He finds a riverbank hollow of frost crystals, and replicates exactly how they look, at a distance and then closer, imagining how they formed. His interest is in the objects, but also in how a subject perceives them—the phenomenology of observation and learning. He finds a mushroom, *phallus impudicus,* in the form of a penis: "Pray, what was Nature thinking of when she made this? She almost puts herself on a level of those who draw in privies." His father's pig escapes and leads its pursuers all over town, helpless before the animal's cunning. He watches snowflakes land on his coat sleeve: "And they all sing, melting as they sing, of the mysteries of the number six; six, six, six." None of these entries reached print; they celebrate instead the gift of writing.

Third, Thoreau's literary genes have split and recombined in our culture, with disturbing results. Organic hipster? Off-the-grid prepper? His popular image has become both blurred and politicized. If Thoreau as American eco-hero peaked around the first Earth Day (1970), today he is derided by conservatives who detest his anti-business sentiments and by postmodern thinkers for whom nature is a suspect green blur. (I still recall one faculty meeting at which a tenured English professor dismissed DNA as all right, "if you believe in that sort of thing.")

Thoreau has always had detractors, even among his friends. Emerson's delicate, vicious smear job at his funeral, a masterly takedown in eulogy form that enraged family and friends, set the pattern for enemies like James Russell Lowell (though happily not Lowell's goddaughter, Virginia Woolf). Our own period sensibilities can flinch when confronted with Thoreaus we did not expect—the efficient capitalist, improving graphite mixes for the family pencil works; the schoolmaster who caned nine pupils at

random, then quit in a fury; the early Victorian who may have chosen chastity because his brother John never lived a full life. (Henry's most explicit statement on the subject of sex, even in the Journal: "I fell in love with a shrub oak.")

Yet lately I have noted a new wave of loathing. When witnesses to his life still abounded, the prime criticism of Thoreau was Not Genteel. Now, the tag is Massive Hypocrite. Reader comments on Goodreads and Amazon alone are a deluge of angry, misspelled assertions that Thoreau was a rich-boy slacker, a humorless, arrogant, lying elitist. In the trolling of Thoreau by the digital hive mind, the most durable myth is Cookies-and-Laundry: that Thoreau, claiming independence at Walden, brought his washing home to his mother, and enjoyed her cooking besides. Claims by Concord neighbors that he was a pie-stealing layabout appear as early as the 1880s; Emerson's youngest son felt compelled to rebut them, calling his childhood friend wise, gentle, and lovable.

The most recent eruption is "Pond Scum," a 2015 *New Yorker* piece of fractal wrongness by Kathryn Schulz, who paints Thoreau as cold, parochial, egotistical, incurious, misanthropic, illogical, naïve, and cruel—and misses the real story of *Walden,* his journey from alienation to insight. I have spent a lifetime with Thoreau. I neither love nor hate him, but I know him well. I tracked down his papers, lived in Concord, walked his trails, repeated his journeys, and read, twice, the full Journal. I knew we were in the realm of alternative facts when Schulz dismissed Thoreau as "a well-off Harvard-educated man without dependents." For that misreading alone, Schulz stands as the Kellyanne Conway of Thoreau commentary. He was the first in his family to attend college, a minority admit (owing to regional bias against French names), working-class to the bone, and after John's death, the one son, obliged to support his family's two businesses, boarding house and pencil factory—inhaling graphite dust from the latter fatally weakened his lungs. He was graduated from Harvard, yes, but into a wrenching depression, the Panic of 1837, and during Walden stays, he washed his dishes, floors, and laundry with cold pond water.

Did he go home often? Of course, because his father needed help at the shop. Did he do laundry in town? We do not know, but as the only surviving son of aging boardinghouse-keepers, Thoreau was no stranger to the backbreaking, soul-killing round of 19th-century commercial domestic labor. He knew no other life until he made another one, at Walden.

Pushback on "Pond Scum" was swift and gratifying, and gifted critics such as Donovan Hohn, Jedediah Purdy, and Rebecca Solnit, who have written so well on Thoreau, reassure me that as his third century opens, intelligent readers will continue to find him. But the path to *Walden* is, increasingly, neglected and overgrown. I constantly meet undergraduates who have never hiked alone, held an after-school job, or lived off schedule. They don't know the source of milk or the direction of north. They *really*

don't like to unplug. In seminars, they look up from *Walden* in cautious wonder: "Can you even *say* this?" Thoreau worries them; he smells of resistance and of virtue. He is powerfully, compulsively original. He will not settle.

What is the future of reading Thoreau? That depends on how well we absorb his advice on resisting predation and falsity, but also on our ability to take science to heart, as he did. Thoreau is a prophet of the Anthropocene. His awareness that Walden was lovely yet broken speaks to our moment, when PCBs and Spam cans foul the Marianas Trench, Antarctica melts, pollinator drones may replace dying bees, and the cumulative weight of industrialism deforms the earth's surface. The cold, clear Walden he knew is silted now with heavy metals, radioactive traces, and industrial phosphorous. "What use is a house," Thoreau wrote a friend in 1860, "if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

I am certain that he would have loved parts of our era: the miracle of music on demand, the wonder (especially to a surveyor) of GPS, the wealth of YouTube nature videos. He would have loved the power of databases and admired current attempts to make *Walden* interdisciplinary and hyperlinked, in order to translate and visualize his narrative for a text-averse world.

In the world that trained me, official literary and historical editions mattered hugely. They were the new scriptoria, creating perfect renditions and textual genealogies of each significant corpus of American papers for posterity. But posterity is here, and manuscript curators may need instead to take their cue from the impromptu gangs of coders who recently worked around the clock for a month to save NASA earth-science data before the new government could erase it all, gag the federal scientists, and shutter the research programs.

For a long while, we editors thought our big problem was going to be succession. Ten years ago, the Thoreau Edition board held a national search for a new project head, and could find no qualified candidate. Not one. Now we face a sudden darkness, as elected officials bay for an end to humanities budgets. I well recall the convoluted application process for National Endowment for the Humanities funding, and also how that money gave the Thoreau Edition, and its many peers, the luxury of getting it right. Perhaps scholars and students who care about the literary record should scan the hundreds of manuscript pages of still-unedited Thoreau, release it all onto the Internet, and crowdsource the job of transcription, one page per reader. If the Congress is ready to send the stately papers of Jefferson, Madison, and Lincoln into oblivion, expect no mercy for the Concord dissenter, even if Emerson did, in the end, say that "no truer American existed than Thoreau."

Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine, he urges in "Civil Disobedience." Roused readers are formidable; reading Thoreau is one American privilege still open to us all. Let us make sure it stays that way. ●

POETRY

Sound and Sense

LANGDON HAMMER

Often poetry depends on the poet's finding not the right word, but the wrong one. Well, maybe not the wrong word, but the word that we didn't know was right—the word we didn't expect—in advance.

This effect typically involves a substitution of one word for another along the semiotic axis of language—that is, language as a sign system in which words link with other words by virtue of their sounds and letters, rather than the semantic axis along which they point beyond words to ideas and things. Poetry only works toward the second, referential axis by exploring the first. Its business is with the words inside, under, or to one side of other words. From the chaotic play of sound and letters, and their potential nonsense, fresh meanings come.

Mary Jo Salter has described this basic but subtle dimension of poetry in an essay on Emily Dickinson, whose poems are rife with "unwritten puns": "for instance, when [Dickinson] writes, 'All the Heavens were a Bell,' she may also want us to think that all the Heavens were a Hell." "Heaven" and "Hell" are paired terms whose connection is so deeply ingrained in us that Dickinson's striking choice of "Bell" subliminally summons "Hell" even as it swerves from it.

We hear Salter listening to words in this way in her own poems. Consider how close the title phrase in "So Far" is to the poem's key word, "suffer." The whole poem is generated by that proximity. The moral and epistemological question Salter is raising—what do any of us know about life "so far"?—itself suggests an answer: "so far" we know "only that we suffer"; and we suffer "for nothing," without result or reward, because living is by nature ongoing and incomplete. *So far/suffer:* by making us ponder the connection, Salter implies that the very limitedness of our knowledge is part of what we suffer from.

Or take the poem "Aloe." Here, the self-healing properties of the houseplant, with its soothing juice, remind Salter that, even if she suffers, she must—and can—take care of her own wounds. Although she might resist it out of stoic pride, self-care is something the plant seems to say she should "allow." The aloe advises her to ease up and make allowances. Magically, the name of the plant itself has healing powers.

Over a long career (she will publish her eighth book of poems this summer), Salter has written a poetry of daily life, rooted in family and personal relationships, set forth in rhyme and meter, and defined by rhetorical balance and sly wit in a manner reminiscent of Richard Wilbur and Elizabeth Bishop (mentioned here in "Fruitcake").

We tend to think of rhyme and meter as expressing a high degree of control on the part of the poet. But they involve putting the sound of words first, and to that extent, letting words take the lead. The point is to enter a "dimension," Salter jokes in "Last Words," not so different perhaps from "dementia," or the "possessive"—no, "progressive"—aphasia that she is afraid of inheriting from her father. Playfully and painfully, that poem points up how close are verbal inspiration and failure, the wrong word and the right one. When the poet is "mating mistakes," she is making meaning.

The Fortune Cookie

No one remembers any more
what the fortune cookie said.
What's come down in family lore
is that it was *read:*

that is, that it was she
who read it, though she was only three.
The two nice daycare ladies
had stood by as she flipped

open the Sleeping
Beauty lunchbox;
observed her as she slipped
the cubes of cheese, the apple slices

into the obedient mouth
that had been promised
the cookie as reward.
Then she cracked it as you would

a new-laid egg,
and out spilled the golden
present of a long long sentence
and all their cries of praise.

Her father came in his car.
Yes, it was he who'd taught her

the game, letter by letter.
We tested her, they told him,

with other words, and everyone
who'd doubted her was wrong!
What would she be when she grew up?
Some masterpiece of a thing.

She wasn't listening.
The future was a sweet
to eat tomorrow, with a secret
on the tip of its paper tongue.

Last Words

Forgive me for not writing sober,
I mean sooner, but I almost don't
dare see what I write, I keep mating mistakes,
I mean making, and I'm wandering
if I've inherited what
my father's got.

I first understood it when he tried
to introduce me to somebunny:
"This is my doctor," he said,
then didn't say more, "my daughter."
The man kindly nodded
out the door.
I thought: is this dimension
what I'm headed for?
I mean dementia.

Not Autheimer's, but that kind he has,
possessive aphasia: oh that's good,
I meant to say progressive.
Talk about euthanasia!
I mean euphemasia,
nice words inside your head not there,
and it's not progress at all.

No, he's up against the boil
after years now of a sad, slow wall
and he's so hungry,
I mean angry.

Me too. I need to get my rhymes in
while I still mean. I mean can.

So Far

All we can say so far
is that we suffer
for nothing.
Not for the self, or
for people at home.
Not for the wisdom.
Not for the love.
Not for the looking
out to the future,
or into the nothing
that goes back so far.

We suffer because
suffering's there.
We hadn't been warned
it got here first,
that it drank all the water
before we were born.
Soon enough we'll join
all the people behind us
who died of thirst
and can tell us nothing
so far.

Aloe

Somewhere between the store
where I'd bought the aloe plant
and its home arrival,

one waxen, prickly spear
had been rent in half.
Why leave a dead thing dangling

by a string? I snapped it off.
A pearly unguent oozed
into my palm, as if

I were the one bruised.
Well, if it thought so, sure.
I rubbed it in my skin.

So rough: I hadn't taken
care in so long ... And why
hadn't I cried for help?

In the morning, a fresh ally
by instinct with itself,
the aloe had sealed up

its broken fingertip—
a low, but unbowed beauty
in its handicap.

My hand, not soft, was softer.
Well then, healing aloe?
Something to allow?

Fruitcake

When Marianne Moore, thanking her friend
Elizabeth Bishop for a gift,
writes, “It is the one exciting
fruitcake in my experience,”

what do we make of this? Does Moore
wish to lampoon herself, or fruitcakes,
or both, or does she honestly
not guess she’s funny? Chances are

she is well aware, and at fifty-five
is squarely in the business of
underscoring the caricature
of the eccentric she always was.

Are we predictably
singular too? If we bring joy
to others sometimes, will that do?
How long can we fend off the ennui

of our idiosyncrasies?
When Moore writes Dr. Williams, “The poems
have a life, a style, that should not surprise me,
but does; like dew-drops on the coat

of a raccoon,” we’d like to answer
“Raccoons are irrelevant here,
even as surprises, and furthermore
nobody thinks you saw those dew-drops,”

but her game anticipates us. We shake
the dew off our coats; resolve not to say
Miss Moore is nutty as a fruitcake,
because *that* is a cliché.

Never expected! Always fresh!
We must be; never, though, as nutty
as Mother, who chloroformed the cat
one day when Marianne was out

because her attachment was too great.
Poor, elated Robert Lowell
grew weary of both lunacy
and repeated bouts of getting well,

of stepping backward down his “ladder
to the moon.” “I’d never drown myself,”
someone said he said. “But if I had
a button I’d switch myself off.”

My Mongolian Spot

AN EPHEMERAL BIRTHMARK IS A RARE GIFT, CONNECTING ME TO GENERATIONS SPANNING THE CENTURIES

JENNIFER HOPE CHOI

FIRST YOU SHOULD KNOW: I was born with a blue butt.

So was my mother.

Thirty-two years and many thousands of miles of land, sky, and sea separated her creation from mine, yet we emerged the same: wailing, mad for first breaths, 10-fingered, 10-toed, chick-like tufts of black hair nested atop our soft skulls, and, incredibly, a wavy-bordered blue spot not unlike that of Rorschach's inkblots, blooming across our tiny bums—blue like ice-cold lips, blue like the ocean at midnight, Picasso's most melancholic bluest of blues.

By the time I learned about my blue butt, it was gone. Like a spy's secret message written in vanishing ink, the spot disappeared sometime after my fourth birthday. The timing seems strange—to think that as soon as I could form my earliest memories, my blueness had already left me. In one such memory, I recall taking a shower with my mother. The water beat down on my shoulders thunderously. I'd misbehaved (perhaps, refused to wash my hair), and as I slid open the mottled glass door to escape, my mother smacked my bottom. Because this is my earliest butt-related memory, I mined it recently, hoping to uncover any clues of my former blue self. I remember wailing in the showy way children do when they're old enough to know better, then peering behind me for proof: the fierce, fiery outline of my mother's hand. But I can recall nothing but plain tush. I was neither red nor blue. We stood as nude as newborns,

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un-shy in our nakedness, water cascading across my mother's towering body as she fumed and I wept in her shadow.

I ONCE ASKED MY MOTHER why we were born blue, and she said matter-of-factly, "Because we have Mongolian blood." Then she walked away casual-like, as if such a spurious-sounding answer did not inspire its own army of follow-up inquiries. My parents were born in South Korea, but I was born in Los Angeles, raised in a nowheresville suburb on frozen TV dinners and laugh-track sitcoms. Jennifers were American. I was American. My blue butt and Mongolian goods seemed practically mythological.

But I wasn't alone. My older sister Laurie was also born blue, and her marking lasted well through kindergarten. We know this because Laurie's teacher asked my mother to come to class one day for an emergency conference. The teacher had taken Laurie to the bathroom, seen her blue butt, and mistaken the spot for an enormous bruise. When my mother told me this story, more than a decade had passed, but the encounter still annoyed her—not for the absurdity of the accusation so much as for the teacher's ignorance. "We are Korean," my mother explained, as if forced to qualify that the grass was green, or that birds could fly. "We are all born this way."

I didn't believe her until I saw a blue butt for myself. After my aunt gave birth to a boy, my mother and I visited to coo over the baby. When it was time to change his diaper, my aunt plucked him up by his ankles, folded his little naked body, and there it was: a bona fide blue butt in the flesh. I felt oddly proud at the sight of it. We were all part of the same club, our secret selves hidden from the rest of world.

My mother pursed her lips at me, as if to say, "See? Told you." But I was too distracted by the striking shade of blue before me. Not happy or cheery, but deeply dark hued. A kind of sorrowful inheritance.

RUBBERBALL/ALAMY; PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID HERBICK

When my mother told me about our purported Mongolian blood, I was 14 years old. The most I'd heard about Mongolia back then pertained to the Khans, namely Kublai and Genghis, the latter at best known as the founder of the Mongol Empire and at worst considered a genocidal warlord. In the 13th century, all of East Asia had been seized through countless Mongol invasions, in a reigning fiefdom that eventually sprawled as far as central Europe, Indochina, India, and the Iranian plateau, so it's true my family's history is inexorably tied up in that messy business. Still, it seemed depressing to think how all that remained of the largest contiguous land empire in human history were these vanishing blue butts—and a stir-fry joint in our local shopping mall's food court.

At Great Khan's Mongolian Festival, you picked all the veg and meat toppings you wanted, which were then cooked with chewy yellow noodles right in front of you on a round, flattop plancha grill. Talk about a fall from grace. The signage had jaunty script, illuminated in primary-colored neon, reminiscent of an entrance to a theme park ride, and the mascot was a mischievously grinning, side-eye-glancing Mongolian warrior, with wispy facial hair, crossed double swords, and that iconic horned helmet. I did not order here often—doing so inspired a specific breed of guilt. The mascot at Panda Express was an innocuous cartoon bear, yet here I was bankrolling a caricature I knew inherently to abhor. But rather than fessing up to my own fraudulence, I let my mind be empty, and chose instead to monitor the simple tactility of my order's progress, which usually entailed a Mexican dude sautéing my food with a pair of comically oversize chopsticks. Or I could watch the blondies across the way at Hot Dog on a Stick, in their cheery uniforms and shako caps, pumping vat after vat of 100 percent fresh-squeezed, real lemonade.

Mongolian blood aside, my mother to this day enjoys reminding me that I am "100 percent Korean." She thinks this purity is a gift, says so with immodest superiority, the way some people talk about 100 percent Egyptian cotton sheets. But in a rather complicated twist, my paternal grandmother, a Choi, was raised in Manchuria. That area is now largely referred to as Northeast China, but also happens to include parts of modern Mongolia. To our knowledge, she never lived in a yurt, or *ger,* as native Mongolians call them. Neither did she dine on marmot meat, or ride horses, or extract alcohol from goat's yogurt, as some rural Mongolians do. My grandmother, a learned woman, said to be "ahead of her time," studied philosophy in Tokyo and theology in Connecticut. She did not wear an ornate horned helmet. We do not know what region of Manchuria she lived in, whether she encountered Mongolians, or, for that matter, whether she considered herself Mongolian too, in spirit or by blood. But she was born bearing the legendary, budding blue that links us all.

ACCORDING TO KOREAN FOLKLORE, our blue spots derive from *Samshin Halmoni,* Grandmother Spirit, a deity whom many families prayed to for their unborn child's good health. Samshin slaps children to life when they are born, leaving behind the indelible blue spot. In other derivations, Samshin beats the baby blue, until it is forced from the womb.

Science tells us that melanin-containing cells trapped in the deeper dermis during embryonic development cause our strange coloring. The result is a blue birthmark, often found on the bottoms of East Asian babies, that dissipates by age five. Western medicine classifies the blue butt as "congenital dermal melanocytosis," or in common parlance, the Mongolian spot. A German doctor named Erwin Bälz coined the term in 1883. Bälz "discovered" blue butts on Japanese babies while serving as personal physician to Emperor Meiji and the Japanese imperial household. Our blueness existed far before 1883, though not in the world of white men, and so it goes.

But if the babies were Japanese, why did Bälz deem them Mongolian? The landlocked nation of Mongolia did not yet exist the way we know it today; it hadn't even acquired independence from the Manchu, or Qing, dynasty.

It just so happens that the Mongolian that Bälz referred to was not ethnic but taxonomic. To understand this fully, we must traverse backward and west, to 18th-century German scholar Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. In a later edition of his 1775 work, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind,* Blumenbach divided the human species into five definitive categories: the Caucasian or white race, the Malayan or brown race, the Ethiopian or black race, the American or red race, and the Mongolian or yellow race. Blumenbach determined these classifications based on his expansive collection of skulls, gathered from around the world. Beyond this private interest and study, no scientific proof supported his naming system. Blumenbach's races were as improvised and subjective as any other made-up name.

I suppose these kinds of enduring choices last, however apocryphal the origin, because people rely on the certitude of names. Sometimes we base this knowledge on one man's personal opinion. Sometimes we call that process *science.*

ACCORDING TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS, my skull type, that of the Mongoloid variety, existed as far back as 10,000 years ago. Physical anthropologist Carleton Coon wrote in his 1962 book, *The Origin of Races,* that my ancestors, the Mongoloid subspecies, existed throughout most of the Pleistocene era, which ended about 11,700 years ago.

If you're like me, you might be alarmed by the word *Mongoloid.* Set that aside for the moment, and consider this: science tells us that Mongoloid is merely another suitable classification we ought to accept for the Asian race.

It is unclear when *Mongolian* and *Mongoloid* fused into synonymous taxonomic foils, but most credit Blumenbach for the origin of both terms. Their casual interchangeability is rampant across early ethnological texts. A three-race model, popularized in the 1940s, is still employed by some forensic anthropologists today. It features the Mongoloid in an achingly archaic trio alongside Caucasoid and Negroid. Like the Mongolian, the Mongoloid includes populations from East, Central, and Southeast Asia, as well as eastern Russia, the Arctic, the Americas, some of the Pacific Islands, and northeastern sections of South Asia.

One might consider this lumping together of visible minorities an example of what Swedish botanist and zoologist Carl Linnaeus called a wastebasket taxon, also known as wastebin, dustbin, or catch-all taxon—a term to classify organisms that do not fit into any other preexisting category, a taxonomical junk drawer, if you will.

Supposed physical features of the anthropological Mongoloid, compiled from *Stanford's Compendium of Geography and Travel for General Reading* (1882), *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* (1939), *Mapping Mongolia: Situating Mongolia in the World from Geologic Time to the Present* (2011), and *Forensic Facial Reconstruction* (2004):

- Thick skin cuticle and an abundance of carotene; yellowish complexion.
- Lightly oblique eyes, small nose, black lank hair, sparse beard, salient cheek bones.
- Glabrousness, i.e., little or no facial or body hair. According to Carleton Coon, both "Negroid and Mongoloid skin conditions are inimical to excessive hair development except upon the scalp."
- Upon the scalp, hair is coarse, straight, blue-black and weighs the most among the races.
- Possesses 450 sweat glands per square inch of skin; both "American blacks" and Caucasoids possess 750 sweat glands per square inch.
- Relatively broad, flat faces; absent brow ridges.
- Upper eyelid characterized by puffiness, extra fat, and the epicanthic, or "Mongolian" fold (the skin fold on the upper eyelid that covers the inner angle of the eye, which creates the Asian "almond-shape").
- Gracile skulls due to the Mongoloid's very recent evolutionary development.
- The "Mongolian spot."

Physical features present in my family, and other observations:

- The "Mongolian spot."
- I have never seen my father sport a beard. I don't think he can grow one. His

legs, arms, and chest are completely hairless. He combs the plentiful, strong hair on his head definitively to the right.

- Until we entered a sauna, I had never seen my mother sweat.
- When I was a child, my mother told me I was lucky, because I'd been born with big eyes. But some days at recess, my classmates pulled the corners of their eyes back so that their prismatic green or blue pupils disappeared behind taut slits of skin. They said, pleased, Look, I'm you! Once, perplexed by their game, I retreated into the bathroom to examine my reflection. I studied every crease and curve, as if beneath the lens of a microscope, for any indication of the grotesque mask they'd presented me. I returned to class believing my eyes were not slanted but broken, for I could not seem to see what they could.
- The back of my grandfather's skull is as flat as a woodblock. His head is shaped this way because he was a *chak-heh* baby. Back in rural prewar Korea, "sweet babies" did not squirm when you laid them down but remained obedient and still, so still their supple skulls flattened to the earth. This was a favorable trait in his day, a lifelong indication of one's goodness. The clear verticality of my grandfather's profile is, to me, his finest feature, the kind of bare elegance you might find in the clean lines of a half moon in the night sky, or the smooth horizon at sunset. When I was a baby, my mother laid me on my face to sleep. She wanted my skull to be round. She wanted my skull to be beautiful.

IN HIS STUDY OF CRANIOMETRY, Blumenbach believed the Caucasian skull to be the utmost superior in physical beauty—the flawless benchmark from which all other races diverged. Blumenbach also concluded that man originated from the Caucasus Mountains, the stunning terrain where Noah's Ark supposedly came to rest. The skull Blumenbach examined for his findings had actually belonged to a Georgian woman, but he chose to propagate the broader term *Caucasian* for his perfect race instead. He did not, however, conceive of that name. The first appearance of *Caucasian* can be traced to a 1785 publication, *The Outline of History of Mankind,* written by Christoph Meiners, a colleague of Blumenbach's at the University of Göttingen and a fellow German philosopher.

Meiners divided humanity into two categories: the beautiful race and the ugly race. The beautiful Tartar-Caucasians were light-skinned, "gifted in spirit and rich in virtue," whereas the Mongolians, the dark-skinned, ugly race, exhibited weakness in body and spirit, and deserved to be controlled through despotic rule.

No actual science had ever upheld Meiners's racial hierarchy. Subjective beauty

served as the essential, and only, criterion. In her 2010 book *The History of White People,* historian Nell Irvin Painter details the questionable nature of Meiners's politics; he merely relied on selective ethnocentric travel literature to inform his narrow theories. I recently stumbled upon a portrait painting of Meiners and was surprised to find in his face an uncomely asymmetry: knobby, ruddy nose; meaty, wide brow; thin, flaccid lips. To me, only in the most charitable conditions could he be categorized as "beautiful."

Thankfully, today, Meiners and his written works are all but forgotten. The legacy of his colleague, Blumenbach, however, often referred to as the Father of Scientific Anthropology, appears everlasting. His *Caucasian* has seamlessly entered our modern lexicon, and we utter the word, oblivious to its arbitrary origins, amenable to its superior beauty, unknowingly acceptant, too, of its ugly Mongolian twin.

In Korean, the word for America is *Miguk,* meaning "Beautiful Country." My maternal grandmother, a Bahk, is of the post–Korean War generation that believes everything Made in the U.S.A. is superior. She wants Skippy peanut butter shipped from the States to Seoul even though she can find it in her neighboring town's E-Mart, a most epic grocery store that trumps all other grocery stores. Besides Skippy, E-Mart sells artisanal earthen cookware, age-defying face emulsions sourced from rare snail slime, fine rice wine, and perfectly ripe watermelons accompanied by well-engineered, complimentary straw satchels. To her, certain things Koreans still do best: kimchi, cars, electronics. But she has a habit of flipping over any packaged good to inspect its origins. "Ah," she'll say, pointing to the label, relieved. "Yoo-essuh-aye. Numba one."

When I graduated high school, this same grandmother offered me the chance to change my eyes. Double-eyelid surgery, or Asian blepharoplasty, all the rage in Seoul, is a cosmetic operation that reshapes the skin around the eye. Many Asians, like myself, are born with a monolid, meaning there is no natural crease above the lash-line. Asian blepharoplasty removes upper eyelid fat, and after a new crease is stitched in to the lid, the eye appears bigger, rounder, and to some, more attractive.

Perhaps my grandmother wanted me to look round-eyed for the same reason she cautioned me against suntanned skin, or why she often permed her own black lank hair. She did not consider herself part of an inferior, ugly race, but it seems she ever aspired to revise her body and mine, according to some extrinsic standard I could not then easily comprehend.

Still, for as long as I've been alive, whenever my grandmother looks at me, monolids and all, she does not see someone from Asia. I may have inherited her bridgeless nose or gracile skull, but to her I have always belonged to a different, superior stock.

To her, my mother is Korean, but I am a *Miguk saram,* American: *the one from Beautiful Country*.

ACROSS THE POND, in Surrey, England, on the sprawling, wooded acreage of Earlswood Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles, Dr. John Langdon Down once conducted a curious research. Down, who served as medical superintendent, believed in a natural system of classifying the "feeble-minded," based on how their facial features best resembled Blumenbach's five races. He published his conclusions in an 1866 study, *Observations on an Ethnic Classification of Idiots*. In it, Down deduced that some patients' disabilities rendered them more akin to those who resembled "the great Caucasian family"; there were also "several well-marked examples of the Ethiopian [i.e. African] variety," those of "the Malay variety," and those resembling "people who ... originally inhabited the American Continent." But Down devoted particular attention to what he deemed the "Mongolian type of idiocy." Certain European patients possessed slanted eyes, accentuated by epicanthic folds, an irrefutable characteristic of the Mongolian race.

After years of genetic research, Down's Mongolian discovery would earn a proper name: Trisomy 21. Those born with Trisomy 21 possess all or part of a third copy of chromosome 21, rather than the usual two. Today, we know this by a different name: Down syndrome. But for more than a century, doctors, patients, and scholars all referred to the condition as "mongolism," or "Mongolian imbecility," in other words, the Asian type of idiocy.

Some argue that Down never referred to his Mongolian idiots as *mongoloids,* but our current, pejorative understanding of the term most certainly emerged from his work. Just as well, Down did not imply that those afflicted with mongolism appeared objectively unattractive; still, we have since come to associate such features with an undesirable mental condition.

So those, unlike me, who opt for Asian blepharoplasty can altogether eliminate that undesirable, Mongoloid quality from their eyes, the Asianness from the Asian eye via a simultaneous epicanthoplasty, which removes our tainted epicanthic folds. According to Los Angeles plastic surgeon Kenneth Kim, Asians with a "harsher appearance" will experience, post-surgery, a "softer, more open look." I examined a few corresponding photos on his website, and couldn't help but agree; the "After" women looked far more beautiful, energetic, kind. It occurred to me that to the world, I might resemble some walking "Before" photo: tired, mean, or worse—"feeble-minded." Perhaps my grandmother had hoped to repair me of this. It's possible, too, that every Asian eye surgery is a kindred, unconscious act, to excise that which binds us to our slant-eyed, blue-bummed Mongolian past.

There are mongols, and there are mongols.

An entire century lapsed before anyone objected to the inevitable discrepancy between Down's ethnic idiot and the East-Central Asian group native to the nation of Mongolia.

In 1961, the prestigious British scientific journal *The Lancet* agreed to call the condition a new name—Down syndrome—because the increased participation of Chinese and Japanese scientists "impose[d] on them the use of an embarrassing term." But the change received considerable opposition. To commemorate the centennial of Down's landmark paper, several specialists met in London in 1966. Controversy over the disorder's name sparked debate, as this transcript offers:

> *Dr. Cummins:* Objections have been raised against the [terms] "mongolism," "mongol," and "mongoloid" because it is said that they resurrect the idea of racial affinity. I think this is an imagined difficulty. We use many terms containing embalmed errors from the past. The words "aorta" and "artery" never arouse in us thoughts of these vessels as air tubes as it was with the ancients; we just use the words as words. And the same applies to the word mongolism.
>
> *Dr. Matsunaga:* I am not happy with the words mongol, mongolism, and mongoloid, although I agree that they are convenient to use. The basic question is this: is it ever justified in medical terminology to misapply a name, especially a geographical one, to a disease when this name becomes inappropriate because of increased understanding of the underlying pathology?
>
> *Dr. Penrose:* I use the term mongol and have taken refuge from the accusation of racial discrimination because the Down-syndrome type of mongol is not spelt with a capital letter whereas the racial type of Mongol is.

An imagined difficulty. Recently, I performed a Google search of *mongol,* which reaped very real, unsettling results, from cruel British schoolyard slang to Uuganaa Ramsay's story. A decade after scientists were arguing over semantics, a young woman named Uuganaa lived inside her family's Mongolian yurt. Unlike my paternal grandmother, Uuganaa cooked marmot meat over open fires, traveled on horseback, distilled vodka from fermented yogurt. Her family wore sheepskin-lined *deels* to keep warm and used sun-dried cowpats for fuel. I think she studied English because she wanted to belong to the modern world. When she paged through a dictionary to find the word *Mongol,* the primary definition described a man or woman whose patronage traces to Mongolia. The secondary definition: a person with Down syndrome or the mentally ill.

I have used the term mongol and have taken refuge. According to her 2014 mem-

oir entitled *Mongol*, Uuganaa eventually moved to Great Britain, where she married a Scotsman and gave birth to two children. Her second child, Billy, was born in 2009, sporting the blue Mongolian spot. But Billy also possessed an extra chromosome, characteristic of Trisomy 21. Devastated by his prognosis, Uuganaa and her husband sought solace from their doctor, but he suggested that Billy's disability might not be physically noticeable, given Uuganaa's ethnic background. In other words, a Mongol is a mongol, capitalized or not.

Embalmed errors from the past. A year later, in 2011, British comedian Ricky Gervais casually tweeted to his scads of followers a series of puns and jeers: "Two mongs don't make a right," "Good monging," "Night night monglets." The nonprofit organization Down's Syndrome Scotland scolded Gervais in a public statement; his frivolous use of *mongol* derivatives appeared irresponsible, and callous to those with learning disabilities. But to Gervais, a mong is a generic term for a div, a dummy, an idiot, devoid of its former implications to Down syndrome. Gervais elaborated in his own statement: "I clearly explain that words change. … Not only am I not referring to people with Down's syndrome, I also explain that I am not associating the word with its old derogatory meaning."

Words change. We forget the mongoloid was first Asian. Or how a tiny fold in the eyelid transformed the Asian into imbecile. Gervais had it wrong, though. There is no dissociating a word fully from its old meaning. It might disappear from the surface, like our blueness, but the essence remains, an entombed truth, our indisputable origin.

Or maybe the words don't change at all—we do.

…

My mother says there is no Korean word for our blueness. Perhaps this is based on the same principle that applies to French doors or Dutch ovens. In France, glass paneled doors are known as *portes-fenêtres,* or door-windows. In the Netherlands, a "Dutch oven" is called a *braadpan,* which is used on the stove to fry meat. Maybe, to Koreans, our blueness is not unusual. Our butts are just butts.

Still, if I ever have a child, I will tell her about our shared mythos. I'll say that she might have the gift of Mongolian blood coursing through her tiny core, like my mother's, like mine. Or how Samshin Halmoni may have slapped her blue, to life. At some point she might want to alter her eyes, her skin, the essence of her being, which is why our blue period lasts much longer than four brief years. In the impossible void where words and science have failed us, I want her to know that being born blue is exceptional, some magic in our chemistry, a bright and bruised and blooming sign that says, if only to each other, we belong. And though she might feel otherwise, I hope she learns that it is not her responsibility to stay easily defined. Some things, like being blue, are meant to remain ineffable, impermanent, unnamable, unnamed.

Things Sweet to Taste

MUCH TO MY REGRET, I NEVER TRULY KNEW THE WOMAN WHO HELPED RAISE ME

LESLIE STAINTON

EVERY SPRING, WHEN THE FIRST stalks appear in the market, I buy rhubarb to make a pie. I follow a simple recipe, folding eggs, sugar, lemon juice, and diced fruit into a shallow crust. Bake for 40 minutes. Lately I've taken to growing rhubarb in my back yard so that as winter morphs into spring and summer into fall, I can harvest the plant myself, recalling, as I slice through the thick stalks, a woman I loved.

She is bent over in my grandfather's garden, barely visible behind its white fence. With a paring knife in one hand, Carrie works quickly, severing the crimson stems near their base, gathering a bride's bouquet of rhubarb in her arms. As she heads back to the house, she pauses at the compost bin, slides the knife once more into the blushing flesh, and severs the giant, mildly toxic leaves from the more desirable stalks. Then she makes her way across the lawn to the kitchen. It is early morning, still cool on this June day, but by the time she serves dinner several hours later, at noon, it will be hot and muggy, and she'll need to wipe her forehead with the back of her hand before she enters the dining room, where I sit, 10 years old, waiting for dessert.

Beyond the open windows, the brown, listless Rappahannock River flows against a hazy sky. Water beads on our glasses. To move is to sweat. We wait at the table, polished to a gloss and topped with cloth placemats and napkins, porcelain plates, and sterling silver forks and knives inscribed with a gothic *P,* for Pettigrew, my grandfather's sur-

Leslie Stainton, the author of two nonfiction books, is at work on a memoir about her slaveholding ancestors. Her writing has been published in *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and *Michigan Quarterly Review.*

CARRIE AND THE AUTHOR; COURTESY OF THE STAINTON FAMILY

name. We've eaten roast chicken, butter beans, and the potato rolls I watched rise in a pan this morning beside the stove.

The gray door to the kitchen swings open, and Carrie appears, her hands full of blue plates. She sets one down in front of my grandmother, a second in front of my grandfather, then strides regally around the table, pauses, and lowers a third onto my placemat. Each plate holds a small triangle of crust filled with bright yellow custard flecked with bits of ruby fruit. I pick up my fork and spear a mouthful.

When I tuck into Carrie's rhubarb pie now, 40 years later, I notice its sudden

THERE'S A SORCERY TO THIS FRUIT, WHICH BLOOMS TWICE AND IS REALLY A VEGETABLE, AN IMPOSTOR, A STRADDLER OF WORLDS.

tartness masquerading as sweet. In parts of the United Kingdom, the first rhubarb of the year is harvested by candlelight in dark sheds. The practice supposedly produces a sweeter, more tender stalk, but isn't it also a nod to the occult nature of the plant, whose sour leaves harbor poison? There's a sorcery to this fruit, which blooms early in the spring and late in fall, preferring frost to sun, needing winter's whisper to flourish. This fruit that is really a vegetable, an impostor, a straddler of worlds.

In my baby book, a photograph taken in 1956 shows me at seven months in Carrie's arms, on what must have been the first of my family's annual summer visits to Virginia. With my square face, I could be a boy if not for my striped dress, its hem resting on Carrie's arm. A stout woman in her 30s, she wears a short-sleeved cotton dress, buttoned high, and a white apron trimmed in eyelet lace. Something—kitchen grease?—has spattered its front. She stares at the camera without smiling. Because the flash has caught her glasses, you can't see her eyes, just two small explosions of light.

Both my grandmother and Carrie loved to tell the story of how, when Carrie was a teenager growing up on the far side of the Rappahannock, she saw a house being built on the opposite shore. As Carrie watched the skeletal structure become a two-story colonial with a long back yard sloping down to the river, and later saw lights glowing inside the house, she wondered who would live there. The answer, of course, was my grandparents—Carrie always grinned at this revelation—and eventually Carrie herself, as their housekeeper and cook.

This was just after the Second World War. My grandparents, having decided to retire near friends in Essex County, Virginia, bought adjoining lots for a house and vegetable garden, as well as farmland across the road for cattle and pigs. They filled their new home with Oriental rugs, mahogany furniture, and watercolor landscapes. On the floor beneath the dining room table, near my grandmother's seat, my grandfa-

ther installed a small buzzer that, when pressed, summoned Carrie from the kitchen.

"Ma'am?"

"You may clear the plates now and bring dessert, Carrie."

"Yes, ma'am."

Carrie lived over the garage, halfway up the back staircase in a narrow room with rose-patterned wallpaper, a linoleum floor, a dresser, and a single bed. The room had an attached bath, a TV set, and an air conditioner wedged into a window overlooking the driveway. I don't remember ever being invited inside. What I knew of its secrets came from glimpses filched on my way up and down the stairs to the kitchen. I found it dizzying to behold this small and forbidden space, to think of Carrie as someone who in her free time watched television, fussed with her hair, smoked (I'd seen her with a cigarette on the back porch), talked on the phone, harbored plans that did not include us.

A SQUEEZE OF LEMON, two tablespoons of flour, and a dash of salt. Fruit, sugar, eggs. Farther south, the cops are turning dogs and hoses on people in the streets, and the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. is organizing marches, but here in Virginia, Carrie is making rhubarb pie. She mixes shortening, more flour, and water together in a blue bowl, then turns out the dough on a board and coaxes it into a disk. She works at a low table beside an open window where a fan rattles, fluttering the edges of her apron.

Out back the river glitters in the early morning sun. Crabs, eels, and jellyfish lurk in the water's depths, and along its banks are arrowheads, bits of clay pipe, and colonial coins—snatches of the history of this place. We're not far from Washington's birthplace at Wakefield, Robert E. Lee's at Stratford Hall. Had Carrie come of age in the 19th rather than the 20th century, she likely would have been enslaved to one of the families whose estates lined these shores. I've seen the arrangement at nearby Stratford, in Westmoreland County: manicured grounds, a majestic plantation house, kitchen garden, and off in the distance, rows of slave cabins.

My grandmother grew up outside Brunswick, Georgia, on land that was once similarly apportioned: slave quarters and a slave cemetery stood under a grove of live oaks a quarter-mile from the spacious house that for more than 40 years headquartered my great-great-great-grandfather's cotton plantation, the source of his family's wealth and prestige until war left them destitute. My grandmother, born in 1898 and raised to detest the invaders who had impoverished her kinsmen, could not forgive. "Virginia is as far north as I'll ever go," she insisted, pressing her tiny foot into the carpet as if to mark a line.

"O how I hate the Yankees. I am done with them," her great-uncle wrote as he watched his family's small empire begin to disintegrate in 1862. "I hope when peace

is made a law will be passed to kill every one who ever dares to put his foot on our soil."

A century later, my grandmother wrote to my uncle, her only son: "It still makes me mad at those Yankees stripping the Southern families."

In a second photograph taken during my first seven months, my grandmother and Carrie are standing together in the doorway that separates the kitchen from the dining room. My grandmother, unaccustomedly aproned, holds me while Carrie proffers some sort of indistinct sphere. An apple?

During the years that followed, when my brother and sister and I spent part of every summer with our grandparents in Virginia, I watched my grandmother traverse the divide between kitchen and dining room several times a day, especially in the morning. I would often come downstairs for breakfast to find her sitting at the metal table in the kitchen, making a list of the day's meals with Carrie. A fan thrummed behind them.

"We'll have meatloaf at noon, and for supper, crab salad. You may leave it in the icebox. The children will eat that."

"Yes, ma'am."

My grandmother sighed, rose, and walked back into the air-conditioned living room where she and my grandfather spent their days.

A curious balancing act existed in that house, a split between the oven-heated kitchen and the damp, manufactured chill of the family quarters. For a time I moved freely back and forth from one to the other. I preferred the mess of the kitchen: the steam from pots stewing on the stove, the pea pods and carrot scrapings on the back porch, and Carrie and her sister, who sometimes visited, sitting at the table, laughing. The back end of the house had a revelry that was absent from the front rooms, where my grandmother held court, organizing lessons and activities to edify us, and my grandfather sat in an armchair, sedately turning the pages of the newspaper. The kitchen was noisy, Carrie exuberant. *Child,* she'd crow when she saw me. I'd pick at whatever she was preparing, and although she'd shoo me away, I sensed she didn't mind my being underfoot, not really. I liked to stand next to her at the sink as she tossed a basket of crabs under the faucet and turned on the hot water.

"I *love* to watch 'em squirm," she sang, and shot me a jubilant look.

As the crabs clattered to escape, Carrie nudged them back underwater with a fork until they stretched their claws in agony and at last fell limp. She dropped them into a pot of boiling water on the stove, where they turned a phosphorescent orange. Later she sat alone on the back porch, dismantling their warm bodies and tossing their flesh into a bowl for our suppers.

Somehow I knew that after I turned 16, I would shift from being simply "Leslie" to "Miss Leslie," and I would be confined to the other side of the kitchen door. Until then,

CARRIE WAS REPEATING THE MOTIONS, I IMAGINE, PERHAPS DREAMING OF A FUTURE WHEN SHE WOULD COOK FOR HER OWN FAMILY.

though, Carrie and I belonged to each other. She clasped her hands around mine as she taught me how to churn butter and make cottage cheese, how to shell beans and shuck corn. I watched her put up peaches and tomatoes, placing jar after jar of jewel-colored fruits and vegetables on the basement shelves my grandfather had built. She used no cookbook, only her memory. Carrie was repeating the motions her mother and grandmother had taught her, I imagine, standing by a window in a one-story house with a tin roof and screen door, slapping dough into a metal pan, perhaps dreaming of a future when she would cook for her own family.

AT SOME POINT IN MY CHILDHOOD, Carrie married a man named Louis and moved into his house in a remote part of town. She continued to use the room above the garage in my grandparents' house as her own, however, and she kept a separate set of dishes and glassware in the kitchen cupboards for her meals, as she'd done before her marriage—presumably at my grandmother's insistence. Carrie's life outside of ours was, to my mind, mostly a silhouette, a photographic negative. My mother would return from the grocery store with rumors about Louis: he didn't treat Carrie well, couldn't hold a job, drank. He was a shadowy figure, silent and skinny beside Carrie's heft. They had no children. Weekdays before I woke, Carrie arrived to set out our breakfasts (pancakes every Wednesday) and prepare the noon meal. She left sometime in the afternoon, and in the evening we would find our suppers waiting for us on china plates in the refrigerator.

In the privacy of their living room, my grandmother and grandfather talked in low voices about "the colored people," with the understanding that we were different—as we clearly were, in ways that meant everything: property, education, and opportunity. My grandparents assumed that my brother, sister, cousins, and I would go to college (my grandfather had seeded funds for each of us) and that we would one day inherit the crystal and mahogany that surrounded us in their home, as indeed we have. They

assumed that Carrie harbored no ambition other than to cook and clean and press our disordered lives into order.

If I shared any responsibility for the arrangement, I didn't realize it. I watched the sit-ins and marches of the 1960s with the indifference of a 12-year-old who grew up in Pennsylvania just east of Gettysburg. I remember the night Rev. King was shot and the riots that followed. Although I knew something historic had happened, I failed to grasp the larger significance of these events. I lived in the North, and my summer sojourns in Virginia were largely an exercise in heat and new foods. But my grandmother had grown up in the postwar South. "Whenever I get homesick for Georgia," she once whispered to me, "I eat grits." She had a bird's beaked nose and mouth, and she wore her hair in long ropes looped around her skull. Pictures of her as a child show an ethereal presence in cinched dresses and ribboned hats. About the war that had ravaged her family, she said, "There are some things we don't talk about." She repeated this even as she labored to sort the genealogical details of her Brunswick ancestors and packed us into the car for yet another visit to Lee's birthplace across the river. Years passed before I wondered about her history.

For his part, my grandfather planted himself in a wing chair in the living room and read his way through a stack of tomes about the conflict whose mention caused his wife to wince. I was never sure whose side he took. Born in Missouri, raised in Montana, and stationed in Georgia during the First World War, this white-haired, cigar-smoking former naval officer and engineer showed more interest in tactics than personal stories. He seemed equally detached from the images that wafted across his television during cocktail hour: bus boycotts, demonstrations, beatings, arrests. Befuddled by the new language of civil rights, he joked that the bugs he called chiggers were "chegroes."

Yet without fanfare, my grandfather paid for four years of college tuition for a young black man whose character and prospects he admired—a deed my mother told me about only after my grandfather's death. And in the upstairs bedroom my grandmother used as an art studio, she painted canvas after canvas of mournful African-American women, copies of photographs clipped from the newspaper of mothers grieving for their children, friends, or slain civil rights leaders. Sometimes my grandmother would cup the palm of her hand around one of these stricken faces as if to console the person she had painted. Decades after her death, I discovered photo albums filled with snapshots of the African-American men and women who had worked for her family in Georgia. Who were they? How and where had they lived, and what did it mean that they were included in the family scrapbooks alongside pictures of my relatives playing cards in their living room?

It never occurred to me to ask Carrie how she felt about events in Selma, Montgomery, or Memphis. I was too young and too afraid of my grandmother's wrath—she'd have deemed the questions impertinent—to inquire about her past. Now it's impossible to find

out what country Carrie's ancestors were from or how they got here. Did they, like the African man my great-great-great-grandfather reportedly purchased in 1858 from the slave ship *Wanderer,* make the middle passage chained in a space no larger than a coffin, spooned around the next man, caked in excrement and misery? Were there any white men in her lineage? Men such as my ancestor Francis Dunham Scarlett, who fathered at least one slave child? (That child, a boy named Madison, grew up to become a ship's servant and father of six, one of them a daughter bearing the same name as my mother, Ann Scarlett.) Did the foods Carrie so deftly prepared derive from the days when her forebears had so little to eat that they had to practice the biblical art of turning poisonous plants, lethal sea creatures, and discarded animal parts into meals?

All that's clear to me today are the textures and smells of my grandparents' house, the sound of bobwhites in the back yard, the slam of the porch door—all the ingredients of nostalgia—but not the soul who kept it running, the woman whose hands were capable and generous, who was, in her way, omnipotent, despite living in modest quarters over the garage (at least my grandparents air-conditioned *that*). The one person who never seemed to mind my interruptions (but did she have a choice?), who took me down to the river and taught me how to bait crabs, and once, as we lugged a basketful of them back to the kitchen, spun the creatures over her head in a display of gaiety I am still not entirely sure I witnessed. Maybe I've invented her cheer because I so want her to have been happy, this woman whose existence made ours possible, this cipher in our midst, as coy and wondrous as the pies she held aloft, emerging from the kitchen's gray door, pounding her weight into the carpet, delivering sweets.

Carrie's Rhubarb Custard Pie

2 ½ cups unpeeled rhubarb, cut in 1-inch lengths
1 ½ cups sugar
2 tbsp flour
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1 ½ tsp lemon juice
pinch of salt
pastry for 9-inch double pie crust
2 tbsp butter
2 tsp sugar

Mix together fruit, sugar, flour, eggs, lemon juice, and salt. Turn into pastry-lined pie pan. Dot with butter. Lay on top pastry, fold bottom pastry edge over top crust & flute edges to seal in juice. Sprinkle with 2 tsp sugar. Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 degrees & bake 30 minutes longer.

Goodbye to Westbrook Acres

AS A WRITER WALKS AND MUSES, THE WORLD'S SORROWS INTRUDE UPON THE PEACEFUL STREETS HE WILL BE LEAVING

ANDREW HUDGINS

October 20, 2015: Tomorrow Erin is having foot surgery to repair a humped-up middle toe deformed by girlhood dreams of being a ballerina. Fifteen years ago, the doctor straightened the toe by driving a 10-inch-long pin through the end of it and down the length of her foot. For years, Erin kept the bent and slightly bloody wire on her desk, until it disappeared, probably tossed by a housesitter who did not recognize it as the memento mori it was.

Because Erin won't be able to walk the dogs with me for about six weeks, I'll use the time to look more closely at the neighborhood we'll soon be leaving. In the spring, I'll retire from Ohio State, Erin and I will sell our Ohio house, and we'll move to Tennessee, close to my family in Alabama and Georgia. I've lived in Ohio for 30 years, the last 15 in the safe and friendly enough environs of Westbrook Acres, yet I've never felt like an Ohioan, a Buckeye, a son of the Midwest. I wonder if I'll miss it. This short diary is a chance to hold on to this expanse of days for a future in which I might need an Auld Lang Syne for my last months as an Ohioan in the final years of the Obama presidency.

October 22: *The Columbus Dispatch* says that last month was the warmest September on record. Because of what global warming means for the planet, I am perturbed to love this Indian summer so much. Is this what it feels like to be enamored of a

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shockingly beautiful woman who is slipping arsenic in your food and so far you've been relishing it?

November 4: Today was trash day, and Sister, a 55-pound coonhound mix, has learned that paper, lots of it, blows out of the recycle bins. I hadn't noticed she was eating paper until I saw twists of fiber in her feces. I had never known the world was so full of Kleenexes, napkins, and fast-food wrappers.

A lady sitting on her porch in her housecoat, smoking, called out to me that she used to love to watch Max, our 90-pound labradoodle, chase his lacrosse ball down the street.

I called back that Max is older and slower now, and I need the leash to keep him moving. Max will be 10 this month, and Erin and I have begun pondering how sad we'll be when we have to put him down. Of course Erin and I are both older and slower too, with a bit of arthritis in our knees, like Max. I'm trying not to turn the dog into a symbol of my own age and occasional infirmities. When we were first married, Erin asked what I wanted done with me when I died, and I always said, "Double-bag and leave me out on the curb." Now, I say, "Sure, cremate me," because that's what she wants for herself. I don't care, she cares; therefore, she decides.

U.S. authorities are now saying the downing of the Russian plane over the Sinai last week was probably caused by a bomb. Wish I were surprised.

RONALD SAUNDERS/FLICKR; DAVID HERBICK

November 5: Today Sister sniffed around in the gutter and then reared her head, dis-

playing what she'd found. After a moment's puzzlement, I saw it was the wing of a bird, completely stripped of feathers and meat, and only slightly bloody. The elbow joint moved smoothly. Was the wing torn off by one of the many hawks patrolling our skies? The crows are busy here too, as are the raccoons, and we've seen a fox a couple of times. I returned Sister's articulated bit of gruesomeness to the gutter.

Russian and Egyptian authorities are saying that the U.S. government's assessment that a bomb caused the crash is "irresponsible speculation." How many days will pass before they admit the obvious?

November 6: Erin is recovering nicely. The day after surgery, we went to the Giant Eagle, and on the knee-scooter, her knee propped up on the cushion, she zipped around the grocery store, laughing and having a good ole time. I was finally moving a little more easily myself, I noticed, as I limped along behind Zippy the Scooter Girl.

I'd hurt myself a couple of weeks ago, while I was out with the dogs. Sister caught sight of the mailman and began howling. Because he pets her, calls her "Pretty," and gives her treats, she looks for him and yodels out her love from two blocks away. This time, though, he was also giving a treat to a collie, and Sister suddenly changed direction and launched herself at her competition. I jerked her back just as Max began surging toward the mailman. Pulled in two directions, I lunged forward to keep from falling and felt a searing tear in my right hamstring. I've been limping ever since.

November 7: Today I noticed the first Christmas decoration, a tentative small snowman, unilluminated on a windowsill. As I pulled Max along, I thought of our neighbor Betty pulling along her slow black dog, Charley, her arm stretched out behind her and her voice coaxing him cheerfully, "Come on, Charley, come on." On Westbury Drive, a large pear tree dropped its fruit in the street, and in the fall, Charley was allowed to eat exactly one pear a day, seeds, stem, skin, and all. Betty had to yank him along before he snatched a second one.

November 8: Halloween's faux tombstones (Barry D'Alive, Al B. Back, Ben Better) vanished almost overnight, and a few more Christmas lights have gone up.

Thinking about Charley yesterday reminded me that he was euthanized at seven when he developed a huge malignant mass in his abdomen, one that swung beneath him when he walked, like an udder. Charley's fate reminded me, in turn, of the neighbor who, after a stint in Iraq as a military contractor, brought home a feral dog he'd taken a shine to. What a wonderful rescue story, we first thought, and then how sad, when after hundreds of dollars of training, the dog kept attacking other dogs and was put down. The man's story was worse. He too apparently was violent, and after the divorce he moved to California to live with his parents and then shot himself. But

before the divorce and the suicide, he replaced the Iraqi dog with a brace of Chesapeake Bay retrievers, and when they were puppies I lay down on his driveway, flung my hands out, and let the puppies crawl all over me, licking and nipping.

November 9: Walking big old slow Max, I must look like Betty, my arm stretched out behind me as I wheedle, "Come on, Big Slow. Pick up the pace, handsome boy."

According to the paper, this is the longest Indian summer in memory, and the heat is tough on Max. The weather is still glorious but unnerving, even creepy, the gorgeous autumn hinting at insane summer heat, rising oceans, melting glaciers, droughts, and tornadoes.

November 10: The Halloween pumpkins are now Thanksgiving pumpkins, the larger ones deflated with rot.

Several years ago, I answered a knock at the door and said, "Hello, Betty." She stood looking at me for few seconds and then, crying, blurted, "I have a brain tumor. I always said if this happened I'd just die, but I'm not going do that. I'm going to do everything I can." She refused my invitation to come in for tea, pulled herself together, and marched off. As she was dying, another neighbor, knowing how much Betty loved her two-lap, twice-a-day walks, sometimes led her around the neighborhood, much like Betty herself had led be-tumored Charley. Now I too have a brain tumor, though a benign one, a meningioma, that lovely specimen of ironic melopoeia. The doctor has assured me that the tumor is "indolent."

November 11: Yesterday afternoon, feeling a twinge in my back, I did some crunches on the bedroom floor and stalked around the house, trying to work out what I thought was a minor cramp. Suddenly, I was holding the kitchen counter and vomiting uncontrollably. I was still there vomiting when Erin returned from her errands and clumped into the kitchen on her protective boot. I spent the afternoon and evening in the ER, and after the nurses got the drugs going, I was fairly comfortable. Kidney stones.

November 12: Because Erin still cannot walk far on the protective boot, I slowly shuffled up to the corner to give the dogs a little exercise. Exhausted. Can do this only because of the oxy.

Toothpaste must be made of stronger, stickier stuff than it used to be. Each morning, after brushing, I look at my face in the mirror, and my lips and sometimes my chin are white. Thus every morning I unwillingly remember my mother in the hospital, not even 50, dying, her lips caked with the Maalox she took to hold down the nausea of chemo. I stared at that white crust instead of her eyes, and though she was my mother, I did not dampen a tissue and wipe it away. I did not want to treat her like the invalid,

the dying woman, that I refused to understand she had become.

When I see her death on my lips, I cannot deny that I'm also seeing my own.

November 13: News of a terrorist attack in Paris. 130 dead, mostly young people at a rock concert, and all that sudden mortality was on my mind as I again shuffled to the corner with the dogs. In the afternoon, I went to the hospital and had my stones broken up with a sonic device.

On the corner, the large ginkgo has turned a uniform yellow-gold, and the leaves on the ground surrounding it are the same brilliant color. Who needs blossoms when the leaves are so dazzling? But returning home, approaching it from the west, I see the ginkgo foregrounded against an evergreen, and suddenly the drab evergreen is now beautiful too because the golden ginkgo draws my eyes to it in a new way, and I see it not just as green among other green. The golden leaves draw my eyes up the tiers of the evergreen's narrowing branches as they climb heavenward, the blue sky bright between each pair of bracketing branches. And 130 young people are still dead in Paris.

November 14: The dogs got an abbreviated walk once again. I've been drinking glass after glass after glass of water, then pissing through a sieve and collecting the stones in a teacup.

The first big stone passed without drama. I felt it move through me and into the sieve, like an orgasm devoid of pleasure. I took it upstairs for Erin to ooh and ah over.

November 16: Shuffled around the block with the dogs. Forgot to look at the ginkgo. God bless oxycodone.

The teacup is filling up nicely with bits of teeny-tiny jagged brown bits of calcium. I sent pictures to my friends Juliana and Danny. Juliana thinks they just look like dirt. Danny says it looks like I've been pissing coffee grounds. Erin says smoked sea salt.

November 17: Today, nearly lost in the news from Paris, Russia has confirmed that a bomb brought down its airliner over the Sinai.

November 18: Thanks to modern opiates, I walked the whole mile and a half. On Parsons Drive, I found a jar of dill pickle spears in a glitter of crushed glass, and flashed on how when I was in college, I'd walk late at night, between midnight and three, antsy, striding up and down the streets of our suburban Alabama neighborhood. When I found a Coke bottle, I'd kick it skittering down the asphalt, kick after kick till 20 or 30 kicks along, it fell apart in jagged shards under the street light, and the shards always seemed to have a new life to them, an exploded existence more compelling than the sticky thick Coke bottles they no longer were.

I lived at home through college, working afternoon and night jobs, and freshman year, I worked in a dry-goods warehouse in downtown Montgomery. On breaks, the other workers and I drank Cokes out of the machine. The reusable bottles had the name of where they were made molded into the bottom, and we bet dimes on whose bottle had traveled the farthest. Any place outside Alabama beat Alabama. Spartanburg versus Atlanta? Spartanburg's holder swept four or five dimes off the table. But Spartanburg versus Tampa? Probably Tampa, but who knew for sure? Bet dissolved. I loved the promise of distance, geography—the larger world that the scuffed and scratched bottles suggested. Their paths were small mysteries, like how in the devil a bottle of dill pickle spears came to be shattered and left on Parsons Drive this morning.

Throughout college, when I saw broken glass on asphalt, I thought of William Carlos Williams's "Between Walls," a love song to improbable beauty in unpropitious places: the area between the wings of the hospital is barren, but in the cinders "... shine / the broken / pieces of a green / bottle."

I thought again about how all work is ephemeral but gardens are especially forceful reminders of transience, going to weed and bramble, thistle and dandelion in a season.

November 19: First day completely off oxy. Feel like a despondent 10-day-old dog turd. But once I got going, I made the whole route, though had to lie down when I got home. I encountered the man who owns the ginkgo, which has almost completely blown its leaves. He was turning the bed beside the tree to replant his irises.

"They were beautiful," I said.

"But not beautiful enough," he replied, and I thought again about how all work is ephemeral but gardens are especially forceful reminders of transience, going to weed and bramble, thistle and dandelion in a season. Walking on, I considered his garden and understood his reckoning was right. His irises, though lovely, were not as lovely as they had been the year before. He was right to pull them up, separate them, and replant.

Farther along, I saw, atop a long pile of leaves raked up in the gutter, a pink golf ball, as odd as an Easter egg at Thanksgiving.

November 20: The corner ginkgo is down to a few nearly white leaves motionless on bare branches, pale unto ghostly. The pile of gold leaves raked to the curb has a tire track rutted through them. In these diary entries, I seldom record the weather without thinking of haiku. Add a ginkgo and the resemblance becomes insistent—except for, you know, all the extra words.

Today, I encountered the sad man who always asks, "What are your dogs' names?"

When I tell him, he repeats, “Max? Sister?” quizzically as they lean into his knees to accept the petting and rubbing he gives with complete focus on them, as if he is trying to absorb back into himself the pleasure he gives them. Soon his melancholy makes me sad too, and I wonder if he enjoys the gorgeous metallic blue vintage Maserati he drives so carefully, or if it too is merely something else to worry about.

We named Sister after my mother. “Sister” is what my Aunt Joyce and Uncle Buddy, my mother’s younger siblings, called her, as if her relation to them were her name.

“So,” my brother Mike said, “have you told Dad you named your dog after his dead wife and our dead mother?”

“Yeah, I was slow to see the problem.”

“And … ?” he said, making a rolling motion with his hand, urging me to keep talking.

“I made the mistake once of referring to Sister by name. Now when he asks about the dogs, I just say Max is moving a little slow but the other one is doing fine.”

Mike hooted. Did I think Dad was a moron? No, but maybe Dad thought we had dogs named Max and The Other One, and not Max and Your Dead Wife.

The time I spent talking to the sad man and then the mailman, who mocked me for wearing gloves in 37-degree weather, made me late getting home, so Erin came looking for me in the car. She was afraid I’d suffered another kidney-stone attack or had collapsed in the street. When she offered the dogs and me a ride back to the house, a walk of about half a block, I was so furious at her implicit assumption of my decrepitude that I stood on the sidewalk and glared silently until she shrugged and drove off. After about 20 enraged and self-justifying steps, I calmed down and spent the rest of the walk home framing an apology.

November 21: Yesterday, Islamic terrorists seized a hotel, a Radisson, in Mali. They took 170 hostages and killed at least 20 of them before commandos stormed the hotel.

I noticed long needles beneath the evergreen beside the ginkgo, so it must not be a fir but some sort of thick-barked northern pine.

November 22: “Myanmar Mudslide Kills 100.” Is it a relief to be reading about a hundred people dying if they are killed by an act of nature, instead of yesterday’s 20 killed by terrorists? But was it an act of nature? I’ll bet someone cleared the land and that caused the mudslide. Just checked. Jade mining.

Today snowflakes were in the air, fat drifty ones, and they reminded me of the house that exploded a couple of blocks away last spring. The homeowners, thank God, were visiting relatives in Japan when a gas leak turned their whole house into a bomb. Our house shook from the blast, which I at first thought might be the sonic boom from a low-flying jet or even a nearby plane crash. Erin and I raced outside to look. The entire neighborhood poured out of houses and moved toward the blast.

Even as I was doing it, I was aware that walking toward a blast, rather than away, was proof we lived in a secure neighborhood and took our own safety as a given. The air was full of bits of charred paper, rising at first in a black cloud and then drifting down slowly as the black smoke dissipated. I plucked a canceled bank check from the ground, thinking I'd return it to the homeowners, but it lay on the kitchen island for almost a week before I threw it away. The now-homeless family had more to worry about than a canceled check from 2009.

November 23: Mudslide total up to 110, plus 100 missing. On the walk, I counted 81 pumpkins and four plastic snowmen.

November 25: Headline in the paper: "Apparent suicide attack on Tunisian presidential guard bus kills 12." Locally, a neighbor burst into a house in the Hilltop neighborhood of Columbus and killed a family—husband, wife, and seven-year-old boy. The 12-year-old girl, though shot multiple times, somehow survived. "She had blood all over her," a neighbor told the reporter. "Her hands were cherry red." Barry Kirk, the murderer, was pursued by police and killed.

If that's not enough to start the day with a hefty dose of horror, the *Dispatch* quoted the 911 call: "Please God. Please ... My husband is shot. My husband is shot. Please come. Come now." Later: "Barry, please. Please." Then the line goes silent.

On true-crime shows, I've heard enough 911 calls to recognize the supplicatory incantation of "please," the helpless abracadabra of it. I have myself, in moments of desperation or of what seemed at the time like desperation, been reduced to simply repeating *please, please, please,* as if the word alone were a complete prayer.

Hank's Japanese magnolia holds up next spring's buds like candles. Pale green, a green that is nearly white, the closed blooms remind me of chrysalides, not just in shape and color but because of the hard covering that protects the soft incipient beauty forming inside. The buds look as if the tree were holding them up to the sun for its blessing, which, now that I think about it, is not exactly a metaphor.

November 26: Thanksgiving. I spent most of the walk thinking about Laquan McDonald, who was shot by a Chicago policeman more than a year ago. The dash-cam video was released the day before yesterday, prompting protests in Chicago. According to *The New York Times,* the cop shot McDonald 16 times. Some of the shots were apparently fired after he was on the ground. I have not seen the video. I do not want to look at it. But as I walked, I realized I had to.

Preoccupied with the place where ethical obligation trumps the compulsion to turn away from appalling realities, I did not notice until we were almost home the brown-red fruits on the crabapples lining our street. And I saw them only then because

earlier I'd noticed bright red fruits on a different tree, one I didn't recognize. A little time online revealed it to be a hawthorn. After that, I looked at the video of Laquan McDonald being killed.

Why does the world I have never seen dominate the one in which I live? Why do murders in Paris or Chicago, known only via reading or video, the media by which I ingest fiction, color the world I walk through? I know it's simply right, inevitable, and therefore logical to embrace the idea that my life is contiguous with that of others, but I wish I had access to their joys as well as their suffering. That may be a failure of faith or imagination, or the smallness of my soul.

Erin and I spent a lovely Thanksgiving with my relatives in Westerville, a little north of Columbus, though this past year has not been a good one for many of us. My Aunt Bettis had a walnut-sized tumor removed from her "lady parts," one cousin had a heart attack, and another suffered whiplash from an auto accident. My kidney stones finished a distant fourth in the competition, barely ahead of cousin's wife's current but small stone. The picture of my stones in the teacup did, though, garner a number of appreciative winces.

November 27: No leaves left on the ginkgo. I counted eight or nine illuminated snowmen and roughly the same number of reindeer, as well as three scarecrows—one male, two female; one concrete goose dressed as an Indian maiden, long black braids falling nearly to the ground; one concrete goose in a red Ohio State poncho; one concrete goose unclothed; one concrete bear dressed as a pilgrim, perhaps male; and five plastic flamingoes, four pink, one purple.

I did not sleep till six and woke at eight. I spent the night tossing from side to side, fighting the sheets, the pillows, and the blankets, and now I want to yank them all off the bed and burn them. Hot, cold, hot, cold, turn, kick—the insomniac's Saint Vitus' dance. Because I had a headache behind my left eye, more or less where the brain tumor is, I kept sitting up and testing myself for double vision, which the neurosurgeon told me to watch for. My vision is fine, but I had plenty of time to fret about Laquan McDonald, 130 dead in Paris, a family slaughtered eight miles from here, the daughter who survived covered by blood. What are the continuities between them, and between them and me? On the other hand, the *Dispatch* reported that November is National Novel Writing Month and a local woman is nearing 50,000 words about a unicorn barista named Lance.

Made myself watch the Laquan McDonald killing again. McDonald was clearly down and unthreatening as I assume bullets kept hitting his prone body. If that's not murder, I don't know what is.

November 30: I've been meditating on a picture of Presidents Obama and François Hollande before a glorious wreck of flowers outside the Bataclan Concert

Hall, where the Paris massacre took place. Obama's head is bowed slightly, and I appreciate the sorrow he displays with such dignity and resolve. I'm glad he is there to do it for the nation and for me. The pictures of the many dead are in *The New York Times,* young and beautiful almost to a one. After 9/11, I made myself read every single goddamn one of the capsule biographies of the dead as the *Times* printed them. That was the second month we lived in this house, and 15 years later, I don't have the heart to do that sort of reading again. Thus I deny them the individuality I would wish for myself and those I love, leaving them in my mind the beautiful undifferentiated dead.

All of this mortality was flying around in my head as, walking west with the dogs, I saw the ginkgo had not in fact lost all its leaves. Some had drifted down, yellow-white, onto a damp black pile of mulch, and as I circled the block, I thought of them. A lovely stark beauty—oversize stars in a dark and heavily textured sky. On the way back, walking east, I looked forward to seeing the pale fan-shaped leaves again bright against the rough darkness, but the light had shifted and they looked drab and ashy.

I'm fully recovered from the kidney stones, if not the irksome pulled hamstring, and I'm feeling pretty good. Paris and Laquan McDonald linger in my mind far more than the other sorrows and atrocities, even the family murdered in the Hilltop or the jerk that this morning's paper tells me shot up some paintings at the Wexner Center for the Arts and then shot himself. The Wex is about a quarter of a mile from my office.

December 1: The dogs got a short walk in drizzle. Though it is bad of me, a moral deficiency, I'm more concerned about the damaged paintings at the Wex than I am about the asshole who shot himself there.

December 2: The sun is just a blur in the white-gray sky, the southeast sky. No rain. Just counted: yep, that's 17 syllables.

A few streets over, one neighbor—perhaps with a sense of humor, perhaps not—has hung a Christmas-tree ball from the top limb of a four-foot-tall Japanese maple still scraggly with leaves. The dusty red ornament is about the size of a basketball, and the poor tree is bent not-quite-double from the weight. It was so ridiculous that I drove Erin over to look at it, and she immediately sang out, "Charlie Brown's Christmas Tree" before collapsing in laughter.

The horrors of Paris, Laquan McDonald, and now a Planned Parenthood shooting in Colorado continue to fill my thoughts. I have repeated "Laquan McDonald" over and over, pondering the *l*'s and *n*'s, the short *a*'s, the *k*-sounds that knit the dead man's name together. As the murders in Mali, the mudslide deaths in Myanmar, and the slaughtered family in the Hilltop fade in memory, I am both relieved and some form of sorry that I can't maintain the remembrance. Now there's today's horror—people

shot at a social services center in San Bernardino, where I lived for three years as a boy, ages 11 to 14. Erin just came downstairs to tell me about this one, crying.

I forgot to mention the downy patch of hawk-plucked pigeon in the back yard. It has finally blown away. The hawk must have picked the pigeon off the power line that runs the edge of the property.

The news reports now say 14 dead. I can't stop checking.

December 3: Late last night, I read that authorities had identified one of the killers by an Arabic name, so I went to bed even sicker at heart at the certainty of anti-Muslim backlash, but still I slept well and dreamed a voice that said, "I am the cheese," and then ordered me to repeat it, which I did. "How does that sound to you?" the voice asked. I admitted that it felt good to say, "I am the cheese." On waking, I wondered if this were old individuality asserting itself against all my moaning after connectedness. As we all know, the cheese stands alone. Pakistani-American killers, the paper reports.

I'm reeling from the shooting, if one can be reeling and still go through one's day more or less efficiently and not weeping in bed in a darkened room. The latest reports indicate it is in fact jihadi terrorism. The creep who shot up the Wex is, though, a perv, a security guard who was fired for groping students.

The more I think about it, the surer I am that I regret the vandalized art more than the shooter's suicide. I should value life over art, and of course I do, I do, I do. But the self-destroyers who destroy other people and other people's pleasures are more contemptible than sympathetic. I fret about the Warhols, the Jasper Johns, the Lichtensteins, and feel small for doing so.

December 6: In counterpoint to the nut who shot up the Wex and vandalized the art, at Art Basel in Miami Beach, two women got into a fight, and one stabbed the other. "I thought I saw a performance, and I thought it was fake blood, but it was real blood," some guy said. He assumed he was witnessing a commentary on American violence. He was.

December 7: I taught my last class on Pearl Harbor Day—coincidence or fate, you decide. Yesterday, the urologist said, "As a stone-former you'll need to drink 2.2 liters of water a day." So I began this diary with several identities I'm relinquishing—professor, teacher, wage-earner—and gained a new one: stone-former.

Erin is now completely recovered, and on the walk this morning, she and I stopped to look at a hawk perched on a maple branch in fog. I couldn't make out what kind of hawk it was, so to amuse Erin, I said, "Hey bird, what kind of hawk are you? Fly so I can see."

Answering for the hawk, Erin said, "I'm a hawk. Screw you." ●

Alphaland

RALPH LOMBREGLIA

Rock Nova walked down West Third Street in disguise. He had his well-known mop of corkscrewing hair tucked into a big knit cap, oversized shades on his face, and a leather jacket that a woman fan had told him looked cheap, though he'd paid good money for it in a SoHo boutique. He stopped for coffee on Thompson Street and laughed to himself when nobody recognized him. But he was too tired to give it the gusto it deserved. He'd gotten up at 8:30 A.M. to pee and take some ibuprofen, and he was so hung-over that he couldn't go back to sleep. At 9:30 he finally said fuck it and took a shower.

He'd have to rearrange his day to get some sleep before the gig. For now, he was going to visit the breakaway republic of Alphaland, which had seceded from the Union a week ago. He'd watched it happen on TV from his farmhouse upstate: everything from 14th Street at Avenue A down to East Houston at FDR Drive was now another country, surrounded by militiamen. The soldiers were symbolic, for the moment, with business carrying on as usual, vehicles and pedestrians coming and going at will. But everyone was waiting to see what the government would do. Rock knew what they'd do. He remembered it from Zuccotti Park: crack down violently in the middle of the night. And the pressure was on them to do it. Iceland and Venezuela had recognized the fledgling nation, and now Russia was praising the spirit of the Alphalanders. Rock expected the hammer to come down sooner than later, maybe even today.

Alphabet City. In the '70s people got shot there, like the trumpeter Lee Morgan, killed by his girlfriend at 33, Jesus's age, in a club called Slug's on East Third Street. Even in the '80s, when Rock was growing up in Jersey, you had to be careful going that far east. Today, he couldn't afford a condo there. When he'd heard about Alphaland

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seceding, he wanted to stay there this weekend and feel the energy, write a song about it, but his wife, Laurie, said, "With a fucking seven-year-old, Rock?" And so they'd kept the West Village apartment she'd already rented online. They would stay in Washington Square like a couple of NYU parents, shopping and having dinner with friends, and then Rock would play his comeback gig, as his manager insisted on calling it.

And then the sudden lunatic fight, where one minute everything was fine and the next minute his wife and daughter were getting on a plane and flying to Laurie's sister's in California. He'd left an apology on her voicemail during the flight, and last night he'd sent an email from the city, pleading with her to fly back for the gig. She hadn't answered. He was a flawed human being, and she was divorcing him. She'd get custody of Grace, and his own daughter would grow up regarding him as a stranger.

His latte was gone. He threw the cup in the trash. His band was staying at The Roxy, hoping to be recognized. They, too, thought he was an asshole—for canceling their tour, taking a year to write new music, blowing off dinner with them last night. They viewed tonight's gig as make-or-break. In fact, it was break. Rock was dissolving The Snow Pussies after the show tonight. He just hadn't told them yet.

Or was he only thinking of dissolving the band because he was coming down with something? While sweetening his latte in the coffee shop, he'd repeatedly dropped sugar packets and wooden stirring sticks on the floor. A case of the dropsies usually meant he was getting sick. If he hadn't gotten high last night and then had a whole bottle of Sancerre in the strange woman's apartment, he'd have slept just fine. He cursed himself for it while crossing Lafayette where Third Street became Great Jones.

No, he was doing it. Dissolving the band.

He thought of his Airbnb landlady. Her picture was on the rentals page. She was quite beautiful. Her profile stated that she rented her apartment because she was always at her boyfriend's place anyway. People now announced such things to the general public. She was probably a Snow Pussies fan. He could send her a message offering his wife's seat to the sold-out show. Or he could just fail to check out tomorrow, stay in her bed, and meet her that way.

HE TURNED LEFT ON BOWERY toward the tangle of streets where he'd gone to college. His professors thought he'd never make anything of himself, and they were right—in their world anyway. Cooper Union had been free when he attended. Now it cost money to go there, and the big new glass building was an insult to the old spirit of the place. The dream was officially dead, everywhere you looked.

Except in Alphaland! He emerged from chaotic Cooper Square and headed east on St. Marks Place, where, crossing First Avenue, he could see the National Guard up ahead on Avenue A, just as he'd seen them on the tube, standing at ease but with the big-ass weapons across their chests. They were strung out along the eastern side of the avenue, maintaining the intersection itself as part of the USA. Up and down the line, citizens faced off with them, sticking flowers in the barrels of their guns.

He passed through them like they were ghosts and entered Tompkins Square Park via the northwestern gate, across from the portrait of Joe Strummer on the wall of a Seventh Street building. If you wanted to be a legend, all you had to do was die. The sky was blue, and the air was unseasonably warm for the 10th of April, more like a day in late May. It was Saturday, and the park was packed. But it would have been packed on any day in any weather. It was the soul of a new nation. He wondered how many of these freaks were actually undercover cops. A guy in full purple camo with a purple beret came up to him. "Hands off Alphaland!" He had a petition he wanted Rock to sign.

"Nobody has their hands on it," Rock said.

"Yeah, but soon."

"And you think a petition's gonna stop that?"

FABIO PAGANI/ALAMY; WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

"You got a better idea?"

"Yeah. Get the law to stop taking people's signatures. Starting with you."

The guy seemed stunned. He looked down at himself and then back up at Rock. "Fuck *you!* You're the cop!"

Rock loved that. He elbowed his way deeper into Tompkins, through the throngs, looking for a place to sit down and take it all in. The benches and the grass were already filled. He would have settled for a seat of roots with a tree trunk for his back, but those were all occupied, too. He was almost to Avenue B when he saw two adjacent benches that weren't totally full. One had two men on it, the other had only a woman. But the woman was sprawled out with one leg up on the bench and her pocketbook behind her as support for her back. She was attractive and announcing her desire to be left alone.

Rock sat down with the two men. His immune system was nuked, and something was undeniably blooming in his sinuses. He absolutely had to get a nap before bouncing onto the stage tonight. The obvious opportunity was to skip this afternoon's rehearsal in the theater. The band had already rehearsed plenty in Rock's barn. However, skipping it would be interpreted as further evidence of Rock's "terminal LSD"—Lead Singer Disease—a phrase the other Pussies had taken from Van Halen lore. They hadn't bothered to consider that Van Halen had hired the singer, whereas Rock had hired them.

They didn't know he was down here alone. He'd say that Laurie had the flu and he was stuck taking care of his daughter. That wouldn't satisfy them, but fuck it, rock bands weren't democracies. They could rehearse all afternoon without him if they wanted to, killing the music slice by slice.

IT WAS ROCK'S 40TH BIRTHDAY. He'd woken up this morning with that fact searing its way through his brain. Now he took his mother's birthday card from his inside jacket pocket. It had arrived two weeks ago, a heavy, black envelope textured to resemble animal fur, though it wasn't the hide of any animal Rock had ever seen—oil-slick and textured by an algorithm, yet also believably organic. Or so the greeting card geniuses believed. It was large and square and required extra postage, as befitted a special birthday, the big four-O. But why had she sent it so far in advance? Eagerness to

welcome him to the other side? Or did she believe that Rock's turning 40 was the signal for her own body to start shutting down, and she'd better get his card in the mail while the getting was good?

It was addressed in her perfect cursive, in silver ink—pretty much your only option with a black envelope. He'd saved it to open on his birthday, which he did now, still headachy and half-sick to his stomach. The card itself was inexplicable—just another hunk of the same shiny hide, cut into an irregular shape like the silhouette of an animal. Was it the animal he'd have to fight in a future life? His mother believed in future lives. It had no preprinted message inside, just her handwritten "Happy 39th!"

He dialed her number in Florida. "Thank you for the birthday card, Mom. I'm touched. I waited till today to open it. But I have a question. Actually, two questions. What animal is the card supposed to be? And why do you say 'Happy 39th' when you know perfectly well I'm 40?"

The phone was quiet for a few seconds. "The card's a museum piece I thought you'd like," his mother said. "The title's on the back. And how do you get 40? Take the year you were born and subtract it from the year we're in now."

Rock turned the card over: *Rough Beast Slouching Towards Bethlehem.* He took the phone away from his ear to use the calculator: 39. He sat staring at it for a minute. "I can't believe this. Do you have any idea what a miracle this is? You've given me back a year of my life!"

"I gave you the whole life to begin with."

"I'm down in the city. I'm playing a big gig tonight."

"Not for your 40th, I hope."

"No, I haven't told anyone it's my birthday."

"Because you're terrified."

"How do you know that?"

"Why else would you keep your birthday a secret?"

He yearned to tell his mother about the fight with Laurie, but he knew she'd take Laurie's side. "You're right, I'm terrified," he said. "You're the only one I can admit it to."

"But now that you're only 39, you can relax!"

"I'll try to get that thought through my head."

"Be the rough beast," his mother said, and laughed.

When they hung up, he considered speed-dialing Laurie's number. She could fly as late as one P.M. West Coast time and still be here to see him go onstage. He could use his mistake about his age as the pretext. *You're not gonna believe this, honey. I thought I was 40, but I'm only 39! I can do this whole rotten year over again!* But Laurie wouldn't get to do the year over, only he would. And he'd already apologized and asked her to come back twice. Calling her would be begging.

He looked up to the sky for guidance. The wind shifted, and he caught a stunning reek of garbage. He'd managed to sit right next to a heaping trashcan that hadn't been emptied since the secession began. How could he have failed to spot it? When he looked away, the lounging woman was staring at him.

"So, you'll sit next to a stinking garbage can before you'll sit next to me."

HE WALKED OVER AND sat down on her bench. "First, I didn't realize it was a garbage can until the wind changed direction. Second, you were sprawling across the whole bench like Cleopatra." He held out his hand. "Rock."

"Paper? Scissors?"

"It's my name. Rock Nova."

"It says 'Rock Nova' on your birth certificate?"

"It says Rocco Dellanova."

"Ah. You don't meet many Roccos these days." She shook his hand. "April."

"You don't meet many Aprils either. And here we are in the month of April."

"You think I'm making up my name?"

"No, sorry. I'm preoccupied by this brand-new nation."

"You elect a clown president, people will want to leave. Unfortunately, I'm not sure they know what they're doing. The ones I saw on TV didn't look too swift."

She seemed vaguely suburban in a yellow-blue printed shift and almost-matching blue flats, her hair in a flip. Were suburban women wearing flips again? Rock had seen the television coverage, too—stoned incoherents you couldn't take seriously. Undoubtedly, this revolution had its bona fide Tom Paines, but you'd never see them on the mass media.

He said, "They know enough to get off this fucking *Titanic*."

She was staring at his wedding ring. He lifted his outstretched hand and looked at his palm. "My wife left for California with my daughter. I don't know why I keep wearing this."

"Me neither. I saw you giving me the once-over."

"I'm an artist. Artists look at people."

"Oils?"

"Songs. I'm the singer in a rock band."

"Oh. Do I know you?"

"I doubt it." His band's name was legendary to some, but if you didn't know the music, it sounded idiotic.

"Try me."

He said it. She cracked up. "What's that even mean? Men who don't like winter? It's men, right? Even though you're pussies?"

"Yeah, basically."

"Basically men or basically pussies?"

"I was starting a new band, and I was sick of winter. Voilà. We're playing tonight, five minutes from here." He nodded northwest, in the direction of Webster Hall.

"In the old country," she said.

He laughed, though there was nothing funny about the militiamen, even with petunias sticking out of their guns. He moved closer to her on the bench. Her dress was more complicated than he'd thought at first: a blue-and-yellow fractal pattern that seemed to reiterate itself endlessly, downward and downward. She held out her hand. He laid his in it. She wiggled off the wedding band and dropped it in his palm.

"Now, there's something you could help me with," she said. "I think I parked my car in a bad place."

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THEY CROSSED BACK into the USA at 1st and 10th, under the watchful eyes of the militiamen. At 11th Street he made a left to walk her past Webster Hall.

SNOW PUSSIES
SOLD OUT
April 10

"Wow, you weren't kidding. But it's sold out. I won't be able to go."

"Obviously, I'll get you in."

"I might bring a friend."

"Guy or girl?"

"Guy, probably. Is that a problem?"

"Of course not," said Rock.

They came to a private parking lot on an alley not far from the Strand bookshop. There were two big, identical signs painted on the brick buildings bordering it:

DO NOT PARK HERE!
Your tires will be deflated and
your plates will be removed.

A high-end black Mercedes was parked directly under one of them. It looked new, but those hulking diplomatic models never went out of style. All four tires were flat and there was no front plate, but some states didn't require one. He walked to the back. No rear plate. In her defense, the warning signs were painted fairly high up on the walls, and she was petite.

He called the West Village garage where his own Mercedes was parked. They would send someone over to fix it for her. It was now 12:30. He was starting to imagine himself going completely blank on stage, unable to remember a single song lyric. Maybe the thing to do was go back to his room, take a light benzo, sleep for four hours, and show up for the end of rehearsal after all.

"Listen, I'll have two tickets waiting for you at the box office. We go on around 11. The opening act is supposed to be good, if you want to check them out. Come back after the show and say hi. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go get some shuteye."

"I know what you mean," said April. "I hardly slept a wink last night myself."

She pulled off his beanie and ran her fingers through his famous hair. They made out like teenagers against the wall of the parking lot. Then they took a taxi across town and fucked in the rented apartment. Rock thought of Japanese love hotels, which he'd wanted to see when he was touring Japan, but there hadn't been time. He felt that he was cheating on his landlady more than his wife. He made April come with his mouth, then came himself. Ten minutes later, she was sound asleep. He didn't know how someone could do that. He lay beside her for a while with restless leg syndrome, then got up and took a shower.

WHEN HE WAS DRESSED again, he went to the living room to look down on the streets he'd often walked as a young man. Only movie stars and finance brats could live in this neighborhood now. The much-grittier Alphaland had been going in the same direction, but then a billionaire bought his way into the White House and brought them to insurrection.

His phone rang. It was Ivan from his garage. He'd arrived at the Union Square lot to find a man with the black Mercedes, claiming to own it. "He wants to talk to you."

The man came on. "Where's April?"

"No idea. I was sitting on a bench in the park when she asked me for help with her car."

"In Union Square? That's where I left her."

"Yeah, but I think she was heading to Alphaland."

"Fucking Alphaland."

"They get your car fixed up?"

"One guy's inflating my tires now. His partner went to get the plates. This is what they do to you in Manhattan."

"Maybe that's why Alphaland seceded. I gave April my garage's address. She can pick the car up anytime."

"No, I'm driving it from here. She can fend for herself. Your guy won't take my money, by the way."

"I told them it was on me."

"You don't have to do that."

"Let me make the gesture. From what I saw, you have enough on your hands."

"You're a prince. Text me your number, and we'll have dinner sometime."

When Rock hung up, a nude April was in the living room entranceway.

"You were on the phone."

"It was a wrong number."

"You were on for a while."

"They always want to tell you their life stories."

"Why are you dressed?"

"Preconcert nerves."

"You said you needed sleep. Come lie down."

"I will in a few."

When she was back in bed, he closed the door and called Laurie's number. It went straight to voicemail. He hung up and tried it again. Same thing. His wife had abducted his daughter and wasn't taking his calls, but not so his rock band. His phone was full of complaints from The Snow Pussies. They were upset by his behavior, by his going incommunicado. They were waiting at the theater for the rehearsal to begin. He sent them a group text.

I'll be there. Start rehearsing without me.

He took out his mother's birthday card and ran his fingers around it. What segment of the rough beast was the card portraying? Was it in profile or straight-on, slouching left or right toward Bethlehem? He couldn't see anything in it. If it was all beasts to all people, then Rock should have seen a dragon, because dragons were the beginning of his recent misery. He'd started telling his daughter, Grace, about them last summer when he found scans of old maps on the Net, the kind that said "there be dragons" at the edges of oceans, with pictures of scaly monsters in the water ready to eat the boats. He thought it would be good for her to see fanciful things that people once believed in, rather than made-up junk on TV. But he miscalculated. The dragons hit her wrong. She got

sleep-terrors from them. She'd wake up screaming in the middle of the night with fire-breathing monsters chasing her.

"Why did you have to show her those fucking maps?" Laurie had screamed at him. "She's a six-year-old, and you show her dragons that people thought were real."

"I thought she'd think it was cool. I didn't know she'd get obsessed by it."

"You didn't know she'd get a *behavioral disorder* from it, you mean! She can't sleep. She talks about dragons with her teachers. You've damaged her development."

"That's a serious accusation."

"I'm glad you think so. I'm calling a therapist."

Rock sat down with Grace to talk about it. "Honey, I know I told you the dragons were real. But I just meant that the old-time sailors thought they were real."

"You said they saw them."

"No, I said they *thought* they saw them. They thought the earth was flat back then, which led them to imagine that dragons were hiding in the places they couldn't see."

"What is hiding in those places?"

"Nothing, honey, because the earth's not flat. There's no edges. It was a big misunderstanding because the sailors were ignorant. Scientists came along and showed that there's no place for dragons to hide. Okay?"

They were sitting on the living room sofa, Grace's feet on his lap. She leaned closer and put her face to his ear. "The dragons told me they can hear your music from very far away."

HE HEARD APRIL SNORING lightly in the bedroom. He used his landlady's pad and pen to write her a note. "Going to rehearsal. Come backstage after the show." He wondered if the guy she was bringing was the same one he'd spoken to. He called for a ride on his phone. When he got downstairs, it was the kind that still had a human driver, and he had opinions about Rock's destination.

"Think about the position Alphaland puts the president in. They're forcing him to drop a bomb on them."

"Not a bomb, but I get your point."

"He tweeted a bomb."

Sometimes a driverless car was exactly what you wanted.

"But the president, as you call him, will tweet anything."

"He's the commander-in-chief of the soldiers surrounding it."

"Yes, and I'm surprised it took the commander this long to impose military rule. I expected it on Inauguration Day."

At Avenue A they were stopped so soldiers could look into the car and examine the trunk.

"They're asking for it," said the driver. "You're the last person I'm taking over here today. I don't like the smell of this place."

"I love it," said Rock. "Let me off at the corner."

He got out on Avenue B in front of a bar with some empty sidewalk tables. The hostess gave him a table that looked across East 10th Street at the edge of the park. "Gin martini straight up with olives," he said. At four o'clock there was a chill in the air, but it was warm enough for one drink outdoors. If he wanted something to eat after that, he could go inside. At the right moment, he'd walk up to the theater. His anxieties about the gig had magically disappeared. Nothing could touch him. The dragons heard his music from far away and told him not to be afraid. He created them with his singing, scaly creatures made of fractals that turned the flat earth into a sphere.

He couldn't see the militiamen, but he could hear their unintelligible barking over the bullhorns, exactly as if the president himself were ordering people around. People hated the man for an infinity of reasons, but Rock had one that didn't seem to bother anyone else: the bastard was now a blond. His coiffure surgery was like nothing else on earth. But at least when other politicians dyed their hair, they more-or-less stuck with their original color. The current commander-in-chief had been a brunet all his life, and suddenly he was golden haired, and no one

even commented on it. The scoundrel thought he could get away with anything, but becoming an Aryan at his age was a stroke too far.

And then his mother's birthday card hit him. He pulled it out of his jacket pocket. It was a presidential silhouette, like the ones he'd done in grade school. The rough beast was the swirling head of fraudulent hair. He laughed and took out his phone to call his mother, but it started ringing in his hand. It was his guitarist, Duncan "Dunk" Dunkle, the member of his band he was closest to.

"Dunk, I'm on my way. The city's madness."

"I've done everything I can do. They're frothing at the mouth now."

"I'll be there in half an hour."

He hung up. The waitress arrived with his brimming martini. He was waiting for her to put it down when she said, "Oh, my god! You're Rock from The Snow Pussies!"

He'd forgotten about hiding his own mop of hair. Plus he was six-foot-five. He gestured for her to be quiet, but other customers were now staring, and this was tripping the celebrity sensors of people walking by. Within seconds, a smiling oaf was approaching with a Sharpie to get himself signed.

"Sorry, sister, and I wanted that drink, too."

He stepped over the bar's sidewalk rail and ran across the street, hiding his hair under his beanie. The park was a different scene than before. The people were agitated. He shouted to the guy beside him, "What were they saying on the bullhorns?"

"That it was our last chance to leave Alphaland. But we're not fucking leaving!"

"Right on," said Rock. But leaving, he realized, was the thing to do. He started making his way toward the nearest exit on Avenue A. He'd find a gap in the militiamen and go straight to the theater. His phone was ringing again in his pocket. "I'm on my fucking way," he said into it.

"Rock?" It was his wife. "What's all that noise?"

"The sounds of revolution."

"We're on our way to the apartment."

"What apartment?"

"The apartment I rented in the Village. If you're not there, could you call the landlady to let me in?"

"You're in New York?"

"We just landed."

"You didn't tell me that."

"You pleaded with me to come back."

"Listen, the place in the Village turned out to be a dump. I went to The Roxy instead."

"Hundreds of people raved about that apartment."

"Trust me, it was bad. I'll call the hotel and get a room."

"You just said you were staying there."

"Yeah, but I shared Dunk's room last night."

"Why? You hate Dunk."

"I don't hate Dunk. This is how these rumors get started."

"Never mind. I just found the landlady's number. I'm going to the Village."

"I gave that apartment up!" he said, but she was already gone.

When he looked back over the heads of the crowd, he saw that a phalanx of soldiers had entered the park from the periphery and circled around behind them. Paddy wagons were suddenly parked on all the surrounding streets. Everybody in the park was being zip-tied and herded into them.

"I have to get out of here," he shouted when he got to the troops.

"You're under arrest."

He was ill, feverish and achy. "I need to be in a bed, maybe a hospital."

"Remain silent and put your hands behind your back."

He ripped the beanie off his head. "Do you know who I am?"

"Rock!" someone said. "It's Rock of The Snow Pussies!"

"Snow Pussies! Snow Pussies!" the park began to chant.

"They love me," shouted Rock, "and that's more powerful than your bullets!"

"Snow Pussies! Snow Pussies!" he heard as the soldiers started dragging him away. ●

ARTIFACTS

A Legacy in Ruins

What now for Iraq's Mosul Museum, recently liberated from ISIS?

CATHY OTTEN

THE ONLY WAY INTO THE Mosul Museum, as I discovered a few months ago, was to crawl through a hole in the wall, accessed from an alleyway that cuts between the museum and its former administrative buildings. At the end of the alley is an Iraqi Federal Police barricade; beyond that are the narrow streets of Mosul's old town and the Great Mosque of al-Nuri, where ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi gave his infamous July 2014 sermon after the jihadist group conquered the city. In March, Iraqi forces retook the museum, and I was granted access to the site with two colleagues. The surrounding neighborhood was blackened, destroyed, still unsafe. We were told to watch out for ISIS snipers, and the sound of gunfire shook the stillness. Only Iraqi Federal Police were wandering about, though I could also hear birdsong coming from the museum's garden, where rosebushes and fig and olive trees had been planted in homage to the gardens of ancient Nineveh, around which the modern city of Mosul arose.

The floor of the library was thick with ash. The walls were licked black with fire, and the air was hot and sweet with the smell of burnt paper and plastic.

Inside the museum, I found the floor of the Assyrian gallery carpeted with shards of stone inscribed with cuneiform, remnants of the tablets that told the stories of Mesopotamia. In the gallery devoted to the city of Hatra, capital of the first Arab kingdom, the plinths bore no pedestals or statuary. It was here that ISIS fighters in 2015 filmed themselves smashing objects with sledgehammers. Nearby is a gigantic hole where explosives tore through an Assyrian winged bull statue that was too large to destroy by hand. Below that hole, in the basement, the floor of the museum's library was thick with ash. The walls were licked black with fire, and the air was hot and sweet with the smell of burnt paper and plastic. Some 25,000 books had been destroyed.

Because of the building's height, ISIS used it as a sniper's nest. When the museum was retaken in March, Iraq's Federal Police found bodies of

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Assessing the damage to the Mosul Museum after it was retaken this spring. In this room in 2015, ISIS fighters smashed artifacts with sledgehammers.

REUTERS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ISIS fighters among the rubble, said Wisam Fadil of the force's Third Division as he trod around the ruins. He's from Baghdad, but for him, these objects transcend region: they are remnants of a shared, ancient past.

ISIS fighters announced their caliphate at the end of June 2014, after seizing Mosul, and began to impose dogmatic religious codes and punishments upon the people of the region. Since the worship of stones or images depicting gods or humans was now strictly forbidden, ISIS destroyed shrines and temples, particularly those of Shia Muslims and Yazidis, and looted objects that could be carted away. Now in Iraq, the group's gains are being reversed. Neighborhood by neighborhood, Mosul is falling back under Iraqi government control, although at great cost to its people, who are being bombarded from all sides. ISIS fighters regularly kill civilians trying to escape. Not long after the museum was retaken, an American airstrike, part of the war against ISIS, killed more than 100 civilians sheltering in a house in western Mosul. Saba Omeri, a former museum worker and native of the city, spoke about the tension between protecting heritage and human lives. For her, the deaths of neighbors and friends and the forced displacement of the city's ancient Christian community have been far more tragic than the loss of the museum's pieces.

Despite the risks, staff members have returned to survey the damage and, most notably, what's not there. Empty walls were once filled with Neo-Assyrian bas-reliefs and tablets and sculptures from Hatra. Most of the 115 or so objects in the galleries and another 200 in storage were looted, though only 18 or so pieces were destroyed, said former museum curator Leila Salih. She has hope that some of the objects can be recovered. The storerooms included tiles from Nineveh, pottery, jars, and Islamic decorative objects. Some of these pieces have already been found elsewhere in the city, she said, along with documents detailing illegal excavations.

"How many countries in the world went through four wars within 30 years?" asked Iraqi archaeologist Lamia al-Gailani when I spoke to her later. She reeled off a list of wars, civil wars, and invasions that have killed and displaced Iraqis and damaged the region's cultural heritage. But the systematic and deliberate destruction by ISIS was something completely different, she said. "It is an ideology they have to erase history."

Another expert in Iraqi and Syrian archaeology with whom I spoke, Smithsonian fellow Katharyn Hanson, added: "In the past you could look at the skyline in Mosul and see the different minarets and tops of the different shrines and see that diversity reflected. You could walk

through the halls of the Mosul Museum and see that diversity of people who lived in northern Iraq, and different interpretations of the past, not just the one homogenized interpretation of Islam ISIS wants it to be."

These links are particularly important to the country's Assyrian Christians, who trace their lineage back to the pre-Christian kingdoms of Nineveh. Under Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, symbols of these past civilizations were taken up to bolster a vision of shared history and national identity. Now, the damaging cultural losses have elicited a shared national feeling of outrage. In July 2014, when ISIS destroyed the mosque of Nabi Yunus, across the Tigris River from the Mosul Museum, the city collectively wept. Believed to hold the tomb of the prophet Jonah, the shrine sat above a mound inside the historic city of Nineveh. Muslims and Christians alike saw it as a symbol of the city. "The foundations of Mosul have all been lost," said Adel al-Bakri, a Mosul historian, speaking to his nephew through his tears when he heard about the destruction. He told his family that it was up to the young people of the city to rebuild Mosul. Since the recapture of the mosque, archaeologists have found tunnels underneath the structure with Assyrian reliefs and possibly the entrance to another palace. According to Hanson, an Assyrian temple almost certainly exists below the mound.

THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME Iraq's cultural heritage has been under attack. Nineveh, the great city that held the palaces of the Assyrian kings (after the capital of the empire moved from nearby Nimrud), was sacked in 612 BC. In the mid-19th century, a time when the European powers were competing to gather up trophies from the ancient worlds, British and Iraqi archaeologists excavated at Nimrud and Nineveh, sending their finds back to the British Museum. (One Assyrian winged bull, on its way to France, was lost in the Tigris River as it was being ferried away.) In London, these plundered objects projected the might of the British Empire through the acquisition of knowledge and symbols of historical power. In subsequent years, plundering continued to be a problem (as have neglect and insensitive development). Many invaluable artifacts are still missing since the looting of Baghdad's National Museum of Iraq during the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. During that same invasion, the Mosul Museum was also looted.

Shortly after leaving Mosul, I traveled to London and decided to visit some of these plundered Assyrian artifacts. When I arrived at the British Museum, it was a bright day in early spring and the queues snaked along the front lawn. A cheery man checked my handbag with a flick of a small, black flashlight, and I was ushered in among a sea of European students and tourists. London was jumpy after five people were killed in a terror attack on Westminster Bridge in late March, and the main newspapers were earnestly manufacturing fear. ("Which bridge was it?" my friend asked darkly as we crossed the Thames.) Upstairs in the museum, I saw some of the clay tablets from the library of the last Neo-Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal (668–627 BC). The fires were so strong when Nineveh was razed that the tablets bubbled like molten glass, according to the description beside the objects. The king's library included a copy of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which the British Museum now has. Having seen the destruction in the Mosul Museum not long before, I experienced a strange feeling of dislocation and doubling of place as I stood in front of these Assyrian objects, more than 2,000 miles from their home. Anthropologist Michael Taussig has noted that monuments "create public dream-space in which, through informal and often private rituals, the particularities of one's life [make] patterns of meaning." Gazing upon the massive, majestic winged bulls that guard the entrance to the Assyrian gallery, or the intricate lion hunt scenes of the stone bas-reliefs, I felt an intense sadness.

Iraqis have complained that their cultural heritage is displayed in Western museums, but since the rise of ISIS, Gailani told me that minds have

changed, adding that many of the objects themselves were originally looted by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. "It's nice to walk around the British Museum, the Met, and see these objects in front of you complete," she said, "but I feel very sad for Nimrud and so on, because I think, 'I'll never see them again.' It is like a loved one has died."

"I'm glad they're safe, but they're ours," said a friend of mine from Baghdad, when I told him about my visit to the British Museum.

Last year, a replica of the Arch of Triumph, destroyed by ISIS in Palmyra, Syria, was displayed in London's Trafalgar Square. Via 3D printing technology, a scale model of the monumental Roman arch, formerly a UNESCO World Heritage Site, had been conjured, out of context, in the heart of London. The replica sparked debate among archaeologists: some said the money would have been better spent preserving what remained at the actual site. And yet, in parts of the ISIS caliphate, the memory and ritual associated with a destroyed site linger still. One day, inside a U.S. military office, civilian employees charged with mapping targets in the war against ISIS noticed something unusual. A group of people, perhaps women, had gathered in an empty place for no obvious reason. And then they realized: this was not an ISIS cell, or militants on the move, but a group of people continuing to worship at the site where their former shrine had once stood.

PHOTOGRAPHY

A Wink and a Nod

The French artist Nadar at his most subversive and sly

ADAM BEGLEY

NADAR—THE PSEUDONYM of the most famous photographer in 19th-century France, Gaspard-Félix Tournachon—was a celebrity, renowned not only for his portraits of eminent contemporaries but also for his caricatures, his writings, his radical politics. The person Félix photographed most frequently was himself—out of curiosity more than vanity. He experimented on himself, attempting to push portraiture as far as it would go in its fundamental mission of revealing identity. In other words, he tried, fitfully, to set aside his habitual showmanship and show who he was. He worked at a disadvantage: there was no one to charm him out of his self-consciousness. His usual trick was to banter with the sitter, but he couldn't be expected to banter with himself. Also, he was notoriously bad at holding still: the real Félix was in constant motion, frenetic energy a defining element of his personality. Was he the same man when frozen in place? If Nadar asked a friend to sit for him, he would manipulate the pose and the lighting, chatting away all the while, then step back and examine the result. When he sat for himself, with an assistant releasing the shutter, he could gauge the effectiveness of the pose only after the print was developed. And ironically his eyesight was poor: behind the camera he wore his spectacles, but in front of it he removed them. (You sometimes see them in portraits dangling from a ribbon around his neck.) Sitting for a self-portrait, he was in a sense doubly blind to the goings-on.

Often what we get is only a glimpse of a certain aspect of his personality. The very earliest self-portraits mostly show eagerness. Still unsure

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of his technique, he wanted the image to prove at least recognizable: apprehension mixes with impatience and desire to produce nothing more than a fuzzy, pleading look on the face of a bohemian no longer in his first youth. As his confidence grew, his ambition asserted itself, and he achieved specific calculated effects. In a striking seated portrait, he looks directly at the camera and attempts—perhaps too transparently—to seduce the viewer with his charm.

He tilts his head forward and slightly to the side, rests his cheek on his hand, and fixes you with one hopeful eye. (The other is deep in shadow.) He appeals silently for an intimate exchange. Although his hair is uncombed, he's more neatly dressed than usual, his black cravat crisp against the white of his shirt. If he's aiming for sincerity, he has missed the mark; the result is more coy than genuine.

In another early self-portrait, he stands tall, his body at an angle to the camera, arms crossed and hands buried in the sleeves of his jacket, head swiveled so that he looks back over his shoulder.

As Nadar felt more comfortable taking self-portraits, his images became more charming and seductive, the embodiment of the romantic artist.

TOP: COURTESY OF THE GETTY'S OPEN CONTENT PROGRAM; BOTTOM: RMN-GRAND PALAIS/ART RESOURCE, NY

It's a theatrical pose with heroic overtones: behold Nadar as romantic artist, isolated, exposed, self-contained, self-protective, ready to move forward, but conscious of what's behind him—which in this case might be the painterly tradition of portraiture. A hint of vulnerability, of anxiety in the eyes and around the mouth, adds considerably to the interest of the photograph. Was Félix truly anxious? Or is this a deliberate imitation of troubled genius?

The best photos of Félix aren't formal self-portraits. A photo-montage of our hero dancing the cancan on the tiptop of a steeple (or is it the point of an ink pen?), an absurd image that caricatures Félix's long legs and somehow catches his anarchic spirit: he's wild-eyed, wild-haired, astonished, and worried about his precarious position. I don't know who did the cut-and-paste job, splicing comically elongated limbs onto a Nadar self-portrait, or who inscribed it to whom (the inscription reads, "To

the great man / the instant daguerreotype / with gratitude"), but my guess is that it was a present to Félix from a waggish friend.

The other revelatory portrait is an experiment in making moving pictures: a dozen photos of Félix from the chest up, taken from 12 successive angles—flip through them and you have a revolving portrait.

In the sixth photo, when he's just about to face the camera straight on, he grins; in the next photo the sly smile is gone, replaced by a level stare.

The effect is like a playful wink or a wave, a subtle subversive signal to posterity. Hardly anybody smiled for the camera in the mid-19th century; to do so was to risk appearing foolish or simple-minded. Today's ubiquitous smirk was unthinkable. Yet Félix, unwilling or unable to smother his high spirits, flashed his grin—and so left proof that the friends who celebrated his boisterous good humor understood him best. It's the confirmation of Baudelaire's remark: "Nadar, the most astonishing expression of vitality."

CINEMA

Prometheus Unbound

Emily Dickinson comes confidently alive

JEROME CHARYN

WE OPEN ONTO A BLACK SCREEN. We hear the clack of footsteps, almost like the very voice of doom. Suddenly the screen breaks into light, and we witness a panorama of 15 young women in lace collars, standing in three ragged rows, like some silent chorus. Only one of the women is really discernible. She's in the second row—it's young Emily Dickinson, played by Emma Bell with a ferocious, quiet dignity. The other girls are almost invisible in their plainness.

Someone is addressing this silent chorus in a slightly sinister voice. The camera twists about to reveal Mary Lyon (Sara Vertongen), headmistress of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, the first women's college in America—it's 1848. Mary Lyon isn't fooling around. She insists that the souls of these young women are at stake.

"Do you wish to come to God and be saved?" she asks.

The chorus remains silent. Miss Lyon treats the young women like a handful of dolls, shuffling them about in her own fashion. She orders those who consider themselves Christian and saved to step to the right, and those who still have some hope of being saved to move to the left. Only Emily remains, with the languid light of three windows behind her.

Mary Lyon in all her starkness is wearing a cap with white wings—wings are a motif throughout this film, as if eternity were flitting about somewhere in the background.

Miss Lyon interrogates Emily. "Are you in the Ark of Safety?"

"No," Emily answers without the slightest hesitation. And Mary Lyon condemns her as a "No-Hoper."

Thus we have the opening scene of *A Quiet Passion,* Terence Davies's stubbornly original and defiantly old-fashioned film about Emily Dickinson. Shot with a marvelous dance of light and the high drama of two opposing forces that will never budge, the scene has a stark clarity that we seldom find in commercial cinema.

Davies was wise to begin here. The importance of Dickinson's two semesters at Mount Holyoke has often been overlooked. It was her first and

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This daguerreotype (top) was first published in September 2012; the confident, smiling poet (left in image) "could have been Cynthia Nixon's twin."

TOP: COURTESY OF A PRIVATE COLLECTION; BOTTOM: HURRICANE FILMS/COURTESY OF MUSIC BOX FILMS

very last long departure from her father's house in Amherst, except for two sojourns in Cambridge, when a renowned Boston ophthalmologist attended to her failing eyesight. Dickinson seldom wrote about her stay at the seminary, and it did not seem to provide her with any lasting attachments. Yet here, away from home, she might have discovered the Promethean power that poet Susan Howe describes in *My Emily Dickinson* (1985).

Davies uses a clever device—the daguerreotype—to have Emma Bell morph into Cynthia Nixon, who plays Dickinson as an adult. Nixon is not the mousy and tubercular young girl from the single iconic portrait we have of the poet, circa 1847. Nixon is tall and lithe, often ferocious and witty at the same time—much closer to a second daguerreotype, discovered by a New England collector and first published five years ago. Taken in 1859, it shows two women sitting side by side, one of them staring defiantly at the camera. The picture suggests a possible love affair between Dickinson and Kate Anthon, a classmate of Emily's sister-in-law. In her letters, the poet calls this phantom lady "Condor Kate." There's no mention of Condor Kate in *A Quiet Passion*. And it's a pity.

After a recent screening of the film at Manhattan's Morgan Library, Davies was very firm about not wanting to deal with Dickinson's possible "lesbianism." He was much more concerned about the modulations of the poet's nuclear family—mother, father, sister, and brother. And he gives us a wondrous portrait of these creatures. Keith Carradine is particularly striking as Dickinson's rigid yet loving father, who can never really fathom the Prometheus in his own house. Joanna Bacon is also quite fine as the poet's sickly mother, who sleepwalks through the film in a catatonic state. Davies's crafting of the poet's younger sister, Vinnie (Jennifer Ehle), as a lesser Prometheus with her own powerful wit, shadows Nixon's own performance. Actually, Vinnie was "full of Wrath, and vicious as Saul," as the poet writes in one of her letters. She also surrounded herself with a troupe of cats that Emily despised.

But the film still turns on Nixon's performance. A glimpse of her bisexuality might have provided a key to her volcanic shifts of mood. Whether or not Kate Anthon is etched out of the second daguerreotype, the confident woman who smiles at us in her old-fashioned dress could have been Cynthia Nixon's twin. To Davies's credit, he pursued Nixon—and waited four years until she was ready to play the poet. We see in her partly ravaged face the ravages of creation. In her own hypnotic performance, she will become the Emily Dickinson we now remember. ●

BOOKS

ESSAY

Remembering Bob Silvers

The legendary *New York Review of Books* editor knew everybody, had read everything, and oversaw every stage of what he published

GARRY WILLS

HALF THE FUN (AT LEAST) of being an editor of a literary review must be matching a book and its reviewer. What will that reveal about the book, and what about the reviewer, and what about their conjunction? Robert B. Silvers, who with Barbara Epstein (his co-editor for 43 years until her death in 2006) had that duopoly followed by his monopoly for all the life of the "paper," as they called *The New York Review of Books*. Silvers, who died in March, wanted to get something new out of each matchup—his favorite term of praise for the result was that it said something "fresh." But he did not think of the job as confined to just that one creative gamble. He personally oversaw every stage of the resulting review, suggesting further insights, sending ancillary books or articles, negotiating phraseology. One often got the feeling that this was a man who had met everybody and read everything. Yet how could he do that, chained as he was for most of every day, weekends and holidays included, to his editing desk?

Of course, he did not do it alone, or just with Barbara. He had an incredibly skilled staff—usually three principal assistants—in the office with him, across from his desk, getting the appropriate references, linking Bob by phone with the author when Bob or the reviewer was traveling, checking references. I learned how these anonymous workers were chosen when a very promising student of mine, about to graduate from Northwestern University, applied to be one of Bob's assistants. Bob called me about the young man and asked the expected questions. Did he have wide interests, cultural and political? Had he more languages than English? Did he write well? I assured him he was well qualified on all those counts. And then he asked me an unexpected question: "Does he have a sense of humor?"

I told him I had not been given an occasion to observe that. With a disappointed air, he said, "No one can survive around here without a sense of humor." I realized from that conversation what pressure these young talents were under to perform. But whenever I observed Bob and Barbara together, in the office, at a restaurant, or at the opera, I could tell that a perpetual chuckling at the odd world around them had to be life-sustaining under a crushing workload. My student was not hired; but I don't know if that could be ascribed to his not evidencing a sense of humor.

Garry Wills, over the past 44 years, has written 260 articles for *The New York Review of Books* or its blog. Like Robert B. Silvers, he is a recipient of the National Humanities Medal.

ANNIE SCHLECHTER/*NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS*

Silvers was well known for calling his authors with a question on weekends and holidays. His talented assistants had to work in shifts to keep up with him.

Bob had other tests when interviewing for the post—including a written analysis of an author or a piece in the *Review*.

I know of former assistants who certainly do have a sense of humor—especially Jon-Jon Goulian, the New York eccentric who worked as an assistant organizing Bob's library. Others, after time in that pressure cooker, have become well known in the literary, academic, or film worlds—Nathaniel Rich, A. O. Scott, Mark Danner, Jean Strouse, Deborah Eisenberg. Everybody in the New York literary world knows about these fabled assistants. A tenure of two years or so gave them a prized résumé. They had been at the center of literary and intellectual traffic of the highest kind. They had watched Bob coax reviews from sometimes resisting authors. They had seen the great tact with which Bob suggested a change in copy. They had watched as publicists came with their seasonal book catalogs and tried to convince Bob or Barbara that some of their upcoming titles would be right for the *Review*. (The publicists had better know what the *Review* had already published on this subject or by that author.)

Bob's customary way of soliciting a review was not to write or call with a request but to send a book (or a set of them) out of the blue with his handwritten note asking whether the writer could say something

about this. Length and due date might be mentioned if Bob thought acceptance was probable, but he could be cagey about that if more negotiation was required. I was often surprised by the book(s) that came by courier (once to me in Rome). When Bob sent me Marilynne Robinson's 2015 book of essays, *The Givenness of Things,* I told him on the phone that I had never read a book of hers—I just knew what President Obama had quoted from her in his eulogy for the murdered pastor and members of Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston. Bob was sure I would be the person to savor her if I just dipped into the book—and he was right. I read all of her novels to write what I thought worthy of her.

I could not tell whether he would assign a book to me if I requested it. Sometimes he had already assigned it (or he might have thought I could not do it as well as someone else he was considering). But if I was near an event of some interest, if I was in Italy where a major exhibit was being mounted—on Frederick II at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, on Pope Sixtus V at the Scuderie del Quirinale, on Renaissance architectural models in the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, on a Pordenone exhibit in Empoli, on Tintoretto's portraits in a converted church in Venice—he was glad to hear what I had to say about it. I told Bob the Tintoretto show would not open until three days after my wife and I had to leave Venice. He faxed the famous curator of the show with a request that she give me a private tour before the opening, and she did. Bob's writ ran far.

Some of his commissions I would never have expected. He sent me to Minnesota to interview Gov. Jesse Ventura. (Ventura was a kind of proto-Trump, though we did not know it at the time.) Other assignments were more natural. Bob seemed to remember everything he had run in the *Review*. Many years before, I had quoted John Ruskin in a review of an unrelated book; recalling that, in 2014 he sent me to an exhibit of Ruskin's delicate scientific watercolors in Toronto. Other ideas followed on his own favored subjects. He had a fondness for Chicago, where in 1947 he had graduated from the University of Chicago at the precocious age of 17. The university was still fizzy at the close of Robert Maynard Hutchins's presidency. When I moved there, Bob started sending me books on the city—its history, its architecture, its theater. After I had reviewed a few of these books, he suggested I do more and turn them into a book on the city for the fledgling New York Review Press. I had to confess I was all Chicagoed-out. The same thing happened when I did some reviews on Catholic subjects. When he sent me another one, I told him I was all poped-out. (Francis would later reawaken that interest.)

In 2010, Bob asked if I would write for a blog the Review *was starting. I told him I did not know what a blog was. "Neither do I," he said with a chuckle.*

Bob was in many ways traditional. He kept up with developments, but with a sense of their strangeness. In 2010, he called and asked me if I would write regularly for a blog the *Review* was starting. I told him I did not even know what a blog was. He chuckled his regular chuckle and said, "Neither do I. But I'm told it will be good for the paper." And so it has been. Edited by Hugh Eakin along the same lines as the major venue, it has given writers the opportunity to respond to developments in a daily (not a biweekly) posting. It is now appropriately called *NYR Daily*.

Some people feared that Bob had not prepared a successor for the *Review*—but the blog is there ready to keep up the same standards. The proud connection of writers with what he has created will not simply disappear. I am sure all its writers felt as privileged as I have to appear on the same pages with heroes of mine—Murray Kempton, Joseph Kerman, Joan Didion, Elizabeth Hardwick, Edmund Morgan, and all the many others. That kind of company does not simply disappear. Bob built it to last. ●

REVIEWS

It's Complicated

Unraveling the mystery of why people act as they do

REVIEW BY MICHAEL SHERMER

BEHAVE:
The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst
BY ROBERT M. SAPOLSKY
Penguin Press, 800 pp., $35

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT about killing someone? I have, and I confess that it brought me peculiar feelings of pleasure to fantasize about putting the hurt on someone who had wronged me. I am not alone. According to the evolutionary psychologist David Buss, who asked thousands of people this same question and reported the data in his 2005 book, *The Murderer Next Door,* 91 percent of men and 84 percent of women reported having had at least one vivid homicidal fantasy in their life. It turns out that nearly all murders (90 percent by some estimates) are moralistic in nature—not cold-blooded killing for money or assets, but hot-blooded homicide in which perpetrators believe that their victims deserve to die. The murderer is judge, jury, and executioner in a trial that can take only seconds to carry out.

What happens in brains and bodies at the moment humans engage in violence with other humans? That is the subject of Robert Sapolsky's new book.

What happens in brains and bodies at the moment humans engage in violence with other humans? That is the subject of Stanford University neurobiologist and primatologist Robert M. Sapolsky's *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst.* The book is Sapolsky's magnum opus, not just in length, scope (nearly every aspect of the human condition is considered), and depth (thousands of references document decades of research by Sapolsky and many others) but also in importance as the acclaimed scientist integrates numerous disciplines to explain both our inner demons and our better angels. It is a magnificent culmination of integrative thinking, on par with similar authoritative works, such as Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature.* Its length and detail are daunting, but Sapolsky's engaging style—honed through decades of writing editorials, review essays, and columns for *The Wall Street Journal,* as well as popular science books (*Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, A Primate's Memoir*)—carries the reader effortlessly from one subject to the next. The work is a monumental contribution to the scientific understanding of human behavior that belongs on every bookshelf and many a course syllabus.

Sapolsky begins with a particular behavioral act, and then works backward to explain it chapter by chapter: one second before, seconds to minutes before, hours to days before, days to months before, and so on back through adolescence, the crib, the womb, and ultimately centuries and millennia in the past, all the way to our evolutionary ancestors and the origin of our moral emotions. He gets deep into the weeds of all the mitigating factors at work at every level of analysis, which

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Sapolsky has made a monumental contribution to the scientific understanding of human behavior.

THOMPSON MCCLELLAN PHOTOGRAPHY

is multilayered, not just chronologically but categorically. Or more to the point, uncategorically, for one of Sapolsky's key insights to understanding human action is that the moment you proffer *X* as a cause—neurons, neurotransmitters, hormones, brain-specific transcription factors, epigenetic effects, gene transposition during neurogenesis, dopamine D4 receptor gene variants, the prenatal environment, the postnatal environment, teachers, mentors, peers, socioeconomic status, society, culture—it triggers a cascade of links to all such intervening variables. None acts in isolation. Nearly every trait or behavior he considers results in a definitive conclusion, "It's complicated."

Does this mean we are relieved of moral culpability for our actions? As the old joke goes: nature or nurture—either way, it's your parents' fault. With all these intervening variables influencing our actions, where does free will enter the equation? Like most scientists, Sapolsky rejects libertarian free will: there is no homunculus (or soul, or separate entity) calling the shots for you, but even if there were a mini-me inside of you making choices, that mini-me would need a mini-mini-me inside of it, ad infinitum. That leaves two options: complete determinism and compatibilism, or "mitigated free will," as Sapolsky calls it. A great many scientists are compatibilists, accepting the brute fact of a deterministic world with governing laws of nature that apply fully to humans, while conceding that such factors as brain injury, alcoholism, drug addiction, moments of uncontrollable rage, and the like can account for some criminal acts.

Sapolsky will have none of this. Telling a child after a successful task, "you must have worked so hard," he notes in one of many examples, "is as much a property of the physical universe and the biology that emerged from it" as telling her, "you must be so smart" (the former produces better results than the latter). Or, "transcranial magnetic stimulation techniques that transiently activate or inactivate a part of the cortex can change someone's moral decision making, decisions about punishment, or levels of generosity and empathy. That's causality." Sapolsky quotes American cognitive scientist Marvin Minsky in support of the position that free will is really just "internal forces I do not understand." We understand much more about human behavior than did our ancestors who burned witches in the 15th century (Sapolsky reaches deep into the past to reveal how inadequate our theories of human action have been). That gaps still remain

does not open the volitional door, he contends.

This is the part of *Behave* where the academic rubber meets the legal road as Sapolsky ventures into the areas of morality and criminal justice, which he believes needs a major overhaul. No, we shouldn't let dangerous criminals out of jail to wreak havoc on society, but neither should we punish them for acts that, if we believe the science, they were not truly responsible for committing. Punishment as retribution is meaningless unless it is meted out in Skinnerian doses with the goal of deterring unwanted behaviors. Some progress has been made on this front. People who regularly suffer epileptic seizures are not allowed to drive, for example, but we don't think of this ban as "punishing" them for their affliction. "Crowds of goitrous yahoos don't excitedly mass to watch the epileptic's driver's license be publicly burned," Sapolsky writes in his characteristic style. "We've successfully banished the notion of punishment in that realm. It may take centuries, but we can do the same in all our current arenas of punishment."

We shouldn't let dangerous criminals out of jail, but neither should we punish them for acts that, if we believe the science, they were not responsible for.

What Sapolsky is talking about here is the difference between retributive justice and restorative justice, to which I devoted a chapter in my 2015 book, *The Moral Arc,* along with the knotty problem of free will. I agree with Sapolsky that we need reform of our archaic criminal justice system, focused as it is more on retribution than on restoration of harms done to individuals and society. There are many social experiments to monitor, such as how Germany handles its prisoners with the goal of returning most of them to being productive members of society in a relatively short time. As for free will, a way to think about this in the context of a purely materialist determinist worldview is that we are volitional beings through (1) our modular minds that have many competing neural networks, which (2) allow us to make real choices by veto power—"free won't"—over contending impulses, which (3) give us a range of volitional choices by varying degrees of freedom, so (4) our choices are part of the causal net but free enough for most of us in most circumstances to be accountable for our actions. This won't satisfy hardcore determinists, but in support note the results of a 2009 survey of 3,226 philosophy professors and graduate students asked to weigh in on 30 subjects of concern in their field. On the topic of "free will: compatibilism, libertarianism, or no free will," the survey found that the majority of professional philosophers (59.1 percent) believed that free will and determinism were compatible. Either they're all misguided (1,906 philosophers trained to think about such matters?), or this may be one of those problems for which no answer will satisfy everyone, restrained as it is by our language and cognition.

This is just one of several contentious issues in *Behave* that will raise the hackles of those who think and feel strongly on such matters. The book concludes with the biggest of them all: war and peace, which comes as an uplifting finale largely in agreement with Steven Pinker and others, although Sapolsky picks a few nits over the proper measure of just how bad certain periods of history were. He argues, for example, that it is inappropriate to compare the six years of World War II with the dozen centuries of the Mideast slave trade or four centuries of Native American genocide. Sapolsky concludes that World War II really was the worst thing humanity ever did to itself. Fine, but the important point is that we've stopped doing such things. Our better angels are winning out over our inner demons, and Sapolsky concludes his tome by reviewing the many acts of kindness and reconciliation humans have exhibited, entreating us to "recognize that science can teach us how to make events like these more likely."

Amen, brother.

Waking From the Dream

Most Americans assume society is more egalitarian than it is

Review by Nancy Isenberg

THE BROKEN LADDER:
How Inequality Affects the Way We Think, Live, and Die
BY KEITH PAYNE
Viking, 256 pp., $28

Keith Payne, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of North Carolina, is intent on showing how the problem of inequality operates within the human mind. He does not claim to have studied the historical causes of the American class system, nor does he aim to explore the political or cultural ideologies that have been used to rationalize differences between the haves and the have-nots. His singular focus is on how the brain is evolutionarily wired for ambition and justice alike. When societies such as ours deviate from the primitive sense of fair play, he asserts, everyone suffers.

Payne writes about both poverty and the broader condition of "feeling poor," which affects not just the actual poor, but also many people in the middle class. For Payne, inequality is a malaise that leads struggling Americans to engage in risky, self-defeating behaviors, while simultaneously strengthening a self-serving conclusion among Americans who have become steadily richer: namely that the system works.

To tell his story, Payne intertwines two narrative voices—one left over from his poor-boy past in Kentucky, the other of the erudite thinker he has become. His youthful experience informs the story every bit as much as statistical information gleaned from psychological experiments meant to offer clues to the hidden "logic" of human behavior. Sociologists use the term *alienation* for the phenomenon he describes, and historians have studied status anxiety as well, but Payne is interested in psychic pain and the social costs of failure. As he amply shows by citing compelling examples from scientific research, the brain masks the degree of inequality we perceive, and most Americans assume our society is far more egalitarian than it is.

Scholars have discovered that most people grossly underestimate the amount of wealth on either side of the economic scale. They are not even close when it comes to the salaries of CEOs, estimating that they earn 30 times what an average worker takes home; in fact, it is 350 times. Assembling a group of 5,000 American participants, researchers in one remarkable study asked the subjects to compare pie charts of the wealth distribution found in two unnamed countries. As it turned out, 92 percent of the participants chose Sweden over the United States as the place they wished to live because of its greater economic equality. This held for both Democrats (94 percent) and Republicans (90 percent).

Ignorance is not bliss, however. The macrolevel deception conceals a more dangerous conflict between evolutionary impulses for status and power and our survival instincts to live in a world (which Payne traces back to the hunter-gatherer stage) that relies on sharing resources. The ladder is broken, he writes, because human beings can't forgo their desire for status, and yet are like hamsters on a wheel, chasing a dream that gives them little satisfaction. The top is so far out of reach that ambition generates debilitating levels of stress and depression, and makes the most emotionally vulnerable among us prone to risky behaviors such as outbursts of rage on a plane, sabotage at work, or taking drugs to deal with the emotional pain. Health and happiness are sacrificed in pursuit of unobtainable goals.

Neither conservative nor liberal rationales address this problem. Hard work and talent are

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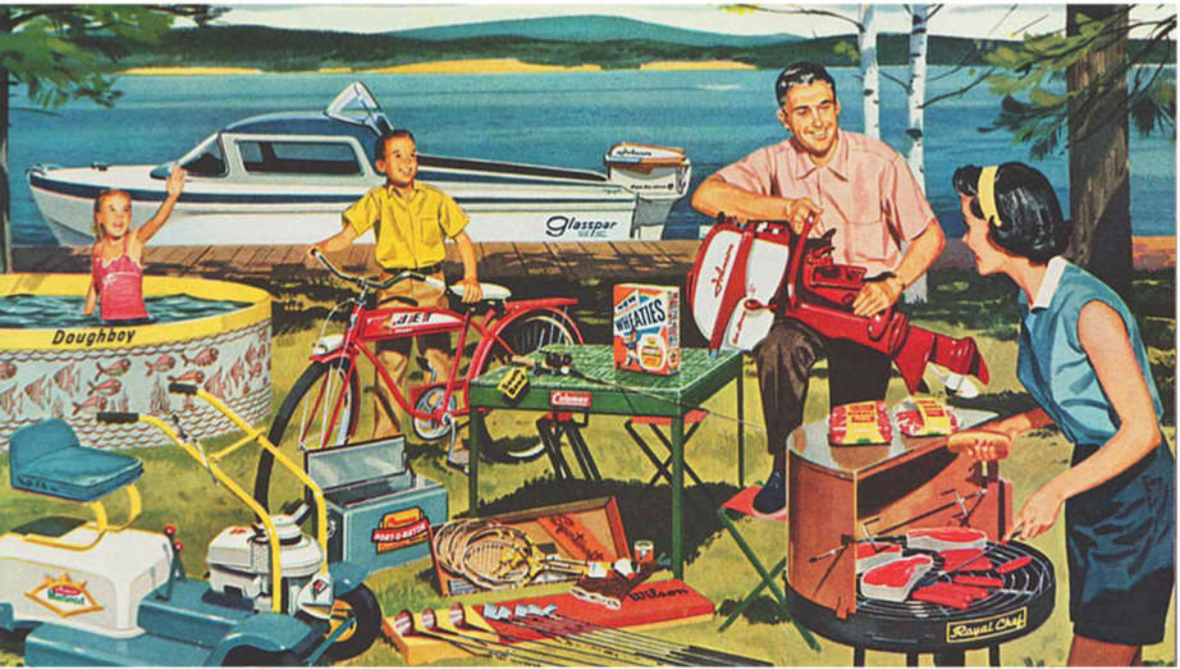

Human beings can't forgo their desire for status, and yet are chasing a dream that gives them little satisfaction.

no more important than chance and privilege in determining success, and a lack of character or a constricted social environment does not alone explain the mental poverty trap. Humans are creatures of instinct and improvisation, and poor people who live in precarious situations adapt and devise different rules for survival—what Payne identifies as the "fast strategy," to "live fast, die young." More successful, middle-class Americans will defend the hard work explanation even when they know from experience that rewards are allotted randomly. No one, Payne insists, can avoid that evolutionary craving for status, which leads people to constantly evaluate where they are on the ladder, subconsciously comparing themselves to others. Once again, average Americans conceal this impulse, often convincing themselves that they care more about love, faith, loyalty, and integrity. But it's not true, writes Payne. All we need are a few primate studies to remind us that the hunger for status is what the proto-psychologists of the 18th century considered to be an "animal passion."

Beyond its case studies, the memoir portion of Payne's book is compelling in its own way, and is a counternarrative to J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy. The Broken Ladder* is a liberal man's view of his own rise. From the first chapter, he lets us know that he remembers the feeling of shame he had as a poor child. One memory of worthlessness stands out: A new lunch lady at school asked him to pay for his meal, and he didn't have the money. As a poor kid, he wasn't supposed to pay, but all at once, he recognized that he had been lowered in the eyes of his peers. Comparison is at the heart of Payne's system of inequality, so it is not surprising that he offers symbolic contrasts between himself and his working-class sibling. We encounter his brother Jason as a kid picking tobacco as the tar turns his hands black. We meet him again as he recklessly drives his pickup truck. He spends eight years in prison, while his author-brother lands a prestigious post at the University of North Carolina.

The most disturbing tale in the book involves the author's uncle Sterman, an alcoholic living in an abandoned barn at a landfill. When diagnosed with lung cancer, he chooses whiskey over pain-

killers. This decision would seem irrational to most middle-class Americans, Payne writes. Yet the cause, I suggest, has a much longer history. His uncle was a quintessential squatter, part of a long line of hoboes and landless poor who live on the margins of society and contest its rules. They dismiss middling sensibilities and reject the masculine value of hard work. That is to say, the "broken ladder" of Payne's concern long predates today's crisis; it only looks new because the one percent have gained the lion's share of the nation's wealth only in the past 50 years.

This historical element is what is missing from Payne's book. Status may be a part of our brain circuitry, but it has also been conditioned in us over time. Our present interest in inequality comes principally in response to the obsession with status that arose after World War II. The historian Richard Hofstadter won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Reform,* his 1955 study of "status anxiety." Vance Packard's influential best seller *The Status Seekers* appeared in 1959. This was no coincidence. The postwar creation of a stable middle class encouraged parents to expect that their children would do better than they had done. The emergence of the homogeneous class environs of suburbia and the rise of the white-collar corporate ladder created the perfect breeding grounds for a personal preoccupation with status. Payne is right to conclude that status is not new, but it is crucial to add that the rules we now live by were shaped by the "ideological toolbox" of the 1950s.

Despite this omission, Payne's book will make its readers pause to consider the human condition in more depth. Some will no doubt conclude that the ladder-in-our-minds has become so dysfunctional that in 2016, voters elected a president whose life has long been consumed by a craving for status. The serious disability, which Payne underscores, of casting votes based on feelings over facts fits all too neatly, and that's scary. Wishing for a quick fix ("Make America Great Again") means that those in Donald Trump's column were so desperate that they refused to plan for the future and instead adopted the "fast strategy," by betting all their chips on one very risky choice. The sad conclusion this book compels is that Americans are so out of touch with reality, and so hobbled by mental crutches, that social inequality will remain the dirty little secret that we cannot possibly purge.

Not by Taste Alone

The flavor of food is produced by all of the senses

Review by Tim Carman

GASTROPHYSICS:
The New Science of Eating
BY CHARLES SPENCE
Viking, 336 pp., $27

For several days in April, the American media took a break from their around-the-clock coverage of President Trump's first 100 days to comment on another outsider with unnatural coloring: the Unicorn Frappuccino from Starbucks. Much of the criticism-cum-comedy focused on several of the drink's ingredients—pink powder, blue drizzle, sour blue powder topping—that Starbucks unabashedly promoted via its PR machinery.

"When a news release identifies a drink's component parts by its colors, rather than its flavors—well, that's a pretty telling detail," wrote one of my colleagues at *The Washington Post*. *Late Show* host Stephen Colbert piled on: "That's all your food groups right there: Mango, pink, blue, and obviously, topping. The FDA recommends at least three servings of topping a day."

Turns out, the joke may be on us. According to the research conducted by Charles Spence and his colleagues in the field of gastrophysics, people actually do associate colors with basic human

Tim Carman, a James Beard Award winner, writes about food for *The Washington Post*.

tastes. In one experiment that Spence shares in his playful, approachable book, *Gastrophysics: The New Science of Eating,* diners were asked to arrange four sample spoons, each containing a small sphere of colorful liquid, in the exact same order: the salty one first, followed by the bitter one, the sour one, and finally the sweet one. Diners had no clue what the liquids contained. They knew only the colors: red, white, green, and brown-black. (Ask yourself what tastes you would assign to each color and compare them with the answers below.) In the test, "we get somewhere around 75% of people ordering the spoons in the way that the chef (and the gastrophysicist) intended," Spence writes. "So on the basis of such results, I would say that tastes are very definitely associated with specific colors."

The experiment is further confirmation of what gastrophysicists have long been telling chefs, restaurateurs, and regular diners: Our experience with food is not shaped by taste alone, or even taste in combination with smell. All our senses work in tandem to heighten our pleasures, alter our opinions, and sometimes convince our brains that a foodstuff is fresher, sweeter, or more filling than it really is.

A merging of gastronomy and psychophysics, gastrophysics is, writes Spence, "the scientific study of those factors that influence our multisensory experience while tasting food and drink." That, mercifully, arguably, is the wonkiest sentence in the book. A professor of experimental psychology at the University of Oxford and head of the school's Crossmodal Research Laboratory, Spence takes pains to rise above the academic language of his field to explain his research clearly, often humorously, while providing examples of how it applies in the real world.

STARBUCKS

Chapter after chapter, Spence runs through our primary senses, providing food for thought all along the way. Have you ever wondered why some fine-dining chefs serve an entrée with a side dish of pure aroma, such as the pheasant at Alinea in Chicago, which comes atop a bowl that wafts scents of hay, apples, and cinnamon? It's not because we mostly "taste" through our nose. It's because our sense of smell is closely tied to memory and emotion. With his pheasant, Alinea chef Grant Achatz is feeding our nostalgia as much as our hunger, hoping our associations with fall are warm enough to intensify our feelings toward his dish.

"It turns out that the olfactory receptors in our nose are actually an extension of our brain," Spence writes. "In fact, it is only a couple of synapses from the cells in the olfactory epithelium lining the inside of the nose through to the limbic system, the part of the brain that controls our emotions."

Spence's research can be applied to both the restaurant and the grocery store. His famous study—for which Spence and a colleague were awarded an Ig Nobel Prize for Nutrition in 2008 by the scientific humor magazine *Annals of Improba-*

ble Research—concerns a sonic experiment in which volunteers were asked to chomp on potato chips in front of a microphone, which directed the sound back to the participants' headphones. Unknown to the chip eaters, researchers were manipulating the sounds. Volunteers perceived the chips to be fresher and crunchier when sampled under higher frequencies, their ears clearly influencing their taste buds. Perhaps more remarkably, Spence later discovered that just by increasing the noise of the packaging, he could alter people's perception of how crunchy the chips were inside. "[O]ur brains appear to have a remarkably hard time distinguishing the product from the packaging," he writes.

You can probably blame Spence and his peers for those bags of SunChips that rattled louder than an old rollercoaster. But you can also credit them for helping us understand how almost everything can affect the perceived quality of our food and drink. It could be music ("the more we like the music, the more we enjoy the taste of the food and drink"), utensil weight ("if people tasted food with a heavier spoon they generally had better things to say about it than when exactly the same food was eaten with a lighter spoon"), even product shape ("Sweet and creamy sensations ... are nearly always paired with rounder shapes").

The book is not without its faults. When Spence moves beyond the interaction of human senses, his observations are less compelling. His chapter on social dining, for example, reads more like a mental health argument against eating alone than a gastrophysics-based defense of group dining, and another on airline food includes a finding that I found comical: that in flight, pairing pasta with a Verdi aria, for example, could boost a diner's perception of the dish's authenticity. I mean, what functioning adult is expecting Tuscan trattoria cooking at 30,000 feet?

Gastrophysics could have also used a tougher editor. Repeated references to the Italian Futurists as the forerunners of modern molecular gastronomy grow tedious, especially when Spence offers 13 tips on how to host your own "Futurist party." His intended audience also seems to be a moving target. Sometimes he addresses chefs and food manufacturers, and sometimes he appeals, with lesser authority, to home cooks.

Still, you have to give the man his due. Spence's influence on the food industry is significant. You could even argue that Starbucks employed gastrophysics to the potential benefit of its customers. As Spence notes, you can "make food or drink taste sweeter by adding a pinkish-red colour." In other words, consumers might not notice if you cut down the sugar in a drink that has the addition of, say, "pink powder." Interestingly, the Unicorn Frappuccino had 59 grams of sugar compared with 69 grams in the same-size cup of Caffè Vanilla Frappuccino. That doesn't exactly make the Unicorn Frappuccino a fruit smoothie, but it's a start.

(By the way, for those keeping score, most people associate red with sweet, green with sour, white with salty, and brown-black with bitter.)

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR thanks the following people for their financial support in 2016.

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England, My England

The poet whose bucolic lyrics defined a generation

Review by Jan Morris

HOUSMAN COUNTRY: Into the Heart of England
BY PETER PARKER
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 544 pp., $30

I CAN STILL HEAR MYSELF, when I think about it, replying to an American lady in Cairo who asked me if I was British. It was sometime in the late 1940s, I would guess, and being British in Egypt then was not always comfortable. "Say, are you British?" she wanted to know, and I answered in kind.

"O, *very* British," said I.

What another world it was in those days! To be British meant something altogether different—to her, to the world at large, and to me. But it would not last. Americans would soon begin to lose the inherited respect that so many of them felt toward the Old Country. The nations of World War II would presently forget Churchill's heroic Britain of the Spitfires. The British Empire was no more, and people would not so often think of themselves as very British at all. And by now, as the so-called United Kingdom is apparently disintegrating, citizens of Great Britain may well look back with some confusion to their old certainties.

Actually, though, it was never really Britain I myself felt emotional about. Mine was too complex a loyalty to explain to the American in Cairo, but it was by no means a country-right-or-wrong sort of pride. It was pride in an idea, and its name was not Britain, but England. It is itself subsumed nowadays in my love for Wales and Welshness, but still in my heart I always hear, as poets have down the generations, the English siren-call. The gentle beauty of England's countryside was part of it, and the grandeur of its history, and the humor that ran through its affairs, and the melancholy, and the ironic blend of right and wrong, and Shakespeare, and what people like me always fondly thought of as an essential kindliness. The American Henry James defined it as the *sense* of England.

A. E. Housman, whose bittersweet verse about the old dream of England remains profoundly relevant.

COURTESY OF THE PUBLISHER

Never fear. The United Kingdom may dissolve, Great Britain is losing its meaning and the imperial idea is long discredited, but no doubt that old dream of England will lyrically ride the debacle. I embark upon this self-centered opening to a book review because the book itself is a contribution to the dream's survival. The lit-

Jan Morris has written some 40 books of history, travel, biography, memoir, and fiction.

erary historian Peter Parker has devoted some 450 pages essentially to the study of a particular, profoundly relevant poem, A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) together with its sibling *Last Poems* (1922). Shakespeare apart, I think it safe to say that among English people of my kind and generation, few poems spring more readily to mind and memory than the lyric verses of these collections. Parker has devoted his taste and his learning to the task of interpreting this very particular preference, and nobody could do it better. He has sympathetically explored the nature of Housman himself, and the intellectual climate of his day, and the particular sense of mingled pride, resentment and tragedy that was to haunt the England of his time, cruelly affecting the nature of British family life (my own, for instance).

The bittersweet suggestion of *A Shropshire Lad* is apparent almost from the start. In one of the best-known of all its verses, frequently set to music (by my own brother, among others), the cherry tree is lovingly apostrophized—it "is hung with bloom along the bough / And stands about the woodland ride / Wearing white for Eastertide." What could be more idyllic? But turn a single page, into the next stanza, and here we read that

> And you till trump of doomsday
>   On lands of morn may lie,
> And make the hearts of comrades
>   Be heavy where you die.

Here is the sad irony that so many readers have cherished in *A Shropshire Lad,* and the sense of comradely kinship that Housman emphasized throughout the work by his constant use of the exhortation *"Lads!"* More sophisticated critics than I have interpreted this as a sign of latent homosexuality. I read it as natural human decency, written with tragic prophecy in the last decade of the 19th century—a few years before hundreds of thousands of English lads were to die in the battles of World War I. And the irony can sometimes be expressed, too, in humor of a deliberately bucolic flavor, for he was not writing of or to the officer classes:

> Oh, when I was in love with you,
>   Then I was clean and brave.
> And miles around the wonder grew
>   How well did I behave.
>
> But now the fancy passes by,
>   And nothing will remain,
> And miles around they'll say that I
>   Am quite myself again.

The reason this bittersweet mélange has meant so much to readers down the generations is this: it has seemed to many of us a very part of England itself. As one of its earliest critics wrote, in 1896, "Mr. Housman has a true sense of the sweetness of country life, and of its tragedies too." And although Housman was no Shropshire lad himself, having been born in Worcester, he had chosen to celebrate in this, his first book of poems, one of the English counties that has always seemed, and sounded, most thoroughly English. The very names of the place sound comfortably homely—Clunton and Clunbury, so Housman assured his readers, are "the quietest places / Under the sun." Ever since, poets have been following his example in celebrating the names of rural England when they need a tug at the emotions—think of Rupert Brooke's Grantchester, or Edward Thomas's Adlestrop, where the slow train stops!

Peter Parker explores far more profoundly than I can the personal, historical and intellectual impulses that created *A Shropshire Lad.* However, from the vantage point of my own 90 years, I can testify to the poem's impact upon a generation that has watched with mingled hope, affection, despair, wonder and nostalgia what has happened since Housman's day to his Shropshire England, its lads and its lasses. Clunton and Clunbury, I learn from my computer, still tranquilly survive the tourists, and anyway, whatever happens in the harsh world of reality, the abstraction that is England itself still lives on in art, pride and affection.

Back From Oblivion

A writer who refused to live in a world robbed of meaning

Review by Dana Gioia

THE POETRY OF WELDON KEES: Vanishing as Presence
BY JOHN T. IRWIN
Johns Hopkins University Press, 120 pp., $32.95

WELDON KEES IS THE most mysterious figure in modern American poetry. Lean, handsome, and impeccably dressed, he looked like a B-list Hollywood star, the sort who played the nightclub owner in film noir. In photographs, Kees smokes and broods—cool, stylish, and doomed. Born in Nebraska in 1914, he drifted through half a dozen colleges and cities before arriving in New York in 1943. An artistic polymath, he excelled at every medium he attempted—poetry, fiction, painting, jazz, journalism, and film. His poems appeared in *The New Yorker*. His paintings earned him a one-man show, praised by his fellow abstract expressionists. He wrote for *Time*, edited newsreels for Paramount, succeeded Clement Greenberg as art critic for *The Nation*, produced experimental films, wrote songs for a San Francisco cabaret, and coauthored a pioneering book in semiotics. If the career sounds brilliant but unstable, so was the man. As soon as Kees achieved something significant, he became dissatisfied—with his medium, his colleagues, or himself. Only poetry held his attention.

Fame eluded him, and polymathy didn't pay. "An age of specialization," Kees observed, found artistic versatility "puzzling or irritating and sometimes suspicious." A restless bohemian, he didn't fit into the academic postwar poetry world. Using ingenious forms often invented for a single occasion, his poetry promiscuously mixed high and low culture on equal terms. His lines veered suddenly from sardonic satire to piercing lyricism. Mordantly outspoken, he had no gift for cultivating the mediocrities who filled the ranks of

Kees in 1953, two years before he likely committed suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge

DAN WYNN ARCHIVE

Dana Gioia is the poet laureate of California and a former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

metropolitan cultural life. "Problems of a Journalist" begins,

> "I want to get away somewhere and reread Proust,"
> Said an editor of *Fortune* to a man on *Time*.
> But the fire roared and died, the phoenix quacked like a goose.

The poet's former colleagues at *Time* surely understood the insult. "I can tell from the way you act you don't want to be a success," Truman Capote admonished Kees at a party. "Why, you're a much better poet than that old Robert Lowell."

For 15 years, Kees moved on intimate terms among the major figures of American culture. His friends included Hans Hoffman, Edmund Wilson, Willem de Kooning, Mary McCarthy, Romare Bearden, and Pauline Kael. In 1950, Kees moved to San Francisco, where he found the artistic scene "remarkably fluid, open, adventurous." He experienced a burst of creativity in half a dozen arts, and then his life started falling apart from alcohol, drugs, divorce, and persistent failure. In 1955, Kees disappeared. He almost certainly committed suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. He was 41.

After his disappearance, Kees vanished from cultural memory. His poetry, which had been published mostly in limited editions, went out of print. His paintings were given away. His other writings remained uncollected. Critics and anthologists ignored him. Posthumous oblivion is the fate of nearly all authors. What saved Kees was the conviction among a few writers that he was, as his first champion, Donald Justice, asserted, "an important poet, among the three or four best of his generation."

Over the next half century, a cult of Kees slowly emerged among writers, first in the United States and then abroad. Recognizing his work—still difficult to obtain—became the literary equivalent of a secret Masonic handshake. Although Kees remained invisible to academics, he exerted a powerful influence on young poets. The huge gap in Kees's reputation between poets and professors came to symbolize the stark differences in literary taste among creative and theoretical thinkers who often coexist uneasily in the same English department.

John T. Irwin, a poet and literary critic who teaches at Johns Hopkins University, has partially closed the gap in a brilliant new study of this neglected author. Most pioneering monographs are cautious in their approach. Irwin's *The Poetry of Weldon Kees: Vanishing as Presence* is audacious and provocatively speculative. Declaring Kees "the most interesting poet of his generation," Irwin frames the author's life and work against a backdrop of modern literature and philosophy. Concise, clearly argued, and free from critical cant, the book is a model of scholarly writing; it also reminds the reader how revelatory literary criticism can be. For Irwin, the stakes are not merely academic; understanding Kees is literally a matter of life or death.

The cult of Kees slowly emerged among writers. Recognizing his work became the literary equivalent of a secret Masonic handshake.

Irwin begins by carefully examining the circumstances of Kees's "disappearance." No one saw the poet jump from the bridge. His car was found (with the keys inside) in the Vista Point lot at the Golden Gate's north end. Kees left no suicide note, but in his apartment police found his cat, Lonesome, and two books placed conspicuously by the bed—Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Devils* and Miguel de Unamuno's *Tragic Sense of Life*. Both volumes contain extended considerations of suicide as an act of existential defiance. Kees had mentioned going to Mexico to start a new life. Irwin interprets the poet's statements as deliberate misinformation to make his disappearance enigmatic. No body was

ever found. Irwin speculates that Kees deliberately chose the time of his death to have the tides carry him out to sea. "Kees likely staged his death," Irwin concludes persuasively, "as his final aesthetic act."

Building on his daring hypothesis, Irwin places Kees as a significant figure in the existentialist lineage of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Unamuno, and Camus. The poet's apocalyptic worldview contains the same theistic-nihilistic dichotomy pondered by Dostoevsky and Unamuno–either belief in God or despair. Although Kees ached from spiritual hunger, he possessed no capacity for religious belief. Lacking both Dostoevsky's faith and Unamuno's existential sangfroid, Kees suffered from the intolerable tedium of living in a world robbed of meaning. He shared Camus' conviction that the "only truly serious philosophical problem" was suicide. As Irwin suggests, the poet's death reflects Unamuno's insight that "the self-slayer kills himself because he will not wait for death."

The book analyzes Kees's major poems to support the theory of suicide as an intentional aesthetic act, an existential validation of the author's worldview. Corroborative evidence isn't hard to find. Death, suicide, drowning, and despair are ubiquitous in the work, though it must be noted that Kees had an eerie genius for making the apocalypse simultaneously terrifying and mordantly amusing.

Irwin's sensitive readings are consistently illuminating. He is particularly good at uncovering the complex sources that characterize Kees's urbane and allusive verse. Oddly, however, in his analysis of "A Distance from the Sea," a poem that stands at the center of his existential argument, Irwin entirely misses the source. In this long dramatic monologue, Kees crafts the voice of an aged apostle who reveals how and why Christ's miracles were faked. Irwin seems unaware that Kees based the poem on passages from Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.* That source not only clarifies the poem; it also indicates that late in his life, Kees studied a classic of modern Christology, though he never found Dostoevsky's religious consolation.

Was Kees's suicide an act of existentialist assertion or simply a surrender to despair? Perhaps it was both. No life is entirely rational, and the great turning points rarely have a single cause. In either event, the strange nature of Kees's disappearance, deliberate or accidental, imbues his work with mystery and mortal gravity. Like the title image of his poem "A Good Chord on a Bad Piano," Kees's life remained "double to the end, / Like all the smashed up baggage of the heart."

Broken Bodies, Broken Forms

What relation does art bear to suffering?

Review by Roy Scranton

DRAW YOUR WEAPONS
BY SARAH SENTILLES
Random House, 320 pp., $28

"This Report Contains Graphic Content," the video warns; "Viewer Discretion Is Advised." A man lifts a dead girl from a hospital bed while music oddly reminiscent of *The X-Files* theme plays in the background. The film cuts to a room full of bodies—children, old men, women—killed by sarin gas. Then the dirty, bloodied five-year-old whose shell-shocked face the world came to recognize as #SyrianBoy, Omran Daqneesh. Finally, a montage of corpses and trauma care connected to April's chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun, Syria.

Watching these images does not make me a better person. They do not help me understand the Syrian civil war, honor the dead or help the living, or ease anyone's suffering. They might shock and appall, unless I have been numbed by the proliferation of such images, as many people have. So what are they for? Would it be

Roy Scranton is the author of *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* and the novel *War Porn.*

better if I wrote a poem for Omran Daqneesh? Or painted a picture, like the one Dana Schutz painted of Emmett Till's battered corpse, *Open Casket,* which sparked such a furor at this year's Whitney Biennial? What good is art about war, or racism, or any other kind of human suffering? What relation does it bear to its subject?

Questions like these emerge whenever we reflect on the encounter between the concerned citizen and representations of suffering, especially but not only representations of war, especially but not only representations intended to be appreciated for their aesthetic form. This encounter is the subject of Sarah Sentilles's book *Draw Your Weapons,* which approaches its subject through two loose narratives, one about a conscientious objector who refused to fight in World War II, the other about an art student on the G.I. Bill who had served in Iraq, and—in the aggregative style made influential by Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* and David Shields's *Reality Hunger*—an associative collage of impressions, comments, quotations, facts, and reflections.

Once you start thinking about the relations between aesthetics, ethics, and suffering, you see the problem knotted into every fold of human culture.

Draw Your Weapons ranges widely, from video games to Louis Agassiz, from the author's memories of divinity school to her reflections on teaching critical theory to art students, from French artist Hubert Duprat's gold caddisfly cocoons to war-zone tourism. This is no great wonder, since once you start thinking about the relations between aesthetics, ethics, and suffering, you start seeing the problem knotted into nearly every fold of human culture, connecting to the deepest and most tragic riddles of human existence. Sentilles's approach allows for powerful poetic compression in the way that it juxtaposes superficially unrelated yet resonant material, yet it also risks shallowness and diffusion. Masters of the form develop their themes through ellipses and repetition, always coming back to a discrete handful of tropes and images. Sentilles develops a powerful metaphor in the idea of the box, the cocoon, the coffin—the enveloping body in distinction to the flat image—the body of the violin with which the book begins.

We meet Howard Scott, conscientious objector, through a picture taken of him with his violin on his 87th birthday. The violin, we come to learn, took 60 years to build: Scott began putting it together while imprisoned at McNeil Island Penitentiary. Before McNeil, Scott had been doing his civilian public service at a camp in California, but one day he decided that any wartime service was tantamount to supporting war, so he walked out. He was soon arrested and sent to McNeil. Released before he finished the violin, Scott brought the pieces home with him in a box. Sixty years later, Scott's grandson had the violin

The HEDGEHOG REVIEW

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finished and presented to him for his birthday.

The body of the instrument resonates with the strings; the air within carries the sound. Just so, Sentilles recounts how one of her theology teachers discussed "the God who speaks words to bring the world into being, who uses clay and breath to make human beings. ... In this story God is a poet and a potter." Artistic creation is here equated to divine creation, and Sentilles dramatizes this metaphor in a closing gesture of transcendence: *Draw Your Weapons* ends with a Quaker memorial service, after Howard's death, at which one friend says, "He was always making music ... He's making music still. Can't you hear him?"

It is a touching moment, though one haunted by the unresolved chord Sentilles plays again and again throughout the book as she confronts us with broken human bodies, boxes that are cages, and the possibility that the promise of art is not a promise of transcendence at all but a kind of voyeurism or even aggression. The book's second main narrative strand, following Sentilles's conversations with Miles, Iraq war veteran turned art student, opens this minor-key counterpoint, making much of the fact that Miles worked at Abu Ghraib prison, though well after the torture scandal there had run its course. These meditations on torture, violence, and complicity contrast, in complicated ways, with Howard's story of virtuous resistance and creative redemption. One moment stands out: a student in Sentilles's critical theory class (at an art school in Portland, Oregon), whom she suspects of having violent tendencies, presents for his final project a sculpture of a human body covered in photographs of "disemboweled bodies, disemboweled children, women naked and split open, women dead in the street in their underwear." Some of her students were afraid, Sentilles tells us. Several of them cried.

What are we to make of this? What relation does art bear to suffering? Sentilles does not say. She circles the question repeatedly, insistently, yet always at a certain remove, suggesting only that art may be a weapon or a tool depending on how you wield it, as if this told us anything, as if weapons weren't also tools. Sentilles speaks through Susan Sontag and Elaine Scarry and Judith Butler and numerous others, but never for herself, never saying why she had to write this book, what kind of world she hoped to create. Perhaps these are questions she did not want to ask, for though she talks about "spooky action at a distance," the Manzanar Japanese internment camp, the history of photography, and her students, whirling and whirling, sometimes gracefully, sometimes obscurely, she never plunges into the tragic depths her question opens.

Yet while this may be one of her book's greatest disappointments, it might also be one of its virtues. For if the redemptive note on which *Draw Your Weapons* closes remains strained, Sentilles's gentle resistance to the depths of her own subject is, in its way, an attempt to sound out that which is best in us, the affirmation we always hope to find echoing back in each other.

"I Will Die a Russian"

A marriage of convenience that yielded an intelligence bonanza

Review by Sara Mansfield Taber

SPIES IN THE FAMILY:
An American Spymaster, His Russian Crown Jewel, and the Friendship That Helped End the Cold War
BY EVA DILLON
Harper, 352 pp., $28.99

My father was a CIA covert operative. After his death, I found among his papers a sealed envelope containing articles about a Chinese newspaper editor's arrest—a rare trace of my father's 30-year intelligence career. During my childhood in Taiwan, I had sensed his sorrow about one of his Chi-

Sara Mansfield Taber is the author, most recently, of *Born Under an Assumed Name: The Memoir of a Cold War Spy's Daughter.* A writer and psychologist, she is also the author of *Bread of Three Rivers: The Story of a French Loaf* and *Dusk on the Campo: A Journey in Patagonia.*

Above: Anne and Paul Dillon in Munich, November 1951. His Army uniform was part of his cover. Opposite: General Polyakov and Nina in New Delhi, circa 1974

FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

nese contacts—a quaking man he'd hidden one night in our house. In my own memoir, I explored the toll my father's work took on him, but it was only by reading Eva Dillon's new book, *Spies in the Family,* that I finally understood the nature and intimacy of my father's relationship with the man for whom he grieved.

Dillon's memoir offers a Windexed view into the 9-to-5 of a clandestine CIA field officer—her father, Paul Dillon—and his management of foreign "assets," people who risk their lives to give the American government secrets about their countries. Most riveting is Dillon's portrait of Russian general Dmitri Fedorovich Polyakov, with whom her father shared a covert working relationship as Polyakov revealed secrets of "inestimable value."

This espionage story, drawn from in-depth interviews with many of the main players, including Polyakov's sons, is a masterly interweaving of subplots and layer upon layer of detail, which add up to a remarkable crystallization of the many forces and personalities that made up this significant chapter in Cold War foreign relations.

The Polyakov plot jolts into motion when, as a 30-year-old lieutenant colonel posted to the United Nations in New York with the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence agency, he requests a secret meeting with the CIA. He was no starry-eyed America-phile with a naïve attraction to his country's adversary; he was a patriot, who told his American handlers, "I was born a Russian and I will die a Russian." Nevertheless, he was fed up with Soviet hypocrisies and brutalities, and deeply concerned about a catastrophic war between the superpowers. "Polyakov was putting himself at risk so that the Americans would see Khrushchev and the Politburo for who they were, so that the United States would stand up to the Soviet's policies and counteract them," Dillon writes.

In 1973, Paul Dillon was posted to New Delhi, where his sole job was to manage Polyakov, now chief of the local GRU *rezidentura*. The two men enjoyed a warm and productive friendship. Polyakov was an avid sportsman, and since the pair often went hunting and fishing together, Paul gave the Russian a special gift: a fishing rod with a chamber for hiding clandestine information.

Theirs was a perfect marriage of convenience. As a former CIA colleague remembered of Paul,

he was "relaxed and unpretentious, serious but not forbidding, and approached the job at hand with plainspoken intelligence." The Russian wholly trusted him. "Polyakov/BOURBON regularly provided photographed copies of the contents of GRU pouches coming from and going out to Moscow," Dillon writes, "information on GRU operations and spies throughout the world, secret technical data ... military and foreign policy directives." The volume of intelligence was so prodigious, in fact, that the Agency dispatched an extra analyst to New Delhi to handle it.

Despite the treasure trove Polyakov dead-dropped into American hands, for many years his tremendous contribution remained undervalued.

Despite the treasure trove Polyakov dead-dropped into American hands, for many years his tremendous contribution remained undervalued. James Jesus Angleton, the Agency's famously paranoid chief of counterintelligence, believed that the Soviets had devised a "monster plot," and that any Soviet asset was suspect. The Angleton story, deftly recounted here, is a reminder of how one disturbed madman can wreak havoc in international affairs.

But it was not Angleton but Aldrich Ames who ultimately led to Polyakov's undoing. In 1985, as division head of the CIA's counterintelligence branch for Soviet operations, Ames accepted $50,000 from the KGB in exchange for the CIA's crown jewels, the names of almost every active Soviet agent spying for the Americans, including Polyakov. This tragic end to Polyakov's brilliant espionage career spoke to the moral gulf that separated him from his American counterpart: For 20 years, Polyakov risked his life, giving away Russian secrets for no reward, save the exercise of his own principles; Ames divulged American secrets to finance his fondness for Jaguars and fancy liquor.

COURTESY OF ALEXANDER POLYAKOV

Many more intriguing stories nest within the Polyakov tale. These include accounts of: the FBI's contribution to the affair; the contrasting lives of the Dillon and Polyakov children; the snake pit inside the CIA; the American journalists whose exposés doomed countless Soviet assets; and the long search for the Agency mole, which in 1994 finally rooted out Ames.

Dillon's book gets at the almost unfathomable complexity of the intelligence world and is at once heartening and distressing. On the one hand, she offers a portrait of human nobility and courage; on the other, the petty betrayal of Polyakov, who, in 1988, was executed for harming the Soviet Union when he may well have saved it. "Polyakov," said James Woolsey, CIA director under President Clinton, "was the jewel in the crown. ... What General Polyakov did for the West didn't just help us win the Cold War, it kept the Cold War from becoming hot. Polyakov's role was invaluable, and it was one that he played until the end—in his own words—for his country." ●

Collected by Anne Matthews

Commonplace Book

I have only to break into the tightness of a strawberry, and I see summer—its dust and lowering skies. It remains for me a season of storms.

—**Toni Morrison,** *The Bluest Eye,* 1970

Being embraced and sustained by the light-green water seemed not as much a pleasure as the resumption of a natural condition, and he would have liked to swim without trunks, but this was not possible, considering his project. He hoisted himself up on the far curb—he never used the ladder—and started across the lawn. When Lucinda asked where he was going, he said he was going to swim home.

—**John Cheever,** "The Swimmer," 1964

Pigeons on the grass alas.

—**Gertrude Stein,** libretto of *Four Saints in Three Acts,* 1928

It is neither just nor accurate to connect the word alas with pigeons. Pigeons are definitely not alas. They have nothing to do with alas and they have nothing to do with hooray (not even when you tie red, white, and blue ribbons on them and let them loose at band concerts); they have nothing to do with mercy me or isn't that fine, either. White rabbits, yes, and Scotch terriers, and blue-jays, and even hippopotamuses, but not pigeons.

—**James Thurber,** "There's an Owl in My Room," 1934

The great American dream that reached out to the stars has been lost to the stripes. We have forgotten where we came from, we don't know where we are, and we fear where we may be going. ... We must believe that it is darkness before the dawn of a beautiful new world; we will see when we believe it.

—**Saul Alinsky,** *Rules for Radicals,* 1971

It was surely, save perhaps for oranges, a more informally and familiarly fruit-eating time, and bushels of peaches in particular, peaches big and peaches small, peaches white and peaches yellow, played a part in life from which they have somehow been deposed; every garden, almost every bush and the very boys' pockets grew them. ... We ate everything in those days by the bushel and the barrel, as from stores that were infinite; we handled watermelons as freely as cocoanuts, and the amount of stomach-ache involved was negligible in the general Eden-like consciousness.

—**Henry James,** *A Small Boy and Others,* 1913

Humanity is perishable. That may be. But let us perish resisting, and if nothingness is what awaits us, let us not act in such a way that it is a just fate.

—**Étienne Pivert de Senancour,** *Obermann,* 1804

O brilliant kids, frisk with your dog,
Fondle your shells and sticks, bleached
By time and the elements; but there is a line
You must not cross nor ever trust beyond it
Spry cordage of your bodies to caresses
Too lichen-faithful from too wide a breast.
The bottom of the sea is cruel.

—**Hart Crane,** "Voyages," 1933

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd Vertue, unexercis'd and unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary.

—**John Milton,** *Areopagitica,* 1644

In the afternoon, a great event: we pass a ship that's following the same route as we are. The greeting that the two ships give each other with three grand prehistoric animal roars, the waving of the passengers lost at sea and alert to the presence of other human beings, the irrevocable separation on the green, malevolent waters—all that weighs on the heart a little. Afterwards I remain staring at the sea for a long time, full of a strange and good exaltation. After dinner I go to the bow. The emigrants play the accordion and dance in the night, where the heat seems to mount as if it were day.

—**Albert Camus,** sailing to South America, July 1949

I wrote to Mrs. Clarkson and Luff—went with Ellen to Rydale. Coleridge came in with a sack full of books, etc., and a branch of mountain ash. He had been attacked by a cow. He came over by Grisdale. A furious wind. Mr. Simpson drank tea.

—**Dorothy Wordsworth,** June 1802

The look of things. The weather. Men and women long at rest in the cemetery but vividly remembered. The Natural History of home: the suede glove on the front-hall table, the unfinished game of solitaire, the oriole's nest suspended from the tip of the outermost branch of the elm tree, dandelions in the grass.

—**William Maxwell,** *All the Days And Nights,* 1995

I think of that lost world, the way we lived before these new networking technologies, as having two poles: solitude and communion. The new chatter puts us somewhere in between, assuaging fears of being alone without risking real connection. It is a shallow between two deep zones, a safe spot between the dangers of contact with ourselves, with others.

—**Rebecca Solnit,** *London Review of Books,* August 29, 2013

Is this escape-into-the-frame a fine game for a hot afternoon, or is it rather something that conceals itself beneath a frivolity? To be isolated for ever in some romantic and forlorn landscape, enchanted oneself and imprisoned "out of time," beyond the necessities of human life, their humilities and importunities, without hope, without hope of return, without the aggravating possibility of some knight-errantry, how delicious, when one is in the mood, the contemplation of such a fate.

—**Stevie Smith,** "Art," 1937

[The story] has not been changed since it reached manuscript form, very swiftly, one day when I awoke with it already in mind. One of its sources was a great-limbed poplar tree that I could see even lying in bed. It was suddenly lopped and mutilated by its owner, I do not know why. It is cut down now, a less barbarous punishment for any crimes it may have been accused of, such as being large and alive. I do not think it had any friends, or any mourners except myself and a pair of owls.

—**J. R. R. Tolkien,** *Tree and Leaf,* 1964

Look, stranger, on this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers ...
And move in memory as now these clouds do,
That pass the harbour mirror
And all the summer through the water
saunter.

—**W. H. Auden,** "On This Island," 1937

AMERICAN PLACES

Joel Babb lives and works in Maine but seeks out urban inspiration in Boston, resulting in pieces such as this oil on linen painting called *Back Bay Aerial View* (2005). Babb's work can be found in numerous collections, including the Harvard Art Museum.

American Mathematical Society

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From West Point to Berkeley & Beyond

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From West Point to Berkeley & Beyond

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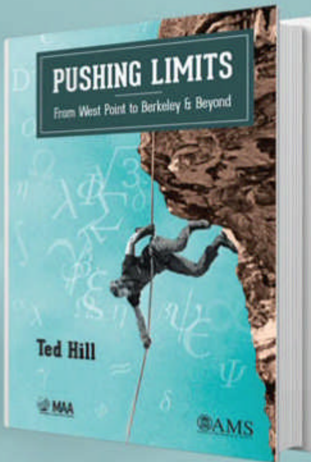

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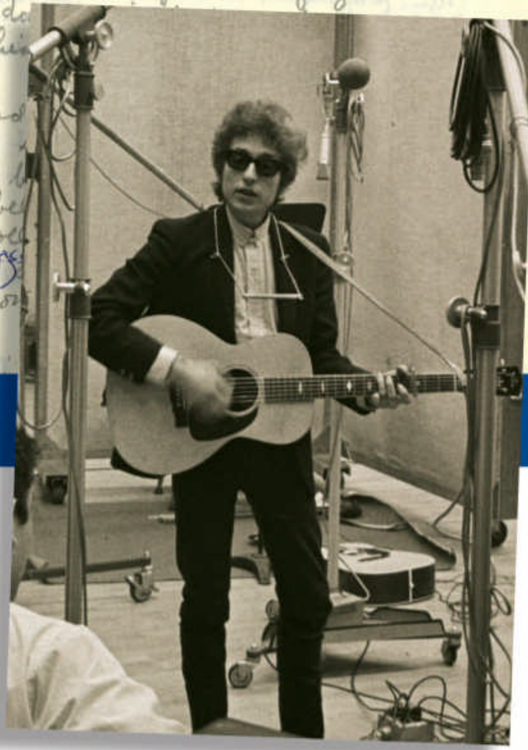

BobDylanArchive.com

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