PRICE $8.99

THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 13, 2023

CONRAD

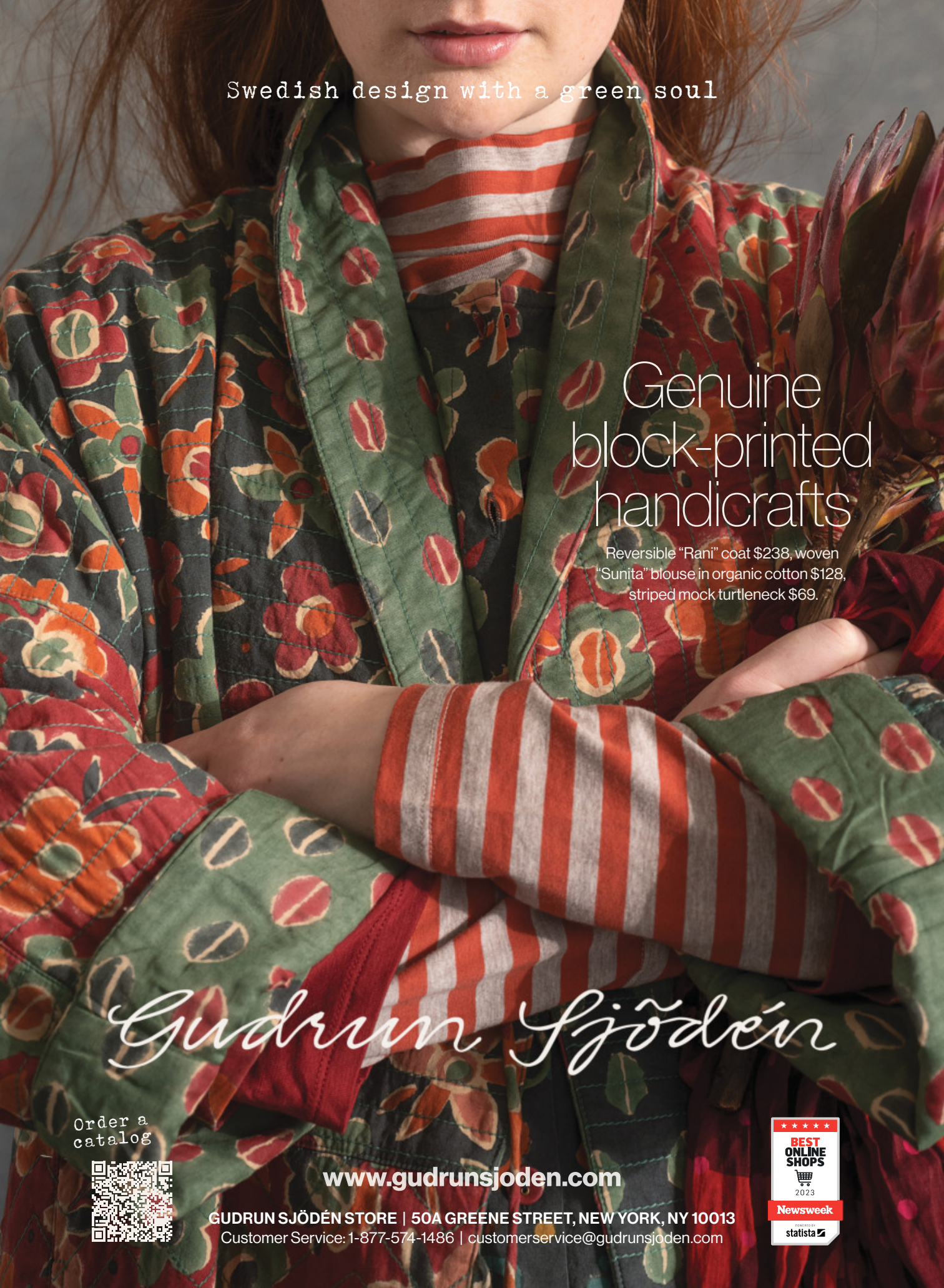
HOTELS & RESORTS®

INSPIRED

THE NEW YORKER

NOVEMBER 13, 2023

DRAWINGS *Charlie Hankin, Roland High, Dahlia Gallin Ramirez, William Haefeli, Roz Chast, Kate Isenberg, P. S. Mueller, Jorge Penné, Victoria Roberts, John McNamee, Sofia Warren* SPOTS *Simone Massoni*


Swedish design with a green soul
Genuine block-printed handicrafts
Reversible "Rani" coat $238, woven "Sunita" blouse in organic cotton $128, striped mock turtleneck $69.
Gudrun Sjödén
Order a catalog
www.gudrunsjoden.com
GUDRUN SJÖDÉN STORE | 50A GREENE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10013
Customer Service: 1-877-574-1486 | customerservice@gudrunsjoden.com
BEST ONLINE SHOPS
2023
Newsweek
statista

CONTRIBUTORS

Ed Caesar (*"Desert Captives," p. 46*) is a contributing staff writer. He published, most recently, "The Moth and the Mountain."

Adam Gopnik (*"The Organizer," p. 24*), a staff writer, published his latest book, "The Real Work," in March.

Kadir Nelson (*Cover*) won the 2020 Caldecott Medal. His paintings are in the permanent collections of numerous institutions, including the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art and the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.

Ada Limón (*Poem, p. 40*) is the Poet Laureate of the United States and a 2023 MacArthur Fellow. Her latest book of poems is "The Hurting Kind."

Vinson Cunningham (*The Theatre, p. 74*), a theatre critic for *The New Yorker*, has been a staff writer since 2016.

Clare Sestanovich (*Fiction, p. 54*) is the author of the forthcoming novel "Ask Me Again," which will be published in June, 2024.

Michael Schulman (*"Napoleon Complex," p. 36*), a staff writer, published his new book, "Oscar Wars," in February.

Rivka Galchen (*"Reinventing the Dinosaur," p. 30*), a staff writer, most recently published the novel "Everyone Knows Your Mother is a Witch."

Mosab Abu Toha (*Poem, p. 58*) is a Palestinian poet from Gaza. His début poetry book, "Things You May Find Hidden in My Ear," won an American Book Award and a Palestine Book Award in 2022.

Carol Kino (*The Talk of the Town, p. 23*) writes about art and contemporary culture. Her first book, "Double Click," is due out in March.

Ian Frazier (*Shouts & Murmurs, p. 29*), a staff writer, most recently published "Cranial Fracking," a collection of humor pieces.

Andrew Marantz (*The Talk of the Town, p. 22*) is a staff writer. He is the author of "Antisocial."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

ANNALS OF GASTRONOMY

Hannah Goldfield lists twenty of her favorite New York restaurants, in no particular order.

THE POLITICAL SCENE

Benjamin Wallace-Wells on Josh Paul, who left the State Department over Biden's arming of Israel.

Download the New Yorker app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

LEFT: TAMARA SHOPSIN; RIGHT: MOHAMMED AL-MASRI / REUTERS

THE MAIL

MISGUIDED

Julian Lucas, in his review of Teju Cole's "Tremor," quotes a passage in which the novel's protagonist, Tunde, ruminates on a hero of his, Piailug, the great Micronesian celestial navigator (Books, October 16th). Piailug is also a hero of mine; I even wrote a book, "A Song for Satawal," about traditional navigation in his Caroline Islands.

Cole is winging it, however, when he has Tunde say of Piailug that "he sailed alone," guided only by such things as "the movements of the stars by night" and "the swelling of the waves." Micronesian navigators do not sail alone; their peculiar method of tacking requires several crewmen. Nor do they sail by the movements of the stars, but toward a star's position at rise. And "the swelling of the waves" confuses the reliability of swells with the incoherent chatter of the waves on top. For a writer who is so aware of "the soul-stealing that's latent in fiction" (as Lucas puts it), Cole might have at least made sure to steal an accurate description.

Ken Brower
Berkeley, Calif.

THE BIG ONE

Nathan Heller, in his Letter from San Francisco, cites me as calling the West Coast "imperial" ("Spectacular Fall," October 23rd). Actually, my book is entitled "Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin." As its subtitle implies, the book covers the many ways that the city's leaders have colonized and plundered not just the West Coast but also the entire Western U.S., Mexico, and much of the Pacific Basin. Heller's article offers a good analysis of San Francisco's current problems, but it fails to consider how the city's unimpeded growth has contributed to sea-level rise and extreme weather, to name just two aspects of climate change that will have a devastating impact on the Bay Area. San Francisco's example applies to every other city that has ignored, and continues to ignore, what's coming.

Gray Brechin
San Rafael, Calif.

THE COST OF CARBON

Heidi Blake's excellent takedown of the carbon-credits industry, and the carbon-offsetting firm South Pole in particular, laudably resists the idea that the industry's flaws are merely resolvable excesses ("Hot Air," October 23rd). The late economist Elinor Ostrom showed, with mathematical rigor, that market-based "solutions" for avoiding the tragedy of the commons suffer from a fatal problem: the incentive to free-ride outweighs the amount spent on enforcement. Those who argue that carbon offsets channel resources to carbon-mitigation projects have got it wrong. The industry needs to be outlawed, not fixed; carbon taxes would have a much better chance of working, since governments' drive for revenue would provide for stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Chris Coleridge
Cambridge, England

Despite the problems that Blake identifies in the world's carbon markets, I hope we can avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Efforts to conserve and replant forests remain a critical piece of the global climate-change puzzle. Trees are arguably the most efficient carbon-capture technology that we have. Studies have found that keeping our existing forests standing and helping degraded ones to recover could reduce annual global emissions by up to thirty per cent. There are many community and Indigenous conservation projects doing important work, and it is here that our carbon dollars could have a real impact.

Sarah Wilson
Montreal, Que.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

Programs for Families at the New York Philharmonic are presented by **Daria and Eric Wallach.** Major support for Holiday Brass is provided by the **Gurnee and Marjorie Hart Endowment Fund.** Programs are made possible, in part, by the **New York State Council on the Arts** with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. Conductors, programs, soloists, prices, and sale dates are correct at the date of printing and are subject to change. All concerts are at the Wu Tsai Theater, David Geffen Hall, unless otherwise noted.

GOINGS ON

WINTER PREVIEW

What we're watching, listening to, and doing this season.

ART

Zines, the Harlem Renaissance, Joan Jonas

The American Folk Art Museum doesn't get enough love, so it's fitting that its big winter show should riff on the theme of neglect. **"Unnamed Figures: Black Presence and Absence in the Early American North"** (opening Nov. 15) bills itself as a "corrective" to the notion that early American racism was a "largely Southern issue," but that description seems too modest by half. Some hundred and twenty-five works, made between the late seventeenth century and the early nineteenth, offer a vibrant, occasionally tragic view of Black life above the Mason-Dixon Line.

Later in November, the Brooklyn Museum gives another neglected subject some overdue attention. **"Copy Machine Manifestos: Artists Who Make Zines"** (Nov. 17) is the first major North American exhibition to explore the fanzine, one of the more eclectic forms of media of recent decades. Close to a thousand art works take us on a tour of punk, queer, and hip-hop subcultures, all of which revelled in the zine's versatility. Some notable artists featured here, such as Carolee Schneemann, are well known for their other creations, but the majority are hardly known at all. Better late than never.

Maren Hassinger, who turns seventy-six this year, did some of her most powerful work in media so unorthodox that they make zines look like watercolors. In 1983, she mounted bunches of iron cables onto cement bases and called the result, which looks a little like a mass of wheat stalks, "Field." As the title might suggest, Hassinger's art keeps one foot in the natural world and the other in industry. The sculpture's display at Dia Beacon (Dec. 16) represents its welcome return to the public eye after a hiatus of more than thirty years.

Harold Cohen, a painter and a lecturer at U.C. San Diego, authored several versions of AARON—one of the earliest artificial-intelligence software programs capable of making art—between 1968 and Cohen's death, in 2016. The program's creations, on display at the Whitney, include drawings and paintings, both in color and in black-and-white, some representational and others abstract. (There will be live demonstrations of AARON's artistic process.) One can't help but wonder what sort of work the program would be doing had its inventor lived even longer—and, the way things are going, whether there will be sentient androids, eager to honor their illustrious ancestor, by the time that **"Harold Cohen: AARON"** (Feb. 3) welcomes patrons through the doors.

A century on from the Harlem Renaissance, cultural historians still aren't sure what to do with it. The Met's ambitious survey—the first in any New York City art museum since the eighties—makes the case for the movement as a form of modernism: regional yet international, tied to the Great Migration and Jim Crow but also to Egyptian aesthetics and the European avant-garde. Roughly a hundred and sixty works of photography, sculpture, film, and painting appear in **"The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism"** (Feb. 25), some from the museum's permanent collection and others on loan from historically Black colleges and universities.

The art of Joan Jonas, now eighty-seven, resists categorization, but MOMA is making an attempt. The retrospective **"Joan Jonas: Good Night Good Morning"** (March 17) is a hearty stew of video, film, sculpture, photography, drawing, and dance, often addressing themes of gender, performance, and ecology. Jonas has a thing for folklore, as evidenced by the installation "The Juniper Tree"; some of her recent work incorporates ideas inspired by marine-biology research, creating a mood both scientific and mystical.

—Jackson Arn

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NOLAN PELLETIER

MOVIES

Literary Ambition, Bio-Pics, Melodrama

For movies, the end of the year is a season of Oscarizables, and that means it's often replete with notable literary adaptations. This year's batch includes **"Eileen"** (Dec. 1), based on a novel by Ottessa Moshfegh and directed by William Oldroyd. The drama, which takes place in Massachusetts in 1964, features Thomasin McKenzie as a young employee at a correctional facility who is drawn into an intense friendship with a recently arrived psychologist (Anne Hathaway). **"Poor Things"** (Dec. 8), based on a book by Alasdair Gray, is a Victorian-era fantasy, directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, about a woman (Emma Stone) who is brought back to life and experiences her return as an emotional and sexual liberation. Willem Dafoe and Mark Ruffalo co-star. The writer and director Jonathan Glazer's adaptation of Martin Amis's novel **"The Zone of Interest"** (Dec. 8) is the story of the first commanding officer of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel), and his wife, Hedwig (Sandra Hüller), who attempt to maintain an ordinary family life in a house just beyond the death camp's walls. **"The Taste of Things"** (Dec. 8), directed by Trần Anh Hùng, is based on a novel, from 1924, by the food writer Marcel Rouff; it's a tale, set in France in 1885, about a chef (Juliette Binoche) and a restaurateur (Benoît Magimel, Binoche's husband) who become romantically involved after decades of working together. Roald Dahl's children's book "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" returns to the screen as **"Wonka"** (Dec. 15), a musical, directed by Paul King, starring Timothée Chalamet as the mysterious chocolatier. Blitz Bazawule, a musician as well as a filmmaker, directs a movie based on the Broadway musical of Alice Walker's novel **"The Color Purple"** (Dec. 25), starring Fantasia Barrino, Phylicia Pearl Mpasi, Taraji P. Henson, and Colman Domingo.

The end-of-year bio-pics on view this season have a global reach. Ridley Scott's grand-scale historical drama **"Napoleon"** (Nov. 22), which features a wide range of battle scenes, stars Joaquin Phoenix as the French general and emperor and Vanessa Kirby as the conqueror's first wife, Josephine. **"Maestro"** (Nov. 22), directed by and starring Bradley Cooper, follows the composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein from his days of struggle in the nineteen-forties through his rise to international fame; at its center is the relationship between Bernstein and his wife, Felicia Montealegre (Carey Mulligan), which was complicated by his bisexuality. Ava DuVernay's new film, **"Origin"** (Dec. 8), is among the most distinctive of recent bio-pics; it's the story of the journalist Isabel Wilkerson, who, amid grievous personal losses, is inspired to write "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents" (which was published in 2020). The movie, starring Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor as Wilkerson, dramatizes the author's research in India and in Germany and, with extensive quotes from the book, features reënactments of historical events that she narrates and analyzes. Adam Driver flaunted an Italian accent in "House of Gucci," in 2021, and he does so again, as Enzo Ferrari, in Michael Mann's **"Ferrari"** (Dec. 25), about the automaker's effort, in the nineteen-fifties, to become a kingpin of motor racing.

Melodrama gets its scholarly and critical due, and several films of that passionate genre are on the season's slate, including the writer and director Emerald Fennell's **"Saltburn"** (Nov. 17), which stars Barry Keoghan as a poor Oxford student who, after being invited to the lavish estate of a wealthy classmate (Jacob Elordi), is caught in a web of decadence and conflict. In **"All of Us Strangers"** (Dec. 22), directed by Andrew Haigh, a London screenwriter (Andrew Scott) begins a relationship with a neighbor (Paul Mescal) and is drawn back to his late parents' small-town home—only to find them there alive, as his contemporaries.

—Richard Brody

We act to build a business with inclusivity at its heart.

At L'Oréal Groupe, we have a long-term commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Our teams represent 168 nationalities, and our products and services take into account all skin and hair types, all genders, all identities, all cultures, all ages.

L'ORÉAL GROUPE

CREATE THE BEAUTY THAT MOVES THE WORLD

THE THEATRE

Alicia Keys, "Teeth," the Pinball Wizard

After a stately programming pace this fall, the theatre goes into a full gallop as the nights get longer. It begins with a burst of biographical musicals, including **"Hell's Kitchen"** (Public Theatre; starting previews on Nov. 19), by and about, in some elliptical way, Alicia Keys; **"The Gardens of Anuncia"** (Vivian Beaumont; Nov. 20), written by Michael John LaChiusa, about the director-choreographer Graciela Daniele; and **"Buena Vista Social Club"** (Atlantic Theatre Company; Nov. 17), Marco Ramirez's dramatization of the creation of the Cuban band's titular album, making for a production full of music.

Around Thanksgiving, just in time for uncomfortable dinner conversations, Sarah Paulson appears in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's Broadway début, the family drama **"Appropriate"** (Hayes; Nov. 28), in which white heirs discover their valuable—and morally repugnant—inheritance. In its way, **"Life & Times of Michael K"** (St. Ann's Warehouse; Nov. 29), a widely toured puppet-centric adaptation of J. M. Coetzee's 1983 novel, set in South Africa, tells a similar story about racism working its slow way through generations.

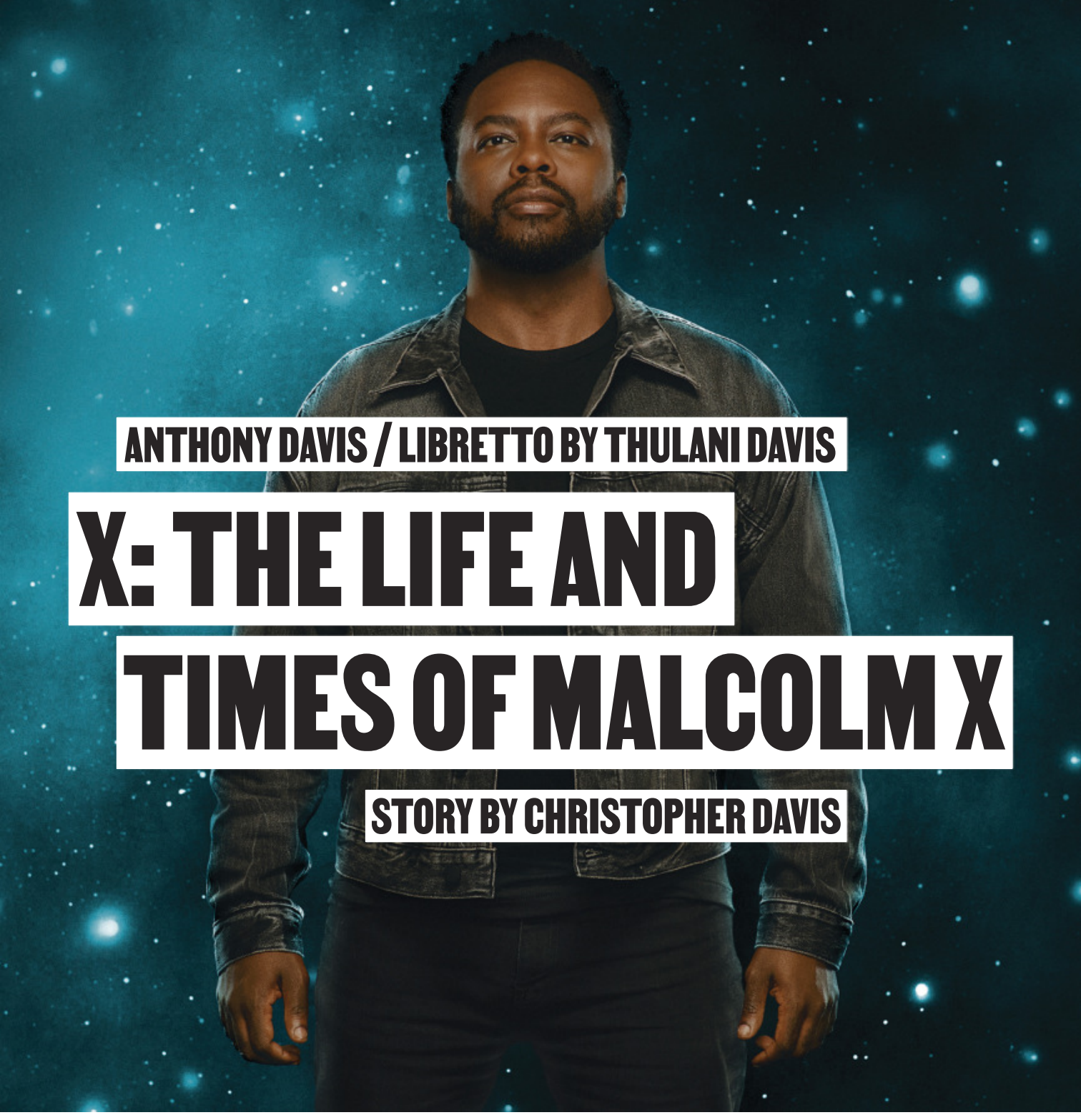
On Broadway, cold weather calls for sober programming: Manhattan Theatre Club moves Joshua Harmon's **"A Prayer for the French Republic"** (Samuel J. Friedman; Dec. 19) to Broadway, where its arguments about the promise of Israel will cut particularly deep; Kelli O'Hara and Brian d'Arcy James star in **"Days of Wine and Roses"** (Studio 54; Jan. 6), Craig Lucas and Adam Guettel's musical adaptation of the movie about alcoholism; and Tyne Daly and Liev Schreiber appear in a revival of John Patrick Shanley's 2004 drama, **"Doubt"** (American Airlines; Feb. 2), about a nun who mistrusts a priest.

Step away from Broadway one inch, though, and the theatre is kicking up its heels. The "Encores!" revivals program, at New York City Center, has the exuberant Sutton Foster in Mary Rodgers's much beloved **"Once Upon a Mattress"** (Jan. 24-28), and Billy Porter appears in **"Jelly's Last Jam"** (Feb. 21-25), George C. Wolfe's fable-tinged tribute to Jelly Roll Morton. The dazzling experimental-theatre festival **Under the Radar** (Jan. 5-21) scatters its avant-garde, international offerings all over the city; the equally audacious (but even thriftier) **Exponential Festival** produces mostly in Brooklyn spaces, throughout January, with a program of strange and mind-opening fare.

Off Broadway truly stretches its legs as the year turns. The Signature Theatre took the fall off, but it returns, at last, with Dominique Morisseau's **"Sunset Baby"** (Jan. 30), a drama about a Black revolutionary political prisoner and his estranged daughter. Two of my favorite shows from 2023 are receiving encores: Shayok Misha Chowdhury's English-and-Bangla bilingual masterpiece, **"Public Obscenities"** (Polonsky Shakespeare Center; Jan. 17), and Joey Merlo's **"On Set with Theda Bara"** (the Brick; Feb. 6), an eerie séance-play performed by David Greenspan, who channels multitudes. And, speaking of discombobulation, Michael R. Jackson, "A Strange Loop"'s brilliant composer, has written a musical adaptation, with Anna K. Jacobs, of the vagina-dentata movie **"Teeth"** (Playwrights Horizons; late Feb.), which should take a nice bite out of the season.

And then it's almost spring, a time flooded with splashy Broadway musicals, including **"Water for Elephants"** (Imperial; Feb. 24), an adaptation of the Sara Gruen book, by the rollicking, folksy PigPen ensemble; Ingrid Michaelson and Bekah Brunstetter's adaptation of **"The Notebook"** (Schoenfeld; March 14); and **"The Who's Tommy"** (playing a mean pinball at the Nederlander; March 8). Finally, beginning on an as yet unspecified day in March, Jeremy Strong appears on Broadway in **"An Enemy of the People,"** Amy Herzog's version of Henrik Ibsen's cautionary tale about inconvenient truths. Will the part win Strong a Tony? One can only assume that "Succession"'s eldest boy will know how to make a run at the crown.

—Helen Shaw



ON STAGE NOV 3–DEC 2

Don't miss the Met premiere of Anthony Davis's gripping opera about the turbulent life of the iconic civil rights leader. Robert O'Hara's new production stars baritone Will Liverman in the title role, with soprano Leah Hawkins as his wife, Betty Shabazz. Kazem Abdullah conducts the newly revised score, which provides a jazz-inflected setting for Thulani Davis's poetic libretto.

Tickets start at $25 metopera.org 212.362.6000

Photo: Zenith Richards / Met Opera

The Metropolitan Opera

Peter Gelb
MARIA MANETTI SHREM GENERAL MANAGER

Yannick Nézet-Séguin
JEANETTE LERMAN-NEUBAUER MUSIC DIRECTOR

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

Earl Sweatshirt, Cat Power, Madonna

There are two distinct lines of thought regarding genre in music: some artists see themselves as disrupters, others as archetypes. This binary plays out in a winter concert season dominated by artists at different stages of their careers, both surveyors looking to expand their sound and pioneers who've settled into various niches. Either approach can (and does) lend itself to invigorating live performance.

A few rap craftsmen put their dexterity on display. At Brooklyn Steel, the savant turned sage **Earl Sweatshirt** connects with his longtime collaborator, the underground beat-maker the **Alchemist** (Nov. 22), and the inquisitive former poet **Noname** (Nov. 27) carries on with the meta hip-hop commentary of her recent album, "Sundial." On Jan. 26, the fellow-Chicagoan **Mick Jenkins** hits Racket with his own sonorous wordplay, exploring personal growth and momentum.

For those looking for something with a bit more punch, there are a handful of rockers making heavy music that's so pretty it can scan as power pop. On Nov. 17, at Irving Plaza, the punk-rock collective **the Armed** cuts post-hardcore songs with electronica. Webster Hall plays host to two shows of varying intensity: the metal band **Baroness** with the riffy hard-rock group **Sheer Mag** (Nov. 29) and the indie star **Sky Ferreira** (Dec. 11), whose only album, "Night Time, My Time," from 2013, remains a thrashing, grungy pop milestone.

Indie-rock icons press on with new music, lean into the weight of their discographies, or tap into the legacies of other luminaries. At Kings Theatre, on Nov. 24, the seminal singer-songwriter **Liz Phair,** who returned from a decade-long recording hiatus, in 2021, with the album "Soberish," unleashes clearheaded music of separation. At Carnegie Hall, on Feb. 14, **Cat Power** sings songs by the great Bob Dylan. **Patti Smith and Her Band** returns to Brooklyn Steel for two shows (Dec. 29-30), and the same venue welcomes the riot grrrls **Sleater-Kinney** (Mar. 13-14), débuting music from the group's upcoming album, "Little Rope."

For something subtler, try **Helena Deland,** a singer-songwriter who makes serene folk music (Music Hall of Williamsburg; Nov. 18), or **Mitski,** indie rock's reigning sad sovereign, who's playing seven shows in N.Y.C. for her new album, "The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We," at the Beacon Theatre (Feb. 21-24) and Kings Theatre (Feb. 26-28).

At the Blue Note, various boundary-pushing soul musicians continue journeys into the unknown. The psychedelic artist **Nick Hakim** loses himself in bleary R. & B. Nov. 14-15, and later in the month, Nov. 30-Dec. 4, the multi-instrumentalist **Cautious Clay** leans into the jazz flourishes of his amorphous new album, "KARPEH." **Kassa Overall,** a Seattle drummer and sometime rapper, straddles the rhythmic realms of jazz and hip-hop with poise (Jan. 15). And, in a somewhat dramatic transformation, **Corinne Bailey Rae** trades in the snuggly pop soul of such breakthrough singles as "Like a Star" for the daring eclecticism of her album "Black Rainbows" (Feb. 15-18).

The jazz drummer **Makaya McCraven** shows off his beat-maker impulses at Pioneer Works on Dec. 1, and the poet **aja monet** brings the political jazz of her début album to the same venue on Dec. 6. Two experimental auteurs operating at similar frequencies take turns at Webster Hall: first up is the Alabama Shakes front person **Brittany Howard** (Feb. 16-17), then the R. & B. singer **Jamila Woods** (Feb. 18).

And, with the dawn of a new year, pop divas take over the arenas. After a stint at Barclays Center (Dec. 13-14 and Dec. 16), **Madonna** brings the Celebration Tour, exploring music from across her storied four-decade catalogue, to Madison Square Garden (Jan. 22-23 and Jan. 29), where the melisma master **Mariah Carey** officially christens the Christmas season on Dec. 9 and Dec. 17, the last show of her holiday tour.

—Sheldon Pearce

PORTRAITS OF AN ARTIST

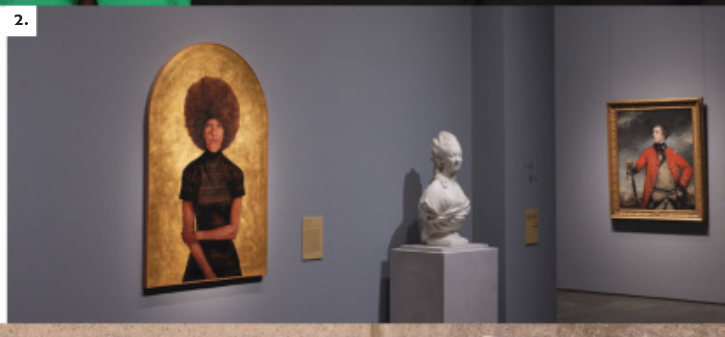
A NEW EXHIBIT AT THE FRICK MADISON SHINES A LIGHT ON THE GROUNDBREAKING WORK OF BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS

On a recent evening in Manhattan, a gathering of art collectors, gallerists, emerging artists, and Goldman Sachs clients arrived at the Frick Madison to take in a historic exhibition: *Barkley L. Hendricks: Portraits at the Frick*, the museum's first solo show by an artist-of-color. Hendricks, a Black contemporary painter, was renowned for groundbreaking portraits that upended tropes of European portraiture. To celebrate Hendricks' legacy, Goldman Sachs Private Wealth Management and *The New Yorker* sponsored an event exploring the context of his work through an intimate conversation between Thelma Golden, the director and the chief curator of The Studio Museum in Harlem; Aimee Ng, a specialist in Italian Renaissance art and curator at The Frick Collection; and Antwaun Sargent, a writer and consulting curator at The Frick Collection.

Ng noted that the setting added context to the artist's works. The Frick was one of Hendricks' favorite museums, and the influence of Old Master portraits can be perceived in his portraits. For instance, his poignant *Lawdy Mama* was inspired by Byzantine icons and gold-ground Italian Renaissance paintings. And, his monochromatic colored backgrounds recall Renaissance portraits. "He saw amazing works of art in European tradition that he admired and, at the same time, saw something missing in—and that was the representation of Black figures in a personalizing and humanizing way," Ng said.

Sargent thoughtfully assessed the artist's impact through the lens of Black history. "Whenever I walk into the Frick, it's about having conversations with different histories in relation to each other. When it comes to Hendricks he noted, "There's an engagement with Black history and Black art history."

1.



2.

3.

1. NICOLE PULLEN ROSS THELMA GOLDEN, AIMEE NG, ANTWAUN SARGENT

2. BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS: PORTRAITS AT THE FRICK

3. THELMA GOLDEN, AIMEE NG, ANTWAUN SARGENT

As guests contemplated Hendricks's legacy, the evening brought the notion of maximizing one's own impact to the forefront. "At Goldman, we're very focused on finding ways to add value to our clients, including constantly thinking about how we can bring them together around topics of importance so that they can maximize their impact," said Nicole Pullen Ross, Goldman Sachs's region head of the New York Private Wealth Management (PWM) business, during the event. Hendricks made his mark through his art, but for others it may mean building a family legacy, developing your own passions, embarking on a new career or doing good in the world through philanthropy.

You define what matters most. Visit Goldman Sachs Private Wealth Management today.

DANCE

Philip Glass, Pina Bausch, Hervé Koubi

The project **"Dancing with Glass: The Piano Etudes"** arose from an idea first explored at the outdoor festival at Kaatsbaan: parcel out Philip Glass's piano études to a select group of choreographers and see what happens. Now part of Van Cleef & Arpels's inaugural Dance Reflections festival, the program (at the Joyce Theatre; Nov. 28-Dec. 10) consists of five dances, including a laid-back, rhythmic meditation by the Brazilian-born tap artist Leonardo Sandoval; a spare and formal duet by the high priestess of dance minimalism Lucinda Childs; and an expansive, full-body ode choreographed and danced by Chanon Judson, the artistic director of Urban Bush Women. The pianist is Maki Namekawa.

Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" has also proved irresistible to choreographers. The late Pina Bausch's interpretation—created for her company, Tanztheater Wuppertal, in 1975—remains one of the most memorable. Lacerating and relentless, it is danced on a mound of dirt that sticks to the dancers' sweaty skin. In **"The Rite of Spring/Common Ground[s]"** (Nov. 29-Dec. 14), Bausch's piece is performed, in the commanding space of the Park Avenue Armory, by a company of dancers from across Africa, which the Senegalese dancer and choreographer Germaine Acogny assembled from her school, the École des Sables. It is paired with a duet for Acogny and a veteran of the Bausch company, Malou Airaudo, both in their seventies.

The dancers of **Compagnie Hervé Koubi** (Joyce Theatre; Jan. 23-28) come from North Africa. Koubi, who is French, is of Algerian descent, a fact that he discovered as an adult. That revelation brought him to a new dance language, inspired by the beauty and the virtuosity of his dancers, mostly self-trained in hip-hop and martial arts. In "Sol Invictus," as in previous works, they fly through the air, spin, and glide, or they join forces to carry and catch one another from great heights, creating images of solidarity, elegance, and wonder.

After a fall season devoted to Balanchine, **New York City Ballet** returns with six weeks of mixed repertory (David H. Koch Theatre; Jan. 23-March 3), including a new work by the dancer Tiler Peck—known for her sophisticated musicality—and another by Alexei Ratmansky, recently appointed artist-in-residence. A new generation of dancers takes on Christopher Wheeldon's striking "Polyphonia," a suite of starkly intimate dances set to moody piano pieces by György Ligeti, from 2001. And, in Balanchine's intensely romantic "Liebeslieder Walzer," four couples live out intimate dramas to the music of Brahms, performed onstage by two pianists and a vocal quartet, as if at a private soirée.

—Marina Harss

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Carnegie Stars, Tributes to Luminaries

As the end of the year approaches, companies are wrapping up anniversary celebrations and finding ways to mark the holidays which don't involve entering the crowded "Messiah" field.

At the 92nd Street Y, New York, the free-spirited pianist **Conrad Tao** interweaves Rachmaninoff with Billy Strayhorn and Stephen Sondheim for the Russian composer's hundred-and-fiftieth birthday (Dec. 6). The soprano **Barbara Hannigan,** a fiercely beautiful interpreter of modernist and contemporary scores, fêtes John Zorn for his seventieth, at Miller Theatre (Nov. 16). The **New York Philharmonic** puts a bow on György Ligeti's centennial with a pairing of his glacial-galactic "Atmosphères"—which Stanley Kubrick borrowed for "2001: A Space Odyssey"—with Holst's "The Planets" (select dates Nov. 22-25).

For New Year's Eve, the **Metropolitan Opera** premières its new production of Bizet's endlessly popular "Carmen," exactly fourteen years after it introduced its previous one. The aching compassion of David Lang's "Little Match Girl Passion," about a poor waif who perishes in the winter cold, has made it an unlikely holiday favorite, and the singers of **Ekmeles** present it in a crypt under the Church of the Intercession, in Harlem (Dec. 8 and Dec. 11-12). The Perelman Performing Arts Center builds a four-part series, "Circle Songs," around the winter solstice, with genre-spanning concerts by **Anthony Roth Costanzo, Toshi Reagon, Time for Three,** and **Orfeh and Andy Karl** (Dec. 20-23).

Nine pianists, including **Nico Muhly** and **Maki Namekawa,** take the stage of David Geffen Hall, where they play through the complete collection of Philip Glass's mesmerizing études (Nov. 19). The new-music specialists **Adam Tendler** and **Conor Hanick** tear into two driving pieces for four-hand piano, Steve Martland's "Drill" and Julius Eastman's "Gay Guerilla," at

GIFT THE SPECTACULAR

Glenfiddich®

SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY

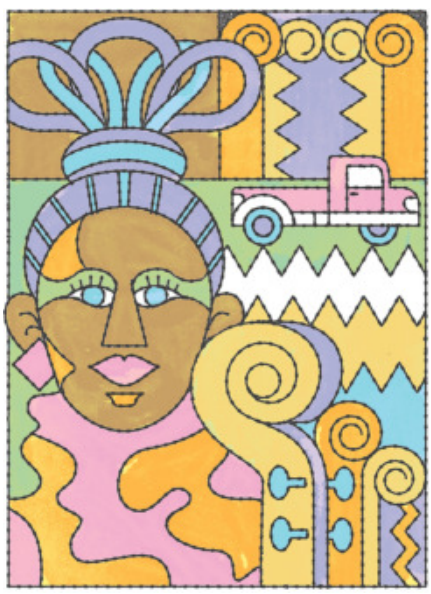
Kaufman Music Center (Nov. 28).

The WQXR host **Terrance McKnight** taps a quartet of singers for "Handel: Made in America," an original show that combines personal reflections with the Baroque composer's music, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Feb. 15-16).

On the festival circuit, the **Prototype Festival** and the **Brooklyn Academy of Music** collaborate for the first time, on Huang Ruo's "Angel Island" (Jan. 11-13), a theatre piece that adapts poems by Chinese immigrants scrawled on the walls of detention centers in California. The **Escher String Quartet** undertakes all six Bartók quartets in the course of three hours, with two intermissions, as part of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's winter festival (March 10).

Carnegie Hall's calendar is particularly plentiful this winter: **Daniel Barenboim,** having stepped down from the Berlin State Opera earlier this year, conducts the city's resident ensemble, the **Staatskapelle Berlin,** in a sonorous cycle of Brahms symphonies (Nov. 30-Dec. 1). The Inauguration poet **Amanda Gorman** and the German cellist **Jan Vogler** team up (Feb. 17), combining spoken word and Bach cello suites. The opera stars **Bryn Terfel** (Nov. 14) and **Juan Diego Flórez** (Nov. 29) stay in their respective wheelhouses, with British songs and lots of Rossini, and the elegant pianists **Daniil Trifonov** (Dec. 12) and **Víkingur Ólafsson** (Feb. 7) overachieve in the towering assignments of Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata and Bach's Goldberg Variations.

—Oussama Zahr



PHOTOGRAPH BY REVA KELLER FOR THE NEW YORKER

TABLES FOR TWO

Bronx Sidewalk Clam Heaven

A particular restaurant, a specific market, one exquisite sandwich—whatever it is that brings you to Arthur Avenue, the Bronx's Little Italy, the real draw is the entire area. Maybe you make the trip for scarpariello at Dominick's or a bouquet of sausages from Calabria Pork Store, but it's a wasted opportunity not to swing by Morrone Pastry for a box of Florentines. To my mind, no visit is complete without a pit stop at one of the street's duelling outdoor shellfish stands—especially in the autumn, when the air is chilly and being outdoors feels like a treat. At the street's two ersatz raw bars—one outside Cosenza's Fish Market (2354 Arthur Ave.), the other outside Randazzo's Seafood (2327 Arthur Ave.)—you can get various shellfish shucked to order, devouring them à la minute while standing around on the sidewalk. There's something unavoidably primal about prying open an oyster or a clam and sucking it from its shell; there's no way to aesthetically refine the act's essential ferality. It's fun as hell, a disposal of ritual, a moment of pure sensation.

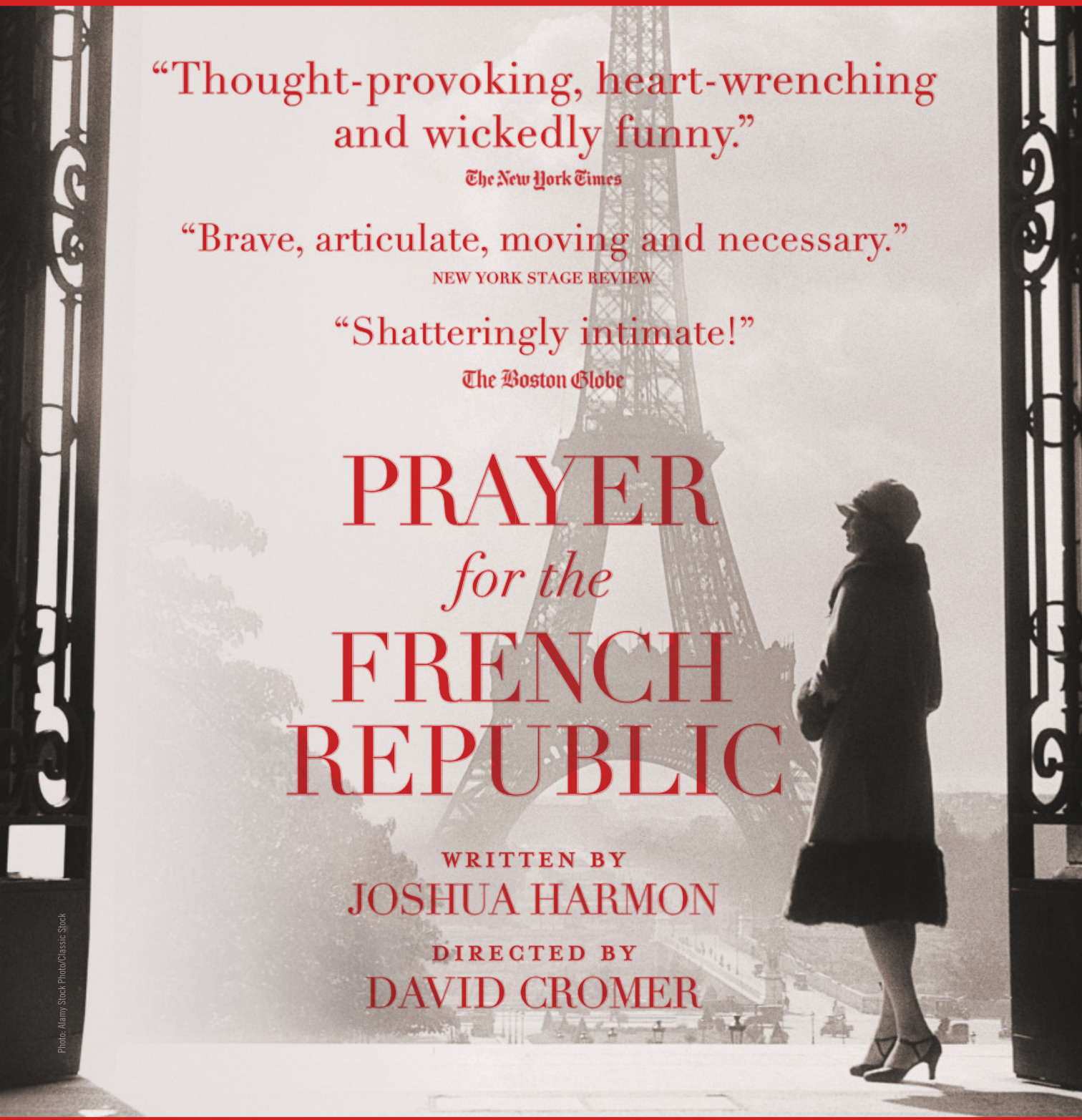
I won't tell you that Cosenza's or Randazzo's is better. Both have been in operation since the early nineteen-hundreds, and both draw passionate crowds. At Cosenza's, clams are shucked to the left of the front door (a buck-fifty for a juicy midsize cherrystone, fifteen dollars for a dozen) and oysters to the right. On a recent visit, the lineup included Beau Soleils, from New Brunswick, and Wellfleets, from Massachusetts ($2.99 each), Blue Points from Long Island Sound ($2.50), and Kumamotos from California's Humboldt Bay (a steep $3.99). There's an array of dressings and hot sauces, including a mouth-puckering homemade mignonette, and the oysters are glorious, a symphony of brine and richness.

I tend to prefer Randazzo's, where it's less slickly touristy and there's a bit more of a rough-spun air, with the day's offerings jumbled in coolers rather than neatly arrayed. There were clams, fifteen dollars a dozen, and also the thrilling option of razor clams, more subtle in flavor than their round counterparts. There were just two varieties of oyster—grassy-bright Blue Point and those buttery Beau Soleil—and both were two dollars apiece. That's the sort of price that lets a person order a dozen, and maybe another dozen after that, to see how far she can take this thing. As at Cosenza's, you can stand at the counter and slurp as they're shucked, or, quite enticingly, you can take a seat in one of the folding chairs, to people-watch while, perhaps, sipping from a little plastic cup of cheap white wine that's mysteriously appeared on the card table in front of you. Squeeze the lemon, dab the hot sauce, devour.

—Helen Rosner

THE 2022 DRAMA DESK AND OUTER CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD-WINNING

BEST PLAY ARRIVES ON BROADWAY



MTC MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

PERFORMANCES BEGIN DEC 19

Tickets on sale now | FrenchRepublicPlay.com

Prayer for the French Republic is made possible in part by a generous grant from The Roy Cockrum Foundation.

DANIEL CATÁN / LIBRETTO BY MARCELA FUENTES-BERAIN

FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS

ALL THE STORIES ON ONE STAGE

ON STAGE NOV 16–DEC 14

Soprano Ailyn Pérez stars as the opera diva Florencia Grimaldi in Daniel Catán's spellbinding drama, inspired by the magic realism of Gabriel García Márquez. Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts this milestone premiere—the third Spanish-language opera in Met history—in a vivid new production by Mary Zimmerman.

Tickets start at $25 metopera.org 212.362.6000

Photo: Paola Kudacki / Met Opera

The Metropolitan Opera

Peter Gelb
MARIA MANETTI SHREM GENERAL MANAGER

Yannick Nézet-Séguin
JEANETTE LERMAN-NEUBAUER MUSIC DIRECTOR

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
AGAINST DESPAIR

In an era of darkness and blood, it is nearly impossible to remember that, from Moscow to Jerusalem, there was once a time of promise. Not resolution, not paradise, and certainly not the end of history—but promise. Between 1989 and 1995, the following things happened: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the liberation of Eastern and Central Europe; the collapse of Soviet Communism and the (seeming) end of the Cold War; the brief, but startling, appearance of a pro-democracy movement in Beijing and other Chinese cities; the end of South African apartheid; and the signing of the Oslo Accords by the Israeli leadership and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

In other words, in many nations, political leaders, dissidents, and social movements, having exhausted so many rotten ideas and endured so much oppression and tragedy, began to push the world in a direction of decency, democracy, and compromise. Of course, there is much that is oversimplified in that sentence—euphoria and triumphalism obscured some of the dark currents that persisted in those countries and in human nature itself—but the promise was real, and it ran deep.

Now we live in ominous times, with Vladimir Putin's Russia laying waste to whole cities and towns in Ukraine, and the death count mounting in the Middle East. Rarely a day passes when there is not a new threat of broader conflagration. Will Putin deploy the worst weapons in his arsenal or extend his forces to other former Soviet republics? Will the Middle East conflict expand to Lebanon, Syria, and Iran? Only the hard of heart do not mourn the loss of life and work to stop it; only a fool does not recognize the possibility of worse days to come. Yet despair, though a temptation, does not constitute a vision. In 2016, when a bigoted authoritarian won election as President in this country, despair was not an option. It is not an option now.

It is almost a certainty, though, that, at least for some time, the forces of reaction, of furious radicalism, will persist. Two vivid examples among many: recently, a senior Hamas official, Ghazi Hamad, declared that Israel can expect "a second, a third, a fourth" attack, until it is eliminated from the map. "We must annihilate that country," he said, "because for the Arab and Islamic world it constitutes a disaster." In Hamad's view, there is no need to regret the brutalities of October 7th. "We did not want to harm civilians, but there were complications on the ground," he told Lebanese television. "Everything we do is justified." At the same time, in the Israeli parliament, Zvi Sukkot, a radical settler with a long record of disgraceful provocations against Palestinians in the West Bank, has been appointed to lead the subcommittee on West Bank issues. Israeli authorities were previously so wary of Sukkot that they deemed him unfit to serve in the Army. Merav Michaeli, the leader of the Labor Party, called him "one of the most dangerous people in Israel, a racist, pyromaniac, terror supporter," capable of igniting a "second front" on the West Bank. (In the past, Sukkot was repeatedly arrested and expelled from the West Bank, on suspicion of committing arson and perpetrating violent attacks, which he denied.)

The forces of hatred extend well beyond the region. The director of the F.B.I., Christopher Wray, testified in the Senate that levels of antisemitism are at "historic levels" in the U.S. and warned that extremists could "draw inspiration" from Hamas and assault Jews on American soil. Wray also said that Jews, despite representing just 2.4 per cent of the American public, are targets of "something like sixty per cent of all religious-based hate crimes." The wave of antisemitism is arguably more pronounced in Europe, where the German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, was so alarmed that he told a rally at the Brandenburg Gate that it was "intolerable that Jewish people are today once again living in fear in our country, of all places." And, as Rozina Ali writes in the *Times,* fears of Islamophobic attacks in the Muslim American community are also on the rise; one

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

of the more appalling examples is the recent stabbing death, in Illinois, of a six-year-old Palestinian American child, Wadea al-Fayoume, by his family's landlord, who, according to the boy's mother, shouted before attacking them, "You Muslims must die!"

Israel was created precisely out of a sense that a tiny and persecuted population, following centuries of violence culminating in the Holocaust, could no longer endure the precarity of exile. More than any event in Israeli history, the massacre of October 7th shattered the country's sense of protection. At the same time, the Palestinians of Gaza, after years of Israeli siege and blockade, and immiserating misrule by Hamas, live in a state of excruciating loss and fear; the Palestinians of the West Bank continue to live under an unbearable occupation that has lately grown so intimidating and violent that there is frequent talk in the territories of a "second Nakba." And any attempt to establish a landscape of security and human dignity will wither if the likes of Ghazi Hamad and Zvi Sukkot go on playing leading roles. Any world in which Hamas and an increasingly reactionary Israeli leadership dictate the policy and the temper of the region is doomed to more injustice, confrontation, and death.

President Biden's challenges are immense. Facing a likely reëlection campaign against an increasingly manic Donald Trump as well as the Russian assault on Ukraine and the constant challenge of China, Biden must also find, day to day, ways to press for peace and security in the Middle East, while encouraging the positive participation of complicated regional powers, including the U.A.E., Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. The standard practice of embracing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in public and pressuring him in private has long proved to be a mug's game. He has been in the business of deceiving American Presidents since the nineteen-nineties. "I know what America is," Netanyahu once said. "America is a thing you can move very easily." Moreover, the man who advertised himself as "Mr. Security" presided over the biggest security failure in the history of the state.

It may take years for a new political culture to take hold among the Palestinians and the Israelis. It may be many years before the psychic wounds heal. Right now, to most ears, talk of a "two-state solution" is nostalgic fantasy and a "one-state solution" a recipe for instant civil war. With all eyes blurred by rage and grief, an absence of vision is the reality. But, as the Palestinian academic Sari Nusseibeh put it to me recently, "People have to be shown or given options. We don't have the option of being pessimistic." At least one source of inspiration is that era of history, not so distant, when leaders and movements, for all their flaws and failures, agreed to agree, and fought for the rights of ordinary human beings to live in freedom and without fear. That is a process that is never fully achieved anywhere, but it cannot be relinquished to a state of despair.

—David Remnick

COMB-OVER DEPT.

DE-EXTINCTING

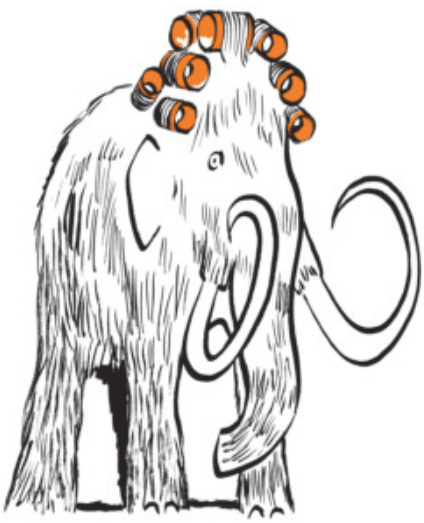
Statistically speaking, most of the really cool animals have already died. Certainly, almost all of the big ones have. *Megatherium*, the twelve-foot-tall sloth? Goner. *Titanoboa*, the snake as heavy as a Honda Civic? Last seen fifty-six million years ago. The cat-size dragonfly, the double-decker-bus-size rhino, the capybara that could dunk a basketball? Expired, departed, no more. A few years ago, a team of scientists launched an effort to "de-extinct" the woolly mammoth by altering elephant DNA. Should they? "I've gone back and forth," Ross MacPhee, a paleomammalogist at the American Museum of Natural History, said. "I think my fundamental position is: What's the point, really?"

The other day, up in the museum's fifth-floor studio, MacPhee was inspecting a mammoth of his own creation. He is curating an exhibition, "The Secret World of Elephants," that called for the construction of a life-size mammoth model. (It was sculpted of steel, foam, and polyester resin by two museum preparators, Beck Meah and Jason Broughan.) MacPhee, who has brown-and-silver hair and a matter-of-fact disposition, had come to check on one of the trickiest parts of the installation: the hair. Another preparator, Celeste Carballo, who wore a blue jumpsuit, was applying hairy tufts with a hot-glue gun.

The studio looked like an old shop classroom, with high ceilings, a skylight, and heavy machinery. Drills buzzed. Workers came in and out carrying glass eyeballs. Two dogs barked, unseen. The model was on a rolling platform. So far, Carballo had covered most of the legs, which were about as tall as she was. The mammoth, naked from the midriff up, looked as though he were headed to the pool. Do the models get names? "People always ask us that," Carballo said. Officially, no. Unofficially, Martin. "As in Martin Gore from Depeche Mode," Carballo said.

The hair was the centerpiece of their design. "A lot of illustrations of Ice Age mammals make them as dowdy as possible," MacPhee said. "They say, 'Since we don't know, it's safe to just make them all brown.' I don't think that's realistic." MacPhee and Carballo wanted more color. Their edgiest decision was to show the mammoth shedding its winter qiviut coat; for some reason, you never see a woolly mammoth depicted with its wool. MacPhee walked over to an inspiration board. He pointed. "This is obviously not a mammoth—this is a musk ox," he said. "But it's a good animal. In shedding time, they look like a badly made bed."

Carballo had found her raw materials at a synthetic-hair company in Massachusetts that did the costumes for



"The Grinch," the 2005 "King Kong," Chewbacca, and "Where the Wild Things Are." She held up a thatch, frizzy and tough. "I'm pretty sure we've bought hair from them before, for some sort of prehistoric gorilla," she said.

"*Gigantopithecus!*" MacPhee said. "A huge extinct orang."

Carballo did the dye job herself. "I pretty much spent the summer painting hair, cutting hair, prepping hair, and separating hair," she said. She'd arranged the shades on carts, a hirsute painter's palette: Conan orange, Beyoncé ombré, Gosling dirty blond. "I would show them to Ross, and he would help me edit and figure out, like, this tone is right, this is not, this is too Trumpy," she said.

"The mammoths were not any one color," MacPhee said. "There was even an indication that some must have been close to blond."

The legs still looked too neat—a well-made bed. Carballo planned to rub the mammoth with dirt once she'd applied everything. "A little less Pantene," she said. Then she'd add the qiviut. She inspected a reference photo of musk-ox eyelashes—thick, kinked shafts, like undone paper clips. She had once used broom bristles, while making a feather-like coat for relatives of a *T. rex*. "There's no material you can buy that's 'dinosaur feathers,'" she said. "You have to figure it out."

Carballo is a painter by training. Years ago, working for a gallery, she assisted on a show of Dieter Roth busts made from chocolate. "Some of my co-workers would eat it," she said. "I refused to touch it for months. I didn't want to ruin it for myself." Her first project at the museum was a diorama of an Aztec marketplace. "I spent a long time painting chayote," she said. She has since lavished time on other gigantic goners. A megalodon model, from a recent shark exhibit, was so big that she could fit entirely within its jaws.

She applied another tuft, then headed toward her private workspace, in the rafters. On a desk, she had cotton samples that she was matting to replicate the wool. "I just go like this," she said, stabbing one with a pointy metal object. On another desk was an unusually luscious hair patch. "When Ross told me to look at musk ox, I actually got ahold of real musk ox," she said. How? "Oh, you know," she explained. "The Internet helps you find things sometimes." It felt scratchy. "It sheds," she said.

—Zach Helfand

BEGINNINGS

SOLO

Walking on the Upper East Side recently, Marco Trigoso recalled his arrival in New York City, this spring. "I came here like falling out of the sky," he said. "The first days were so tiring." He wore a tan windbreaker and beige sneakers. "I'd never even looked on Google Maps to see what New York City was like," he said, quietly.

Trigoso is a twenty-seven-year-old asylum seeker from Peru, one of the hundred and thirty thousand asylum seekers who have arrived in the city in the past year and a half. More than sixty thousand live in city-run emergency shelters, but Trigoso had the means to rent a four-hundred-dollar-a-month room in a house in the Bronx. "We share a bathroom," he said, "but I don't know my neighbors."

He is an aspiring singer-songwriter, and before he left Lima he recorded a tune called "Solo Solito," about the bittersweet joy of lighting out on one's own. "I wrote it when I was feeling alienated from my family," he said. "The song is all about enjoying your own path." After he arrived in New York, the lyrics took on new meaning, and he decided to make a music video.

Setting out before dawn, with a tripod and a smartphone, he began exploring the city, looking for interesting backdrops. He shot himself singing and dancing near Radio City Music Hall, by the Battery Park City marina, and in front of the Coney Island Wonder Wheel. He filmed early, he said, "so that other people wouldn't be in the shots. And because I'm shy." A friend back in Peru edited the footage together: Trigoso is in darkness at the beginning of the video, and by the end he is in sunlight.

He stopped walking when he reached the Roosevelt Island Tramway, at East Fifty-ninth Street. The tramway connects Manhattan with its little neighbor in the East River. "I'm afraid of heights, but this I like," he said, stepping onto one of the swaying cars. "If something happens, I'll die happy." As the car rose above the city, he gazed south. He'd ridden the tram numerous times. "You can see the Williamsburg Bridge," he said.

Trigoso, the child of agricultural workers, was born in a small rural town. A decade ago, he moved to Lima, where he worked in restaurants and later as a *podólogo*, treating foot ailments. "I'm good with feet," he said. He'd wanted to come to the U.S., but lacked the means to do so until March, when a friend loaned him money in exchange for accompanying her brother.

From Lima, he and his companion flew to Mexicali, Mexico. They crossed into California, were processed by immigration authorities, took COVID tests, and then flew to LaGuardia, via Chicago. "I've heard of people walking for days, traversing half a dozen countries," he said. "I walked maybe two hundred yards." He had planned to stay with a friend in New Jersey, but the friend backed out at the last minute.

The cable car's doors opened, and Trigoso stepped onto Roosevelt Island. He had a spot in mind on the island's southern tip, near the ruins of the Smallpox Hospital. In his first days here, he was struck by how old the subway was—the iron grates, the worn cars—and by how chaotic the city seemed. "I didn't expect this," he said. "The trash, the homeless people." Trigoso was referred to an organization in Brooklyn called Mixteca, which helped connect him with legal services. He spent several emotional hours with a caseworker explaining why he is seeking asylum. Peru is a predominantly Catholic country, with a conservative culture, and Trigoso had never felt free to live as he wanted to. "I'm in a process of accepting my own self," he said.

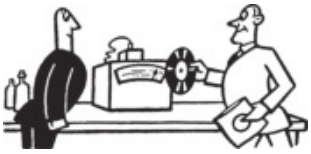
Trigoso found a bench with a view of the water. He took his tripod out and narrowed his dark eyes as he tried to frame a shot. "I like that little tree, and the city behind," he said. He was scouting locations for a second video, for a song called "Esta Noche," about a tough conversation between a mother and her son. "Part of making my music is exploring my own story, my own pain, and transforming it into something that gives me hope," he said. With luck, he will have a

work permit by summer. For now, he is training with a seamstress, and waiting for his papers to come through. "I've been learning about pants," he said. He often rides the subway from the Bronx all the way to Mixteca's office, in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. "I love sleeping on the subway," he said. "People tell me not to do that, that there's so many crazy people here. But I don't care. I always wake up before the right stop."

—Eric Lach

JAZZ ARCHEOLOGY

DIG IT



Zev Feldman has been called the Indiana Jones of jazz, but he's never run away from an exploding Nazi biplane or snatched a golden idol from an altar in the Amazon. What he hunts for are archival photographs, and memories that reside exclusively in the minds of a senescent genre's elders—and, most of all, unreleased live recordings. Years ago, he heard a rumor about a cache of DAT cassettes by Wes Montgomery, the great jazz guitarist from Indianapolis, who died in 1968. Feldman's boss at Resonance Records sent him to investigate. "I spent a few days with the family," Feldman said. They listened to some live cuts of Montgomery at the Hub Bub club—now a Shell station. The music sounded great, but to release it Feldman would need to piece together details, starting with who else was playing on it. "I went to the Indiana Historical Society for clues," he said. "Photos of who Wes would have been gigging with at the time, that sort of thing." He enlisted David Baker, a musicologist at Indiana University. "We sat in his basement and played the tapes," Feldman went on, "and he'd perk up and go, 'You hear that bass, that fingering? Gotta be Mingo Jones.'" After Feldman made a few more visits to Indianapolis, and a side trip to Sedona, Arizona, Resonance put out "Echoes of Indiana Avenue," a double LP with extensive liner notes. "First new Wes in twenty-five years," Feldman said. Indiana Jones never looked prouder.

Feldman also specializes in Bill Evans, Larry Young, and Lee Morgan; he was passing through New York after interviewing Herbie Hancock and just before interviewing Ron Carter. (Both musicians are in their eighties; Feldman is fifty, but in his line of work he often comes across as a bright-eyed intern.) He lives in the D.C. suburbs, alone, unless you count his fifty-three hundred records and seventy-five hundred CDs. "I'll come back from L.A. or Paris with a suitcase full of records and have nowhere to put them," he said. "Japan is dangerous for me."

Heedless of the danger, he walked toward the Jazz Record Center, on the eighth floor of a mixed-use building in Chelsea, down the hall from a real-estate agent's office and a rumba studio. Fred Cohen, the Center's proprietor since 1983, greeted him with the sort of familiar tone you might use with a neighbor—Feldman stops by only once every few months, but, over the decades, every few months starts to add up. (The two also consistently cross paths in the comments section of a Facebook group called Jazz Vinyl Lovers.)

"What's this?" Feldman said, referring to the background music.

"Toshiko Akiyoshi," Cohen said.

Feldman made a stink face of approval. "Saw her trio at Smalls. Cookin'."

He browsed, starting at the "A"s. Albert Ayler: "Revelations," a live box set recorded in France, co-produced for release by Zev Feldman. Roy Brooks: "Understanding," a live triple LP recorded in Baltimore, co-produced for release by Zev Feldman. "Your stuff, Zev, I gotta say, people actually buy it," Cohen said. "Some stuff, I put it out and it sits for ten years."

Feldman is now co-president of Resonance Records, and a few years ago he got a concurrent gig as a consulting producer for Blue Note. "I do my thing, digging for stuff, and if I find something good by a Blue Note artist, something unreleased, I'll put it on their radar," he said. In 2011, a friend told Feldman he'd heard that Bob Falesch, an audio engineer, had a bunch of unreleased live recordings by the late drummer Elvin Jones. "This was a set from 1967, when Elvin was at the absolute height of his powers, recorded at a dumpy little place called Pookie's Pub, down on Hudson Street," Feldman said. He got in touch with Falesch, who handed over the recordings, but it took a few more years—multiple trips to Japan, a search for Jones's widow, and several phone calls to court Jones's children—before he got control of the rights. Once he did, he sent the tape to Don Was, the president of Blue Note, who sat on it for a long time. "I started to get nervous," Feldman said. Finally, he got an e-mail from Was: "On a plane listening to the Elvin Jones Pookie's recording you gave me a while back . . .

"Do me next."

it's pretty fucking great . . . should we do this one???"

"You can imagine how that lifted my spirits," Feldman said.

He riffled through the "J"s, and there it was—"Revival: Live at Pookie's Pub," produced by Zev Feldman. Feeling sentimental, he carried it to the counter and bought it for a friend.

—Andrew Marantz

TABLESCAPE DEPT.
SURREALIST LUNCH

Lee Miller is known as one of the great models, muses, and photographers of the twentieth century, a status soon to be affirmed by the movie "Lee," starring Kate Winslet, and a major show at Gagosian, "Seeing Is Believing: Lee Miller and Friends," which will hang her work alongside that of Man Ray, Max Ernst, and more. But after the Second World War, shattered by what she'd witnessed as a combat photographer, Miller hid her photos in the attic of Farley Farm—the centuries-old house in Sussex where she lived with her last husband, the Surrealist artist and curator Roland Penrose—and suppressed her undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder in an orgy of entertaining and cooking. Some sample dishes: Cauliflower Breasts (cauliflower heads in pink mayonnaise and caviar), Gold Chicken (a bird covered with gold leaf), and Penroses (mushrooms topped with pale-pink foie-gras blossoms). *Vogue* once termed her food "Surrealist cuisine."

The other day, three people held a Zoom meeting to discuss the opening party for the Gagosian show, which will re-create one of Miller's farmhouse lunches in a Fifth Avenue mansion. Michael Moore, the gallery's global-events director, joined Alice Garretti, of Acquolina Catering, and Ami Bouhassane, Miller's granddaughter, who was beaming in from her Farley Farm office, formerly a guest room where her grandparents had put up friends like Picasso.

"Alice, do you want to talk about food first or design first?" Moore asked.

"Maybe start with design," Garretti said. A native of Milan, she perched before the screen in a sleek black jumpsuit. "We need to start sourcing all the pieces for displaying the food and the furniture and whatnot. I just wanted to make sure that I correctly interpreted the book." She and Moore had been sharing a copy of Bouhassane's hard-to-find book "Lee Miller: A Life with Food, Friends & Recipes." It's filled with photographs of the Penroses' visitors, including the chef James Beard, who once called the couple "the maddest people in the whole world."

Garretti raced through her ideas: wooden kitchen tables piled with cookbooks (Miller owned more than two thousand), jars of preserved vegetables, and mid-century cooking gadgets. To create "that Surrealist component," she said, she had sourced Toby jugs, decorative ceramics, and candles shaped like French pastries. For serveware, Garretti was considering "slipwork pottery and traditional Victorian ceramics, and then maybe some very ornate silver."

Bouhassane nixed the Victoriana. "She didn't really use Victorian plates," she said. "It was more artist slipware and Picasso plates."

"O.K., let me try to get my hands on *those*," Garretti joked.

The silver was problematic, too. "The only silverware that she had on her table was the silver King Kong," Bouhassane said, referring to a plastic toy that Miller had covered in silver and sometimes displayed in a vitrine.

But Bouhassane was on board with much of the rest, including the pastry candles and a duck-shaped tureen. "The duck is brilliant!" she said. "I love him! That would be completely her thing! He is super cute." She added, "Not so much the pumpkin."

"Even though it has a little rabbit foot coming out of it?"

"I think that's just a little bit kind of too trying-a-bit-too-hard, if you know what I mean," Bouhassane said, keeping her long-dead grandmother's vision on track. "She's more subtle than that."

They turned to the menu. Garretti suggested dishes that Miller typically served for Sunday lunch—smoked fish with horseradish; trifle; green chicken, stewed in celery, leeks, parsley, and peas. "I could use the soup tureen, the duck,

Lee Miller

to ladle out from," she ventured. Bouhassane approved.

There would also be Gold Chicken, Penroses, and food inspired by Miller's time in Cairo in the mid-nineteen-thirties—when she was married to a wealthy Egyptian engineer—including a dessert called Persian Carpet, in which caramelized oranges are strewn with colorful syrups and crystallized flowers.

"That sounds brilliant!" Bouhassane said. "But what are you thinking of serving the Persian Carpet *on*?"

Garretti hadn't thought that through.

"Well, that's the only thing that she used to serve on a silver platter," Bouhassane said. "But the silver platter was a plate that she stole from Hitler's apartment. It's got his initials on it. In the recipe book, there's a photograph."

At the end of the war, Miller and one of her lovers, the *Life* photographer David Scherman, had joined in looting Hitler's lair in the Bavarian Alps. They'd recently documented the liberation of Buchenwald and Dachau. Back in England with Penrose, she also used her trophy for serving drinks. Miller noted at the bottom of the recipe, "It has Hitler's initials and an ugly eagle on it. No one notices."

"I was thinking it was just like a regular silver tray," Garretti said. "We could also *not* do that."

"It'd be nice to do it," Bouhassane said.

"Alice, I think we should go steal one somewhere," Moore said, "and use it in the spirit of Lee."

—Carol Kino

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE ORGANIZER

How Bayard Rustin managed the civil-rights movement.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Pragmatism and principle, Rustin believed, intertwine to make progress.

Bayard Rustin has emerged of late as a hero almost perfectly tuned to our time. A Black civil-rights leader who was an architect of the 1963 March on Washington, he was also, in an aptly intersectional way, a gay man who suffered for his gayness—suffered in the homophobic America of the nineteen-forties and fifties, of course, but also within the homo-suspicious civil-rights movement of the sixties. A peerless manager and mentor, Rustin had still done more, and harder, prison time than almost any of the other great leaders of the movement. He spent two years behind bars in the forties, as a conscientious objector, and once, after a freedom ride, he actually ended up on a chain gang in North Carolina.

He was also matchlessly eloquent, with as distinct and elevated a manner as any American political leader has possessed. Against the charismatic orotundity of Martin Luther King, Jr., or the clipped, impatient nervosity that Malcom X shared with J.F.K., Rustin's precise, urgent tenor, with his mid-Atlantic accent, stands out. Slightly lisping, smartly concise, he is not trying to inspire or to overwhelm; he is just trying to tell a sharp truth or two. In a video from 1979—he's wearing a tattersall vest and holding a cigarillo—he shocks a well-meaning interviewer, who asked about the civil-rights era, by insisting, "I don't think any of the lessons of that period are applicable now," because "its objectives were veddy concrete and ex-*ceed*-ingly limited." (His enunciation at such moments is almost uncannily like Katharine Hepburn's—and, indeed, Hepburn learned her articulations at Bryn Mawr, not far from the places in Pennsylvania where Rustin learned his.) Rustin popularized the phrase "Speak truth to power," and memorably insisted that social progress calls for "angelic troublemakers." Late in his life, he summed up his credo in five simple steps: "1) nonviolent tactics; 2) constitutional means; 3) democratic procedures; 4) respect for human personality; 5) a belief that all people are one."

And now here he is, suddenly, a celebrity. A musical, "Bayard Rustin: Inside Ashland," about his imprisonment as a pacifist during the Second World War, premièred last spring, near Rustin's birthplace, in Pennsylvania. The production starred Reggie White as a pointedly virile Rustin and included a daring nude scene, and it wittily used Rustin's own recordings as a foundation for its score. (Rustin was a decent singer, whose affinities stretched from spirituals to Elizabethan songs, both of which he recorded.) Several new books have appeared, too, among them "Bayard Rustin: A Legacy of Protest and Politics," a collection of essays on his life and times, edited by Michael G. Long. It contains plenty of thoughtful new material, not least an essay by Rustin's surviving partner, Walter Naegle.

Then, there's the new movie "Rustin," directed by George C. Wolfe, with Colman Domingo brilliantly taking the title role. The screenwriters, Julian Breece and Dustin Lance Black, had a difficult story to tell; there's no martyrdom to provide a tragic shape, and Rustin's mastery of logistics isn't an obviously dramatic subject. Yet the film succeeds by the simple tactic of sticking to the truth. Rustin's sexual adventures—he is shown cruising the avenues and having sex with a young (married) clergyman—are neither underplayed nor sacralized. Though Domingo's portrayal sometimes shies away from Rustin's formality, it gets both his energy and his eccentricity. The film manages to convey Rustin's genius for organization, no easy thing, by spending time on its details. The women who answer the phones in the March on Washington war room are all instructed to answer with the same fictitious name, in order to simplify things when someone calls back: you always get the person you spoke to before. Even as the F.B.I. is putting pressure on Rustin for his homosexuality and his suspected Communism, he urgently instructs his minions to make sure that the sandwiches for the marchers are filled with peanut butter, not cheese: cheese can go bad in the heat. It's a beautiful detail, capturing a man whose gift was for beautiful detail.

Like Frederick Douglass after the Civil War, working doggedly within the Republican Party, and earning the enmity of the remaining radicals for

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / INTERIM ARCHIVES / GETTY

doing so, Rustin, after the heyday of the civil-rights movement, worked doggedly within the Democratic Party, earning the enmity of his time's radicals. He was implacably clearheaded about the Soviet Union and its horrors at a time when many Black luminaries, including Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois, were delusional about it. (Du Bois's tribute to Stalin upon the dictator's death makes unhappy reading for his admirers, of whom Rustin was one.) And his anti-Communism led him to make common cause with figures such as Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, the little-remembered leader of the Cold War liberals.

Yet attempts to kidnap Rustin for neoconservatism run up against his equally dogged commitment to a social-democratic program of vast government initiatives and investments. His dream was always of a new New Deal that would go further than the original one had, lifting all boats not by some rising tide of affluence but by giving everyone the same ship and the same sail. He has been praised by Marxist historians for his refusal to reduce inequality to a matter of psychology, of what white people think about Black people, and by neoconservatives for his repudiation of the totalitarian left—though the Marxists dislike his anti-Communism and the neocons dislike his socialism. What to make of him? Is he a man of irresolvable contradictions or one of exactly the right complexities, the kind we still need now?

Rustin was born in 1912 and raised by his grandmother in the Black Quaker belt not far from Philadelphia. His mother was a fluttering, spectral presence in his life—for a long time he believed her to be his sister—and he never knew his father. His grandmother was a devout Quaker, and a critical context in which to place Rustin is that of the African American Friends. Rustin was as much a representative of this creed as King was of the Black Baptist church.

Just as some in the antiwar movement in America were shaped by the now diminishing traditions of liberal Catholicism—think of Eugene McCarthy, Robert Lowell, even Robert Kennedy in his last years—Rustin's civil-rights work was shaped by the practice of Quaker consensus-seeking. With no set dogma available, members of the Society of Friends have to consult their inner light to navigate, and the many boats are expected to knock against one another as they glide. The necessarily schismatic nature of the civil-rights movement, encompassing godless socialists as well as evangelical Christians, was exactly the right place for someone with a Friends background to flourish. Finding a way from individual crankiness to a working consensus was, as Harold D. Weaver, the leading scholar of Black Quakers, has made plain, a regular Quaker practice.

In 1945, at the height of Rustin's pacifist struggles with conscription, Jean Toomer, who became a guiding spirit of the Friends movement among African Americans, listed a five-step path against impediments to the inner spiritual life which echoes Rustin's path toward political progress: "1. See them, one by one; 2. face them; 3. honestly evaluate them; 4. deny, that is, oppose them; 5. struggle with them." The inner life and the outer life are parts of the same process of incremental improvement.

Toomer urged Quakers toward "not introspection but inspection"—not a Buddhist-like contemplation of the inner self but an inventory of flaws identified and possibilities awakened. Active verbs fill the language of the African American Quakers, above all "watching" and "seeking." Just as the evangelical Black Baptist church of the South was the ideal incubator for a charismatic and inspiring orator, so the Black Friends were the ideal incubator for an organizer to support that orator.

As a sometime student at City College of New York in the nineteen-thirties, Rustin briefly belonged to the youth wing of the Communist Party U.S.A., an affiliation for which he would later pay a price, in several respects. The complexities of the Party's engagement with the civil-rights movement were manifold. The Party, tightly under the control of the Soviet Union, was at first strongly for a Zionist-style ideal of a Black nation situated somewhere in the American South—an idea that Rustin later ridiculed in debates with Malcolm X. Then, after Hitler's invasion of Russia, the Party turned right around and promoted American national interests as primary and the civil-rights struggle as secondary.

Novels are better indexes of the temper of their time than any scholarly history, and the best way to understand the emotional appeal of the C.P.U.S.A. to young Black intellectuals like Rustin is to reread Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man." It dramatizes how the Party, in the book named the Brotherhood, maintained an intoxicating air of equality at a time when the two mainstream political parties were at best equivocal about even Black suffrage in the South. The novel dramatizes, too, the Party's transparently phony rhetoric, and its betrayal of individuals in the pursuit of its own agenda. There's nothing surprising about the Party's appeal to Rustin, although he came to see, as Ellison's narrator eventually does, that it had an instrumental interest in the Black cause, caring only for its own, as defined, mutably, by Moscow.

Leaving the Party, Rustin went to work with A. Philip Randolph, the president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—a far more potent organization than its name now suggests. Early in 1941, the two men started organizing a march on Washington, to take place that July. Roosevelt responded to news of their plans with an executive order banning discrimination in the U.S. defense industry, and the march was cancelled. Making yourself an inconvenience, or promising to, could produce results, Rustin saw. When his pacifism got him sent to prison in 1944—first in Kentucky and then in Pennsylvania—he took the occasion to protest against segregation in the penitentiaries.

Rustin's relation to Randolph was as powerful and filial, in its way, as Malcolm's to Elijah Muhammad, although the instruction was in the pragmatics of politics, not the mythology of race. (Both protégés, significantly, had been fatherless boys.) As Jervis Anderson demonstrates in his remarkable 1973 biography of Randolph, much of which was first published in these pages, Randolph's group supplied the

third leg in the tripod of Rustin's allegiances: Quakerism, socialism, and the union movement. The civic authority that union leaders enjoyed then was immense; they were vital to the growth of the Democratic Party. (Walter Reuther, who built the U.A.W. and helped establish the A.F.L.-C.I.O., is today a distant memory, but he ought to be on the twenty-dollar bill.) Randolph trained Rustin in the intricacies of organizing, and in its sheer essential tedium. Rustin spent formative years in the places where change gestated—the dusty downtown offices of the War Resisters League, and the Harlem branch of the fledgling Congress of Racial Equality. He learned that the only glamorous part of resistance was the songs. The rest was a lot of phone calls to donors and letters to potential ones. Rustin, for all his elegance, was very much a child of the now lost world of the Old Left—deep into the television era, he was still urging memorandums and long-winded position statements on his followers.

Rustin's first encounter with Martin Luther King, Jr.—one of the most consequential meetings in American history—occurred in February of 1956, during the Montgomery bus boycott. Rustin was forty-four; King was only twenty-seven. Rustin, who was officially "on loan" from the In Friendship group, soon persuaded King to form what became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. More than anyone else, Rustin introduced King to the full range of advocates of the combination of nonviolence and committed action, from Gandhi to Niebuhr. (Rustin had spent a couple of months in India in 1948, learning from the Gandhi movement.) He recognized King's greatness as a speaker and a leader, and helped give him an ideology to make sense of his instincts. "I had a feeling that no force on earth can stop this movement," he said of King in Montgomery. "It has all the elements to touch the hearts of men."

Calvin Trillin wrote, in 1968, that the most effective way for the segregationists to cripple the civil-rights movement would have been to pass a law banning metaphor; without its metaphors, the movement was mute. King had a perfect pitch for the metaphoric, and Rustin didn't—he was too practical-minded—but it was Rustin who put meat on the metaphor's bones. He also seems to have largely drafted the memoir published, in 1958, under King's name, "Stride Toward Freedom." The fact that the memoir doesn't mention Rustin was, he later said, "my decision and a very sound one." He explained that he didn't want King to be linked to someone whom Southern reactionaries had designated a "Communist agitator."

Rustin was being marginally disingenuous. It wasn't just his flirtation with the Party that could make the association troublesome; it was also his reputation as a homosexual. The reality, easy to lose track of in our happier times, is that for most of the twentieth century homosexuality was not only illegal on paper but actively pursued by the police as a significant crime. In 1953, Rustin had been arrested in Pasadena for "lewd conduct" with another man in a parked car; he served almost two months in jail and was registered as a sex offender. As a result, he was fired from the pacifist organization he then worked for, the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Rustin was not "out" by our standards—he was discreet, and it was only in the last decade of his life that he was able to live together openly with a male partner. But he was out by the standards of his time, when simply not pretending counted as a major step. (W. H. Auden's biographers struggle to trace the delicate lines of in and out of the period, with Auden still marginally in, and his lover Chester Kallman unapologetically out.)

Homosexuality was more anathema to the existing Black power structure, with its roots both in the evangelical church and in Northern big-city clubhouse politics, than it was to the likes of J. Edgar Hoover. One has the sense that, for Hoover, it was simply one club among many with which to beat agitators over the head (Red, queer: it was all the same). But enemies of Rustin within the civil-rights movement—among them Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., the Harlem congressman and power broker—were motivated by a genuine abhorrence of gay men. In both realms, it was a time when an accusation of homosexuality could end a career. (The plot of the most successful political novel of the fifties, Alan Drury's "Advise and Consent," pivoted on this fatal accusation, and Lyndon Johnson's closest aide, Walter Jenkins, had his career ended that way.) So it is astonishing that Rustin survived. A couple of weeks before the March on Washington, the segregationist Strom Thurmond attacked Rustin on the floor of the Senate as a "sexual pervert" as well as a Communist,

"I think he's getting close to the part where he tells us what the fish of the day is."

and the first charge very nearly got Rustin kicked out by the more conservative civil-rights leaders. But Randolph, a conservative man in manners and morals, knew Rustin's value and stood by him.

Lives worth remembering tend to have one central episode. The new movie does very well with the central episode of Rustin's life: his role in organizing the March on Washington. We learn how Rustin, who, with Randolph, had helped conceive the march, was banished from it owing to worries about his "character." How he was called back to run the show when it became clear that no one else could do the job as effectively. (Rustin had already become known for his role in organizing earlier marches, including the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, agitating for school integration.) How he turned a war room of kids, white and Black, into an organizational force, overcame the resistance of the National Park Service, and led the marchers to the Lincoln Memorial. And then was left out of the after-meeting with the Kennedys at the White House.

One point the movie doesn't make clear is that the march, designed as a demonstration of outsiders, was very much an insiders' event, too. It drew on the assets of the Democratic Party then in power. Walter Reuther, the president of the U.A.W., not only spoke at the march but helped finance it with dues from his mostly white members. And though the Kennedys resented the march, inasmuch as it pushed them too hard too soon, they also needed it, inasmuch as they knew that they had to be seen as being pushed if they were to move on civil rights. All this was part of Rustin's central understanding: pragmatism and principle intertwine to make progress.

A year later, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and other civil-rights groups defied Mississippi's whites-only Democratic Party by creating a parallel party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, open to all. L.B.J., fearing defections by the "regular" delegates, would seat no more than two delegates from the protest group at the Democratic National Convention. Accept the deal or walk out? "When you enter the arena of politics, you've entered the arena of compromise," Rustin, very much in character, urged the Freedom delegates; defeating the Republican Presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater, was too important to be sidetracked by squabbles. But it was a policy of patience for an increasingly impatient time, and succeeded only in opening a fatal space between him and a new generation of activists.

If aspects of Rustin that were once suppressed as controversial can now be played up, aspects that are today viewed as controversial are, inevitably, played down. Perhaps the most notable absence in the Rustin film—and in much of the writing about him—is the scale and the significance of his dispute with Malcolm X and, later, with the Black Power movement. His confrontations with Malcolm were the most dramatic moments in his career, the kind that screenwriters normally seek out, but no doubt it would have risked the audience's sympathy to pit one Black hero against another, more telegenic one.

Now that scholars have worked to rehabilitate the Black Power movement, Rustin's critique of it has been muffled. But Rustin and Malcolm's opposition is a perfect example of the division in any national liberation movement between the charismatic absolutist and the pragmatic pluralist. Whether the oppressor is the European colonialist or the white supremacist, the responses are the same.

The Malcolm with whom Rustin squared off—they met for three high-profile debates, between 1960 and 1962—was a vehement separatist. (This was before Malcolm's break with the Nation of Islam and his late-in-life embrace of a more universalist creed.) Underlying Rustin's argument is an assessment that illuminates all his thought. He recognized that Black Americans, though the protagonists of the American story—the creators of its greatest and most original art, of its most inspiring heroes—were too few in number to succeed except by mobilizing broader coalitions. (Most Americans, surveys indicate, think that Black Americans make up something like a third of the population; the actual percentage is 13.6, and it was a couple of points lower in the early sixties.) The idea that Black Americans could act alone, Rustin believed, was a theatrical illusion.

Yet it is an enormous mistake to see Rustin as a cautious centrist. In 1966 he wrote a long essay in *Commentary*, then a journal of liberal debate, about Black Power and its discontents. The piece is not a lecture on the wrongheadedness of this movement; it is a somewhat impatient attempt to explain to white liberals why the movement has arisen. Rustin is passionate in his description of Black America's frustrations, sufferings, and felt betrayals, and insistent that the path forward is through economic revolution. The futility of a separatist manifesto is, for Rustin, too self-evident to underline. When SNCC and CORE went into the South, he wrote, "they awakened the country, but now they emerge isolated and demoralized, shouting a slogan"—Black Power—"that may afford a momentary satisfaction but that is calculated to destroy them and their movement."

The cause for this demoralization, he went on, was a post-civil-rights-era stagnation that had set in: "The youths who rioted in Watts, Cleveland, Omaha, Chicago, and Portland are the members of a truly hopeless and lost generation. They can see the alien world of affluence unfold before them on the TV screen. But they have already failed in their inferior segregated schools. Their grandfathers were sharecroppers, their grandmothers were domestics, and their mothers are domestics too." Rustin, the lifelong pacifist, saw Black Power advocates like Stokely Carmichael, then chairman of SNCC, as being out of touch in "their repeated exhortations to these young men to oppose the Vietnam war when so many of them tragically see it as their only way out." He continued, "There is no need to labor the significance of the fact that the rice fields of Vietnam and the Green Berets have more to offer a Negro boy than the streets of Mississippi or the towns of Alabama or 125th Street in New York." Yet to imagine

that a dispersed minority could take up arms against someone unnamed to do something unknown was absurd, and also symptomatic of a deeper malaise. "It is up to the liberal movement to prove that coalition and integration are better alternatives," he wrote, as true then as now.

The seeming dead end of Rustin's politics after the height of the civil-rights movement has led the Marxist scholar Adolph L. Reed, Jr., an admirer, to see Rustin as an essentially tragic figure. It's true that Rustin's hopes for a New Deal-style working-class coalition within the Democratic Party were thwarted by changing cultural norms that were more powerful than shared class interests were. Rustin kept forlornly pushing a Randolph-authored plan for economic equality as an alternative to a narrower militancy. But when hard hats attacked antiwar protesters on Nixon's behalf in 1970, the idea that Randolph's plan for a rising minimum wage might save the day for solidarity seemed quaint. Big-city crime and, in some quarters, progressive hostility toward Israel broke the alliance that Rustin had so painstakingly assembled.

Yet Reed, a political scientist, also emphasizes how greatly conditions had altered. Apartheid in the South was being dismantled, and the U.S. was seeing the first rush of African American elected officials since the end of Reconstruction—Black power in fact if not in name. Indeed, we forget the scale of the gains because they were, in Rustin's words, very concrete and exceedingly limited, as political change in a democracy tends to be. In 1963, George Wallace could cry "Segregation forever," and in 1972 he could still contest the Democratic nomination. By 1976, he was roundly defeated in the South, in primary after primary, by a Southern governor, Jimmy Carter, running on a civil-rights platform.

Rustin's last decade seems to have been personally fulfilling and politically lonely. He met the artist and photographer Walter Naegle in 1977, and they lived together openly in New York; at one point, Rustin actually adopted Naegle, as a way to formalize their tie in the absence of same-sex marriage. Yet his faith in progressive, coalitional change never altered. "We will win the rights for gays, or blacks, or Hispanics, or women within the context of whether we are fighting for all," he said, at the height of the Reagan era, not long before his death, in 1987. "You have to all combine and fight a head-on battle—in the name of justice and equality—and even that's going to be difficult."

The principles that Rustin held steadfast, though they may seem unexciting in a political culture that loves romantic extremists, are nonetheless time-tested: Work within a coalition as broad as you can make it. Emphasize logistic efficiency. Relish the metaphoric imagination, but don't let it run away with your judgment. Accept that perseverance is the best friend of freedom. Although utopianism and visionary overreach may be necessary beacons of freedom, they can, left to their own devices, become its betrayers.

Rustin's legacy? It's there in the new reverence with which his name is spoken, and it's there in such places as the Bayard Rustin Center, in Princeton, an activist space devoted to his memory. It's there in the person of Barack Obama—who gave Rustin the Medal of Freedom, posthumously, and who, with his wife, Michelle, produced the Rustin movie.

How you feel about Rustin's legacy, in fact, turns, in large part, on how you feel about Obama's Presidency. If you embrace the progressive insistence that his Presidency was in some way a disappointment—not enough big new programs, too temperate in rhetoric, with Trump and Trumpism the inevitable result—then you will see in Rustin's program a template for electoral success and political failure. In this view, the institutionalism and proceduralism of Obama's imagination, and his reluctance to engage in anything disruptive, failed to win over his enemies, who were only further enraged by his imperturbability, and left in ascendancy his most malign adversary.

If, on the other hand, you see Obama's Presidency—with its creation of an expansive, pluralist liberal coalition that solved many problems, large and small, and its public functioning, which set a tone of decency that will not soon be surpassed—as the kind of guarded success that history allows democratic leaders, then you will see in Rustin's program the template for political advancement.

To build coalitions is to embrace contradictions. The perpetual tragedy of leftist politics, in turn, is the complete inability to imagine the Other—not the near-at-hand Others of allies who marginally deviate from your views, or the fantasy Others of the working classes who would agree with you if they only understood that you were right, but the actual Other of religionists and ferocious ideological reactionaries who think that minimal programs for social equality are a form of personal theft. They get a vote, too. Rustin understood that the exhausting part of democratic politics is working within that reality, and that the alternative is to imagine a mono-ideological utopia—a fantasy even worse when made real.

Curiously, Rustin's credo was once the consensus view of people who combined prudential sense with political principle, whether Albert Camus or Clement Attlee, George Orwell or Eleanor Roosevelt. They saw the authoritarianism of the right and the totalitarianism of the left as conjoined twins that had to be equally opposed. Moves toward economic equality, they agreed, were perfectly consistent with moves toward individual liberty: gay rights and social democracy were both plausible, and possible. Above all, they knew that the real work of politics is the work of choosing peanut butter over cheese, taking the thousand unglamorous steps that create progress.

Rustin's example *is* full of contradictions—he was a man very much of the New Deal thirties who lived into the Nixon seventies and the Reagan eighties without seeing how much the times had been a-changing, for good and for ill. But the contradictions of our characters are what our characters are made of, just as the contradictions of democratic coalitions are not a temporary ill to be cured but an engine of difference to be embraced. Rustin had an imagination tempered by actual struggle in the streets, not just imaginative struggle in a studio. Accepting the inevitability of both kinds of contradictions, those within ourselves and those outside, is the work of the civilized imagination. Rustin made the energetic contradictions of coalition politics into an elegant doubleness all his own. ♦

CARLOS (EL GUAPO) GOFFMÁN, FACT CHECKER

BY IAN FRAZIER

During a period of incarceration scheduled to last fifty years to life, Carlos (El Guapo) Goffmán, the former drug lord, has started a new career as a fact checker and researcher to earn cigarette money in prison. Authorities have looked the other way at Goffmán's nonobservance of the rule against inmate cell-phone use, but have recorded his end of the calls.

CALL NO. 1, MARCH 21ST: "Hello, Professor Smith-Loring, this is Carlos Goffmán. Thank you for finding the time to speak with me. I am checking the facts in an article entitled 'If This Old Summer House Could Talk.' The author of this piece states that the speed of light is sixty-five miles per hour, and fifty-five miles per hour at night or in inclement weather. As a physicist and an astronomer, can you verify that this statement is correct? . . . I see . . . *Much* faster than that, you say. . . . Mm-hmm . . . Are you aware that I'm the Carlos Goffmán whose nickname is El Guapo? . . . Yes, the same one. . . . Uh-huh . . . So sixty-five, daytime, and fifty-five at night would be 'more or less within the ballpark,' you say? . . . Good. I will make a note of that. We are very grateful for your help! Goodbye."

CALL NO. 2, MARCH 23RD: "Doctor, I appreciate your taking my call. This is Carlos El Guapo Goffmán, and I am trying to verify some details in a journal paper that is about to be published, entitled 'Ten Famous Wardrobe Malfunctions.' Our author says that if a person crosses his eyes and a doorbell rings his eyes will stick. In light of your many years of practice as an ophthalmologist, does this claim jibe with your own clinical experience? . . . Not borne out by any research or emergency-room data at all? . . . None at all? . . . Hmm . . . I wonder if you know that I am *the* El Guapo Goffmán? . . . Ah, you didn't know that. . . . I see . . . So now you say it might be possible that if you crossed your eyes and a doorbell rang they would stick. . . . Only 'possible'? . . . Ah, you've treated the condition yourself, in fact, just as recently as yesterday. . . . Thanks so much! May I call back if I need to reconfirm? . . . I certainly will. Goodbye."

CALL NO. 3, MARCH 23RD: "Hello, Madame Ambassador, this is Mr. Goffmán, formerly of the Sinaloa drug cartel, how are you today? I am doing some gig-economy temp work while I sit out my bid in the federal maximum-security slam here in Florence, Colorado, and I am fact-checking an in-depth long-form nonfiction article entitled 'What These Famous TV Personalities of the 1980s Look Like Today.' Now, I know that you were very close with Junior Samples, star of the popular comedy variety show 'Hee Haw.' . . . Oh, you say you never met Mr. Samples? . . . Not even one time? . . . Do you realize, Madame Ambassador, that I can order certain members of your security detail to cut you in half with a chainsaw in your sleep? . . . No, I'm not at liberty to disclose which members—I wish I could, but it's in their contract. . . . So think back—no recollections of Mr. Samples at all? . . . You say you think you two *did* meet once, at Cannes? Oh, that's great! So when the writer of this article says that you and Mr. Samples were 'more than just friends,' that statement would be consistent with the facts? . . . Wonderful! Can you put your assistant back on before I go? Much appreciated—thank you!"

CALL NO. 4, MARCH 24TH: "Hello, Governor, it's Carlos Goffmán. . . . So pleased that you remember me! Pretty good, how's yourself? Listen, Governor, I'm doing some fact-checking, part time, while I sit in stir, and I've got a piece of immersive journalism entitled 'Cosmetology Secrets the Plastic Surgeons Don't Want You to Know' that contains some statements I'm hoping to check with you. First, the author states that you owe him three million dollars. . . . No memory of that? . . . Have you ever heard the term 'creative nonfiction'? . . . Yes, it's nonfiction that's more creative than regular nonfiction, and our writer's being creative here, so it's his call. . . . Direct-deposit information? Good man! Got a pencil? It's routing number 002000243, account 4956755005. . . . If you live—and I now have every expectation that you will—I'll be happy to send you a copy of the article when it comes out. Thanks so much!"

CALL NO. 5, MARCH 25TH: "Hi, Professor Smith-Loring, it's El Guapo Goffmán, circling back to let you know that our author is also going to say that up is down, night is day, grits ain't groceries, geese ain't poultry, and Christmas Day is the Fourth of July. We will be putting all this 'on you,' as we say, with your cell number in case readers want to follow up. I'm assuming that's no problem. Have a good weekend, and be well."

Recently, while Mr. Goffmán was on a supervised walk in downtown Denver, he misplaced his cell phone, and since returning to confinement he has had to do his fact-checking by regular mail. This process is less effective, and accuracies have begun to creep in. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

DEPT. OF SCIENCE

REINVENTING THE DINOSAUR

A documentary renews our fascination with our feared and loved precursors.

BY RIVKA GALCHEN

"Life on Our Planet" spans four billion years, with sixty-five extinct creatures.

Dan Tapster grew up watching David Attenborough's nature documentaries with his mother, in a village outside London. "It was appointment viewing," he said. "She still claims to be Attenborough's No. 1 fan." A few years after graduating from university with a biology degree, and following a stint leading nature tours in Peru, Tapster found himself working on Attenborough's films, first "The Life of Mammals" and later "Planet Earth." Attenborough's documentaries are celebrated for their exceptional footage, often of little-known species or of rarely filmed behaviors: the kodkod of Patagonia, the swarming of red-billed queleas over the African savannah, the dark-of-night hunts (captured with infrared cameras) of big cats. In a sense, viewers get to see what they cannot actually see.

Once, Tapster and a colleague were filming pygmy marmosets (palm-size monkeys with lion-like manes) in the rain forests of Ecuador when they were kidnapped by a group of Huaorani women, who thought they'd be a valuable bargaining tool in their conflict with the local government. "It sounds so dramatic, but then the story gets less exciting, because they were very nice, and fed us and gave us a comfortable place to sleep," Tapster told me. Nonetheless, after a couple of days the two men fled by canoe at night, paddling to a nearby town. But now they faced another problem: until they could get transportation out, two days later, they had nothing to do. "I tried to read the one book I had as slowly as possible," Tapster said. Then he decided to flip a coin a thousand times and record the outcomes, to see if it was in fact true that the coin would land on heads half the time. "It was four hundred and ninety-nine," he said, recalling that he was devastated that it wasn't five hundred. That level of devotion to verification has served him well in the making of "Life on Our Planet," an eight-episode Netflix documentary, for which Tapster, forty-seven, is a writer and a showrunner.

This drive to verify is essential, because "Life on Our Planet" spans four billion years and includes sixty-five extinct creatures. It is perhaps the most ambitious nature documentary ever made. Extraordinary footage of animals living today reveals, through persistent traits, the way the past is still present; long-lost creatures are rendered with such accuracy and vividness that they have never seemed more alive. The extinct creatures, made using C.G.I., are placed in footage of contemporary landscapes. "Paleobotanically, it's pretty accurate," Tom Fletcher, a paleontologist from Bristol, England, and the senior scientific researcher for the show, told me. In choosing sites to film, "our biggest problem was grass," Fletcher said. Though grass has been around since the late Cretaceous period, it's only been widespread for about twenty-five million years. Ferns, conifers—those were sufficiently ancient.

Fletcher was tasked with putting together a fact file for every extinct creature, one that detailed what is known about each species, inside and out, and its behavior, so that artists at Industrial Light & Magic, the visual-effects company founded by George Lucas in 1975, could bring them to life. Some of the C.G.I. dinosaurs' steps follow the precise pattern of documented trackways (also known as dinosaur footprints). Biomechanical studies offer persuasive estimates of bite force, fossilized feces give evidence of ancient diets, and cross-sections of fossilized bone suggest how slowly or quickly an animal grew. From the assembled clues, the I.L.M. artists imagined into being Plateosauruses and woolly mammoths and Theosodons.

Animals and plants alive today, especially those which in some way em-

ILLUSTRATION BY BIANCA BAGNARELLI

body key moments in the story of life—the advent of flight, or of flowering, or of caring for one's young—are also seen in new ways. (There's never-before-recorded footage of how "nurse" Megaponera ants take care of injured ants by applying a liquid from their bodies that contains antibiotics.) This mixture of extinct and living creatures poses an aesthetic problem: the Megacerops and gorgonopsids and two-metre-long millipedes need to appear as realistic as present-day dragonflies, snow leopards, and hummingbirds. Visual effects can make Spider-Man and Iron Man appear to battle Thanos, but the challenge of accuracy shifts when the conjured creatures once really lived. Some of the vivid colors of species we know—flamingos, giraffes—wouldn't seem plausible in an extinct animal. Tapster said, "We tried slow-motion footage of an Allosaurus running at you, to make it terrifying"—a familiar move in footage of predators such as cheetahs. "But it was more credible in real time."

A trope in narrating the lives of artists is their art being so good that it can't be distinguished from nature. The fifth-century-B.C.E. Greek painter Zeuxis is said to have painted grapes that were so realistic that birds came down to peck at them. A lamb painted by Titian was said to have prompted the bleating of a mother ewe; after Titian completed his portrait of Pope Leo X, a cardinal supposedly tried to hand the figure a pen, to sign a document. When watching "Life on Our Planet," I experienced that idea from the other side: the filmed footage of Komodo dragons hunting their own young appeared more fantastical to me than the C.G.I. footage of a Dunkleosteus—a predatory fish of the late Devonian period that was among the first to evolve a jaw—hunting an ammonite, an ancient hard-shelled little creature. "Life on Our Planet" does as much to reveal the extraordinary and alien nature of the animals we currently share the world with as it does to make familiar the extinct ones. These upside-down moments make extinction itself more vivid, more legible. Morgan Freeman, the series' narrator, tells viewers early on that ninety-nine per cent of all species that have ever lived are now extinct—a fact whose contours are unfathomable. The story of life, one begins to realize, is also the story of five mass extinctions, and of the scrappy return of a fraction of the Earth's life-forms following each one.

Dreaming up a beast from fossil clues is not a new practice. You're out on a walk in 1600, or 600, or earlier. You come across an enormous skull, with a large hole in front. What could it be? Some scholars hypothesize that the Cyclops' single eye, as described in the Odyssey, was inspired by the skull of a Deinotherium, a long-extinct creature with a trunk like an elephant's that emerged from an opening in the front of its skull.

In the seventeenth century, Robert Plot, a naturalist and the first keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, at Oxford, described a fossil from Switzerland as appearing to be the thigh bone of a very large creature—perhaps, he speculated, one of the elephants that Romans rode when they conquered Britannia. Almost a hundred years later, Richard Brookes, an English physician, reconsidered Plot's detailed drawing of the fossil and gave it a scientific name that matched what he believed it was: *Scrotum humanum*, the scrotum of a giant human-like creature. Decades after that, William Buckland, a naturalist, looked at the fossil and other bones found in the area and concluded that they were more likely from a giant lizard, which he named Megalosaurus—a name that is still in use today.

Such conjecture is only possible for the things that got fossilized at all, that left us evidence. "You need to die in a shallow sea and be buried quickly if you want to have a good chance of being fossilized," Fletcher said. If we want to know about the life that is no longer with us, fossils are the clues. "That's why paleontology is the best—it's the ultimate cold case."

In the Western world, until the eighteenth century fossils were generally thought to belong to animals that still existed—just elsewhere. Thomas Jefferson, who was nicknamed Mr. Mammoth for his interest in fossils, instructed Lewis and Clark to keep an eye out for mastodons on their journey to the Pacific. This idea soon shifted, however. In 1808, the French anatomist Georges Cuvier was shown the fossilized remains of a forty-foot-long sea monster which had been found deep in a chalk quarry in Holland; he argued that it was a creature no longer living anywhere on Earth. Extinction was a wild idea for Europeans and Americans, the Great Flood notwithstanding.

In the United States, the late-nineteenth-century "bone wars" gave paleontology the reputation of being a bit of a yahoo sport, with rich and richer men competing to acquire more fossils and name more creatures. Paleontology came to be seen as, well, a bit childish; perhaps relatedly, dinosaurs were often seen as dim and lumbering reptiles. But we owe much of our understanding of not just extinct animals but the history of the Earth to paleontology. Many paleontologists today date the "dinosaur renaissance" to John Ostrom, of Yale, who in a 1963 paper argued that hadrosaurs ran quickly and upright, and whose subsequent finding of a Deinonychus ("terrible claw") fossil, in 1964, led him to assert that this large-brained dinosaur had been agile, smart, and a pack hunter; research by his student Robert Bakker strengthened nascent ideas that dinosaurs had been plausibly warm-blooded, and more like modern birds than like reptiles. Soon, the U.S. went from having around a dozen paleontologists to having thousands. In the past few decades, paleontology has arguably advanced as dramatically as biotech or cat memes. One large step forward came in the nineteen-eighties, when the geologist Walter Alvarez and his father, the physicist Luis Alvarez, put forth the idea that an asteroid strike had caused the death of the majority of non-avian dinosaurs. Even that now basic-seeming idea is younger than Laura Dern, who played a paleobotanist in "Jurassic Park."

A field that was once mostly men in hats going on digs in the Black Hills or Hell Creek is now one that combines geology, botany, chemistry, and biomechanical engineering. The slow-witted yet still somehow terrifying dinosaurs of yesteryear are gone, and it's now not necessarily even dinosaurs that paleontologists study—there are so many other creatures, though the term "dinosaur" tends to be used by the public to mean most anything ancient, strange, or frightening.

The shifting story of the Oviraptor captures something of the changes in paleontology. In 1923, an expedition to the

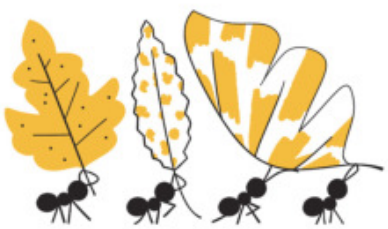
Gobi Desert discovered dinosaur eggs, which were presumed to have belonged to Protoceratops, as there were many Protoceratops fossils nearby. A seemingly different species was found on top of a clutch of eggs, and was named Oviraptor—the egg stealer. It appeared to be a fossilized crime scene. In 1993, scientists were again searching for fossils in the Gobi when they found a similar egg, this one with a preserved embryo inside—that of an Oviraptor. The egg stealer was in fact a protective, nesting parent.

I went with my daughter to the American Museum of Natural History to see the titanosaur exhibit, which opened in 2016. The titanosaur is a hundred and twenty-two feet long, and when it was first mounted at the museum its discovery was so new that it hadn't yet been formally named. It was posed impishly, with part of its long neck and its head peeking beyond the entrance of the display hall. Museums are where most people first encounter a three-dimensional fossilized dinosaur skeleton, or a cast or a replica of one, and museum displays, across the decades, themselves become museum pieces illustrating how the story of ancient history used to be told.

In 1915, the American Museum of Natural History mounted specimen AMNH 5027, a ferocious-looking dinosaur. About forty-five per cent of its skeleton had been found, including a marvellously intact skull. The missing parts were constructed using educated guesses, based on known relatives. (A lot of dinosaurs, even today, are known from only one specimen, or two or three partial skeletons.) Henry Fairfield Osborn, then the president of the museum, had named the specimen *Tyrannosaurus rex*, the tyrant lizard king. (The *Times*, reporting on the fossil's discovery, wrote that it was more than eight million years old; the Los Angeles *Times* said that the specimen was three million years old; it is estimated today to be sixty-six to sixty-nine million years old.) Osborn thought that the animal was pretty athletic, and he wanted to mount it in a dynamic way, showing two *T. rexes* in a standoff over a fallen hadrosaur. But the pose was too much of an engineering challenge—it would have required numerous metal girders. Osborn then wanted the *T. rex* to be as tall as possible, twenty feet high—but there was a beam in the way. Eventually, the *T. rex* stood eighteen feet high, posed in that classic tail-down upright stance of our collective dinosaur imagination. It was the first dinosaur-fossil display of its kind, and for many years the only one, and it was seen by millions of people a year.

The original mount had three claws on each of those curiously short front arms; when paleontologists concluded that the *T. rex* had only two claws, one was plucked off each arm. In the early nineteen-nineties, more changes were made. The pose was altered. Its head and neck were lowered, so that it now looks more like a magnificent, giant, running chicken. Today, the *T. rex* stands only twelve feet above the ground at its highest point.

By one estimate, a new extinct species is discovered nearly every week. In part out of nostalgia for elementary-school trips to what was nicknamed the "dinosaur museum"—now the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, in Norman, Oklahoma—I called up a curator, Jacqueline Lungmus. She thought that she would become a veterinarian until, she said, "I realized I didn't like soft-tissue anatomy." She is part of the new generation of paleontologists; she received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 2020. She said that, in her eyes, a superbloom in paleontological knowledge occurred "in the nineties, with histology, the study of microscopic tissue." By cutting open bones and looking at them through a microscope, scientists "could figure out how fast-growing a creature was, how long-living it was," she said. "This revolutionized how we thought about their life histories." The rapid growth of dinosaurs suggested that they were warm-blooded, because cold-blooded reptiles necessarily grow more slowly. Though there is a long history of connecting birds to dinosaurs, the link only recently began to be seen as scientific fact (by most experts), and to make its way into the popular imagination.



The paleontologist Gregory Erickson, a professor at Florida State University, tells the thousands of students in his course Living with Dinosaurs: The Rise, Reign, and "Demise" of the Fearfully Great Reptiles to recognize that they live in Jurassic Park, with eleven thousand species of dinosaurs—birds—around them. "I think we looked at them as dead animals for a long time, but now see them as formerly living animals," Erickson said, of dinosaurs. With that shift in perspective comes more interest in behavior. As an example, he spoke about how some dinosaurs are now understood to most likely have been "gregarious"—a term that refers to living in social groups. "We'll find cases where we have trackways of sometimes hundreds of skeletons that died at the same time," Erickson said. Reptiles are rarely gregarious; birds almost always are. "You don't see, like, two hundred lizards crossing the street."

Most of us have few ideas about what a Dunkleosteus or a gorgonopsid or a terror bird might have looked like, or of how they might have behaved—but paleontologists now have plenty. Early in the making of "Life on Our Planet," while thinking about how to depict animals whose appearances and behaviors would have to be deduced from an increasing but still mysterious set of fossil clues, the creators invited scientific consultants from Yale, Bristol University, and the University of London to the London office of I.L.M. "We started with 'King Kong,'"—in which the protagonist fights a *T. rex*—"and went on forward, through to 'Jurassic Park,' to 'Walking with Dinosaurs,'" Tapster said. The experts were asked to share what they thought about the different depictions of dinosaurs. I asked if the scientists liked any of them. Tapster laughed: "Mostly it was no, no, no."

Even within the scientific community, there are often profound disagreements about how to interpret the fossil record. *T. rex*, one of the dinosaurs about which the most is known, is a great example of this. Some scientists say that it moved like a roadrunner from Hell (a moniker first used by Robert Bakker), but others argue that *T. rex's* legs would not have been able to bear the body's

enormous weight while running. Some say *T. rex* was mostly a hunter, and others assure you that it was really a scavenger. Some say that the king of the dinosaurs was covered with feathers, and others that only the young had feathers, or that, among adults, probably only the males had a few decorative feathers. My generation, for the most part, can't picture *T. rex* with any feathers at all. "One thing I learned at that conference was the damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't concept," Tapster said. Among the few details that the scientists agreed on was that dinosaurs shouldn't look "shrink-wrapped." Tapster explained, "Dinosaurs in films are often very muscly, as if they've just come from the gym. Except for human bodybuilders, animals don't look like that." Fletcher, the scientific consultant, said, "We decided the *T. rexes* needed to be . . . hefty. To have those chunky legs."

"So do you think it should go 'da da da dummm' or 'da da da doink'?"

• •

How do you tell a story that spans four billion years? Estimating that there are eight million or so species alive today, and nearly a hundred times more across time, and also the companion stories of the evolution of plants, and eight episodes, each of them less than an hour—the math just gets silly. "We had two geologists in the basement—they really were in the basement—giving us information about the planet's history," Tapster said. Then the writers had to solve the challenge of making unfathomable scales of time and change feel intelligible, at least a bit. "We used Post-it notes in five different colors," Tapster said. "I know . . . Post-it notes." One color for prehistoric creatures with an important story to tell—learning to swim, or eggs that can survive out of water. Another color for prehistoric creatures that are iconic—viewers need their dinosaurs. A third for modern-day animals in which exceptional evolutionary traits are apparent. A fourth for key events on Earth. And a fifth for potential cliffhanger moments. Then the team would discuss what would be included and what wouldn't make the cut.

Tapster said, "One of our researchers, Ida-May Jones, kept pushing for Lystrosaurus," a proto-mammal that she found very cute. "We were, like, It has to be more than just cute." The Lystrosaurus was herbivorous, about the size of a pig, with small tusks and a kind of beak. Because its front legs are so much stronger than its back legs, it is believed to have dug and lived in burrows. It existed both before the Permian extinction (in relatively small numbers) and then also after—it survived. "She brought it up again, she had really fallen for it, but what essential story was it telling?" Tapster said. Then Jones uncovered an unexpected detail about Lystrosaurus: at one point, after the Permian extinction, the species represented seventy-five per cent of all the vertebrates on Earth. It was, briefly, king. "So Lystrosaurus made it in," Tapster said. A startled Lystrosaurus in its burrow appears early in Episode 4.

Tapster and his writing team also wanted the show to highlight less well-known aspects of the history of life on Earth: creatures other than dinosaurs, the mesmerizing progression of plant life, momentous environmental events. "I remember getting the note of 'So you're beginning Episode 2 with plankton? And Episode 3 with lichen?'" Tapster said. But who knew (other than paleontologists) that there was a time in Earth's history when it rained for a million years? Or about the forty million years when moss dominated the planet? Or about how plankton, by inventing photosynthesis and thereby giving off oxygen in the course of some two billion years, transformed Earth's yellow methane-filled atmosphere into blue skies, and the lifeless landscape into forests of green? In William Steig's book "Rotten Island," illustrations show erupting volcanoes and creepy sea creatures and thorny plants and vicious land animals. One day, a jealous battle starts over a new life-form: a flower. Violence, destruction, giant insects, and ice and fire ensue, and lead to a mass extinction. I used to think that "Rotten Island" was about the disastrous pettiness of human wants and behaviors, and about how much better life might be without us. Now I see it as a reasonably accurate visual history of our planet, with extra polka dots and stripes, in watercolor.

Even if you haven't visited it in person, there's a good chance you've seen Cheatham Grove. An ecological park in Northern California, it's where the famous chase scene in "Return of the Jedi" was filmed. Walking a few minutes with Tapster and Fletcher along a trail strewn

with redwood needles, and sheltered by trees several hundred feet tall, I met Jonathan Privett, the visual-effects supervisor from Industrial Light & Magic; Jolyon Sutcliffe, a producer and a director with an extensive background in natural-history documentaries; and Katy Fraser, a camera operator whose additional skills as a deep-sea diver were essential for many of "Life on Our Planet"'s underwater scenes. They were snacking on grapes and chatting while waiting for the sun to come out from behind the clouds, so that they could shoot footage that would match that of previous days. "Nature documentary is often hours and hours of waiting and then a few moments of intensity," Sutcliffe told me. He had stayed up for many nights in the Sonoran Desert to capture the moment when a kangaroo rat leaps out to karate kick an attacking rattlesnake in midair; he had sat for hours waiting for the tiny scuffle of dust that signifies a trapdoor spider popping out from its burrow to seize its prey. During the pandemic, he spent weeks filming lichen growing; thousands of those images had to be "stacked" for the sequence in "Life on Our Planet" that shows lichen spreading across the land.

The team had their equipment on hand, including a special three-hundred-and-sixty-degree camera that is essential for making the lighting of the landscape convincingly correspond to the lighting on the extinct creatures—in this case an Anchiornis, a small gliding dinosaur speeding among the trees. "The natural-history people tend to be reactive" when it comes to lighting and other details, Fraser explained. "The visual-effects people have to be methodical."

Privett is fifty-four, with a friendly, relaxed, slightly mischievous vibe. He showed me on a laptop the method he and other I.L.M. artists use to build a creature. "It's like making a real puppet," he said. He pulled up files on Anchiornis. "We first build the skeleton. The audience never sees the skeleton, but, if you get that right, a lot follows." The skeleton could be animated, "and, see, we realized the wings couldn't fold completely away, like a pigeon's"—so Anchiornis, with his wings only partially tucked in, looks a bit like he's wearing a cape. "And then we can add the muscles, then the skin—it's like a sculpture." Some remarkably intact Anchiornis specimens have been found, so there's a lot of information to work with. "Then we add the feathers." In recent years, scientists have even deduced the color of the species' feathers, by a microscopic examination of melanosomes, a kind of pigment cell. Parameters can be put in for how stiff the various feathers are, and for how many barbs they have. "It's the same with fur—you can decide how clumpy it is," he added. Wind and turbulence variables can be added, too. Privett went on, "He doesn't fly so much. It's more like what Buzz Lightyear says: he falls with style. He's sort of part bird, part flying squirrel."

Privett's background is in mechanical engineering. After graduating from college, in 1991, he took a job in Detroit modelling cars with software that was new at the time. The software allowed car designers to work digitally, instead of having to build a model by hand. Soon, Privett was offered a position at a visual-effects company, and he has spent more than twenty years doing work he would never have foreseen, and that he loves. "This is kind of embarrassing, but I was never a fiction person—I read the dictionary and the encyclopedia," he told me. The scientific information that went into building creatures naturally appealed to him, even though "it's a leap of faith, too," he said. Fur and feathers are the toughest. "The snow blowing through the woolly mammoth's fur—that was a lot of work," he said, with a little shudder.

"How about if tonight you pretend to be someone else? I need to practice my social skills."

Tom Fletcher's Ph.D. was on the hydrodynamics of ancient fish and sharks, and he lights up when talking about geologic formations, fossilized skin impressions, the movement patterns of early amphibians. In becoming a paleontologist, Fletcher, who's thirty-six, didn't so much follow his dreams as follow his fears. "The room of dioramas of dinosaurs in the natural-history museum in Liverpool—they're outdated now, but it looked like a sinister aquarium with ichthyosaurs and giant squids, and I would have nightmares about them," he said. "They were terrifying, but also awesome." His parents sometimes drove him to the coast, where he searched for fossils, deciding pretty early on that that was what he wanted to do with his life.

One of Fletcher's jobs in "Life on Our Planet" was to give feedback on each draft of extinct creatures. Once I.L.M. artists had visuals, they would send a collection of images, almost al-

ways including one of the creature posed next to a fountain topped with a statue of Yoda which sits in front of I.L.M.'s San Francisco office. Revisions would then be suggested, to improve on both the "feel" of what Tapster and others thought would work best artistically and, for Fletcher, the scientific accuracy. A producer might want to put something "characterful" on a creature, such as a crest, and Fletcher would have to explain that, owing to fossil evidence, it wasn't possible. "Pretty much all the accuracy changes suggested we were into—but there was disappointment about having to put lips on the *Tyrannosaurus rex*," Tapster said. Lips are likely rare on the *T. rexes* of the popular imagination. "But the science was pretty strong," Fletcher said. With *T. rex's* feathers, there was disagreement among experts about how many there would have been. An early draft of the *T. rex* "looked like he had a mullet and was headed to a Metallica concert," Tapster said. "We asked them to pluck some of the feathers."

More often, Tapster said, I.L.M. saved the show from mistaking an inexact science for an exact one—from failing to take advantage of the special insights of art. He gave the example of the terror bird, a ten-foot-tall apex predator that lived after the dinosaurs. In "Life on Our Planet," we see one terror bird in a territorial dispute, and another as it hunts a group of cute llama-like creatures. There is limited fossil evidence of the terror bird, so in designing one the production team tried to Frankenstein it from modern-day descendants. "We said to I.L.M. to give it the legs of a secretary bird and the beak of its closest living relative, a seriema," a much smaller leggy bird that often sports a bright beak with a fanciful plume at its base. What resulted "looked like a giant chicken with lipstick," Tapster said. They asked the artists to come up with a version that looked like it belonged in the sandy landscape and was suitably terrifying—as per the ambush predator's name. They "came up with something so much better," Tapster said. The terror bird now looks more like an ostrich on steroids, but with a killer hooked beak.

So many astounding creatures now gone! One theme across the episodes is that of the dominant species not surviving the next extinction; it tends to be the smaller, more adaptable ones that make it to the far side. Another through line is that of chance: not only how a random mutation can end up being useful to a creature's survival but also, for example, the chance arrival of the dinosaur-killing asteroid. On our drive back to San Francisco from Cheatham Grove, Tapster said, "That meteorite is thought to have been stuck in the asteroid belt, before maybe a collision kicked it out onto its thirty-five-million-year trajectory to crash into Earth." The precise place where the asteroid hit exacerbated the calamity: it landed in an area full of gypsum, which vaporizes into sulfur, which in turn blocks sunlight. "If that journey had ended two hours earlier, or two hours later"—so that its impact was elsewhere—"that would have made a difference."

Italo Calvino's short story "The Dinosaurs," from 1965, is narrated by a dinosaur that has survived the extinction. Feeling himself to be the last of his kind, he's lonely. He joins a community of New Ones, who don't recognize him as a dinosaur, or really know anything about dinosaurs, but who tell frightening stories about them. The New Ones' fear changes to over-the-top admiration, then eventually to telling stories of dinosaurs that position them as laughable, as "terrible monsters" playing "ridiculous roles." They use stories of dinosaurs, unknowingly, for their own shifting emotional and psychological ends. Late in the story, after a dinosaur fossil is found by the New Ones, the dinosaur sees "everything we had been and were no longer, our majesty, our faults, our ruin." When the New Ones move on to "the idea of the Dinosaurs" as "bound to the idea of a sad end," he gets fed up, and leaves. Calvino's story, written when the extinction of the dinosaurs was still a mystery, now reads as a parable about our own possible extinction, even as its causes are not cloaked but visible.

We are the New Ones now, telling a shifting set of stories, often heedless of their accuracy. The dramatizations of the extinctions in "Life on Our Planet" were difficult to watch, though they were, in a way, magnificent. As sea life froze, or suffocated, or the land transformed into an oven, I admit that I often turned away, as it looked all too real. ♦

NAPOLEON COMPLEX

Does Ridley Scott see himself in the hero of his epic new film?

BY MICHAEL SCHULMAN

On the morning of the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon Bonaparte was full of catastrophic confidence. His seventy-three thousand troops were camped on a ridge near a tavern called La Belle Alliance. His nemesis, the Duke of Wellington, occupied a slope across the fields, with a mere sixty-seven thousand troops. Over breakfast, Napoleon predicted, "If my orders are well executed, we will sleep in Brussels this evening." When his chief of staff offered a word of caution, Napoleon snapped, "Wellington is a bad general and the English are bad troops. The whole affair will not be more serious than swallowing one's breakfast."

He was already making mistakes. Underestimating his enemies' capabilities and overestimating his own, he assumed that the woods behind the British would block their retreat, but Wellington had strategically used the forest to hide more soldiers. An overnight downpour had left the fields soggy, and Napoleon, instead of striking at nine, as he had planned, held off until midday, giving the Prussians crucial time to reach Wellington as backup. Napoleon was tired. He was ill. He was strangely apathetic, declining to survey parts of the battlefield himself. Michael Broers, a Napoleon scholar at Oxford, told me, "The real question isn't so much Why did he lose? but How on earth did he ever think he could win?"

In 2020, Broers was grading a student's essay when he got a call from an assistant in Ridley Scott's office, explaining that the director was planning an epic film about Napoleon, starring Joaquin Phoenix. Summoned to Scott's headquarters, in London—crammed with movie props, it reminded Broers of Aladdin's cave—the professor advised Scott on everything from the motivations of Empress Josephine to whether Napoleon was left-handed. (He wasn't.) Scott was particularly interested in battles, from both a practical and a psychological perspective. "He saw at eye level," Broers recalled. "His Waterloo was like a diorama." At one point, Broers drew him a map, and the director studied it like a hardened general preparing for battle—which, in a way, he was. "He's not un-Napoleonic himself," Broers said. "When he's there, he's in charge, and you have complete confidence in him. He dishes it out, and he can take it."

Scott, who has filmed and fought more than his share of battles, will turn eighty-six this month, a week after the release of "Napoleon," his twenty-eighth film. His movies have tackled other Great Men of History (Moses, Columbus), as well as aliens, androids, con men, gangsters, goblins, soldiers, serial killers, and the Gucci family. He creates visceral worlds, whether the rain-streaked, mechanized dystopia of "Blade Runner" or the dusty Roman arenas of "Gladiator," and several of his screen images—a slime-covered creature bursting out of an astronaut's chest in "Alien," Thelma and Louise zooming off a cliff—are lodged firmly in the popular imagination. But he's tough to pin down. "Is Ridley a fine artist? Is he an art-cinema director? Is he a commercial hack? Is he all of the above?," Paul Sammon, a writer who has published three books about Scott, said. "That's what I really enjoy about Ridley—he is unclassifiable."

The director feels the same way. "My choices tend to be random," he told me in September. He was in the West Hollywood offices of the Ridley Scott Creative Group, a sprawling enterprise that produces features, music videos, and commercials, with outposts in Amsterdam and Hong Kong. We sat in an airy conference room, the walls of which were covered with photographs of Scott on his various sets. Like Logan Roy, the patriarch in "Succession," he wears his authority like an old sweater, his northern English burr unsoftened by Hollywood. He's a growler, a grumbler, a barker, a chortler. His narrow eyes peer over a long, stern nose, and his resting scowl is framed by an untidy white beard, which he occasionally strokes, more in irritation than in contemplation.

Scott regards his œuvre with pugnacious pride, especially his less loved films, such as the 2013 crime thriller "The Counselor," which he maintains was the victim of bad marketing. ("They fucked it up.") When a movie fails, I asked, does he question his instincts? "No," he grunted. "I blast the shit out of a tennis ball." Beside him was Pauline Kael's four-page evisceration of "Blade Runner," which ran in this magazine in 1982 and contains, among other gibes, the line "Scott seems to be trapped in his own alleyways, without a map." Scott had the review framed for his office wall years ago and had asked an assistant to lay it on the table for me; I got the sense that he had agreed to a *New Yorker* Profile in order to have the last laugh.

Scott was on an enforced hiatus. In July, he'd been more than halfway through shooting "Gladiator 2," on the island of Malta, when the actors' strike halted production. But, unlike Napoleon during his exile on Elba, he wasn't taking salt baths and stewing. He was busy preparing an extended cut of "Napoleon" for Apple, which produced and will stream the film. He'd been editing what he had of "Gladiator 2," slated for next fall, and "reccing"—reconnoitering—locations for a Western. As he approaches ninety, Scott is not slowing down but speeding up. Tom Rothman, the head of Sony's film division, which will distribute "Napoleon" theatrically, told me, "Ridley Scott is the single best argument for a second term for Joe Biden." Paul Biddiss, a burly British ex-paratrooper who was Scott's military adviser for "Napoleon," recalled shooting the siege of Toulon, in Malta: "He goes, 'Can you touch your toes? Come on!' We're in the middle of Fort Ricasoli, we're both touching toes to see

Sony's Tom Rothman calls the octogenarian director "the single best argument for a second term for Joe Biden."

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON

who's flexible, and he was, like, 'You've got to take up yoga.'"

While many directors are embracing a gentler, more collaborative mode of authority, Scott characterizes his style as a benevolent dictatorship. "Working with Ridley, it's very much military in some ways," Arthur Max, his longtime production designer, told me. David Scarpa, the screenwriter of "Napoleon," said, "The striking thing about Ridley, more than anything else, is this enormous will. You send him pages while he's shooting, he shoots twelve hours a day, he then goes out to dinner with the actors, *then* he works on editing what he's shot that day. After that, he reads your pages, and the next day you get the e-mail from Europe, and he's storyboarded them. That would kill ninety per cent of the directors in Hollywood."

Researching the script, Scarpa began noticing similarities between director and subject. "Seeing Napoleon and Ridley side by side, I think that there are people who simply don't have that internal sense of limitation that normal people have," he said. "I remember reading about how one time Napoleon was finishing up a battle, and he was simultaneously designing the currency."

Joaquin Phoenix, like other actors who have worked with Scott, was unable to talk to me for this story because of the actors' strike. But, earlier this year, he told *Empire* magazine, "If you want to really understand Napoleon, then you should probably do your own studying and reading. Because if you see this film, it's this experience told through Ridley's eyes." Ten days before filming, Phoenix went to Scott and said, "I'm agonizing over this. I don't know how to do it." The two spent several twelve-hour days psychoanalyzing the Emperor, scene by scene. "We found that he's a split personality," Scott said. "He is deeply vulnerable, and while doing his job he's able to hide that under a marvellous front. His forceful personality was part of his theatre."

Napoleon has enticed filmmakers practically since movies were invented. The French director Abel Gance débuted his five-and-a-half-hour silent epic, "Napoléon," in 1927; with its use of cameras attached to guillotines and sleds, it was a breakthrough in special effects. ("I couldn't get through it, honestly," Scott said.) In 1970, Sergei Bondarchuk released "Waterloo," starring Rod Steiger as a sweaty, screaming Napoleon. It was filmed on Ukrainian farmland, with seventeen thousand extras borrowed from the Soviet Army. At the time, Stanley Kubrick, hot off "2001: A Space Odyssey," was laboring over his own Napoleon project, for M-G-M, envisioning Jack Nicholson in the title role. "He fascinates me," Kubrick said, of the Emperor. He devoured biographies, obsessing over minutiae. One designer quit after an argument over whether rhododendrons had been brought from India by Napoleon's time. When Kubrick's plans fell apart, he funnelled his period research into "Barry Lyndon," which in turn inspired Scott's first film, "The Duellists," in 1977, about a pair of rival officers during the Napoleonic Wars. Years after Kubrick's death, Scott was sent his unused Napoleon script. Scott found it underwhelming, in part because it spanned "birth to death," he said. (Steven Spielberg is currently developing the Kubrick project as an HBO series.)

Scott became interested in Napoleon about fifteen years ago, when he happened upon a book by Sten Forshufvud, a Swedish dental surgeon, who, in 1961, tested Napoleon's hair for arsenic and theorized that he had been poisoned. (Broers, the Oxford historian, is doubtful. "Forshufvud forgot something—everyone was a bit 'arsenic poisoned' in those days," he said. "Wallpaper and many other things were made with levels of it that would be banned today.") Scott started thinking about Napoleon's final exile, on St. Helena. He was intrigued by his friendship with a young girl who liked to play with the Emperor's sword and hat. "He would sit there and watch her hacking away at a tree," Scott said. "She had no idea who he was, other than a prisoner of war."

Unlike Kubrick, Scott wasn't big on biographies. He gave up after two or three books and ordered Scarpa, his screenwriter, to bone up. "One of the questions I found myself asking is Where am I supposed to come down on this guy?" Scarpa said. "In history, we tend to sort characters into heroes or villains. You're either Martin Luther King or you're Adolf Hitler." He was curious about Napoleon's marriage to Josephine, who carried on a flagrant affair with a Hussar in her husband's Army. "What stuck was Napoleon's seeming ineptitude with women," Scarpa explained. "His attachment to Josephine over the course of his entire life, but also the bizarre disconnect in a guy who is able to kill eighty thousand people on a battlefield in Eastern Europe, almost as a sporting event, and yet, to him, it simply wouldn't be sporting to deal with his rival for his wife's affections."

The angle appealed to Scott. "Who was this person, and why was he vulnerable?" he asked. "And it was this woman called Josephine." He cast Jodie Comer, who had starred in his 2021 film "The Last Duel," but two months before filming she had to drop out and was replaced by Vanessa Kirby.

Scott has described the "environment" as a character in all his films, and critics have accused him of prioritizing spectacle over substance. "I tend to be visual above all things, before the written word," he said. He is fond of the adage "A picture is worth a thousand words," which he attributes to Hitchcock. (In fact, it dates back at least to a speech in 1911 by the newspaper editor Arthur Brisbane.) His hand-drawn storyboards, known as Ridleygrams, are his method of thinking and communicating. His older son, Jake, recalled going on a family vacation in France when he and his brother were children: "He had us illustrate the holiday, and he wrote the text. That was a form of storyboarding."

Luke, Scott's younger son, has worked as a second-unit director on several of his father's films, beginning with "Exodus: Gods and Kings," from 2014, starring Christian Bale as an unlikely Moses. For a sequence with the ten plagues, Luke was tasked with filming vultures landing on a statue. When it was done, he recalled, "I think, All good, pretty good shots of vultures. And then I get a phone call: 'What the fuck was that?' He says, 'The top of the statue has to be covered in bones, detritus, all of that!'" Luke called the vultures back and reshot the scene with the jetsam of pestilence. "I

was misreading the storyboard," he said.

Scott's closest collaborators are trained to anticipate his aesthetic preferences. Arthur Max, the production designer, named a few: "Smoke. Thick, crusty, shiny, black, thick paint. Heavy aging. Filth. Dirt. Textures of all kinds. Shiny glass mirrors. Chrome. Metallic, silky fabrics. Corrosion. Small, fine, delicate mechanisms." Janty Yates, his costume designer, avoids fluorescent fabrics for his films. "He prefers rich jewel colors," she told me. "He loves gold trim, but old gold. He loves shadow. He really doesn't like green—and then suddenly he'll like green. He's quite a hummingbird." On "The Martian," he surprised her by requesting a "pop of orange."

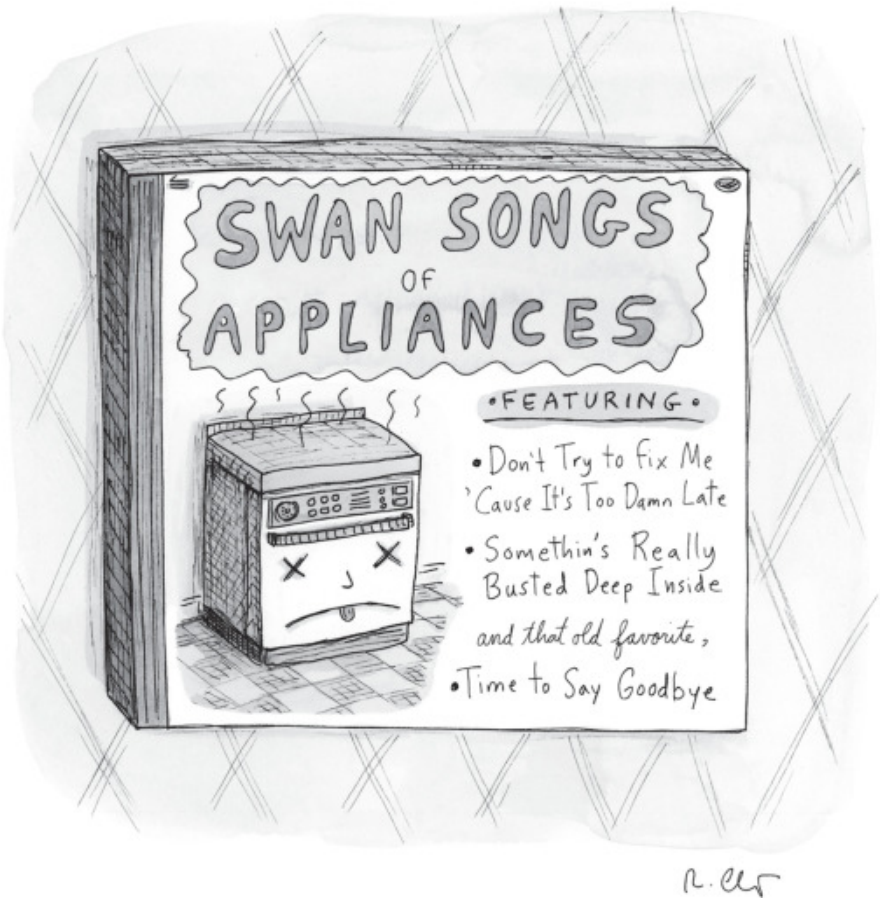
In his L.A. office, Scott had an assistant bring in a bound copy of his "Napoleon" storyboards, which looked like a comic-strip biography. He flipped through: the Battle of Austerlitz, in which Napoleon lures the Russians onto a frozen pond; a cut scene of Napoleon and Josephine discussing politics in a bathtub; the Fire of Moscow, in 1812. ("It burned like a son of a bitch.") "This is now the day of Waterloo," Scott said, pointing at a page. Originally, he had planned to show Napoleon on the toilet, noticing blood; he'd read that the Emperor suffered from hemorrhoids, which were common to equestrians. (It's possible that he actually had stomach cancer.) "As I got close to the release, I thought, I haven't got the courage," he said, and he cut the toilet scene. He turned to a drawing of Wellington in gray, asking a scout when the Prussians would arrive. A scribbled note read, "Does NB have similar intel?"

To play the role of Waterloo, Scott's team scouted dozens of fields in England—"tromping around in Wellington boots in muddy fields, avoiding cowpats," Max recalled—before settling on a farm in Berkshire. The production set up a "war room" in Brentford, a London suburb, with three-dimensional models of the terrain. Biddiss, the ex-paratrooper, ran five hundred extras through "boot camp" at the Cavalry Barracks in Hounslow, which were built in Napoleon's era. He assessed the extras to make sure they were "physically and mentally robust" and put the best three hundred up front. (C.G.I. multiplied them into the thousands.) Biddiss had studied old military manuals and showed the extras how the French and the English loaded their muskets in different ways. Scott is less of a stickler. When the trailer came out, the TV historian Dan Snow posted a TikTok breakdown of its inaccuracies. (At the Battle of the Pyramids, "Napoleon didn't shoot at the pyramids"; Marie-Antoinette "famously had very cropped hair for the execution, and, hey, Napoleon wasn't there.") Scott's response: "Get a life."

Waterloo was shot in the course of five days, with eleven cameras rolling. "It was quite blustery," Max recalled. "I knew Ridley would like it, because he is very visceral about the elements. If he got an earthquake, he'd find a way to use it." Biddiss told me, "Uniformity is very important with Ridley—right down to the guys, making sure their hats are straight. There wasn't a bayonet that was out of synch." The most complicated maneuver was forming human squares, with bayonets pointed outward—an infantry formation that the British used to scare off the Frenchmen's horses. "I had some sleepless nights, because I wanted to make sure that those guys did this square perfectly," Biddiss said. On the day, "they pulled it off brilliantly. I could hear Ridley on the radio—'Buy those boys a pint!'"

Scott calls himself a war baby, though he was born in 1937, two years before England entered the Second World War. The Scotts lived in South Shields, on the northeast coast. "When the air-raid warnings sounded off, my father was in London already as an officer," Scott recalled. "My mother would hustle us under the stairs, and we'd sit drinking cocoa, singing 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm' while bombs came down around us."

His father, Francis Percy Scott, had been a clerk in a shipping office, but the war was good to him. Despite his Geordie accent, he rose up the ranks to brigadier general overseeing civil engineering; according to Ridley, he received letters from Winston Churchill, thanking him for his input on D Day. After the war, Francis was asked to help rebuild Germany's infrastructure. He moved his wife and sons—Ridley, his older brother, Frank, and his younger brother, Tony—to a sumptuous house in Hamburg. In



HELL OR HIGH WATER

Not churchgoers or joiners, still my people sang,
up Highway 12 or Arnold Drive, depending
on the traffic. "Blue Moon, you saw me standing
alone," my maternal grandfather would croon
in a big put-on cowboy voice like Marty Robbins
as we barrelled up the 79 from Julian to Calimesa
after all their money disappeared in a savings-
and-loan scam and they lost everything they
thought was safe come hell or high water. On
the other side, el otro lado, my grandfather would
sing Lydia Mendoza rancheras and "Mal Hombre,"
songs about la frontera, on our way from Oceanside
to Laguna Beach. Also here, in the mountains,
I remember driving up from Glen Ellen, the drive
interminable, my brother's pugilistic tendencies bruising
me on the back seat's sticky vinyl; even then, we
could be swayed to sing. At the campsite, my
father would pull out his guitar, and we'd beg
him for "A Cat Came Back" or "500 Miles," something
with a chorus we could sing along to, sometimes
we'd even like the sad songs. Drifting to black
between the flames of the fire, and the aspen

1952, Francis was offered a prestigious role leading the Port Authority for the Elbe and the Rhine. (Scott said, "That's like being offered the St. Lawrence *and* the Hudson!") But Ridley's mother, Elizabeth, wanted to be near her relatives in England. Ridley remembers speaking up, saying, "Take the job!" and getting a thwack. They returned to England and lived in modest state housing. He said, "Already I was learning how life changes so quickly, you know?"

Despite Scott's machismo, he is known for populating his films with strong women: Sigourney Weaver's Ellen Ripley, in "Alien," one of Hollywood's first female action heroes; Thelma and Louise; G.I. Jane; Lady Gaga's vengeful Patrizia Reggiani, in "House of Gucci"; even the sledgehammer-wielding rebel in his "1984" commercial for Apple. Sigourney Weaver credits Scott with the longevity of Ripley and "Alien." Earlier this year, she told *Total Film*, "They made Ripley a woman, without making her this helpless creature." In *AnOther* magazine, she recalled, "I'd been put in a baby-blue space costume, and Ridley took one look at me and said, 'You look like fucking Jackie O. in space!'" He put her in an old NASA flight suit instead. "Ripley is not a sexy space babe," Weaver said. "I never worried how I looked, I worried about getting down the corridors fast enough to escape the explosions!"

Scott is not one to expound on gender roles. When asked about his predilection, he responds vaguely, as he did in 1998, speaking to Sammon: "I'm drawn to strong, intelligent women in real life. Why shouldn't the films reflect that?" When I raised the subject with his son Jake, he replied, "I can tell you where that comes from—my grandmother."

"I shouldn't say this," Scott told me, "but my mother was the man of the house. My mother insisted she was five feet—she was four foot eleven. And she was ferocious. My dad was a real gentleman. He was a sweetheart, a nice man, who took more than he should have from my mum." Elizabeth, he recalled, "would take a belt or a stick to us." She never worked outside the home, although, in the seventies, she offered to be a receptionist at Scott's commercial-production company. ("I didn't want to say it, but she'd scare away more clients than she'd bring in.") Elizabeth lost her brother and four sisters to cancer, then lived until ninety-six. "She was formidable," Scott said. "Her famous words to me before she died were 'This is ridiculous.'"

I asked Jake which of his father's characters most resembled Elizabeth. He laughed and said, "Mother, in 'Alien.'" Mother, or MU/TH/UR 6000, is the spaceship's computer system, Scott's answer to Kubrick's HAL 9000, from "2001." At the end of "Alien," she counts down to self-destruction in a firm, matronly voice. (The voice actress, Helen Horton, was in her fifties.) Jake said, "Even 'Napoleon' begins with a defiant Marie-Antoinette at the guillotine, which is a sort of punk image." Then he thought of another film, "A Good Year," which features the actress Archie Panjabi as a hard-charging executive assistant. "That's another Grandma," he said. "Do you know what? There's Grandmas in his films. They're here, there, and everywhere."

Does Scott see his mother in his heroines? "No, no," he told me. "But I learned to give as good as I take. She'd say, 'Don't you talk to me like that.' And I'd say, 'Don't *you* talk to me like that.'" In "Napoleon," Josephine is the only person who seems unimpressed by her husband's conquests. In a particularly strong scene, he confronts her about her philandering, demanding that she say, "Without you, I am nothing." Later, as they sit by a fire, she makes him say the same to her, reducing the Emperor of France to a whimperer. "By forgiving her, it in a way is both generous and a weakness," Scott said. Later, his son Luke talked about how Elizabeth ruled over Ridley and his brother Tony. "The only person in the world who could tell them to shut up and get in line was her," he said.

Scott was a terrible student, but by the age of nine he'd discovered two passions: smoking and painting. At seventeen, having flunked all his exams except art, he decided to enlist in the National Service; his older brother, Frank, had joined the British Merchant Navy. "You've got nothing to learn from the Army," Ridley's father advised him. "You should go to art school." He enrolled in a local program, in West Hartlepool, an industrial seaside town. He'd walk the beaches by the steelworks, watching

and the pines all flickering in the distance. What
was the difference between a song sung on
the journey and a song sung once you got there,
one was about passing the time, the other about
bellowing your presence to the rocks and stones,
I don't know. I know that we sang, and here in this
valley I can't help but think of how my father pulled
out his guitar at my stepmother's deathbed, which
was just their bed really, at home up north and on a cold
clear day he sang "500 Miles," and she was already
almost gone and I wept and his voice sounded so strong
so when the hospice nurse came and said, "You
have no religion, right?," I didn't know how to answer,
because we did, it was this, it was all those years
tied together on the road, singing at the top of our
lungs, harmonious and inharmonious both, and with gusto,
our voices meshed together like tree roots, not for any
good reason other than the sheer pleasure of it,
something to pass the time, like beauty, like going
to the mountaintop just to go, it's the old way,
it's the only way I know, a mountain, an echo,
a coming back and coming back, a chorus.

—Ada Limón

"towers belching filth and junk," he said. "It's a wonder I've still got a pair of lungs." Years later, he drew on those polluted skies while envisioning the dystopian Los Angeles of "Blade Runner."

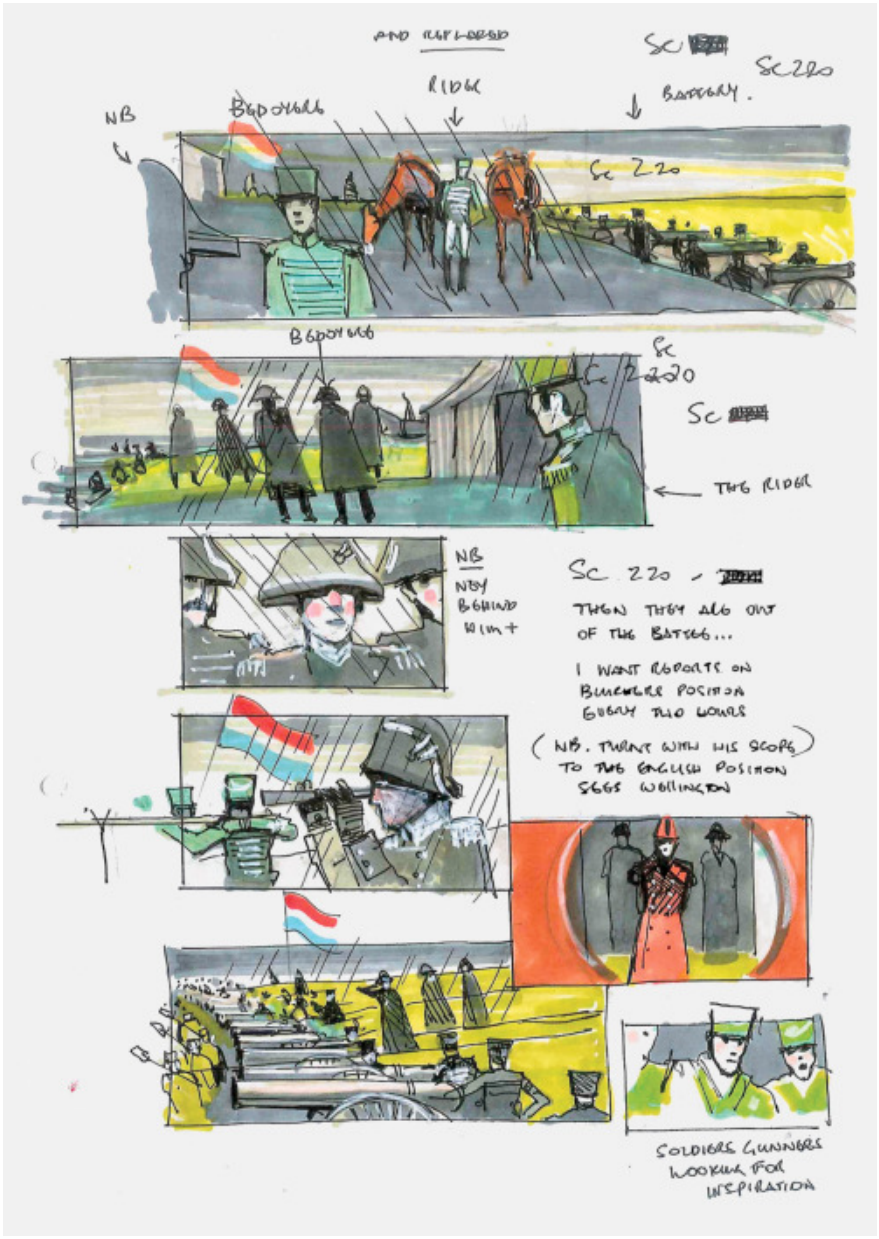
He went on to the Royal College of Art, in London. His classmates included David Hockney, whom he remembers getting bored in a life-drawing class and sketching a skeleton in the corner instead. The school had no filmmaking program, so Scott joined the theatre-design department, where, in 1962, someone lent him a Bolex 16-mm. camera. He returned to West Hartlepool to make a short film, "Boy and Bicycle," starring his teen-age brother, Tony, who would follow him into art school. Scott was fascinated by Joyce's "Ulysses," with its "organically visual descriptions" of, say, a butcher laying a "moist tender gland" onto "rubber prickles." In "Boy and Bicycle," a freckled lad skips school and bikes through town, as we hear his inner monologue on time, the stench of the smokestacks, and death. Scott said, "The idea was, boy plays hooky for the day, thinks it's freedom. It's not—it's actually prison."

His final student show got him an offer of a design job at the BBC, which he deferred to travel the United States on Greyhound buses. In New York, he met fashion designers and worked for the documentarians Richard Leacock and D. A. Pennebaker. He was full of drive but unclear which direction it should take. Back in London, he designed sets for such BBC series as "The Dick Emery Show." He recalled, "From designing, I'd been groomed to be a senior department head, and I surprised them by saying, 'I don't want that.' Then they surprised *me* by saying, 'Would you want to do a director's course at the BBC?'" For the class, he made a "potted version" of Kubrick's war drama "Paths of Glory." The next Monday, he was offered his first directing job, on a police procedural called "Z-Cars."

One day in the mid-sixties, a colleague asked him to cover for her at a test shoot for a Benson & Hedges cigarette ad in Chelsea. Freelance commercial directing was better paying and less bureaucratic than the BBC, and Scott was soon shuttling in his white Mini between the BBC's White City Place and a studio in Chelsea. Within a year, he'd shot hundreds of commercials, starting with a Gerber baby-food ad, during which "the baby spattered porridge all over me," as he recalled with a grimace. Britain's ad business was experiencing a creative revolution, with dull, market-research-driven spots giving way to mini movies that captured the buzz of Swinging London. "British advertising had been waiting for a figure like Scott for some time," Sam Delaney writes in "Get Smashed," his chronicle of the era. "A generation of writers and art directors had elevated the standard of creative ideas but were unable to find directors who could properly execute their scripts."

Commercials trained Scott in economical storytelling, conjuring atmosphere, delivering on time and on budget, and making lots of money doing so. He was known for infusing banal scripts with a sheen of artistry; he shot a soap-powder ad in the style of "Citizen Kane" and a toothpaste spot inspired by "Doctor Zhivago." As competitors moved in on his turf, he realized that he could profit off his rivals and, in 1968, he founded Ridley Scott Associates, which signed up-and-coming commercial directors. When his brother Tony got out of school, dreaming of making documentaries, Ridley urged Tony's wife to dissuade him: "I said, 'Dear, if he does documentaries, he's going to be riding the bicycle in forty years' time. Come with me, because I know he really wants a Ferrari.' So Tony came with me, and, sure enough, he got a Ferrari." With the company flourishing, the brothers earned a reputation for avarice. One industry in-joke went, "What do you get if you drop a penny between the Scott brothers? A metre of copper wire!"

In 1973, Ridley made a commercial for Hovis Bread, featuring a boy pushing a bicycle, its basket stuffed with loaves of fresh bread, through the cobblestoned streets of an English village, set to Dvořák's "New World" Symphony. It was "Boy and Bicycle," with existential dread swapped out for nostalgic warmth. (Tagline: "As good for you today as it's always been.") In 2006, it was voted Britain's favorite advert of all time. Both brothers were part of a wave of rock-star British ad directors, many of whom would become feature filmmakers, including Alan Parker



Scott hand-draws storyboards, called Ridleygrams, for every scene.

("Midnight Express") and Adrian Lyne ("Fatal Attraction"). But Ridley, approaching forty, was impatient to get his movie career going. He developed a project with the Bee Gees, but they didn't want to sing on film, and the project collapsed. When Parker landed his first movie, "Bugsy Malone," produced by the former adman David Puttnam, Scott was so envious that he couldn't sleep.

After "Bugsy Malone" played at Cannes, in 1976, Paramount asked Puttnam if he knew anyone else like Parker. He did—Ridley Scott, who had two potential screenplays. The first, about the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, would cost $2.2 million. The second, "The Duellists," a dark comedy based on a Joseph Conrad story about the madness of competition, would cost $1.4 million. "I'll take that one," the Paramount executive said. After making his first film, Scott recalled, "I thought, Blimey, that was easy." At Cannes in 1977, "The Duellists" was nominated for the Palme d'Or and won the prize for the best début film.

By then, Scott had divorced his first wife, Felicity Heywood, a painter he'd met in art school and the mother of his sons. In 1979, he married the advertising executive Sandy Watson, with whom he had a daughter, Jordan. (He's now married to the actress Giannina Facio, who played the wife of Russell Crowe's character, Maximus, in "Gladiator.") All three children have become filmmakers, and all are partners in the family business. I mentioned the "Succession" vibes at the company to Jake. He laughed and replied, "It's been said." A few years ago, he was at a restaurant in London when Brian Cox, who played Logan Roy, walked in. "My friend was, like, 'Oh, your dad's here!'"

The three children were raised by Watson, and when they were young Scott was subsumed with work, spending evenings laboring over his Ridleygrams. In the seventies, the family lived in a mock-Tudor town house on Wimbledon Common, which Ridley designed with the exactitude he devoted to his sets. Jake recalled a conservatory with a checkered floor and a kitchen with no right angles. Both boys appeared in their father's and uncle's commercials; Luke remembered stuffing his mouth with Cadbury chocolate. In "The Duellists," they play aristocratic boys in breeches and pageboy haircuts, and Jake asks a character played by Keith Carradine if he's ever talked to Napoleon.

The boys saw less of their father as he made trips to Hollywood to drum up films. He developed an idea about Tristan and Isolde, but that fizzled in May, 1977, when Puttnam brought him to see "Star Wars" at Mann's Chinese Theatre. "It was beyond a crazy football crowd," Scott recalled. He hadn't been much interested in science fiction but was seized with a need to top George Lucas. "I couldn't sleep for a week. I said to David, 'Listen, I don't know why I'm doing Tristan and Isolde.' He said, 'Think of something else.'"

So he did "Alien." Scott was engrossed with how it would look. He wanted the spaceship to feel claustrophobic, arguing a producer into lowering the ceilings. He was frustrated that the audience wouldn't be able to smell the creature, which he imagined had a horrible stench. For the chest-bursting scene, he said at the time, "We wanted to do something so outrageous that no one would know it was coming." Kubrick, whom he idolized but had never met, later called him to ask how the hell he had pulled it off. At a preview screening in Dallas, women ran to the bathroom to vomit, and an usher fainted in the aisle. Scott was thrilled.

COURTESY RIDLEY SCOTT

"Alien" turned Scott into a bankable studio director, but he was entering perhaps his darkest phase. In 1980, his brother Frank died, at forty-five, of melanoma. "I was going through a nervous breakdown and didn't know," Scott told me. "I've always been very rational, and death is irrational. It became a nightmare to go to bed, because I'd walk the floor for nine hours." He was attached to direct "Dune," but shooting was at least two years off, and he was restless. Instead, he returned to an idea he'd rejected, an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's sci-fi novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" As he sketched out the world that became "Blade Runner," what emerged was doom: a future of endless rain, perpetual night, environmental ruin, and technology that blurred the line between human and machine to a vanishing point.

The "Blade Runner" shoot was notoriously fraught. The first day, for a scene set in a corporate ziggurat, Scott looked through the lens and saw that the building's columns had been installed upside down. Paul Sammon, who was embedded on set and chronicled the film's making in his book "Future Noir," recalled, "Within the first few weeks, I felt this radical shift in his personality. I saw him go from being fairly personable to being a screamer." Scott was unaccustomed to American union rules, which prevented him from operating his own camera. He sat in a video-playback booth, which isolated him from his unhappy star, Harrison Ford; the two men could never agree whether Ford's character, Deckard, was a man or a "replicant."

Midway through, the *Guardian* ran an interview in which Scott said that he preferred British crews, because he could give them orders and they'd say, "Yes, guv'nor!" The crew printed up T-shirts that read "YES GUV'NOR MY ASS!" Scott and his British compatriots tried to quell the insurrection by wearing T-shirts reading "XENOPHOBIA SUCKS." The budget ran two million dollars over. The final days were a frenzy, with the last scene—Rutger Hauer's moody android death—shot against the last sunrise to dawn before Scott's cameras would be taken from him. In postproduction, Scott was fired—twice—but worked his way back. When preview audiences expressed confusion, Scott, against his better judgment, added a voice-over and a happy ending in which Deckard and his android paramour flee Los Angeles; Kubrick gave him helicopter footage left over from "The Shining."

"Blade Runner" came out in June, 1982, two weeks after "E.T.," which synched better with the sunny Reagan era than Scott's bleak dystopia did. Kael wasn't its only detractor; another critic wrote, "I suspect my blender and toaster oven would just love it." After making six million dollars on its opening weekend, the film all but disappeared. Although it grew into a cult classic and became a touchstone for such filmmakers as Christopher Nolan and Denis Villeneuve (who directed the 2017 sequel), Scott still speaks of "Blade Runner" with an ache. Asked what it taught him, he sounded like a defiant general routed by an undeserving enemy: "I learned that the only opinion that matters, when all is said and done—even with failure in your face, and you're lying on the mat, crushed—is, What did *you* think of it?"

Just as Napoleon had Versailles, Scott maintains his own seat of power in the French countryside: Mas des Infermières, a winery in Provence, situated in a hilly patch of the Luberon region dotted with cypress and olive trees. Scott bought the property, with eleven hectares of vines, in 1992, after he made "Thelma & Louise." He was eager to tell me that it once belonged to General Baron Robert, a health officer in Napoleon's Army.

The day before I met him there, on a cloudless morning in October, his son Luke told me about the house: "It's the sacred space, the mental palace. Everything within is the construct of this person who thinks visually. You'll go, 'Holy shit, this place is beautiful!' But it's not accidental that it's that beautiful, because it's him pitting himself against nature itself. He is Canute sitting on the shores of England, shouting at the ocean, 'I command you to get back!' It's like all of his movies virtually encapsulated, with the waft of the curtains and the drift of the pollen and the mist."

I found Scott not in the house but in a building that he constructed on the property in 2019, with a wine cellar, a tasting kitchen, and a gift shop. The outside is faux-rustic, capped with terracotta roof tiles. The inside is sleekly modern, with concrete floors, a steel staircase spiralling down to the cellar, and movie memorabilia everywhere. Next to a table with wineglasses and spittoons were four spacesuits, from "The Martian," "Prometheus," and "Alien: Covenant." The mise-en-scène: Cézanne meets Planet Hollywood.

Scott sipped an espresso at a café table, beside the bicycle that Adam Driver rode in "House of Gucci." He wore a dark T-shirt, trousers, and a plastic watch the color of a traffic cone (a pop of orange). "If I come here, I find that I can sit and think and draw," he said. He showed me a print of one of his oil paintings, of a mesa in Spain that he had spotted shooting "Exodus." He put on a tan fedora and led me through the back door, to an expanse of fields. "This place is bloody heaven!" he said. "My vineyard goes way across. See those cypress trees? I go beyond that." He hadn't paid much attention to his vintner's work until his reds began winning prizes in Paris. "So far, I'm just losing money like crazy, but it doesn't matter. It's a pleasure."

In 2006, Scott made the Euro-kitsch screwball comedy "A Good Year," in which Russell Crowe plays a London financier who inherits his uncle's vineyard in Provence and learns to appreciate the good things in life. It was filmed eight minutes away. "Russell was damaged goods—he'd thrown the phone in the Mercer Hotel," Scott recalled, referring to a tabloid incident from Crowe's post-"Gladiator" bad-boy period. "In the morning, I see him in handcuffs. I went, Fuck! 'The phone stopped ringing,' he said. 'No one's calling!' And I said, 'O.K., I got a film.' That's how it began. I got him back on his feet. He'll never admit that." (Indeed, a representative for Crowe disputed this account.)

Back inside, past the spacesuits, Scott showed me a hall full of huge stainless-steel wine tanks, each with a blackboard indicating the variety. A circular window above a pair of barn doors was inspired by a monastery in Narbonne where he'd filmed part of "The Last Duel." "It's a church," Scott whispered, taking in the quiet and the pleasant,

vinous aroma. "The standards in France are rigid. You can't force aging. You can't add sugar. I find Californian wine way too sweet—you get drunk off one glass." Scott illustrates all of his wines' labels. In the gift shop, he tapped on a bottle of red, showing two dogs howling at the moon. "I thought all the wine should be about health, fun, sex, dogs," he said.

A tasting group was coming in, so he led me down the staircase, warning, "I've got dodgy knees—too much tennis." (Arthur Max told me that Scott had injured his knee operating a camera on "G.I. Jane" but "blames it on tennis, which is more glamorous.") In the cellar were rows of barrels aging the best of the reds, plus more movie artifacts: a sword from "Kingdom of Heaven," his 2005 Crusades epic; a miniature of the Colosseum, from "Gladiator"; a chain-mail suit worn by Oscar Isaac in "Robin Hood"; a plaster alien head. "This shit is museum quality," Scott said, stopping in front of two Napoleon uniforms. He picked up a gilded scimitar, with the inscription "RECTE FACIENDO NEMINEM TIMEAS." "I was never good at Latin," Scott said. (It means "In acting justly fear no one.")

He asked an assistant for another espresso. He'd been busy. After finishing the extended cut of "Napoleon," he started storyboarding the Western; he showed me pages of Ridleygrams, featuring a snowy fight scene. With SAG-AFTRA and the studios back in negotiations, he was preparing to pick up "Gladiator 2," which stars Paul Mescal, the moment the strike was resolved. "I could shoot on Monday," he said. (The talks fell apart a week later.) In the meantime, he'd been polishing the ninety minutes he had, including a scene in which the hero fights a pack of baboons; he'd been haunted, he said, by a video of baboons attacking tourists in Johannesburg: "Baboons are carnivores. Can you hang from that roof for two hours by your left leg? No! A baboon can."

I asked why he wanted to make a "Gladiator" sequel, and he gave a practical answer: the first one made a lot of money. But, as he described the new film, his thoughts turned toward immortality. In the first "Gladiator," there's a recurring shot of Maximus' hand grazing the tops of wheat stalks in a field, which we come to realize is the afterlife. Scott had captured the image spontaneously, when he saw Crowe's body double walking through a wheat field in Umbria, smoking a cigarette. "Do I believe in immortality?" Scott asked, unprompted. "I'm not sure."

I thought back to something that Luke had told me the day before. "In each movie, there is always a character who I think is Ridley," he'd said. "They tend to be quite peripheral, almost observers. It's the one with a darker humor, the one who is, perhaps, more divisive. The one who has the agenda." He thought of Guy Pearce's character in "Prometheus," an eccentric billionaire who longs for immortality, or of Tyrell, the corporate wizard from "Blade Runner." In "Gladiator," it's the trainer played by Oliver Reed who advises Maximus, "Win the crowd and you'll win your freedom." "In 'Napoleon,'" Luke said, "it's Napoleon."

I asked Scott if he was all these people, and he chortled. "No!" he said. "Oh, dear." But he does see "winning the crowd" as his job description. "I have to," he said. "There's nothing worse than doing something where you're thinking, I really got that right—and it fails."

After "Blade Runner," Scott's ability to win the crowd was in doubt. He had kept up his commercial business, directing a series of chic Chanel No. 5 ads inspired by René Magritte. (Chanel's chairman, Alain Wertheimer, had come to him, pleading, "Chanel No. 5 is my flagship perfume. It's only seen as a present for Grandma!") The "1984" Apple ad, which aired during Super Bowl XVIII, became an advertising classic and established the company's image as a nonconformist juggernaut. But Scott's next film, "Legend," a grotesque fairy-tale fantasy starring Tom Cruise as a sprightly woodland boy, bombed. In 1987, he tried his hand at gritty realism, with the noir thriller "Someone to Watch Over Me." It also failed. Tony, meanwhile, directed the back-to-back mega-hits "Top Gun" and "Beverly Hills Cop II." "He was competitive with me, naturally, because I'm the older brother," Ridley said.

His unlikely comeback was "Thelma & Louise," in 1991. Scott picked up the script, by Callie Khouri, with the intention of producing it. After four directors turned him down, he was in a meeting with Michelle Pfeiffer, who was unavailable to star but told him, "Why don't you come to your senses and direct it?" Again, Scott was thinking visually. As an outsider in America, he wanted to capture the grandeur of the Southwest: "I felt, I'm doing an odyssey of two women on the last journey, and so the last journey had better be beautiful." The old Route 66 had become industrialized, so he shot in Bakersfield, California. "What he did was put it in an incredibly heroic setting, where John Wayne's films had actually been shot, which I think was really special," Susan Sarandon, who played Louise, later told *W*. Arriving during the throes of third-wave feminism, the movie was a lightning rod—and a hit. (As a bonus, it gave the world Brad Pitt.)

Then Scott drove his career over a cliff. His follow-up film was the plodding "1492: Conquest of Paradise," starring Gérard Depardieu, of all people, as Christopher Columbus. Even in 1992, post-colonial sentiment was such that Scott's treatment seemed weirdly hagiographic. But he clearly saw himself in the explorer. In one scene, Columbus argues with Queen Isabella's treasurer over the budget for his voyage, like a director haggling with a studio head: "You expect me to take all the risks while you take the profit?"

The rest of the nineties were rough. Scott's next films, "White Squall" and "G.I. Jane," disappointed. He was divorced, again. His company had personnel problems. "He was being pulled in multiple directions," Sammon observed. "He almost dipped below the radar." In 2000, he rebounded with another once-in-a-decade hit, "Gladiator." The movie, critically dismissed as a swords-and-sandals rehash, made nearly half a billion dollars and won the Oscar for Best Picture, though Scott lost the directing prize to Steven Soderbergh, for "Traffic." "You know, I haven't gotten an Oscar yet," he told me. "And, if I ever get one, I'll say, 'About feckin' time!'"

"Gladiator," for better or worse, re-

vived the Hollywood historical epic, along with Scott's career. Instead of face-planting again, he directed two more hits, "Hannibal" and "Black Hawk Down." He was sixty-two when "Gladiator" was released; since then, in a mad sprint, he's directed seventeen movies, many of them grand in scale. In 2017, his film "All the Money in the World," about the kidnapping of J. Paul Getty's grandson, was six weeks from release when its Getty, Kevin Spacey, was accused of sexual abuse. (Spacey denied the allegations and has since been cleared in two trials.) Scott told Tom Rothman, at Sony, that he wanted to reshoot all of Spacey's scenes with Christopher Plummer as Getty. Rothman recalled, "I said, 'Let me tell you absolutely, positively, it cannot be done.' And absolutely, positively, he did it." Plummer was nominated for Best Supporting Actor. In 2021, Scott released the medieval drama "The Last Duel" and the campy "House of Gucci" within weeks of each other.

Jake Scott has a theory about what is driving his father's turbocharged late period: "I think he didn't get to do it early enough." Ridley reminded me twice that he didn't release his first movie until he was forty. "He's watching Spielberg, he's watching George Lucas, he's watching all those guys in their twenties and thirties," Jake said. "Beginning in midlife means that he didn't get to do all those films that he wanted to do." Or maybe, Jake conjectured, it has something to do with what happened to Tony.

One August night in 2012, Scott was in France when his brother called from L.A. Tony had been battling cancer and was recovering from an operation. He'd survived cancer twice before, as a young man, but his earlier chemotherapy had complicated his treatment. He sounded downbeat, so Scott tried to energize him about work: "I said, 'Have you made your mind up about this film yet? Get going! Let's get you into a movie.'" What he didn't know was that Tony was standing on the Vincent Thomas Bridge over Los Angeles Harbor. After hanging up the phone, he jumped. He was sixty-eight.

Scott shut down his offices for days. He dedicated his next film, "The Counselor," to Tony. Then he made another. And another. "Ridley once told me that he has been dogged by deep depression his whole life," Sammon said. "He calls it 'the black dog,' which is what Churchill called it." (Scott's fashion and music-video division is called Black Dog Films.) "He says, 'If I stop, I find myself sinking.'"

Napoleon was just forty-five at the Battle of Waterloo, but David Scarpa, the screenwriter, sees him as a man battling against time. "This sense of infinite possibility that he had when he was younger is gone," he said. Napoleon died six years later, banished and broken.

In 2014, Scott told *Variety* that he found his brother's suicide "inexplicable." At his offices in L.A., I asked if he still found it so. He didn't. Tony, he explained, was a serious mountain climber. "He'd done El Capitan twice. He would go to the Dolomites. And the operation meant he couldn't climb again. I think climbing was his enthusiasm. It was his mojo." He pointed to a photo on the wall, showing a youngish Tony sitting on a craggy mountaintop, a cliff yawning behind him.

Then Scott drifted into a memory: When Tony was sixteen and Scott was twenty-two, Tony took him climbing in the Yorkshire Dales. "I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Let's see what you're made of.'" The Dales were wet and windy and grim. Scott recalled, "I think, Why am I here? And he's looking around, going, 'Isn't it fantastic?'" Tony tied a rope and scaled up an eighty-foot granite rockface, then called down to his brother, "All right. You come up." Scott started climbing, as Tony clutched the rope from above. "I'm saying, 'This is a bad idea.' He's going, 'Oh, no, I've got you!' In the fog, I said, 'My arms are going!' He said, 'That's because you're holding on too strong.'"

Scott felt himself losing his grip on the rockface. "Tony said, 'Don't peel off!' I said, 'I can't help it!'" Scott let go and spun on the rope, "like a dead spider hanging on the wall," he recalled. As a movie played in his mind of his younger self dangling in midair, all his battles ahead of him, Scott gave a wicked, staccato laugh. "This sixteen-year-old is going, 'I've got you. I've got you.' And then he lowered me down, with his hands burning." ♦

"As we board the aircraft, I'd like to remind everyone that your primary storage space is in your cheeks."

• •

ANNALS OF CRIME

DESERT CAPTIVES

An Eritrean started a trafficking business. Then he began kidnapping his clients for ransom.

BY ED CAESAR

Daniel Yalke was twenty when he left Ethiopia and set off for Europe. One of six siblings from a poor family in Cherkos, a tough neighborhood in Addis Ababa, he had recently graduated from a technical college, where he'd trained to be an electrician. Some of his friends from Cherkos had paid smugglers to reach Europe. These friends now sent Yalke boastful texts about their better lives in Italy, France, and England. Yalke, a handsome youth with a wide smile, didn't see much of a future for himself in Addis Ababa. It was difficult to make money as an electrician in the city, and the work was dangerous: a friend from school had been fatally electrocuted.

In the summer of 2017, Yalke and his best friend from Cherkos, Israel Endale, phoned a broker they knew only as Binyam, who had grown up in their neighborhood. Binyam, who lived in Khartoum, in Sudan, said that he could arrange for their journey to Europe. Starting from Sudan, they'd cross the Sahara, pass through the war-ravaged state of Libya, and then head for Italy on a boat. People often refer to this path as the Central Mediterranean Route.

Yalke and Endale told their families of their plan only a day before they were scheduled to leave. Both families desperately tried to dissuade them, reminding them of people who'd died or been imprisoned on the route, and promising to help them find better opportunities in Addis Ababa. Yalke was initially persuaded by his family, and said that he would reconsider the idea. But Endale was resolute, and within a few hours he'd turned Yalke back to the original plan. The next morning, they secretly boarded a bus. They took no mementos with them, just a few items of clothing, some cash, and a phone. Yalke felt safe with Endale—they were so close that they'd eaten dinner together every night for years, switching between one family's house and the other's.

The bus trip to Sudan took four days and cost them about eighty dollars each. Yalke knew that the remaining journey would be arduous, but as a business transaction it seemed simple. Yet, after he and Endale arrived in Khartoum, Binyam told them, by phone, that he couldn't meet them right away. He directed them to wait at a safe house in Al-Diyum, a neighborhood frequented by migrants from the Horn of Africa. The men guarding the safe house had never heard of Binyam, and they became aggressive with Yalke and Endale, even threatening to shoot them.

After several tense hours, Binyam arrived with another broker, Birhane, whom he described as his superior. The guards knew Birhane and calmed down. Birhane said that Yalke and his friend each could reach Europe for ninety thousand birr, the equivalent of nearly four thousand dollars. The price seemed like a bargain—Yalke knew people who had made the journey and had paid much more. The terms also seemed fair: Birhane said that Yalke and Endale could wait to pay the full amount until they were about to board a boat for Italy.

As is customary for migrants, neither he nor Endale was carrying a large amount of cash. Yalke had hidden money at a neighbor's house in Addis Ababa, and planned to ask his family to relay payments to the smugglers on his behalf. In Khartoum, Yalke called his family and told them about his decision to migrate, and about the cost. His family begged him to return to Addis Ababa. He said that he was determined to make the journey and wasn't afraid.

A few days later, Yalke and Endale joined around sixty other Ethiopians and Eritreans in the bed of a dump truck. Some Sudanese men drove the migrants north, into the Sahara. It was searingly hot in the truck, but Birhane had given Yalke and Endale cookies and fruit juice. After three days, they arrived at the border of Chad. A group of Libyans put the migrants in Land Cruisers and continued through the desert. The Libyans smoked marijuana constantly, and they were cruel. They offered no food, and although they gave the migrants water, they laced it with petroleum so that they didn't drink too much. At one point on the journey, Yalke witnessed some of the Libyans dragging an Eritrean woman away and raping her. He wanted to intercede but was too afraid to do so. As he recently told me, the smugglers were "very heavily armed, and also crazy—they need very little reason to do heinous things."

In southeastern Libya, the migrants arrived at a camp in Kufra—a hub for the smuggling of people, drugs, and weapons. They were still many hundreds of miles south of the Mediterranean. Yalke and Endale expected it to be a short stop. But, after a week, the Libyan guards at the camp said that they wouldn't release them until Yalke and Endale handed over all the birr that they'd agreed to pay Birhane upon arriving at the coast. Yalke and Endale didn't know it yet, but Birhane had staked them while gambling, and lost; they now belonged to another smuggler.

Yalke and Endale remained stuck in Kufra for months. The desert nights were frigid, and Endale, whose lungs had always been fragile, began having serious trouble breathing. After many arguments and beatings, each migrant agreed to pay the ninety thousand birr. Their families, whom Yalke and Endale were allowed to contact by phone, arranged the transfer of the money from Ethiopia. They and other captives who paid what was demanded were told that they would soon be headed toward the Mediterranean. Yalke, who had done menial jobs around the camp to curry favor with the guards, persuaded them to release Endale first, on account of his poor health. Yalke followed three weeks later.

To cross the Libyan desert, Yalke and

SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY DUTCH NATIONAL POLICE

A trafficker known as Kidane herded migrants into a walled compound in the Sahara. Some were held there for years.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY MIKE McQUADE

at least fifty others were told, they needed to hide in a crawl space underneath an industrial load of cement in a huge freight truck. They travelled for twelve hours in this cramped fashion. The next day, the group was transferred to a space in a tanker truck that was half loaded with oil. The heat and the smell were intolerable. ISIS fighters patrolled the area. "It was scary," Yalke recalls. "If ISIS found us, God knows what they would have done."

Finally, they arrived in Bani Walid, an oasis town ninety miles southeast of Tripoli. The truck entered a walled compound, and the migrants were herded into a dilapidated warehouse. At first, Yalke felt relief: they had arrived somewhere it might be possible to eat and rest. But he soon realized that he was in an even worse situation. Some two thousand migrants were crammed inside the compound.

Yalke initially couldn't tell who was in charge. Then he determined that the boss of this camp was a middle-aged man with a hulking frame and hooded eyes. He carried a pistol in his waistband and was flanked by half a dozen guards armed with rifles. One day, the boss told Yalke and the other newcomers that any deal they had struck before arriving in Bani Walid was invalid. To cross the Mediterranean, they needed to pay him fifty-five hundred dollars. The boss declared that he would give them a month to procure the funds; if they failed, they would be tortured on a regular basis until they delivered the money or died.

The boss warned his captives, "It's going to cost me about ten dinars"—seven dollars—"to kill you." This was the price of a muslin sheet that the guards used to wrap corpses before burying them in the desert.

The boss was one of the most notorious human traffickers in Africa. He was known universally by his first name: Kidane.

Like many thousands of his victims, Kidane Zekarias Habtemariam is from Eritrea, a small nation in the Horn of Africa. Since gaining independence from Ethiopia, in 1993, Eritrea has been a heavily militarized one-party state ruled by President Isaias Afwerki. There is no free press. National service is mandatory, capriciously assigned, and indefinite in duration. Religious minorities are persecuted. Long prison terms or capital sentences for minor offenses, including insulting the government, are common. Travel is severely limited, and people of conscription age are rarely permitted to leave the country. In Freedom House's annual assessment of political rights and civil liberties, Eritrea scores the same as North Korea.

Unsurprisingly, many Eritreans find their situation unbearable. According to the Pew Research Center, between 2010 and 2017 at least a million people from sub-Saharan Africa migrated to Europe. During this period, the United Nations estimates, the number of Eritreans living in Europe increased by about forty thousand. (The vast majority of them were granted political asylum.) Meron Estefanos, a Swedish Eritrean expert on the diaspora, told me that there were many more Eritrean migrants than official statistics suggest. She believes that, in 2023, as many as eight thousand Eritreans have fled the country every month. Eritrea's population is supposedly 3.6 million, but she puts it at only 1.5 million.

Starting in the late two-thousands, when migration routes from Africa to Europe became firmly established, many Eritreans joined others from the Horn of Africa on a well-trodden path through Sudan and Libya. At every stage, refugees were forced to make deals with fixers in order to continue their journey. Many of the fixers—and their bosses—were themselves Eritrean. According to multiple sources, high-level Eritrean military officers and politicians allowed smugglers to operate freely along the route, in return for a cut of the profits.

Kidane was one such fixer. He was born into a poor family in Dbarwa, a town fifteen miles south of the Eritrean capital, Asmara, in the nineteen-seventies. (Nobody seems to know Kidane's exact age, but he is generally thought to be in his early fifties.) Whereas many Eritreans working on the Libyan smuggling routes are illiterate, Kidane finished high school, and is known to be an avid reader. He spent a short period of his military service in Assab, a port on the Red Sea. An Eritrean musician who lives outside the country—but doesn't wish to be named—knows Kidane well. He told me he believed that Kidane, during his time in Assab, had met a flagrantly corrupt Eritrean general named Tekle (Manjus) Kiflay. In a 2012 U.N. report, Manjus was described as having supervised two types of trafficking operations: one for weapons and one for people. The businesses used the same routes and, often, the same vehicles. According to the U.N. report, the trade in arms generated around $3.6 million a year for Manjus and other Eritrean officers; the trade in people was said to be "much more lucrative."

If Kidane made such high-level connections as a young man, it took him years to benefit from them financially. According to an Eritrean expatriate now living in Uganda, Kidane worked as a fruit-and-vegetable seller in Asmara during his twenties. He didn't earn much, and he had a weakness for gambling on cards—in particular, a version of rummy that is popular in Eritrea. ("Always losing," the expatriate told me.) At some point in the late two-thousands, Kidane went to Sudan. He was penniless, and eager for an opportunity.

In Khartoum, Kidane met people who ran the smuggling routes across the Sahara and toward the Mediterranean. He built up a network of so-called "feeders": Eritrean expatriates who would bring other migrants to him. Starting around 2010, the migrants would pay a feeder about sixteen hundred dollars to travel from Sudan to the north coast of Africa. The feeder kept a hundred dollars and gave the remainder to Kidane, who then organized the transport across the Sahara. Within a few years, the price for the journey had risen to twenty-five hundred dollars. Out of that sum, Kidane paid a cut to his superiors along the smuggling route; he also covered the cost of transportation, and the bribes that were given to border guards and militiamen.

After the Arab Spring led to revolution in Libya, in 2011, Kidane began working in that country—including in Misrata, a city on the Mediterranean where many migrants ended up before crossing the sea. By 2014, he had garnered enough money and power to work his way up the criminal food chain. He began running a compound at another coastal city, Sabratha, where many mi-

grants were held—and extorted—until sea passage was booked for them. In the desert, Kidane made use of warehouses in Bani Walid owned by a notorious criminal family, the Diabs, who run a trafficking empire in Libya. The Diabs are protected by elements of the Libyan state. The European Union has sanctioned Moussa Diab, the family's most powerful member, for committing "serious human rights abuses including human trafficking and the kidnapping, raping and killing of migrants and refugees."

Daniel Yalke fantasized about escaping the Bani Walid camp, but he knew that there was no point in trying. The Diabs had provided Kidane with sixty to seventy armed guards, from Sudan, Chad, and Niger, to enforce discipline and to patrol the perimeter.

Inside the warehouse, there wasn't enough room for the migrant captives to lie down at the same time, so they took turns sleeping on the concrete floor, some at night and some during the day. There were few opportunities to wash: showers were taken once a month, in groups. Food was dangerously scarce. Once a day, migrants were fed a tiny amount of plain macaroni. Disease was rife.

Yalke noticed that his friend Endale was also a captive in Bani Walid—but for at least two months they were held in different parts of the warehouse, and couldn't speak. Eventually, they were reunited in a separate warehouse for migrants who had not yet paid Kidane. The place was known as Death Row. Half a dozen people seemed to be dying every night. As Kidane had noted, the guards wrapped corpses in muslin and took them into the desert for burial. When somebody died, a friend or two of the deceased person was allowed to accompany the body and say a prayer before it was interred.

Endale declined markedly after he entered Death Row. His breathing difficulties worsened to the point that he developed a serious lung infection. For about eight months, Yalke tended to his friend, bathing him when he could and giving him as much food as he could spare. They rarely saw sunlight. Then, miraculously, Endale's mother mustered up the ransom money. Endale was moved to a different warehouse—nicknamed Canada, on account of its benign conditions—where migrants waited to be transported farther north.

A week after Endale went to Canada, Yalke got word that his friend was dead. "I was crushed," Yalke told me. "He was like my brother."

Kidane and the guards kept the migrants in a state of perpetual fear. Every few days, people were pulled from the crowd and asked to call a family member on a cell phone. After the migrant explained his plight, he was brutalized while his captors asked the family member for the thousands of dollars it would cost to buy his freedom. A common torture method was searing the prisoners' flesh with molten plastic. Yalke suffered this punishment. He told me that he still has nightmares. "It's not just the torture," he said. "It's losing friends, begging your family for money, things like that."

Beatings were generally administered by the guards, but occasionally Kidane himself took over. (Estefanos, the expert on Eritrean migration, told me that the Diabs provided Kidane and other traffickers with experienced torturers.) Yalke told me that his family became so distressed about his beatings that his sister's husband sold their car to help raise the ransom money. Like several other victims of Kidane whom I met, Yalke showed me dark marks on his body from the molten plastic and from other abuse inflicted on him in Bani Walid. Other victims showed me multiple cigarette burns on their arms.

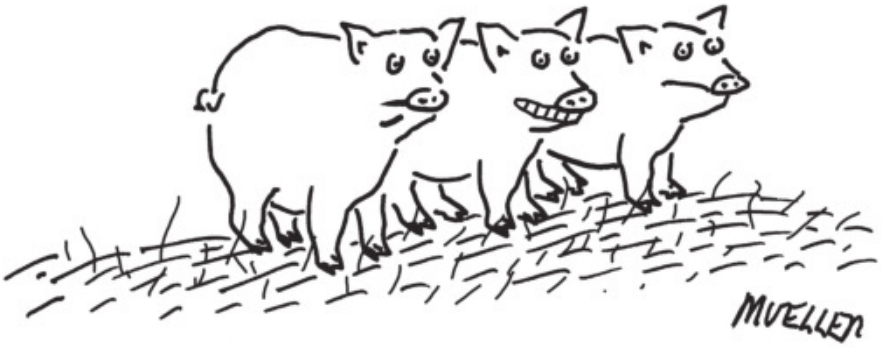
Kidane preferred that victims' families send ransom money via hawala, an informal value-transfer system commonly used in the Arab world and in South Asia. Yalke told me that the contact details of Kidane's trusted recipients in Ethiopia, Sudan, and various European countries were scrawled on a wall of the warehouse, so that migrants could read them out to distraught family members who'd been reached on the phone. Many migrants spent months under Kidane's control. One Ethiopian man I met, Seleshi Girma, spent more than three years in the compound—his family was desperately poor, and it took them that long to scrabble together the ransom money.

Nearly everybody I spoke to about Kidane believed that he took sadistic pleasure in beatings. Certainly, he inflicted more pain than was necessary to extort his victims, often whipping them with rubber tubing. One female victim, speaking to *Le Monde*, said that she was repeatedly raped by Kidane during six months of captivity. She called him a "hyena who gets excited at the sight of blood." Migrants remember soccer games, organized by Kidane, in which players who bungled a chance to score were shot. The winning team was given a female migrant to rape.

Recently, I met Girma in Addis Ababa. He is twenty-eight but looks at least fifteen years older. At a café in the city, he peeled off his T-shirt and showed me a jagged scar from his navel to below his belt line: Kidane and his guards had sliced him open while his family members watched on a video call. In all, Kidane extorted some nine thousand dollars from his family, and Girma never saw a boat. Kidane was a "devil," Girma said, adding, "Human life means very little to him. He only values money."

Girma's story is not unusual: many people who were held captive by Kidane never crossed the sea. Although Estefanos estimates that Kidane did put some fifteen thousand migrants on boats, the financial core of his business seems to have been kidnapping and extortion, not smuggling.

It's difficult to know exactly how profitable Kidane's operation was. His business operated freely, because, in part, Libya fell into a state of anarchy after the 2011



"I hope the table is as nice as the farm."

revolution. But this political instability also caused difficulties for traffickers. ISIS fighters in the region frequently took Kidane's captives hostage themselves. Kidane paid ransoms to get his captives back, then imposed the cost on their families—plus interest. Captives were often traded *among* traffickers. The result was that many migrants had to pay multiple ransoms before being set free.

Despite the tumult of operating in Libya, money flowed steadily to Kidane. He was becoming a kingpin, but he also remained a parasite: to keep his operation in Bani Walid going, he needed to continue paying off the Diab family. According to Estefanos, Kidane gave around forty per cent of each migrant's ransom to the Diabs—about two thousand dollars for the typical "fee." Kidane spent twenty per cent on other costs and kept forty per cent for himself. When Kidane's racket was at its peak, around 2017, it was generating perhaps as much as ten million dollars a year. An officer at Interpol recently told me that Kidane had amassed "significant wealth" through extortion, but it was difficult to say precisely how big the fortune was—because Kidane had hidden much of it.

Kidane's victims remember that he often left the compound in Bani Walid for extended periods. In Africa, smuggling is a seasonal enterprise. Most crossings of the Mediterranean occur between April and September, when the water is less rough. During the off-season, Kidane spent much of his time treating himself to decadent fun in the United Arab Emirates, where he set up a clandestine operation to launder the profits from his criminal activities. Several Eritrean associates of Kidane's, including his brother, Henok, lived for part of the year in Dubai, collecting cash sent from migrants' families through hawala networks. They then sent this money to Kidane-owned businesses in the Horn of Africa or made investments in the Emirates. According to sources familiar with Kidane's network, his many purchases included a house in the Emirates for his family (he and his wife have two children); several properties in Asmara; beauty salons in Addis Ababa and Dubai, each of which was given to a different lover; and numerous Toyota Land Cruiser Prados.

Betting is illegal in the U.A.E., but Kidane's fondness for gambling followed him there. Other Eritreans remember him playing billiards for high stakes in a club inside Eritrea's modest consulate. (Kidane never had to hide from the Eritrean government or from its foreign diplomats, with whom he apparently maintained a cozy relationship.) He once lost between ten and twenty thousand dollars playing billiards at the club in a single day.

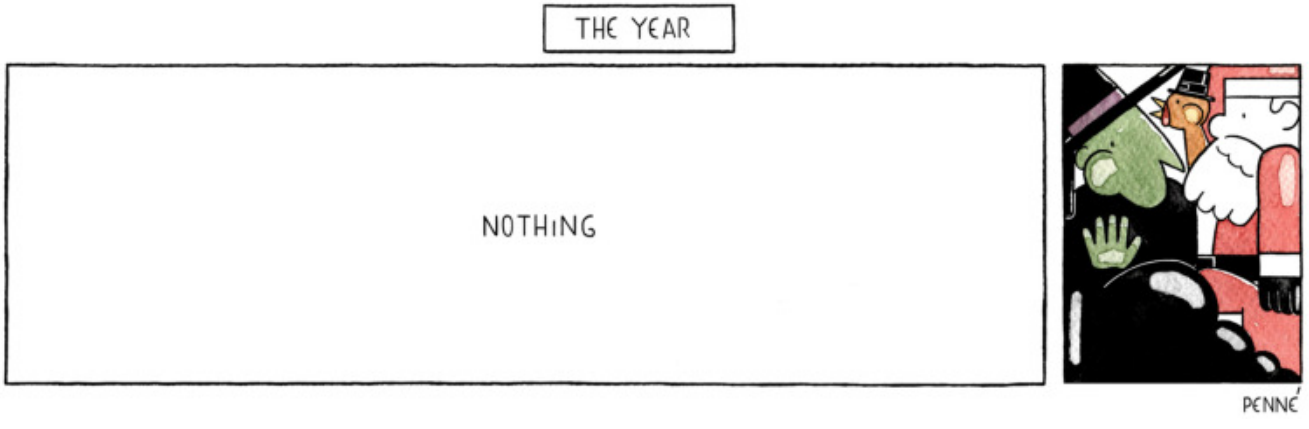
Kidane also arranged high-stakes card games in private rooms in Dubai. An owner of a speakeasy frequented by Ethiopians and Eritreans observed Kidane setting up such games. (The bar owner did not wish to be named, but his closeness to Kidane was vouched for by other Eritreans.) The bar owner said that Kidane's stake would be kept, in cash, by a driver who waited outside in his car. Kidane drank, but never to excess—when playing cards, he'd nurse a glass of Johnnie Walker Black Label.

In one card game at the Sun & Sands Sea View Hotel, an unprepossessing three-star hotel near the Dubai airport, Kidane lost about a hundred thousand dollars. The speakeasy owner recalled that, whenever Kidane lost at cards, "he never got angry—he just laughed." One of Kidane's regular opponents at the card table is said to have used some of the money he made from beating Kidane to build a gaudy hotel in Uganda, on the shores of Lake Victoria.

Though Kidane could be socially awkward—he found it difficult to make a joke, associates say—he was proud of his success, and used his money to cultivate celebrities. He became friends with several prominent Ethiopian and Eritrean performers. Sometimes he paid for someone he admired to travel to Dubai. The speakeasy owner remembered Kidane bragging that he had bought a plane ticket for Daniel Teklehaimanot—an Eritrean cyclist who'd competed in the Olympics—and had paid for him to stay in the hotel at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building. (Teklehaimanot recalls meeting Kidane in Dubai around 2016, but says that Kidane did not pay for him to be there.)

Several years ago, Kidane is said to have brought Tarekegn Mulu, a traditional Ethiopian singer, to do a set at the Dubai Palm hotel. Kidane paid him thousands of dollars and presented him onstage with a gold necklace. The artists he sponsored often performed songs whose bespoke lyrics celebrated Kidane's exploits, much in the way that Mexican *narcocorridos* heroize members of drug cartels. Estefanos knows Eritreans who attended these parties, and she told me that the lyrics to the songs performed in the Dubai Palm "were, like, 'Kidane, my brother,' 'Kidane, the king,' 'Kidane, the hero.'" Estefanos added, "The more they sing in his honor, the more money they get."

Despite the many major crimes Kidane committed, he did not attract the focussed attention of law enforcement in Europe for several years. But in the mid-twenty-tens, as migrant



crossings of the Mediterranean rose, boats became increasingly overloaded, and many sank. Thousands of people drowned. The E.U. began pouring money into an effort to stop sea crossings at the main point of departure: the Libyan coast. In 2015, the bloc began giving the Libyan Coast Guard millions of euros, with a mandate to stop migrant crossings and arrest the smugglers.

The policy has been an abject failure, in terms of both saving lives and reducing the number of migrants. The Libyan Coast Guard is cruel and easily bought off with bribes; indeed, some Coast Guard officers have sold migrants back to traffickers—or imprisoned, abused, and extorted them in compounds much like Kidane's. Without such corruption, Kidane's business could not have flourished; Moussa Diab's trafficking empire emerged, in no small part, from relationships that he established with Libyans in the government and the military.

The International Criminal Court has yet to bring charges against anyone involved in the trafficking trade in Libya. Meanwhile, Italy—the first destination of many migrant boats—and several other European countries have pursued the bosses of smuggling networks, sometimes with embarrassing results. As Ben Taub reported in this magazine, an Italian investigation led to the imprisonment of an Eritrean who was believed to be a major smuggler; he turned out to be an innocent man with the same name as the criminal.

Kidane may have been of less immediate interest to prosecutors in Europe because his main operation, in Bani Walid, was at one remove from the sea crossings, but his crimes were nevertheless egregious. Many of his victims, after being released from the warehouse, did eventually make it to Europe, and for prosecutors there who cared to listen to the stories of Eritreans and Ethiopians it was possible to construct a vivid and disturbing criminal case against Kidane. The Netherlands has a significant Eritrean community; according to an Eritrean source familiar with Kidane's network, the Dutch police first began to ask questions about Kidane a decade ago. But officials at Interpol's unit on human trafficking and migrant smuggling told me that they didn't begin receiving intelligence reports about Kidane until October, 2019. By that time, he had been operating on the migrant trail for years.

In February, 2020, a twenty-one-year-old Ethiopian man named Fuad Bedru was talking with a friend on a street in Addis Ababa when a passerby caused him to do a double take. It was Kidane. Bedru had spent much of the previous three years trying unsuccessfully to reach Europe—and for several months he'd been held captive in Bani Walid. The first night that Bedru spent at the camp, he was identified as a troublemaker because he had escaped from another abusive trafficker. Kidane's guards made him take a freezing shower, leaving him shivering in the desert night. The guards then bound Bedru's hands behind his back and whipped his torso repeatedly. The wounds took a month to heal, and during this period his clothes remained stuck to his flesh. Kidane maintained a special dislike for Bedru, and beat him with a stick whenever he saw him. "I still have the scars on my back," Bedru said.

At one point, about a hundred captives in Bani Walid, including Bedru, fled into the desert. Guards pursued the escapees with guns. Doctors Without Borders, which was operating a hospital in the town, later reported that at least fifteen migrants were shot and killed, and dozens were injured. Bedru, whose leg was hurt in the escape, crawled to a nearby mosque, and eventually travelled toward the coast. He was now focussed on escaping traffickers, rather than making it to Europe. Two months later, he was in a U.N. camp in Libya. He was soon repatriated on a flight to Addis Ababa.

Now his former jailer was walking past him in a humdrum Addis Ababa neighborhood. Bedru could not have been more surprised if he'd seen a Bengal tiger strolling by. He followed Kidane on foot. Every time Bedru caught another glimpse of Kidane, he became more confident in his identification. Kidane was wearing a hoodie, jeans, and sandals, just as he had in Bani Walid. Eventually, Kidane stopped at a phone store. Bedru saw two police officers nearby, a man and a woman, and told them why they should arrest Kidane. The female officer knew about the dire situation in Libya's migrant camps and explained it to her colleague. Bedru then walked up to Kidane and tapped him on the back. Kidane spun around and was shocked to see someone he recognized. "What can I do for you?" he asked Bedru.

The officers stepped in and arrested Kidane, though they didn't handcuff him. Kidane pleaded his innocence. Then he tried to bribe the police officers, offering them about five hundred dollars. The offer was refused. Kidane, panicked, said that he could get the officers a lot more money, and also take care of Bedru; if they dropped the matter, they could later name their price. Again, he was turned down. Bedru realized that it was the first time he had seen Kidane without a weapon or armed guards. The power in their relationship had shifted. "He was afraid of *me*," Bedru recalled.

As the officers led Kidane toward the police station, he suddenly escaped into a crowded marketplace. The male officer chased him and was soon joined by some backup. They eventually overpowered Kidane. Now it was his turn to be detained.

News of the arrest circulated, eventually reaching Meron Estefanos. She reached out to Eritrean contacts in Addis Ababa and learned that Kidane was hardly the only trafficker spending the off-season in the city; many of them had recently been spotted in its cafés and bars. (Ethiopia's government had recently made it easier for Eritreans to spend extended time there.) Estefanos passed this intelligence to the Regional Operational Center Khartoum, an E.U.-funded police body, based in Sudan, that gathers information on criminal networks involved in the trafficking and abuse of migrants. The ROCK passed its intelligence to Ethiopian authorities. Within six weeks, the Addis Ababa police had arrested another trafficker who had held and extorted migrants in Bani Walid: Tewelde Goitom, a man known as Welid. He and Kidane had regularly worked together, even sharing guards. They also came from the same town. Whereas Kidane was notorious for beatings, Welid was known as a serial rapist. To Estefanos's regret, Welid was the final major figure to be apprehended in the investigation. "There were others we

were looking for, and I was hoping they would get arrested," she said. "But then COVID hit, and the whole effort stopped."

Ethiopian prosecutors made cases against both Kidane and Welid, and trials were arranged, but the judicial process was haphazard. Although the pandemic was ongoing, the trial could not proceed through remote hearings, because in Ethiopia witnesses aren't allowed to appear by video link. This proved problematic, as many potential witnesses were scattered across Africa and Europe. Kidane was charged with only eight counts of trafficking. Fuad Bedru, bafflingly, wasn't called to give evidence—although he attended as many court hearings as he could. No international monitors were present at the trial. The only Western journalist who covered the proceedings was Sally Hayden, an Irish writer, whose book "My Fourth Time, We Drowned" is a landmark work of reportage about the migrant crisis.

Partway through the trial, in February, 2021, Kidane arrived at an Addis Ababa courthouse in a yellow prison uniform. He was soon ushered into a bathroom, where someone had laid out a change of clothes for him. A few minutes later, he walked out of the courthouse in civilian attire, and disappeared. In all, I was told, Kidane paid about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in bribes to secure his escape. One of Kidane's victims told Hayden, "In Ethiopia there is a proverb: '*Genzeb kale bezemay menged ale*.' This means 'If there is money, there is a way through the sky.'"

Kidane's escape embarrassed the Ethiopian authorities, but they continued the trial in his absence. In April, 2021, Kidane was found guilty on all counts, and later he was sentenced to life imprisonment. By that time, according to two people with knowledge of Kidane's whereabouts, he had long since left Ethiopia. For the men and women who had testified against him, the verdict was cold comfort. In Ethiopia, there is little protection for witnesses. Before the trial, the police had put Kidane in lineups and asked his victims to identify him in person, by walking over and touching him. Now the man they had touched was at large. Bedru told me that as these events unfolded, in 2021, he feared that Kidane had both the means and the motivation to seek revenge. As Bedru put it, "He is a bad person, and he is a *rich* person."

After Kidane was charged in Addis Ababa, Interpol red notices against both him and Welid were published at the request of the Dutch police, in order to start the process of extraditing them to the Netherlands, where many of their victims now lived. The courtroom escape impressed on the Dutch the urgency of trying Kidane in their own country. The Ethiopian authorities, chagrined, tried to figure out how Kidane had bribed his way to freedom. They didn't solve the mystery, though they did learn of a wire payment—for a reported twenty-four thousand dollars—that someone in Kidane's network had sent to Ethiopia, with the intention of dispersing bribes during the trial.

Following Kidane's escape, Interpol pressed Ethiopia to issue its own red notice against Kidane. In November, 2021, Interpol circulated a report about Kidane's network, and his likely safe houses, to Sudan, where he had operated; Ethiopia, from which he had escaped; the Netherlands, which was building a case against him; and the U.A.E., where he laundered and spent his money. In fact, according to the Eritrean source familiar with Kidane's network, Kidane was based in Libya for part of the period after his escape. One persistent rumor placed him in Kufra, the smuggling hub.

In March, 2022, Interpol arranged a meeting of police officers from the four interested countries in Lyon, France. The meeting concluded with a commitment not only to find Kidane but to dismantle his financial network—which meant placing his brother, Henok, under surveillance in Dubai. After the meeting, the U.A.E. police opened a case against Henok. By December, U.A.E. investigators had received a reliable tip that Kidane was now in Sudan. (A police source from another country told me that Emirati investigators confirmed Kidane's location by tracing phone conversations that he had with his wife, who was travelling from Dubai to meet him; Kidane, apparently feeling out of danger, was making unencrypted calls.) Stephen Kavanagh, the executive director of police services at Interpol, told me that the U.A.E.'s case against Kidane focussed on money laundering, which was easier to prosecute than the Dutch case about Kidane's crimes in Libya. The U.A.E. pursued Kidane's arrest.

"Bringing Kidane in for whatever we could—the Al Capone approach—was more important than sequencing," Kavanagh said. "Even given the more serious charges from our Dutch colleagues."

According to an officer with knowledge of the operation, the U.A.E. determined that Kidane was in an apartment in Omdurman, a sister city to Khartoum, on the western bank of the Nile. On December 31, 2022, officers from the U.A.E. flew to Khartoum; on New Year's Day, Emirati officers broke down the reinforced door of the apartment where Kidane was staying. He was entertaining two women, neither of whom was his wife. There were several guns in the apartment, but Kidane fired no shots before surrendering. On the same day, U.A.E. police broke down the door of Henok's apartment in Dubai, and arrested him, too.

The Emiratis posted a celebratory video on social media announcing that they had led an international effort to catch Kidane—one of the world's "most wanted criminals." But since then the Emiratis have stopped discussing the case publicly. Indeed, they refused to answer any of my inquiries about Kidane and Henok. According to a European police source, however, the brothers were both recently convicted in the U.A.E. of money laundering. The officer with knowledge of Kidane's arrest, though, told me he thinks that the legal process is ongoing. In any event, the Dutch authorities would like to extradite Kidane so that he can stand trial for his more serious crimes alongside Welid, who has been extradited to the Netherlands and whose trial is under way in the city of Zwolle. (Welid denies all allegations against him.) Ironically, it may be that Kidane will first appear in a trial in the Netherlands—not as a defendant but as a witness. Welid's defense team wants Kidane to testify in the trial in Zwolle. (Welid's lawyers did not say which aspect of their defense Kidane might bolster.)

The lack of clarity about Kidane's legal status has frustrated his many victims. In Addis Ababa, Seleshi Girma—the Ethiopian migrant whose abdomen was sliced open—told me that his imprisonment in Bani Walid had left his entire family in dire financial circum-

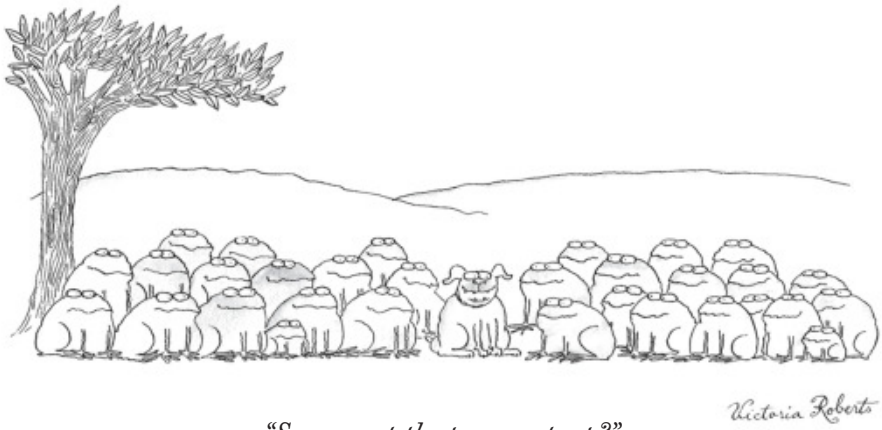
stances. He was back in his home country, and unemployed, and he had no way of repaying his relatives. He wanted the people who had been extorted by Kidane to initiate a class-action lawsuit against him, in the hope of recovering some money. "That would be justice," he said.

Daniel Yalke, who suffered so greatly at Kidane's hands, feels similarly. He is also back in Addis Ababa. After paying Kidane's ransom, he eventually made his way to Tunisia, where he attempted to convince a Red Cross employee that he was not Ethiopian but Eritrean, in the hope of being given asylum in Europe. Eventually, Yalke admitted his true identity. "I realized I just wanted my old life back," he told me. He was sent home on a Red Cross flight. He told me that he is anguished over the financial pain he has caused his family. He is working again as an electrician.

The speakeasy owner in Dubai told me that there is little point in thinking about recovering money from Kidane. Some physical assets could be seized—the houses and the beauty salons—but most of the cash was placed in hawala networks, and would be almost impossible to trace. "The money is with *people*," he said.

After the arrest of Kidane and his brother, Interpol said that the police operation had dealt "a significant blow to a major smuggling route towards Europe" and would "protect thousands more from being exploited at the hands of the crime group." Certainly, the arrests have stopped other migrants from being exploited by Kidane's enterprise, but they seemed unlikely to do much to prevent the trafficking of African migrants. Kavanagh, the Interpol director, admitted as much to me: "We're not naïve. More has to be done. There's no point taking Kidane out and letting others fill the gap."

Migrant tragedies continue to occur with distressing regularity. This past June, an overcrowded fishing trawler carrying as many as seven hundred and fifty Syrian, Egyptian, Palestinian, and Pakistani people sank off the coast of Greece. Only a hundred and four people were rescued. The trawler had sailed from Libya, which remains—despite all the money that the E.U. has spent on preventative measures—a hub for human trafficking. Tunisia, meanwhile, has become another major destination for migrants wishing to cross the Mediterranean. It may be safer to go there than to Libya, but not much. Tunisia's President, Kais Saied, has issued tirades against migrants from elsewhere in Africa, saying that their growing presence threatened to turn Tunisia into "a purely African country with no affiliation to Arab and Islamic nations." Recently, Human Rights Watch reported that migrants who had been intercepted at sea by Tunisia's Coast Guard were being beaten and robbed by Tunisian officers, and then dumped in the desert with nothing to eat or drink. After one such group of migrants was abandoned in the Sahara, at least twenty-seven died of thirst and exposure. (Tunisia's government denies such abuses, and Saied says that he is not racist.)



"So . . . not the pug meet-up?"

• •

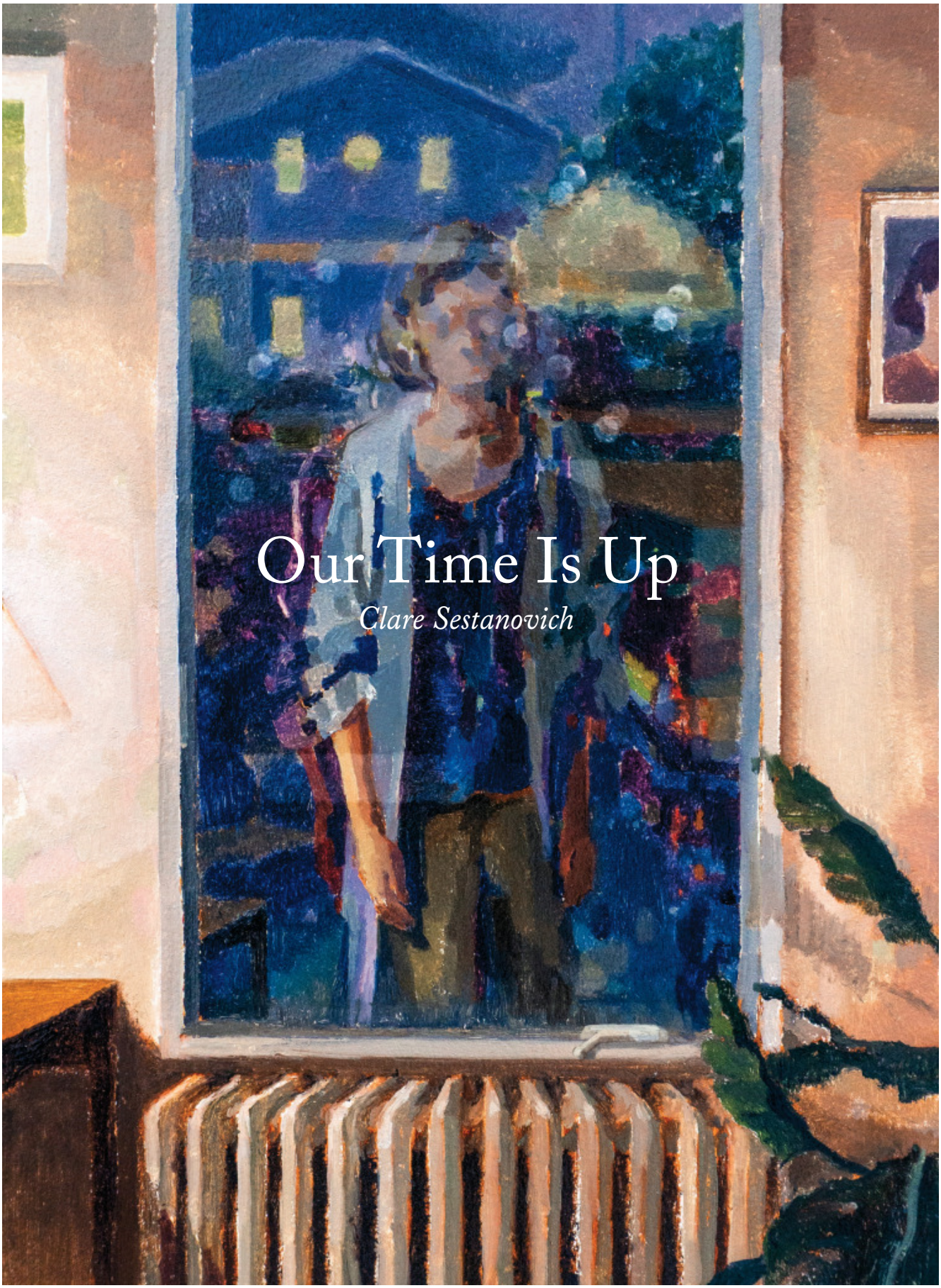
Although Fuad Bedru, the Ethiopian who recognized Kidane in the street, had a horrific experience as a migrant, he was not deterred from attempting to reach Europe again. After Kidane's escape from the courthouse, Bedru—still determined to improve his prospects, and afraid that Kidane might seek revenge—began making new travel plans. Like many Ethiopians currently attempting to enter Europe without a visa, he chose a different route: after going to Sudan by car, and to Turkey on a cheap flight, he would board a small boat for Greece. He surmised, correctly, that it would be easy to find a fixer in Istanbul who could organize a sea crossing.

Bedru made it to Istanbul last September. A fixer told him to travel to Izmir, on the Turkish coast, and gave him a number to call once he got there. One evening at eight o'clock, Bedru joined forty or fifty others on a dinghy bound for the Greek island of Samos. The boat had only a small outboard motor, which wasn't powerful enough for so many passengers. None of the migrants were given life jackets. There were two babies on board. When the weather turned bad and the waves rose, people began crying. Water started coming into the boat. Bedru, like most of the migrants, had brought a duffelbag with him. When it seemed possible that the boat would sink, he threw it overboard. The dinghy reached Samos at 6 A.M. Bedru carried with him a light jacket and his phone, and nothing else.

He walked for miles to a U.N. refugee camp, where he was given a space in a tent for four months. In January, 2023, he was transferred to another refugee camp in Greece, where he slept in a shipping container. His plan had always been to reach a rich country in northern Europe, such as the United Kingdom. But that prospect still seemed distant.

Recently, I met Bedru in a southern European country, where he was working at a chicken-processing plant for forty-five euros a day. He asked me not to say exactly where he was, because he didn't want to alert Kidane's family or local authorities who might cause him problems.

Bedru was eighteen when he first attempted to come to Europe, and now he was twenty-four. A quarter of his life had been spent on the migrant trail. In his new country, he did not speak the local language, and he had few friends. His work was arduous and poorly paid. I asked him whether he wished he had stayed in Addis Ababa. "No," he said. "It's better to be here—even alone." ♦



Our Time Is Up

Clare Sestanovich

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES LEE CHIAHAN

The mirrors reveal when it's time to clean again. A thin layer of dust on the one in the bedroom, toothpaste and fingerprints on the one in the bathroom, which doubles as a cabinet door. All the windows become mirrors at the end of the day, when it takes a subtle adjustment of the eyes to look through yourself instead of at yourself. But the windows will never be cleaned; the most that can be hoped for is a hard, purifying rain. There's a yellow streak of bird shit on the glass in the living room, crusted over now, and the kitchen window still bears the ghostly pattern that Angela once traced on the fogged-up surface while waiting for something on the stove, she can no longer remember what: a pot to boil, a formless egg to acquire edges and turn opaque, a single drop of oil to escape its pan and scald her out of her thoughts.

Since when does Angela care about cleaning? The other day, at dinner with a friend, she found herself extolling the virtues of a certain type of mop. She recently learned several methods for removing stains from supposedly stainless steel. She has even wished, on occasion, that she owned an iron.

An iron! More symbol than tool at this point, and Angela doesn't like what the symbol stands for. She's not a housewife. For one thing, she rents. True, she's married, but there wasn't really a wedding, because she's opposed to weddings. She's employed. In theory, empowered.

The thing about the mop is that it's satisfying. Under the supervision of a therapist, Angela and Will have been talking a lot about satisfaction. How to define it, where to find it, whether they can feel it—have it—at the same time. Each swipe of the mop proves its usefulness, a glistening arc on a floor that a second ago looked O.K. but now is revealed to have been dusty and dull all along. The water in the bucket turns gray.

Angela doesn't like the therapist. Why are they talking about satisfaction when they could be talking about happiness?

When I was your age—

Angela has heard this sentence completed so many times, in so many ways, that by now she can line up her mother's entire life beside her own entire life (thus far) and compare them year by year. She can try on the other life as you might try on a dress forgotten at the back of the closet: with no hope of it fitting, and yet with some perverse desire to see exactly where the seams stretch or the zipper catches, where two pieces of fabric refuse to meet.

At age six, Angela's mother watched the apartment building where she and her parents lived burn to the ground. At age six, Angela moved into a new house, with her very own bedroom. She was afraid to fall asleep in it, her heart beating wildly in the dark.

At eight, Angela's mother lost her father. Something to do with the smoke that had got into his lungs. At eight, Angela lost her asthma inhaler. She knew it was expensive, so she didn't tell anyone for weeks, wheezing loudly through gym class.

At eleven, Angela's mother worked all afternoon in her stepfather's laundromat, where he occasionally slid his hand under her shirt or, in the summertime, up the loose openings in her shorts. She started wearing pants all year round. At eleven, Angela tried to pretend that her nipples, which had puffed up and made two tiny tents in her T-shirt, did not exist. Once (but only once), a boy in her class pinched the left tent between his thumb and his index finger, and then it definitely existed.

At eighteen, Angela's mother did not get to go to college. At eighteen, Angela did not want to go to college. She wanted to live on a farm in Italy, where she could turn grapes into wine with her bare feet. She had saved nine hundred dollars of her hard-earned wages for airfare.

At twenty-two, Angela's mother married Angela's father, in a church. He was more than a decade older than her, but, if anything, she considered that a good thing: he had more experience, and also more money. At twenty-two, Angela, having never been to Italy, having been reminded that her mother did not receive a single cent of her own hard-earned wages until her stepfather died, graduated with a degree in American Studies. Degrees were also said to be earned, but other than a large amount of debt, which could not possibly be paid off by crushing grapes between her toes, Angela didn't think there was much evidence that she deserved hers.

At twenty-five, Angela's mother had Angela's brother. At twenty-five, Angela took Plan B: once for a broken condom, once after unprotected sex with a man who was married, and once because of a nameless, baseless feeling that there was something inside her that needed to be expelled.

At thirty-one, Angela's mother had Angela. At thirty-one, Angela went to her first baby shower. Gifts everywhere: clothes that would fit for only a few months, a stroller that cost as much as a used car. She vowed never to go to one again.

At thirty-nine, Angela's mother threatened to divorce Angela's father. An affair. She eventually reconsidered, but not before she told Angela all about it. In the end, she said, pity won out: he didn't even know how to use the washing machine.

Here Angela's desire for comparison flags. She will be forty at the end of the year. Thinking about her mother's life is tiring, though not as tiring, she reminds herself in her mother's voice, as actually living it. The dress is harder to take off than it was to put on. Having tugged it over her hips, she leaves it there, the empty top flopping in front of her. Her stomach is soft and her breasts are heavy and she has no children to blame for either fact. None of this—her painless upbringing, her pointless degree, the money she finally spent on a vacation to Tuscany, which she could have spent on a thousand other things or, better yet, saved—would matter to Angela's mother if there were children.

The therapist suggests that they talk about what matters to Angela instead of what matters to her mother. Will nods. He agrees with the therapist because he's agreeable, which is part of why Angela married him, which is why she can't object to the nodding, even though it irritates her. She wishes she were agreeable, too. Like the therapist, Will is full of good suggestions: more intimacy (physical), less inertia (existential). He wonders aloud if they should get a cat.

Whenever her mother calls, Angela

nods to prove she's listening. They live four hundred miles apart: Angela by the beach, her mother in the desert. They used to talk every Sunday afternoon, but lately her mother has been calling on any day, at any time, even late at night. In the middle of a conversation, she accuses Angela of having hung up, and Angela has to remind herself that nodding means nothing on the phone. The only person she's proving anything to is herself.

The summer heat arrives and Angela opens all the windows, relieving herself of her reflection. The dust that accumulates during this time of year is no more visible than dust at any other time of the year, but, when Angela wipes the surfaces in the apartment with a microfibre cloth, the cloth ends up not the usual gray but a more alarming black. They live on a busy street. The dust is probably more like soot. They could close the windows, but Angela doesn't like the artificial cold of air-conditioning.

"Plus, refrigerants are bad for the planet."

"But pollutants are bad for us," Will says.

As a compromise, they turn on the A.C. only at night. In some ways, they're too good at compromising. Every morning, the air is dry, their eyes crusty.

Early one Monday, before leaving for the office, Angela removes the eye crust and applies mascara in front of the bathroom mirror—clean but streaky. She works at a talent agency, where her job is to believe that her clients' big break is about to come, or else to refuse to believe that it has come and gone. All the clients, mostly actors and models, put a lot of work into their appearance, and so do many of the agents. In front of the mirror, Angela ignores the way her eyelashes clump together unattractively, because in general she doesn't try very hard to be attractive. Her halfhearted makeup is, in its way, a point of pride. Unlike her apparent affinity for mops and irons and microfibre rags, her disdain for the rules and rewards of feminine style is a small triumph of principle.

Half an hour later, stopped in traffic, Angela watches a driver in the next lane apply lipstick, then brush a fine powder over her face. The cars start moving and the woman keeps brushing. Dangerous! (But as dangerous as refrigerants? As pollution? As turning into your mother?) Behind her, the other cars start to honk. The woman snaps her compact shut and, without turning her head, raises a middle finger in the air. Triumphs of principle are everywhere, Angela thinks, now doubting her own. Is the woman more or less attractive than her? She tries to get a better look at the woman's face, but the other car speeds up and is soon out of sight. In traffic, Angela somehow always chooses the slowest lane.

Attraction, related to satisfaction, is another one of the therapist's big themes. After eleven years, Will still says Angela is beautiful. The therapist suggests the word "sexy," which makes Angela recoil. Will notices, of course. He's disappointed, of course. They don't have as much sex as he would like.

His disappointment is a wide, finely meshed net—hard to wriggle out of. In her efforts, Angela is tempted again toward principle: what is this, the nineteen-fifties? Haven't we agreed that husbands are not the only ones who get to have desires? These questions sound pointed when she practices them behind the steering wheel—when she's impatient or aggrieved, when she's alone—but they don't lead anywhere good.

At the office, Angela sits at a desk that's hers on some days and Carrie's on others. There's a sticky note from Carrie on the computer screen. *Remove crumbs from keyboard.* Mortified, Angela tears up the note and throws it in the trash.

No, Angela can hear the therapist say, husbands are not the only ones who get to have desires. Wives (another word to recoil from) get to have them, too. Angela can see Will nod. But what does she desire? As she extracts crumbs from between the keys, a string of letters, utter nonsense, appears on her screen.

Will and Angela started therapy because of the kids question: whether they want them, what it would mean to have them. For years, they've avoided answering it by discussing it—long, looping conversations that are never finished, only abandoned. Afterward, they cry or fall asleep or order an elaborate takeout meal, which makes Angela feel guilty: all that plastic. Now they're running out of time to answer the question, but they've spent at least half of their sessions arguing over a different one: whether Angela's mother needs to move out of her house. It's Angela's father's house, too, but Angela never thinks of it that way. He bought it, but her mother chose it. He left it early in the morning and returned to it late at night. She decorated it and redecorated it. He called from the top of the stairs when he was looking for something he couldn't find.

At first, Angela and Will were in agreement about the house: things were getting out of hand; alarm bells were ringing. But Angela lost the argument with her mother, and after that her only choice was to bury it someplace inaccessible, practically unrememberable. To see Will dig it up again was enraging—more enraging, somehow, than the original dispute.

"How can you ignore it?" he asks. He's incredulous, but never impatient. "It's right in front of our eyes." The therapist smiles at him encouragingly.

Will means the plastic bags, the stacks of magazines, the clamshell containers, the shelf in the pantry where her mother keeps all the complimentary snacks she's received on airplanes: miniature packages of pretzels and cookies, squat cans of tomato juice. (She protests if the flight attendant tries to open the can.) Admittedly, these collections are fastidiously organized. The plastic bags are stored in the sleeves of Angela's father's old dress shirts, which dangle from hooks all over the kitchen like severed limbs.

And not all of it, as Angela's mother and then Angela herself have pointed out, is trash. Her mother is a talented

ceramicist, a hobby that she practiced in moderation for the many decades that she had a job, and then in a kind of ecstatic frenzy as soon as she didn't. At her job—first she was a secretary and then she was an administrative assistant, though the work itself never changed—she didn't get to produce anything. Now every surface in the house displays her wares. Empty flower vases and stacks of cereal bowls, mugs that chart her progress at the wheel, their slouching posture improving until they are all in perfect, proud proportion. She makes teapots and gravy boats, despite never making tea or gravy. On a high shelf, Angela once found half a dozen egg cups, each one painted with a baby chick. She stood on a stool, eye level with the chicks. Why doesn't her mother give these things away?

The therapist tries to steer the conversation back to bigger, harder questions.

"Put aside, for a second, who *you're* attracted to," she says to Angela at the start of one session. "Do you believe that someone could be attracted to you?"

The therapist looks about the same age as Angela's mother. A second-waver, probably. (Not that Angela's mother has ever heard of the second wave.) She wears sensible shoes but expensive sweaters. Over the course of their sessions, she's been letting her hair gradually go gray. Angela can picture her in one of those consciousness-raising groups in the seventies, where all the women were given mirrors and instructed to look at their vaginas—presumably for the first time. The idea, as Angela understands it, was that once you saw yourself you could know yourself. *Be* yourself.

Sounds nice! The mirror stuff seems quaint now, but Angela isn't totally sure why. Was everyone supposed to have done their own self-exploration—self-realization—long ago? She certainly hadn't. In adolescence, the approved period for such exploring, the only suitable mirror in her parents' house would have been the full-length in the hall closet, next to the winter coats and the umbrellas. And anyway, back then, Angela had a different scale of exploration in mind: Italy, the Alps, something vast and impersonal. The sticky, unfamiliar folds of her vulva grossed her out. By the time she could appreciate the point of more local knowledge, it seemed too late. Plenty else had been down there: fingers, tongues, a whole clove of garlic (for bacterial vaginosis), various buzzing rubber toys (for fun). After all that, to admit that she hadn't fully seen what she had let many people touch would have been too embarrassing.

"Don't you see? You were never an ugly duckling. You were a beautiful senior administrative analyst."

• •

Now is the time to admit it. Here is a paid professional, a licensed therapist, who has been asking for their admissions. But Angela is pretty sure she's seen enough. You don't really need the mirror. The clitoris is a raisin flattened by a shoe. One of her labia, slightly larger than the other, droops like a lazy eyelid. It's not the vivid, secret pink of the body's interior. Like any exterior, its original color has been weathered a worldly gray.

When Angela's father falls and breaks his wrist, it's been a few months since Angela and Will last argued about the house. Her father is eighty-one, with a history of minor hospitalizations. This time, he slipped, or tripped—the story is vague. He tried to brace his fall. It could happen to anyone, her mother keeps saying, which means: it could happen to someone young. He's still in the hospital, for some reason; his blood pressure, her mother says cryptically. Or maybe his blood-cell count? Her uncertainty is alarming enough that Angela and Will book a hotel with credit-card points and fly from Los Angeles to Phoenix. Angela makes certain compromises on the plane. They'll fix up the house. The junk can go, but the art will stay. Or fine, not all of it: just the essential stuff, the not lopsided stuff.

Will has made an informational call to a retirement community. There are tour guides who can show them around. Angela doesn't want to talk about it.

"My mom is barely seventy."

Will doesn't say anything, because he knows she knows what he will say: age is always relative. He scrolls through the facility's promotional materials online, tilting the screen in her direction.

"Is there any harm in looking?"

There's a dining room, a rec room,

a man-made pond, a hair salon. There are art classes and therapy groups. One wing is for what the Web site calls independent living. How could anyone object to independent living?

"They'd be able to stay together," Will says.

"Who said anything about them splitting up?"

In the tense silence that follows, Angela, in the middle seat, becomes aware of the woman to her right—younger than her, but not by much, staring studiously out the window. From this angle, it's hard to know what the woman really looks like; she might look very different if they were face to face.

"It can't be cheap," Angela says.

With the therapist, she and Will have planned to discuss the cost of children. They haven't said anything about the cost of parents. Angela follows the younger woman's gaze out the window, but the view is obstructed by the wing of the plane. She closes her eyes and listens to the engine, to remind herself that there is something keeping so much heavy metal aloft.

When Angela pictures her mother, the image that appears is decades out of date. Dark hair and unspotted skin, a bony frame that would be called petite, not fragile. This image feels like something she's remembering rather than inventing, but it's hard to tell the difference. When Angela opens her eyes, the flight attendant is handing her a paper napkin and a flimsy cup. Soda crackles over ice. She splits open a package of almonds and pours them straight into her mouth.

They buy a seat for the shower and put a plastic bag over her father's cast before turning the water on. He's still not entirely steady on his feet.

"See," her mother insists. "He's going to need plastic bags."

Patiently, Will tells her that she can keep one shirtsleeve's worth. He unstuffs the rest, pulling the bags out one at a time, until there are a dozen limp arms on the counter. He looks around for his next task.

The kitchen's elaborate architecture of detritus—towers of dishwashered takeout containers, a whole skyline of empty salad-dressing bottles—turns out to conceal a simpler, uglier landscape: mold, moth larvae, grease, something sticky, cobwebs, crumbs, pencil shavings, more mold. Angela's mother does not avoid the evidence. While Angela herds mouse droppings into a dustpan, she hovers behind her, enumerating all the treasures that she's saved over the years: swim-team trophies, letters from summer camp, red-eyed photographs with elaborate captions written on the back. When she says "saved," what she means is "rescued." Angela's prom dress is shrouded in dry-cleaner plastic and kept, inexplicably, in the hall closet.

"This is your past," her mother says, sweeping her arm grandly around the house. "Your history."

Back at the hotel, Will takes a long shower. Angela consults the minibar prices, turns the TV on and then instantly off. Listening to the shower spray the shower curtain, Angela considers whether to repeat what her mother said. "History" is a weighty word. Will might think she's telling him in order to pick a fight, or at least to make a point, but she would be telling him only to—well, just to tell him. She has no idea what the point is. The water turns off. The shower rings slide along the rod. This is the unbidden intimacy of routine: to know exactly what he is doing on the other side of a closed door. In her head, she can see him turn his towel into a rope, then shuttle it back and forth across his back. At what point, she wonders, does routine become life? He opens the door an inch: steam, heat, a vaguely floral scent. Next, he'll smear a circle on the mirror, stick his neck out to get closer to his reflection. He'll look with special scrutiny at the stray hairs on his neck and shoulders. They're hardly noticeable, pale and delicate—almost elegant in their alienness, Angela thinks—but they distress him. As a kid, Will says, he dreaded his father's bare torso, pale and lumpy clay from which misplaced hairs just like these seemed to be constantly multiplying, his body newly confused about where and what to grow.

The bathroom door opens all the way. Angela can tell that Will is surprised to find her there watching him—instead of watching the TV, say, or whatever it is on her phone that makes her smile the faint, enigmatic smile he no longer asks about. (What's so funny?) In this room that looks exactly as they expected it would, surprise saves them. They smile at each other and their smiles are at least a little bit enig-

OBIT

To the shadow I had left alone before I
crossed the border, my shadow that stayed
lonely and hid in the dark of the night,
freezing where it was, never needing a visa.
To my shadow that's been waiting for my return,
homeless except when I was walking by its side
in the summer light.
To my shadow that wishes to go to school
with the children of morning, but couldn't fit
through the classroom doors.
To my shadow that has caught cold now, that's been
sneezing and coughing, no one there saying to it *God bless!*
To my shadow that's been crushed by cars and vans,
its chest pierced by shrapnel and bullets
flying with no wings,
my shadow that no one's attending to,
bleeding black blood
through its memory
now, and forever.

—Mosab Abu Toha

matic. They kiss each other. His chest still wet, his neck and ears steamed pink. His hair, dripping onto her forehead, makes her think of dew. The way desire can feel brand new every time. She takes one of his errant shoulder hairs between her teeth and tugs.

But the sound he makes is not the right kind of pain. Not enlivening pain. Not sexy pain. It's the sound of ordinary displeasure, the quick-drying disappointment of bodies that no amount of steam and soap will transform. Instinctively, he pulls away. Angela looks down at her shirt, at the Rorschach imprint of Will's damp chest. Is this shame or anger? Her mistake or his? He'll insist it's O.K.; he'll try to recover, because their therapist has taught them the importance of resiliency. Even the not young, they have been assured, can bounce back. Will touches Angela's shoulder, which should feel comforting, even arousing, but instead feels like nothing. She thinks about the bedspread getting wet under his towel. She multiplies fifty-two by eleven. Five hundred and seventy-two weeks of on-average weekly sex, plus another hundred for the early weeks (the sexy weeks), minus twenty or thirty for some of the later weeks (the worst weeks).

"What are you thinking about?" His hand is still on her shoulder.

Angela goes to the bathroom and closes the door. The room is still full of moisture, the toilet seat damp under her thighs. She lingers at the sink. Holding her wrists under cold water, she can see the outline of the circle he wiped on the mirror. She leans in, so that the portal perfectly frames her face, and then she looks away.

In the morning, her mother has brought the trophies up from the basement. Plastic figures caught in the act of achievement: tennis racquet in mid-swing, cleated foot in mid-kick, toes curled on a ledge, ready to dive into some unseen body of water. Angela remembers these trophies clearly. Before each competition, they were lined up by height so that everyone could compare them in advance: from impressive pedestals all the way down to mere platforms. Each extra tier made the thing easier to grip, more satisfying to hoist in the air the way real athletes do. The trophies meant nothing after that, once they'd been brought home and clustered among all the others of similar height.

But now here they are on the carpet, insisting on their prowess even as their gold coating chips away, exposing the dull surface underneath. Scurrying up and down the stairs, her mother seems younger than she did yesterday. Will picks up a trophy, looking back and forth between the figure and Angela, as if searching for a resemblance.

"You never told me you played softball."

"I didn't, really."

The faces on the trophies look like they've been melted off, shiny and blank. Angela's mother shouts from the basement, "Of course you did!"

She emerges clutching an outfielder's androgynous torso. The story she tells is something out of a movie. A championship game, a home run destined to break the tie, until Angela, backed up against the center-field fence, grabbed it right out of the air. Robbed!

Angela is about to object, but Will beats her to it: "No way."

He's found a cardboard box and is stacking the trophies on their sides, which makes them look like a pile of corpses. As always, his incredulity is mild; her mother may not even have noticed it. She hurries over to the box, waving her hands above it ineffectually.

"Wait—wait a minute." Bending down over the stack of trophies, she

seems to lose her balance, lurching forward before catching herself. She stands up quickly, fear and pride vying on her face. Will reaches for her elbow, but she jerks her arm away. "When I was your age. I mean, when I was that age"—she gestures at the trophies—"we didn't play sports. The boys played and we watched."

"Didn't you like tennis?" Angela says.

"That was later." Her mother snatches a figure from the box. "Too late."

Multiple figures, actually. There are three girls on top of this trophy, arms around one another's shoulders. They look exactly the same: matching uniforms; featureless, indistinguishable faces. Their chests are gently rounded, one mound instead of two. The metal plaque below them says "Participation." Pressing the trophy into Angela's hands, her mother repeats the story of her heroics: her outstretched glove, reaching, waiting. The crowd was full of mothers holding their breath.

"Robbed!" she says for the second time.

The more Angela thinks about it—the climactic moment of the climactic game, the ball sailing toward her, its perfect, inevitable, downward arc—the truer it seems. Surely it happened to someone.

Will is struggling to close the box. The flaps keep springing open. Angela bends down to help him, because she's good at this—the box thing. Getting one end of the first flap under one end of the second flap at the same time that you get the other end of the first flap over the other end of the second flap. She can feel her mother watching her, but Angela keeps her eyes on the box. It's satisfying when they're finished, the flaps coerced into their flat, unnatural shape. It's easy to ignore what's inside.

Will shows her parents the retirement community online. They've agreed to take baby steps: first the Web site, then—maybe—the tour. Will is the one who says baby steps. Angela says, Don't infantilize them.

The images flick by on the screen: the buffet line, a smiling receptionist, the pond with two gray ducks. Her father makes vague sounds of curiosity. Her mother sits very still, straight back and stony face.

"Don't breathe in my ear," she says.

Will schedules a tour. He puts the box of trophies on the curb while Angela's parents take a nap. (Angela didn't know they took naps.)

The tour begins in independent living, passes through assisted living by way of the pond, and concludes in

the memory wing. A savvier guide, Angela thinks, would have reversed the route, turning inescapable decline into an illusion of defiance: life could end with your very own kitchenette, figure-drawing classes, bread crumbs tossed to the ducks, enough strength to stand up from a chair after you sit down.

They have to stop a few times during the tour, sometimes right in the middle of the hall, so that her father can catch his breath. Angela's mother—still stony-faced, silent—ignores this, so Angela is the one to put her hand on his back. She feels the air go in and out of his lungs. His body expands and contracts.

When the tour is over, they're invited to meet the residents in the dining room. There are crisp white tablecloths and brown plastic trays, windows that look onto the parking lot. Only four o'clock, but dinner is being served.

"Look," Angela's mother says. "All the servers are women."

There's an awkward pause, in which the tour guide surveys the room, as if in search of evidence to the contrary. But Angela's mother is right. The women are all ages, in matching button-down shirts and not quite invisible hairnets. A teen-ager with bad posture ladles soup, a middle-aged woman with a weak chin tosses salad. One of them seems old enough to live here herself. The tour group watches the women in silence for a moment, and then the guide—she, too, is a woman, not the youngest but certainly the prettiest—clears her throat and changes the subject. She assures them that the residents are all very impressive people: former artists, former teachers, former entrepreneurs. Will notes that Angela's father was an entrepreneur, too. He's using his most agreeable voice. The guide smiles gratefully at him, but Angela's father doesn't seem to have heard.

While the rest of them wait their turn at the buffet, her mother stands by the windows, squinting out at the view. Angela accepts a bowl of soup. Up close, she can see that the teen-age server is wearing too much makeup: bright lips, caked-over pimples, eyelashes with an unnatural upward curl. Who is she wearing it *for*? The question embarrasses Angela, even though she hasn't said it out loud—a question a mother would ask. She takes the soup to the window.

"Minestrone."

Her mother accepts the bowl, still staring out at the parking lot. There are only a handful of cars.

"How many people here are still allowed to drive?" her mother asks.

At the far end of the lot, a boy and a girl are taking turns pushing each other in a wheelchair, as fast as they can. Someone's grandkids, probably.

"Allowed?"

When the wheelchair reaches the edge of the asphalt, the girl gives it one last push and lets go. It knocks across the uneven ground for a few feet, then tips over. The boy jumps out in plenty of time, laughing.

"All children eventually take away their parents' keys," Angela's mother says, without turning away from the window.

"She doesn't want to go."

They're back at the hotel, lights off, under the covers.

"But is that a good enough reason?" Will asks.

They've spent only one night here but already the sheets have been changed, the new set tucked tightly under the mattress. Angela feels a little trapped.

"It's not a reason at all," she says. "It's just a desire."

She stares up at the ceiling, dark but getting less dark. Or no, the same amount of dark—she's just getting used to it. Will falls asleep before her, as he always does, snoring softly. He tosses and turns a lot, and this, too, has become routine. When he flings his arm across her chest, jostling one breast against the other, she doesn't really mind. Their bodies are blind and dumb. In the partial dark, in her dimming mind, for right now but possibly also forever, she is all alone. His arm slides down, pressing against her bladder, which makes her realize she needs to pee. The bathroom seems far away. She shakes her legs to loosen the sheets but doesn't get up.

When she finally falls asleep, an ordinary dream turns into a sex dream. At the beginning of the dream, Angela is supervising some sort of field trip—a bunch of teen-agers packed onto a school bus. She's not the teacher, just the chaperon, and she's too afraid to enforce any of the rules. When a game of spin the bottle starts at the back of the bus, she pretends not to notice. The bus is met at its destination by a team of nurses in monochrome scrubs, who lead all the teen-agers into a building that looks exactly like the main building of the retirement community. Unlike Angela, the nurses are good at getting the kids to be quiet. "You have a lot to learn," they say sternly—to the kids, or maybe to her.

The sex starts in the dining room, and, as in most of Angela's sex dreams, she is not the one having it. The room is crowded, old people and teen-agers all mixed together, chatting, helping themselves to seconds, eating off one another's plates without even bothering to ask. At some point, Angela realizes that they're naked. Is her mother in there? Watching from the far side of the buffet, holding a plate she hasn't yet filled, Angela is pretty sure that the young are having sex with the young and the old are having sex with the old, but the longer she watches the less certain she becomes; all the bodies, actually, seem to look the same. She doesn't look down at her own.

In the dream, she's a little afraid and a little turned on. When she wakes up—the room is its darkest dark again—she still is. Will is on his back, breath flapping through his mouth, arm over his head, as if he were waving to someone. Angela squeezes a hand between her thighs, to feel herself respond: the crackle of a not quite near-enough radio station, the creak of ice under the weight of a shoe. But she doesn't keep the hand there. It's the beginning of masturbating she likes, that first exploratory touch. To see if anything's there. The rest of it, the dutiful search, too often disappoints. Does she even know what she's looking for?

Will rolls toward her, his open mouth beside her open ear. She presses gently under his chin and his jaw gives in easily. The noise stops. She stays

awake for a while, the dream half dissolved, the static in her crotch half gone—that is, still there.

When it's time to return to California, they still haven't decided anything. But they've cleaned. Angela has swept, sponged, Dustbustered. She's sorted glass from plastic, plastic from cardboard. Her hands smell like rubber gloves.

"Look how much more room there is," she says, opening closet doors with a magician's flourish. The winter coats were moth-eaten. The prom dress is gone.

"Room for what?" her mother asks.

She wants to drive them to the airport. She wants to give them half a dozen ceramics. A soup bowl, a serving bowl, a mug. At least two egg cups. She'll pack them carefully. There's bubble wrap in the basement.

"There isn't," Angela says. "Not anymore."

In the end, they compromise: a taxi to the airport, just a mug. The one Angela chooses is slightly off balance—she pictures the wet clay wobbling, the momentum of the wheel briefly taking over—but she likes the color: blue that looks black, the deeper color visible only in a certain light.

"That one?" Her mother laughs. Maybe the laugh means, I knew you would choose that one. Maybe it even means, I love you for choosing that one. Angela wraps the mug in several layers of underwear and stuffs it with a sock before putting it in her bag. She wonders if her mother will see it again.

On the plane, Angela and Will are seated behind a baby who whimpers feebly from takeoff to landing. Would it be better, Angela asks, if he really, truly cried?

"Better for whom?" Will wants to know.

It's only when they get home—the mail clogging the mail slot, the stale smell of rooms left by themselves—that they realize they've missed their therapy appointment. Angela opens the windows and throws a softening onion in the trash. She imagines all the things they might have said to the therapist. Not the usual things: the careful criticisms, the qualified complaints, question after question. Is this normal?

"If a tree falls in the forest but plays it off as a dance move, does anybody buy it?"

• •

What's normal? They are almost forty. They still don't know. Haven't they always wanted to be exceptional?

No, instead of questions: confessions, accusations. It's a strange, sour sort of satisfaction to hear them in her head. She may be beautiful, but she is less beautiful than before. He calls her sexy because he wants sex. There are other people, you know, who want it, too. Sometimes makeup shows you still care. There's a woman at the office (eyeliner, earrings) who makes him feel—well, what? Desired? Empowered? Something other than agreeable. At what point should they agree to disagree?

Will is already unpacking his bag, because the longer you wait the harder it gets. Angela unzips her suitcase and removes the ceramic mug. She holds it up to the light, tilting it until black reveals blue. The blue of water under the surface or blood under the skin. Then she tilts her hand a little farther and the handle breaks off the cup. Or is it the other way around—the cup breaks off the handle? There's a crack and shards on the ground and Angela is left holding the pointless piece.

For a moment, she just stares, unable to think of what to do next. But it isn't really a decision. She gets a broom from the closet and sweeps everything into a small, efficient pile. When she looks up, Will is watching her. She laughs, so he laughs, too. They don't really know what they're laughing at—what it means. Does her laugh sound like her mother's?

The cup didn't break into that many pieces, actually: four big ones, each as sharp as a knife. But there are probably smaller ones she can't see; they can travel farther than you'd think. Days from now, at the other end of the room, a tiny, blue-black shard might pierce the sole of her bare foot and make her call out—the pain of surprise, which can also be pleasure. Angela looks at Will and her vision briefly blurs. She won't find the pieces now, but she might later, when she's stopped looking, when she's bending down to pick up some other delicate thing that's slipped from her hand. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Clare Sestanovich on routine and rupture.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MAN DOWN

"Priscilla" and "Dream Scenario."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new film from Sofia Coppola, "Priscilla," begins in 1959. Sitting at the counter of a diner at a U.S. Army base in Germany, Priscilla Beaulieu (Cailee Spaeny) is asked whether she likes Elvis Presley. She answers with a question: "Of course, who doesn't?" Priscilla is petite, polite, and fourteen—a little older than Juliet was when she first bumped into Romeo. The exciting, if alarming, news is that Elvis, the most unattainable of stars, has swung into her orbit. He's currently stationed nearby, serving in the military, and Priscilla is invited to meet him at a party. Romeo is right there in the room. "You're just a baby," Elvis tells her. "Thanks," she replies.

Elvis is played by Jacob Elordi, who, by my estimate, is about three times taller than his co-star. As a result, the rapport between Elvis and Priscilla appears to be powered less by loving hearts than by simple hydraulics; he has to lean over and down as if hinged, like an industrial crane, for a word in her ear. (Later in the movie, she acquires a towering beehive, but that doesn't really solve the problem. "Talk to the hair" is not something you say to Elvis Presley.) Nonetheless, the two of them fuse, sharing pangs of homesickness, and it's not long before Elvis is introduced to Priscilla's mother, Ann (Dagmara Dominczyk), and stepfather, Paul (Ari Cohen). "I happen to be very fond of your daughter," Elvis reassures them. When he takes her out for the evening, Paul—a captain, and therefore Elvis's superior in rank—commands him to "bring her home by 2200." This is the Army, son.

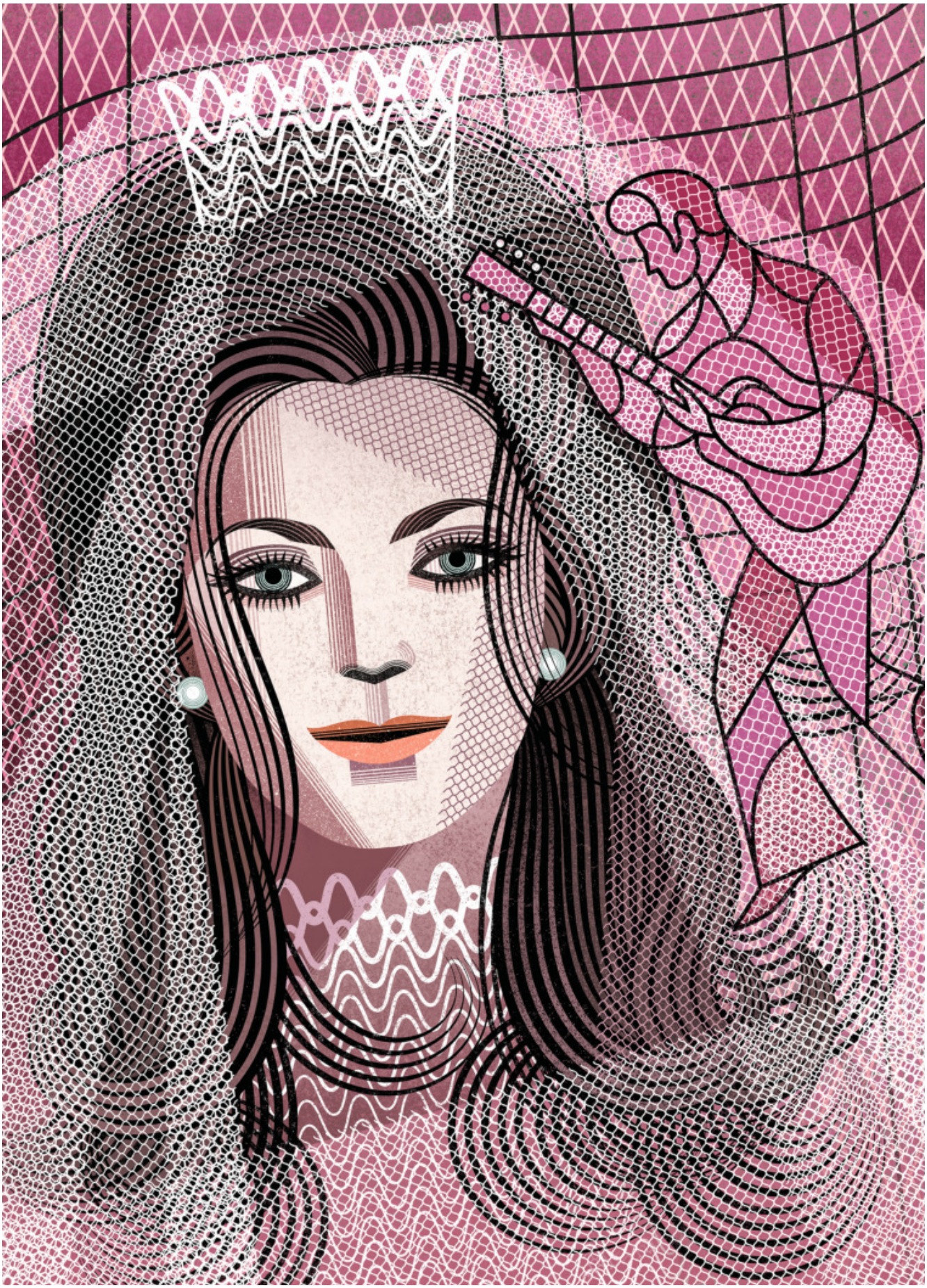
The rest of the movie charts the rise and fall of a strange romance, as viewed through Priscilla's eyes. We stay with her as Elvis, his soldierly duties complete, heads home. "How's my little one?" he asks, in a long-distance phone call. Armed with a first-class ticket on Pan Am—and, for some unfathomable reason, the consent of her parents—Priscilla goes to visit him, arriving at Graceland in a pink dress and white gloves. After a bacchanalian interlude in Las Vegas, there's a wonderful shot of her returning to Germany, her clothes still immaculate but her hair and makeup in meltdown. Aged seventeen, she flies back to America for more. Elvis offers her a little white dog, a red sports car as a graduation gift, and, at long last, his hand in marriage.

In some ways, "Priscilla" is an oddly old-fashioned creation. The passage of time is indicated by the tearing of pages from a calendar, and the prolongation of sex by the sight of trays, bearing food and drink, being left outside a bedroom door. Elvis, we are given to understand, has been saving himself for this pleasure—whether through moral nicety, or from a desire to avoid the crime of intimate relations with a minor, is a question left unresolved. What's clear is that he, no less than Priscilla, is something of a kid; while denying her the comfort of any friends, he is encircled by a rowdy rat pack of pals, who cheer as the King knocks down a house for fun.

To point out that "Priscilla" is superficial, even more so than Coppola's other films, is no derogation, because surfaces are her subject. She examines the skin of the observable world without presuming to seek the flesh beneath, and this latest work is an agglomeration of *things*—purchases, ornaments, and textures. We see an array of outfits, chosen by Elvis for his wife, each one lovingly accessorized with a handgun. Closeups tell the tale: bare toes, at the start, sinking deep into the nap of a carpet; false eyelashes and china knickknacks; a single pill (the first of many) that Elvis lays on Priscilla's palm, as if it were a Communion wafer; and a mini-sphinx, gilded and ridiculous, that we glimpse as she eventually flees from Graceland. If she stays there any longer, being Mrs. Presley, she, too, will shrink into a thing.

The music we hear, during that final exit, is Dolly Parton singing "I Will Always Love You." There are no Elvis hits in the film. (Though you may catch a tinkle of "Love Me Tender," on a music box, as the Presleys hold their baby daughter, Lisa Marie.) This echoing void is well suited to Coppola's purposes; what neater way to present Elvis as a lumpen, insensitive brute than to ignore what made him the greatest joy-bringer on Earth? Slice off his superhuman talents and you haul him down to the level of regular men, as mean and as faithless as the next guy. The late bloom of his Vegas shows, lingered over with relentless panache in Baz Luhrmann's "Elvis" (2022), is distilled here to images of Elvis from behind, onstage—swaying his hips or spreading his cape for the congregation. We need both movies, I would argue: last year's frenzied act of worship and now this irreverent response, all the more potent for being so still and small. "You're the

ABOVE: LALALIMOLA



Cailee Spaeny stars as the teen-age beloved of Elvis Presley (Jacob Elordi) in Sofia Coppola's bio-pic.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA AND ELENA BALBUSSO

only girl I ever loved, the only girl I want to be with," Elvis says to Priscilla. He sounds like a cheap song.

What is it, exactly, that Nicolas Cage does? You could call it overacting, especially if you saw "Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans" (2009) or "Mandy" (2018). I prefer to think of Cage's style as *otheracting*. He approaches the whole racket of dramatic art from an angle untried by his peers, restoring to movie acting the kind of dice-rolling risk that we associate with the theatre. You sense that you could watch him three nights running in the same film, in the same cinema, and find him giving a different performance each time. It's not that he improvises; rather, his characters seem to be improvising their own lives—making themselves up as they go along.

If "Dream Scenario," a new film written and directed by Kristoffer Borgli, is one of Cage's most fulfilling ventures, it's because it allows him to trade so richly in the unforeseen. He plays a lecturer named Paul Matthews—has a hero ever borne so numb a name?—who teaches evolutionary biology at a provincial college. He has tenure, spectacles, a shiny pate, a sad beard, a nice house, two daughters, and a long-suffering but loving wife, Janet (Julianne Nicholson). "You score high in assholeness," she says to him, without rancor. Nobody hates Paul, but nobody really notices him, either. As he gives a class on zebras, noting their ability *not* to stand out from the herd, we can see his students thinking, Yeah, you should know.

Before long, however, Paul will be hailed as "the most interesting person in the world right now." Why? Because he begins to appear in the dreams of other people—not just people he knows but total strangers, too. This phenomenon is never explained. It's just a splashdown in the collective unconscious, and Paul, understandably, isn't sure how to respond. He's flummoxed at first, then flattered ("I'm special, I guess"), then freaked out; as you can imagine, the emotional to-and-fro is an ideal ride for Cage. Never has that eager grin of his trembled quite so helplessly between anguish and delight.

What's particularly welcome about "Dream Scenario" is how undreamy it looks. Borgli switches from reality to reverie with clean, matter-of-fact cuts, affording us precious little opportunity to brace ourselves for the untoward. (Buñuel would raise a glass.) As a bonus, we get a tasty running gag at Paul's expense: once inside the panoply of dreams, he doesn't actually *do* anything. When one of his students has a nightmare about being stuck on a piano with two alligators slithering toward her, Paul arrives but shows no inclination to help. Someone else's sleeping self is stalked by a gangling figure bathed in blood. Does Paul, strolling by, race to the rescue? Like hell he does. If anything, he's even duller in the kingdom of the fantastical than he is in everyday life.

The trouble is that, for all the comedy and the poignancy of this central concept, the movie requires a plot. It is as if the bowler-hatted residents of Magritte's paintings had to walk out of the frame and go to work. So it is that Paul travels into the city, where he's courted by Trent (Michael Cera), a marketing jerk, who wants to transform Paul into a brand and use him to sell Sprite. One of Trent's employees, Molly (Dylan Gelula), bids Paul bewitch her in her apartment as he recently did in her dream. (Needless to say, the outcome is so humiliating that you'll be left curled up in your seat like a dormouse.) From here on, the story grows oddly vindictive and less appealing. Is Paul being scourged for his venial sins, or for the mortal transgression of yearning to be more than he is?

The easiest—and the least interesting—way to parse this unlikely film is to treat it as an allegory of the Internet. For dream, read meme. "How does it feel to go viral?" Paul is asked, and, once his fame spreads online, it's hardly surprising that he should be dreamed about—he's part of the daily detritus in the public brain—or that his erstwhile contentment should wither and rot. "Dream Scenario" strikes me as more of an Everyman fable, hacking into our obsessions in the way that a movie like "Meet John Doe," starring Gary Cooper as a drifter caught up in a scam, reflected the anxious mood of 1941. Noble integrity just about carried Cooper through the American Dream. Nicolas Cage, hangdog and half feral, wanders into it, traps a paw, and can't get out. ♦

MAKE ME

Is free will an illusion? You decide.

BY NIKHIL KRISHNAN

People should never be blamed for their actions, Robert M. Sapolsky argues.

ILLUSTRATION BY TILL LAUER

You're walking fast, late for work. The line into the subway is barely moving. A man is walking very slowly, holding up everyone behind him. You're annoyed. And then you catch a glimpse of him. He's walking with the shuffle of the very old. You're inclined to be a little more tolerant; after all, he can't walk any faster. You look again—no, he's not old, just drunk. It's too late for him to sober up, but, it occurs to you, it was once up to him not to be drunk. And now you're annoyed again.

But why stop there? There are bars everywhere, and billboards advertising the pleasures of spirits. The days are getting colder, and you live in a cold country—a cold country and a decadent one. Everyone drinks; how could he do otherwise? But, again, why stop there? Generous soul that you are, you wonder if he had a bad day, or week, or year, or life—one marked by the kind of suffering from which the bottle promises respite. Can you be sure that he doesn't come from a long line of alcoholics, helpless in the grip of their compulsion?

You might go further. Perhaps all this was simply meant to be. Recall that old French polymath Pierre-Simon Laplace and his omniscient "demon." If the demon knew where every particle in the universe was at a given moment, he could predict with perfect accuracy every moment in the future—which is another way of saying that the future is wholly "determined" by the past. The demon, of course, merely illustrates a thesis that can be stated in more sombre terms: everything that happens is the inevitable consequence of the laws of nature and what the universe was like once upon a time. We're bound to do what we in fact do.

"Causal determinism," the philosopher's unlovely term for that unsettling hypothesis, is the default assumption of most modern science. It matters a good deal if the idea implies that none of our actions are what we call "free." If science tells us to be determinists, and determinism is incompatible with freedom, shouldn't we give up on judging people for doing what they were destined to do?

That's what the Stanford neurobiologist Robert M. Sapolsky urges. He thinks the time has come to accept the truth about determinism and acknowledge that "we have *no* free will at all." What follows? Early in his book "Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will" (Penguin Press), Sapolsky lists, with the morbid relish of a man daring to think the unthinkable, the implications of his heresy: no one is ever blameworthy—or, equally, praiseworthy—for doing anything. No one, Sapolsky writes, "has *earned* or is *entitled* to being treated better or worse than anyone else." Ordinary human sentiments—resentment and gratitude, love and hate—are pretty much irrational in their normal forms: "It makes as little sense to hate someone as to hate a tornado because it supposedly decided to level your house." One practical implication is that, since nobody's to blame for anything, criminal justice shouldn't be about retribution. Accordingly, he tries to view human beings without judgment. Free-will skeptics are, he suggests, "less punitive and more forgiving."

The steps of his reasoning are familiar: if everything is determined, there is no freedom; if there is no freedom, there is no moral responsibility. Science tells us that everything is indeed determined. Ergo, no freedom; ergo, no responsibility. Are we bound to agree?

Much of "Determined," appropriately for a book by a neurobiologist, is an attempt to defend the part of the argument which sits safely in the scientist's wheelhouse: that our best

contemporary science has established the truth of determinism. Sapolsky draws on explanations at every level—from atoms to culture—to make the case that everything we think and do is caused by something other than free will. We can't control, say, the conditions of the crucial first nine months of our existence. "Lots of glucocorticoids from Mom marinating your fetal brain, thanks to maternal stress, and there's increased vulnerability to depression and anxiety in your adulthood," he writes. You thought your failing marriage was to blame for your depression. But it turns out it was all bound to happen long ago. It isn't so much that our blame was aimed in the wrong direction as it is that blame, in the strict sense, never truly made sense.

Biochemistry only confirms Sapolsky in his conviction, as does physics (though he treads more warily through the mysteries of a discipline at least as demanding as his own). History does, too: details from our species' past, he argues, explain why some cultures are peaceable and others martial, some monotheistic and others polytheistic.

Why do we resist the truth? In part because we're skilled at concocting stories in which we're in charge. One experiment Sapolsky mentions suggests that people had cooler attitudes about gay marriage when considering it in a room with a disgusting smell. The effect was connected to the way certain odors activate the brain's insular cortex, which is what makes rancid food nauseating to us. But did the subjects know what was going on in their heads? "Ask a subject, Hey, in last week's questionnaire you were fine with behavior A, but now (in this smelly room) you're not," Sapolsky writes. "They'll claim some recent insight caused them, bogus free will and conscious intent ablaze, to decide that behavior A isn't okay after all." They were being played, but were desperate to regard themselves as the players.

Sapolsky's summaries are pithy and pacy, his spoiling-for-a-fight tone enjoyably provocative. Still, he doesn't assert that any one piece of research demonstrates that there is no free will. Rather, he says, "All these disciplines collectively negate free will because they are all interlinked, constituting the same ultimate body of knowledge." In the end, "there's not a single crack of daylight to shoehorn in free will."

To his exasperation, though, many sophisticates are skeptical about free-will skepticism. In a 2020 survey of academic philosophers, some sixty per cent of them—a strikingly large majority in a profession allergic to consensus—didn't agree that determinism ruled out freedom. Where Sapolsky, who says that he has been a free-will skeptic since adolescence, sees an excitingly counterintuitive conclusion, philosophers often see a reductio ad absurdum. Determinism, they tend to hold, is compatible with freedom, and therefore with moral responsibility, and therefore with blame, gratitude, and so on.

The technical term for that happy reconciliation is "compatibilism." A compatibilist, that is, agrees that our actions are determined but denies that this truth casts doubt on anything of significance about human practices. Sapolsky will have none of it. He devotes some of his most trenchant writing to these quislings, whose arguments, he claims, "boil down to three sentences":

> a. Wow, there've been all these cool advances in neuroscience, all reinforcing the conclusion that ours is a deterministic world.
>
> b. Some of those neuroscience findings challenge our notions of agency, moral responsibility, and deservedness so deeply that one must conclude that there is no free will.
>
> c. Nah, it still exists.

How fair is that précis? Sapolsky clearly thinks that philosophers should start with the results of the sciences (objective, external, impartial) and ask what they imply for our naïve prescientific self-conceptions. If science, coming from outside, tells us that our self-conceptions are confused, so much the worse for them. Yet there's another way of approaching the question: from the inside out.

Of those who take such an approach, the most influential is Peter Strawson, a compatibilist philosopher whose arguments make no appearance in "Determined." (Sapolsky mentions him once in a list of his allies, evidently thinking of his son Galen.) What we label "free will," as Strawson saw it, was something that we could grasp solely in relation to the role it plays in our lives, in our daily practices of judging others and ourselves.

Start from the fact that, in our dealings with other people, we are sometimes angry or resentful, or, in happier moments, grateful. Does the fact that we're material beings situated within vast chains of causation make these responses—Strawson calls them "reactive attitudes"—irrational? In any case, could we live an intelligible human life while giving up such reactions entirely?

The really troubling forms of philosophical skepticism—say, about the authority of moral demands, the possibility of altruism, the legitimacy of governments—are troubling in part because it's possible to live without a belief in such things. Can we live without a belief in the possibility of holding one another and ourselves responsible for the things we do? Try it. We are always a "sorry," a "thank you," or a "how dare you" away from slipping back into the bad old ways. Sapolsky's long-standing convictions on the subject notwithstanding, he admits to being a normal guy with a normal guy's feelings. "It's been a moral imperative for me to view humans without judgment or the belief that anyone deserves anything special, to live without a capacity for hatred or entitlement," he writes. "And I just can't do it." He's in permanent misalignment with his theory of the world: "Sure, sometimes I can sort of get there, but it is rare that my immediate response to events aligns with what I think is the only acceptable way to understand human behavior; instead, I usually fail dismally." If even the archest of skeptics cannot live out his skepticism, how serious an alternative is it?

For that matter, if Sapolsky has no choice in how he thinks, what would it even be to try to think any particular way? It's unclear how he could subscribe to "hard incompatibilism," as he avows, and believe in such ancien-régime vestiges as "moral imperatives." The very idea that someone "ought" to do something makes sense only if that person is capable of making choices.

For Strawson (like Kant before him), the difference between a story of causation and a story of choice-making is one of viewpoint. We'll never purge ourselves of those "reactive attitudes," nor should we try to. But that's not a rejection of determinism; as Strawson says, we can sometimes "achieve a kind

of detachment from the whole range of natural attitudes and reactions . . . and view another person (and even, perhaps, though this must surely be more difficult, oneself) in a purely objective light—to see another or others simply as natural creatures whose behavior, whose actions and reactions, we may seek to understand, predict and perhaps control."

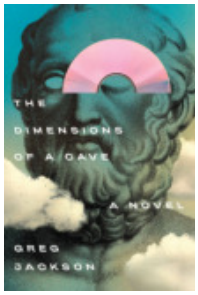
The parents of teen-age boys are always oscillating between regarding their impossible offspring as creatures moved by hormones to do stupid things and regarding them as rational human beings who should know better. In time, those boys will learn to give Mom a pass for her possibly perimenopausal outbursts and understand that Dad, with his atherosclerosis, occasionally forgets things. On a night out in college, they'll learn to spot when it might still be possible to persuade an increasingly drunk friend to order an Uber home and the point at which all that remains to do is to pick him up off the ground and bundle him into one as if he were an unwieldy mattress.

What Sapolsky considers "the only acceptable way to understand human behavior," then, is one that we adopt *some* of the time. Is it really one we should adopt *all* of the time? Physics tells us a story about ourselves in which we are as much matter and energy as that mattress. Biochemistry tells us another story. So does neuroscience. So do history, psychology, and anthropology. All these modes of explanation tell us, in various ways, that people are causal systems, enmeshed in larger ones. But, from a first-person perspective, we're seldom inclined to wait around to see what the system does when we're faced with a decision. Instead, we do what even Sapolsky finds himself compelled to do—we get on with things and open the kitchen cupboard to decide (or, anyway, "decide") what kind of tea we're going to have.

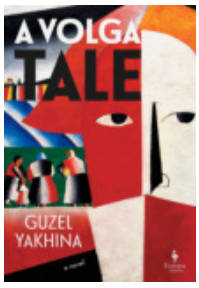
A few minutes later, a kettle boils. Why? Consider these answers: because I want a cup of Earl Grey; because it's teatime in England and that's what we do around here; because the water molecules have reached a certain energy state. Must we choose among these statements? Can't they all be true?

Sapolsky, to his credit, resists the

BRIEFLY NOTED

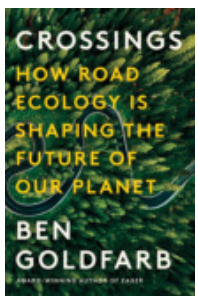


The Dimensions of a Cave, *by Greg Jackson (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. This cerebral thriller follows an investigative journalist as he attempts to expose a secret government program developing a lifelike virtual reality. His reporting raises profound questions: Are artificial beings alive? How do ambition and idealism transform each other? And "how, when you're inside one story, can you see around it?" The character of the journalist takes shape through his relationships—with his girlfriend, a gallerist, who feels that their settled coupledom has run its course, and with a young, high-minded reporter who lacks the journalist's ironic distance—suggesting that we best affirm our own realness by recognizing the reality of others. Jackson depicts the world as "stranger, wilder, deeper, more open than you've been made to know."



A Volga Tale, *by Guzel Yakhina, translated from the Russian by Polly Gannon (Europa)*. The Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was a state located along the Volga River, populated by ethnic Germans whose ancestors had been lured to the region by Catherine the Great. This rich epic depicts its rise and fall through the story of a principled and awkward schoolteacher, whose life intersects with twenty years of social tragedy. Early in the novel, the teacher falls in love, but a horrific incident renders him mute and his lover pregnant. Yakhina charts the brutal decades of Stalin's collectivization and repression, and creates a moving portrait of the teacher's profound love for his family, and of Russia's multiethnic population.

Omega Farm, *by Martha McPhee (Scribner)*. In this expansive memoir, a novelist recounts her return to the place where she grew up—a compound in New Jersey, known to her family as "the Farm," where she was raised by her mother and stepfather in a combined family of ten children. As she revisits the scene of her tumultuous childhood, McPhee writes, memories begin to emerge from "every patch-job and jerry-rigged 'solution' from the broken, yet widening, spell of the past." When a tenant alerts her that overgrown bamboo is interfering with the electricity and plumbing, she embarks upon a series of projects—including tending to the understory of the land's forest—that lead her to examine the stories that sit behind her own ideas of family and sense of self.



Crossings, *by Ben Goldfarb (Norton)*. Roads, those most ubiquitous features of human civilization, are the subject of this perceptive book by an environmental journalist. Roads kill more creatures than any other "environmental ill"; they also bisect migration routes, pollute with noise, and help to facilitate deforestation. Road ecology—a specialty that Goldfarb lauds as "a field whose radical premise asserted that it was possible to perceive our built world through nonhuman eyes"—seeks to understand these dynamics and to propose solutions that actively consider animal lives. Through encounters with practitioners, including a veterinarian who helps track the movements of anteaters across Brazilian highways, Goldfarb charts a path toward a less destructive future.

fallacy of moving from ontological reductionism (the correct view that we're all physical stuff, governed by the laws of physics) to methodological reductionism (the error of concluding that physics is the only discipline that explains anything). Wisely, he doesn't think that history, psychology, or anthropology are just window dressing on the hard truth of our material, molecular existence. Mental states and neurobiological physical states, Sapolsky thinks, "can't be separated—they're just two different conceptual entry points to considering the same processes." Different, but apparently equal, neither privileged over the other. Why, then, does he resist the first-person register of explanation, in which we believe, want, intend, and decide?

Probably because his notion of "free will" isn't the one we actually make use of. Every now and then, it occurs to Sapolsky that the parties to the debate may be talking past each other, and he makes an effort, a little grudgingly, to clarify his terms. "What is free will?" he asks early in the book. "Groan, we have to start with that."

What follows is not a definition but a challenge. A man, Sapolsky invites us to imagine, "pulls the trigger of a gun." That's one description. Another is that "the muscles in his index finger contracted." Why? "Because they were stimulated by a neuron," which was in turn "stimulated by the neuron just upstream. . . . And so on." Then he throws down the gauntlet: "Show me a neuron (or brain) whose generation of a behavior is independent of the sum of its biological past, and for the purposes of this book, you've demonstrated free will."

Sapolsky's qualifying phrase—"for the purposes of this book"—suggests he recognizes that there are other things "free will" might mean to other people. The real question is whether the thing he thinks has been disproved will be much missed—whether Sapolsky's concept of free will is "our" concept, what we take it to be when, uncorrupted by the specialists, we go about our days blaming and thanking, loving and hating.

His definition of free will, or the test he proposes in lieu of one, exemplifies an approach advocated in the nineteen-fifties and sixties by the German-born philosopher Rudolf Carnap, one of the great exponents of logical positivism. Carnap, who thought that philosophy should be a handmaiden to the sciences, found ordinary language squishy and unreliable; philosophers, he argued, should reconstruct, or "explicate," its terms in more precise ways. Take a term of ordinary language such as "warm," a word we understand as relating to our sensations, and a term of science, "temperature," which, unlike "warm," is a quantitative notion, employable in scientific formulas. Carnap thought that we would do well to replace the first with the second, or, anyway, to use the second to define the first. Something is warmer when its temperature increases, and the temperature of a room, unlike its mere "warmth," can be precisely and objectively defined with reference to a thermometer.

In the positivist spirit, a philosopher or a scientist may replace "We have free will" with some determinate claim that might be supported or undermined by experimental evidence. But if we're going to allow the experimental results, and the ambitious thesis that they support, to overthrow our everyday practices of praising, blaming, and punishing, the scientific explication had better be close enough to the everyday concept that underlies these practices. Otherwise, as Strawson—a leading critic of Carnap, and of logical positivism—objected at the time, we're not solving a problem; we're just changing the subject.

Sapolsky may want us to replace our everyday concept, complex and muddled as it must be, with a new, improved concept. But he needs to offer us a good argument for doing so. In other words, if this isn't how we already use "free will," is it how we *should* use it? We don't ask this question often enough. Maybe that's because "free will" has become, for better or for worse, a term of ordinary language. As with other such large, abstract questions, our professed views on the free-will problem rarely do justice to the complexity of our real thoughts on the subject.

There are sane and humane reasons for reminding ourselves that, as Sapolsky puts it, "*some* people have much less self-control and capacity to freely choose their actions than average, and that at times, we *all* have much less than we imagine." But Sapolsky and skeptical fellow-travellers such as Sam Harris want to blow up our everyday practices; they're convinced that the innumerable subtle distinctions we mark in our ordinary talk and practices don't matter. Whatever it is we think we've got, we haven't got it.

Once we give up on free will, after all, we have to be willing to say that nobody has ever done anything intentionally (or voluntarily or deliberately or on purpose). That no line can truly be drawn between the malicious and the accidental, the voluntary and the forced. That no event has really been an *action*, except in the undemanding sense in which the puppet Punch killing Judy was an action. We are not, except in this minimal sense, "agents." Bits of our bodies move; things happen. That's it.

Yet we can wonder whether this ideal of the "causeless cause" is what we really mean in our careless everyday talk of free will. If it isn't, then insisting on that as the appropriate standard is, as Strawson once remarked, "like offering a text-book on physiology to someone who says (with a sigh) that he wished he understood the workings of the human heart."

As it happens, Carnap's own definition, or explication, of "free choice" was devised to be compatible with the truth of determinism. Free choice, he wrote, "is a decision made by someone capable of foreseeing the consequences of alternate courses of action and choosing that which he prefers." He saw no contradiction between free choice thus understood and even the strongest form of determinism. More than that, he thought that without determinism—that is to say, without reliable relations of cause and effect—there *is* no free will. The point of making a choice, he noted, is that it has consequences. Indeterminacy—should the kind that exists at the quantum level encroach upon the meso-level scale of human lives—would replace our agency with sheer randomness, which is not anyone's idea of freedom.

Still, if Sapolsky's radical revisionism threatens to eliminate our moral vocabulary altogether, the traditional compatibilist approaches can err in the other direction: they can deny us grounds for reforming our practices of moral judgment. So we might want to ask—in the philosophical tradition not of positivism but of pragmatism—about the "cash value," the practical uses, of invoking free will. Ignore the many things we say about free will and focus on what we do. By attending to our practices, we can conduct a more profitable line of inquiry: What do we need free will to be?

Consider these questions. How does my response to a student who has failed to meet a deadline change when I discover that she sprained her wrist the day before? How do I respond to a piece of fruit chucked at me when I discover that the chucker is two years old? How vehemently do I press for a tough prison sentence when I learn that the defendant was abused as a child? Is there a difference between someone jumping into a pool and being pushed in? Between falling in after he stepped on a banana peel and falling in because he was drunk?

In each of these situations, we can ask whether the person in question had or lacked something called "free will." But look back at the factors that seemed to undermine the exercise of free will: rotten luck, immaturity, circumstance, coercion, accident, and incapacity. When the terms on the obverse side of the contrast are so disparate, it's hard to be confident that there really is a single thing called "free will" whose presence or absence we can meaningfully debate.

The philosopher J. L. Austin, in a paper titled "A Plea for Excuses," observed that, though it's tempting to view "freedom" as a positive term requiring elucidation, we tend to use it just to rule out one of these miscellaneous antitheses. Freedom's just another word for no excuses. In Austin's spirit, you can wonder how much would be lost if we ceased talking about free will altogether and spoke more specifically of what we meant. "He was not acting of his own free will," you tell me. "What do you mean?" I ask. "Was he being held at gunpoint? Sleepwalking? High on narcotics?" "Oh, no," you say, "I just mean he's a toddler." Maybe you should have just said that. Maybe, in other words, there is no *one* thing that we need "free will" to be.

Sapolsky's most persuasive passages remind us of the many modest changes that we have made to our practices in light of advances in our understanding of certain facts about ourselves. Things got better for people with epilepsy once we learned that the condition was not a form of demonic possession that was "brought on by someone's own freely chosen evil." Things got better for people with schizophrenia (and for their families) once it was recognized that the condition was at base a biochemical disorder, not a product of faulty mothering. Some of our current moral conceptions and presumptions may come to seem just as confused. We may currently be blaming people whom it would be better to treat, tolerate, or simply avoid.

Or, perhaps, better to forgive. That was, after all, part of Sapolsky's case for his new morality: free-will skeptics are "less punitive and more forgiving." To understand all, he might have said, is to forgive all. But he can't have really meant that. Forgiveness is, as much as vengeance, a concept that can be applied only from within the first-person point of view. If free-will skepticism means never having to say you're sorry, then it also means never being forgiven. Sapolsky's ethic of forgiveness demands that we retain something of our old-fashioned belief in holding one another responsible.

The traditional project of compatibilist philosophers has been to treat determinism, free will, and moral responsibility as fixed parts of a triad and to search for ways to reconcile them. The skeptics, seeing an irresolvable contradiction, have concluded that the whole idea of moral responsibility has to go. But there are other ways of reconciling scientific and moral inquiry. It may be that we need a suppler and more humane approach to holding one another responsible, an approach that takes more seriously what our best scientific accounts tell us about ourselves. We needn't follow the skeptics to the conclusion that the best morality would be no morality at all to recognize that our current morality remains a work in progress. ♦

TRYSTS TROPIQUES

The nested narratives of Tan Twan Eng's "The House of Doors."

BY JAMES WOOD

In Eng's novel, the world's most famous writer visits a hotbed of intrigue.

In 1926, Virginia Woolf wrote an essay about an innocent young art form: the silent cinema. Woolf argued that the movies were too literary. They would have to find their own artistic language, since they were currently imprisoned in a system of dead convention and mechanical semaphore: "A kiss is love. A broken cup is jealousy. A grin is happiness. Death is a hearse." Once in a while, she had found herself in a darkened cinema with an apprehension of what film might achieve. "Through the thick counterpane of immense dexterity and enormous efficiency one has glimpses of something vital within," she wrote. "But the kick of life is instantly concealed by more dexterity, further efficiency."

In the same year, the English writer W. Somerset Maugham published "The Casuarina Tree," a book of six short stories. Maugham was at the height of his success, as a great, and greatly rewarded, writer of immense dexterity and enormous efficiency. As his biographer Selina Hastings writes, "For much of his long life"—he died in 1965, at ninety-one—Maugham was "the most famous writer in the world." He had the kind of celebrity that now attends actors, musicians, and criminal politicians. Wherever he went, his spoor was tracked by readers and journalists. His slightest pronouncements fattened a thousand provincial newspaper columns. By 1926, he had launched two very successful careers, as a novelist and a playwright (his collected plays would come to fill six volumes). A year later—the year he bought a villa in Cap Ferrat—"The Letter," one of the stories from "The Casuarina Tree," was adapted for the theatre. It played in London and on Broadway; two film adaptations appeared, in 1929 and 1940, the latter with Bette Davis.

Maugham's worldwide renown could probably have existed only when it did, between the twenties and the fifties. Literary prestige was still culturally central. An audience hungry for literary storytelling overlapped with the audience for cinematic storytelling, and English was the lucky lingua franca of these two mass art forms. The British Empire might have been receding, but Maugham, like his friend Winston Churchill, moved through the world as if the sun were hardly setting on its sins. In the twenties and thirties, the writer made well-publicized journeys to India, Burma, the West Indies, Singapore, and Malaysia. A Maugham "tale" was a smoothly machined artifact—psychologically astute, coolly satirical, mildly subversive, and a bit sexy. Malarial British colonies provided excellent conditions for humid, erotic undercurrents. "The Letter," set in Singapore, and based on an actual criminal trial, concerns Leslie Crosbie, the wife of a well-off British planter, who has been accused of murdering her neighbor Geoffrey Hammond. It seems a straightforward case: rape narrowly averted. Geoffrey had visited her in the evening, when her husband was away. He made sexual advances, and she shot him in self-defense. Leslie's lawyer assumes that his client will be acquitted. Maugham's story turns on the sudden discovery of a passionate letter, a lover's note, in which Leslie appears to beg Geoffrey to visit her that evening. So was the murder a necessary act of self-protection or an avoidable crime of passion? Was Geoffrey there to assault Leslie, or to break off the affair? "The Letter" lunges toward its narrative bait.

Maugham is a comfily unsurprising storyteller: the surprises are all proce-

ILLUSTRATON BY JULIE BENBASSAT

dural. Woolf's desired kick of life can be felt now and again, but is efficiently muffled by the great dexterity of the plotting and style. A familiar realist grammar dulls all interrogation, and the reader is happily brought along. Characters are primitively blocked in: "Hutchinson was a tall, stout man with a red face." "His blue eyes, behind large gold-rimmed spectacles, were shrewd and vivacious, and there was a great deal of determination in his face." "Crosbie was a big fellow well over six feet high, with broad shoulders, and muscular." A robust core of cliché and formula keeps the stories sturdy and shipshape. Woolf's orchestra of gestures—a kiss is love, a grin is happiness—does its idle signalling: "She frowned as she thought of the reason which was taking her back to England." (A frown is puzzlement.) There are also many twinkling eyes, sinking hearts, and ruthless stares. When Maugham attempts a simile, it's often an odd combination of the exaggerated and the secondhand: "His fist, with its ring of steel, caught him fair and square on the jaw. He fell like a bull under the pole-axe." Or: " 'Where's the cream, you fool?' she roared like a lioness at bay." It was a saving insight of another world-famous, commercially successful, and utterly professionalized writer of the era, P. G. Wodehouse, that a wild comic poetry could be made from such automatic realist filler. Why have a character just walk into a room (and a tale) if she can enter "with a slow and dragging step like a Volga boatman"? Why have someone roaring like a lioness at bay if instead you can make your readers laugh with "She looked like an aunt who has just bitten into a bad oyster"? Wodehouse, an instinctive anti-realist anarchist, is not only more experimental than Maugham but invariably the more precise stylist.

You could call Tan Twan Eng's new novel, "The House of Doors" (Bloomsbury), a kind of biblio-fiction: it offers, among other distinct pleasures, an imagined account of how Maugham came to write "The Letter," and does so by combining novelistic hypothesis with the available biographical record. Eng's novel, set largely in the Malaysian state of Penang, juggles two central narratives, one from 1910 and one from 1921. Somerset Maugham visited Malaysia in 1921, and liked it enough that he stayed for six months—prospecting for stories, enjoying the admiration and the hospitality of his colonial British hosts, and vacationing in freedom with his secretary and lover, Gerald Haxton. (Maugham had a wife and a child back in London. He had excellent practical reasons to be cautious about publicizing his bisexuality.) In Eng's novelistic version, Maugham is famous enough that even one of the servants has read his work.

Malaya, as it was known then, was under British administrative rule, and "The House of Doors" is set in the colonial world that Maugham evokes in "The Casuarina Tree"—sweat-prickled dinner parties with excellent local cuisine and nostalgically bad English food, comfortable racial prejudice, insular colonial gossip. Maugham's hosts are Robert and Lesley Hamlyn (Eng borrows the names from characters in "The Casuarina Tree"). Robert, a lawyer, is an old friend of Maugham's from their younger London days. Eng elegantly animates a complex social scene, in alternating chapters seen from Maugham's point of view (in the third person), and from Lesley Hamlyn's (in the first person). Maugham, known as Willie to his friends, has arrived with Haxton; it isn't immediately obvious to Lesley that the men are lovers, and the revelation is unwelcome. ("Why had I not seen it sooner? . . . We had a pair of bloody homosexuals under our roof. I shot a look at Robert—he knew; of course he knew.") Lesley initially finds Maugham a little vulgar. She is unsettled by the writer's coldly scrutinizing stare, and instinctively sides with Maugham's abandoned wife against the two footloose gents who have taken up easy residence in her home. And Lesley has cause to feel neglected: she is living the underemployed existence of a colonial wife; Robert, who is eighteen years older, is chronically unwell; the marriage has curdled into respectful lovelessness. Maugham, meanwhile, receives a letter informing him that he has lost all his money. The New York brokerage firm with which he had invested forty thousand pounds has collapsed. Provoked by his losses to seek out promising new stories, he turns his attention to Lesley, who warily warms to her celebrated guest, and who indeed has stories to tell, three of which fill the second part of Eng's novel.

Lesley's tales, as recounted to Maugham, take us back to 1910, when she first read a newspaper report that her friend Ethel Proudlock had been arrested for murder. A neighbor, William Steward, visited Ethel's bungalow in the evening, while her husband was out; he assaulted her, and she shot him in self-defense. Ethel Proudlock is not Eng's fictional invention. Proudlock's trial, which took place in Kuala Lumpur in 1911, caused a sensation in the Malayan expatriate community, partly because she was well connected, and mainly because, bucking the complacent colonial assumption, she was not acquitted but sentenced to death. Lesley tells Maugham about the trial (she was called as a witness for the defense) and her visits to Ethel in prison. The trial and its aftermath are masterfully recounted; the long episode is the most compelling stretch in Eng's novel, which follows the broad outline of the historical record. Eng's fictional twist involves Ethel confessing to Lesley that she had been having an affair with William Steward; that she had broken off the relationship, and he had refused to accept it; and that when he visited her in a rage she shot him in self-defense. Rather than publicly admit to being an adulterer, the Ethel of "The House of Doors" silently takes her judgment, and is sentenced to be hanged. The actual Ethel Proudlock, as far as we know, made no such private admission, and her relationship to William Steward remained ambiguous. (In "The Letter," Maugham's fictional addition is the letter itself. This novel allows us to examine the actual event of the trial, which is lightly fictionalized by Eng and was more heavily transmuted by Maugham, who, in turn, is novelized by Eng.)

Eng moves the Proudlock trial from 1911 to 1910, so that he can run this narrative together with another of Lesley's reminiscences—her momentous encounter with Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who was elected the Republic of China's

first provisional President at the end of 1911. When Sun visited the Hamlyns in 1910, he was a roving revolutionary, on what was essentially a fund-raising tour for his cause among a receptive local population that included Indians, Malays, and Chinese. Again, Eng—who was born in Penang in 1972, of Straits Chinese ancestry—nicely splices the historical record with various fictive weavings. The actual Sun did visit Penang in 1910; the Penang Conference, in November of that year, promised to be Sun's Finland Station moment, setting in motion the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. Eng's novelized addition has Lesley, unusually for a white British colonist, ardently drawn to Sun and his political movement. Initially, Maugham assumes that Lesley must have had an affair with the captivating Chinese radical; in time, he learns from her that she had an affair not with Sun but with one of his local political allies, a Chinese physician she calls Arthur. The two lovers had regular assignations at a house in town originally bought by Arthur's grandmother after her flight from China to Penang. It gives Eng's novel its title: the walls are "hung with wooden doors painted with birds and flowers, or mist-covered mountains. The upper halves of some of the doors were decorated with intricate fretwork of dragons and phoenixes."

"The House of Doors" is an assemblage, a house of curiosities. Eng can write with lyrical generosity and beautiful tact: moths are seen at night "flaking around the lamps"; elsewhere, also at nighttime, "a weak spill of light drew me to the sitting room." Shadowy emotions are delicately figured: "His eyes, so blue and penetrating, were dusked by some emotion I could not decipher." Lesley's account of her affair with Arthur has a lovely, drifting, dreamlike quality—the adulterers almost afloat on their new passion, watched over by the hanging painted doors of Arthur's house on Armenian Street. In these and other scenes, Eng demonstrates the control and the exquisite reticence that made his previous novel, "The Garden of Evening Mists," a sharply magical collocation. But in this novel these moments seem to occur only when Eng provokes himself to some special point of intensity and concentration. They sit alongside plenty of slack and formulaic gesturing. History and geography arrive in large flat patches—say, the political context of Sun's radicalism, or Malaysia's special diversity. Early on, for instance, when Maugham tells Lesley's cook that the dinner is the best meal he has eaten "in the East," Lesley conveniently replies, "You won't find anything like it anywhere in the world. . . . Over the centuries Penang has absorbed elements from the Malays and the Indians, the Chinese and the Siamese, the Europeans, and produced something that's uniquely its own. You'll find it in the language, the architecture, the food."

In the same vein, Eng's narrative can take on a tone of blandly fictionalized biography. When Eng dabs in a little backstory around Maugham's unhappy marriage to Syrie Wellcome, the writing dozes off: "Their rows grew more frequent and stormy. After another quarrel, he told himself that the situation could not go on." Maugham recalls returning to London from one of his long trips: "'You missed Liza's birthday,' Syrie reminded him barely half an hour after he had stepped inside 2 Wyndham Place, his four-storey Regency house in Marylebone." This passage occurs in one of the chapters seen from Maugham's point of view; the writing is thus offering a kind of free indirect style. (It's headed "Willie, Penang, 1921.") It is unclear why Willie Maugham would have to remind himself that he lives in a four-floor Regency house in Marylebone. This kind of biographical positivism—Eng stays close to the historical facts—has the effect of forestalling the most fertile element of the novel, its manner of layering the narratives. (We have the "real" Maugham, the "real" Proudlock trial, and then the lightly fictionalized versions of both offered by Eng, and the more heavily fictionalized version of the trial offered by Maugham.) The potential for a vertiginous examination of the instabilities and deceits of storytelling collapses too easily into novelized biography. The novel sends one back to the source texts.

Would Maugham have any reasonable objection to Eng's fictional portrait? Certainly, he'd be quite at home in Eng's spacious suite of cliché. Here is Lesley at a colonial party at the Eastern & Oriental Hotel: "I nursed my glass of wine and eyed the women around me. . . . I groaned inwardly when I saw Mrs Biggs, the wife of the director of the Rickshaw Department, making a beeline for me. In a booming voice that could be heard over on the mainland, she asked me if it was true that Ethel Proudlock had been having an affair with William Steward." Woolf's cinematic reaction shots are everywhere: "Her laughter ebbed into a smile. She crooked an eyebrow." "Robert laughed, slapping his knee." "He swore softly at himself." (A curse is anger.) "Willie looked at us, mortification flushing his face." (A blush is shame.) And so on.

No doubt Eng is slyly mimicking the dated argot and patter of Maugham's work, a fictional universe of stinging retorts, inward groans, arched eyebrows, and the like. (For instance, Eng uses the verb "chaff"—to tease someone good-naturedly—in what looks like conscious imitation of Maugham, who liked the verb.) You could say that this stylistic inhabiting in turn allows Eng to do something daring and eccentric: to write, as a contemporary Malaysian writer of Chinese descent, a novel set in early-twentieth-century Penang almost entirely from the perspective of the interloping white community resident there. Into this apparently stable and monochrome existence, Eng then introduces the gentle subversion and deviance of his more interesting subplots—Lesley's passion for Sun Yat-sen's cause, Lesley's passion for Arthur, Maugham's passion for Gerald, Robert's erotic wandering.

But these relationships and encounters lack the power and the narrative emphasis of the central Ethel Proudlock story, which casts an enviably dramatic shadow over the whole book. And the subversions are too gentle, so that Eng's portrait of Somerset Maugham and his colonial world has neither the rotten pungency of satire nor quite the vitality of a truly fresh realism. The kick of life always stubs its toe on cliché. Where is P. G. Wodehouse when you need him? ♦

THE NEW YORKER

A podcast for the culturally curious.

Join *The New Yorker's* critics for a weekly conversation about books, film, television, and pop culture. Hosted by the staff writers Vinson Cunningham, Naomi Fry, and Alexandra Schwartz.

Listen wherever you get your podcasts.

To find all of *The New Yorker's* podcasts, visit newyorker.com/podcasts.

Scan to listen.

THE THEATRE

COPING MECHANISMS

Philip Roth's "Sabbath's Theater" adapted for the stage, and "I Need That."

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM

John Turturro plays the horny comic hero Mickey Sabbath, a former puppeteer.

It's possible that John Turturro was born to play a dirty old man. The actor, one of my lifelong favorites, has a lurid, suggestive smile, curt at the edges, and eyes that shine with hidden information. He often seems to be holding back a disastrous secret, the kind that ruins families and topples friendships, and also often seems just about to spill the beans. In his affect, there's a tinge of nihilistic fun: Let's just forge ahead and see what happens!

Turturro, now sixty-six, is the same slim and restless New York City sidewalk denizen he's always been, but with a softened posture and a gentle white froth bubbling through the waves of his hair. The mischief's still there, but alongside it, darkening its colors, is the shadow of experience. It makes some sense, then, that Turturro would play Mickey Sabbath, the horny comic hero—wanting to fuck, wanting to die, weighing those desires on an ever-shifting existential scale—of Philip Roth's novel "Sabbath's Theater." Turturro collaborated with Ariel Levy (a staff writer for this magazine) on an adaptation of Roth's book for the stage, now up at Pershing Square Signature Center, produced by the New Group and directed by Jo Bonney.

Necessarily for a play that runs to a fleet hundred minutes and depends on the adrenalized performances of only three actors—Turturro, Jason Kravits, and the wonderfully versatile and funny Elizabeth Marvel—this version radically condenses Roth's verbose, joke-rich text. Still, it gets across the book's heart and gist: Sabbath is a trysting old man, fond of prostitutes and disdainful of the chaste, whose career as a puppeteer has long since run aground. An advantage of bringing this story to the stage is that a monologuing Sabbath—obviously interested in attracting the spotlight and in holding the attention of an audience—gives us a sense of why he liked the theatre to begin with, and how sex, for him, might be a substitute for the thrill of performance. A novel with the texture of a blue standup routine now takes on elements of a satyr play.

Marvel portrays several women in Sabbath's life, none more important or vivid than his Croatian mistress and sexual accomplice, Drenka. She's a married woman who's turned on and propelled by Mickey—she's a gymnast of the adulterous life, swinging through lovers by the dozen, instructed in depravity by Sabbath. "Men wherever she went sensed the intangible aura of invitation," Mickey tells the audience. When the play begins, though, Drenka is looking to tame Mickey and domesticate their situation. "I don't want anyone else," she says. "Either forswear fucking others or the affair is over." Mickey objects. To submit to monogamy would be to lose his louche appeal. Plus, he admits to the audience, the tales he tells Drenka of his wild nightly adventuring are largely bogus.

Soon, the point is moot: Drenka, only in her fifties, dies. The loss tosses Mickey into a vortex of despair. Haunted by the voice of his dead mother and goaded by the example of a friend's recent suicide, he contemplates ending his own life.

The plot, while nicely sketched, is secondary in this play to the sheer wicked pleasures of the flesh. Before Drenka gives her ultimatum, before the stage lights are fully up, there's a funny scene of sex play and naughty talk:

ILLUSTRATION BY ZACK ROSEBRUGH

DRENKA: Ohhh—I am going to feed you *ćevapčići*.

SABBATH: Feed me anything you want.

DRENKA: Three types of meat—beef, pork, lamb. Ohhh. All is ground. It is like a meatball—

SABBATH: Ahhh . . .

DRENKA: —but a different shape. Very small. You must eat *ćevapčići* . . . with onion. Little . . . peppers. Red. Very hot. Yes, I am going to feed you *ćevapčići*.

SABBATH: And I, in turn, will fuck your brains out.

DRENKA: Oh, my American boyfriend—that means you will fuck me seriously?

SABBATH: Quite seriously.

All the meatball business comes later in Roth's novel; Turturro and Levy's decision to place it at the top announces the indulgently sensualist intentions of this production. Its purpose is largely cathartic rather than moral: it exists to make its audience squirm with the pleasures of dirty talk and the promise of dirty action. Here, bodily nastiness exists unquestioned, for its own sake.

There's a hint in Mickey's surname: The great rabbi and theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel called the Sabbath an "architecture of time," attractively describing that placid day as an escape from the imperatives of daily life—of erecting edifices, making money, securing a place in the busy world of commerce. "Gallantly, ceaselessly, quietly, man must fight for inner liberty," Heschel wrote, against the earthly urge to gather things and conquer land. In Turturro's portrayal of Mickey, we can glimpse, amid his manias and self-destructive drives, the contemplative aspect of sex. Mickey, whose brother died in the Second World War and whose relationships have been disasters, uses sex and its lure as a kind of prayer, making a temple of the bedroom, a way to ward off the tugging insistence of the rest of the world.

In Turturro's and Marvel's performances, it's easy to see the glow of coital glorification. When they pantomime sex or describe unspeakable acts, they vibrate with excitement. Each performer takes on an almost ceremonial duty—one that tracks back to Dionysus—to carry the audience past discomfort and into something sublime. How else could an actor pull off lines like these?

DRENKA: I was unsure. Would you like my piss? How would you react to it, my own piss in your face? So I was shy about it at first. But once I started doing it, and I realized that it was okay, that I didn't have to be frightened, and seeing your reaction . . . you even drank some of it, and it made me feel that we're in this together, everything together, and Mickey, it was just wonderful.

SABBATH: I have a confession to make.

DRENKA: Oh? Tonight? Yes? What?

SABBATH: I was not so delighted to drink it.

The play's not a simple romp, though. Mickey is coping with his admittedly difficult life by making wild advances willy-nilly—at one point, he even comes on to his best friend's wife. He's surrounded by death, but sex keeps him on the throbbing side of life. Until, at last, it doesn't. "Sabbath's Theater," in this fun adaptation, seems to say, Hey, there are worse ways to self-medicate.

Sometimes a cluttered mind leads to a cluttered sex life; other times it simply leads to a messy house. In "I Need That," a new comedy by Theresa Rebeck (directed by Moritz von Stuelpnagel, for Roundabout Theatre Company, at the American Airlines Theatre), Danny DeVito—that constantly odd, delightful presence—plays Sam, a widower trying to hold on to the memory of his old life by holding on to ever-growing mountains of crap. Sam's daughter, Amelia (Lucy DeVito), keeps trying to get him to mow his lawn and to throw away the mostly useless items that his house is stuffed with—otherwise the fire department is going to show up and condemn the place, leaving the elderly Sam to the whims of the state. His friend Foster (Ray Anthony Thomas) comes by often, occasionally to enable Sam in his accumulations, but usually to side with Amelia.

Rebeck—always skillfully funny in a glossy, bantering, sitcom way—is taking advantage of one of the theatre's most natural roles. She's fishing an archetype out of the vague swirl of popular culture—in this case, the hoarder—and trying to see if it contains any useful psychological depth. The TV show "Hoarders" comes up in conversation, and Sam seems dismayed that his like have become fodder for scolding episodes of reality television. DeVito has many moments of wonderful physical comedy, and there's a very strange, late-arriving subplot wherein Foster, who is Black, admits to occasionally stealing from Sam's hoard. Sam's psychology is relatively thin: he hoards because he's sad, and because his items contain traces of the past.

The play, which is just fine, did serve at least one purpose: it made me want to clean my apartment. ♦

VOLUME XCIX, NO. 37, November 13, 2023. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four planned combined issues, as indicated on the issue's cover, and other combined or extra issues) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Lauren Kamen Macri, vice-president of sales; Rob Novick, vice-president of finance; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue and president of international; Anna Wintour, chief content officer; Nick Hotchkin, chief financial officer; Stan Duncan, chief people officer; Danielle Carrig, chief communications officer; Samantha Morgan, chief of staff; Sanjay Bhakta, chief product and technology officer. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail help@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail adinquiries@condenast.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, or call (800) 825-2510.

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by P. C. Vey, must be received by Sunday, November 12th. The finalists in the October 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 27th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

“ ”

.....

THE FINALISTS

“We have plenty of time to catch the ark.”
Autumn Crockford, Hermosa Beach, Calif.

“I'm not being hysterical, Alan. I saw nuggets shaped like us on their kids' menu.”
Steve Daugherty, Apex, N.C.

“That eventually hit the spot.”
Ryan Kendall, Novato, Calif.

THE WINNING CAPTION

“Of course, we'll place it higher if it's a girl.”
Jerrold E. Fink, Highland Park, Ill.

THE NEW YORKER STORE

Stay warm in style.

Gear up for cooler weather with *New Yorker* hats, sweatshirts, and more. Our trendy totes, home goods, and other favorites make the perfect accessories.

newyorker.com/store

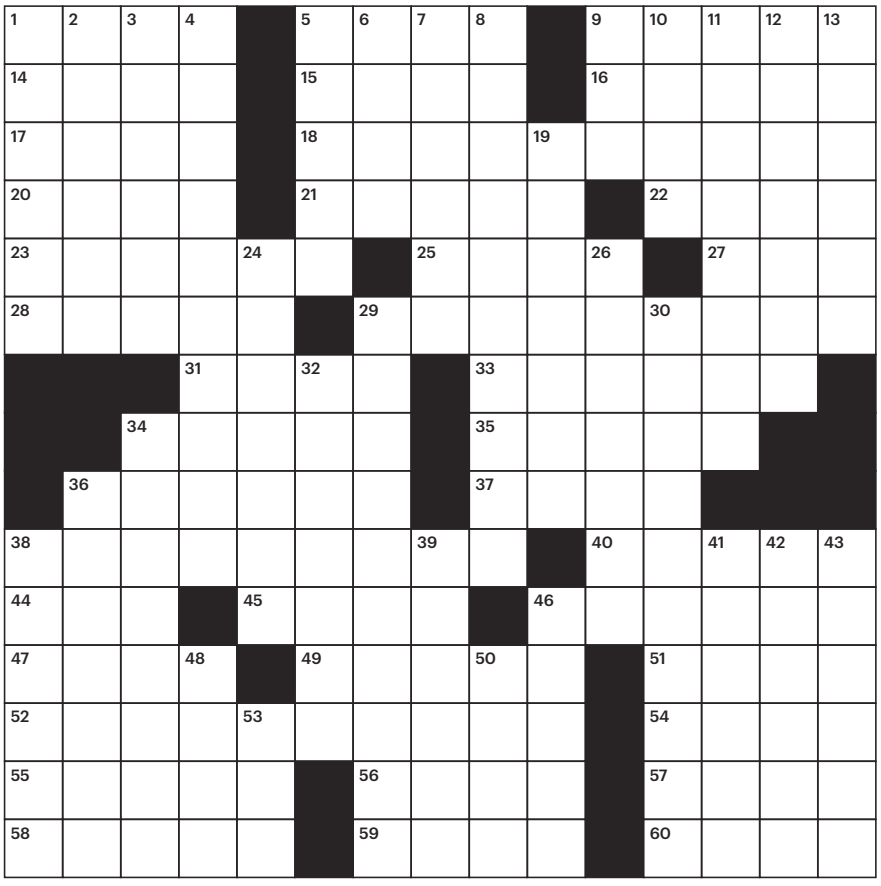
Scan to shop.

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A moderately challenging puzzle.

BY ERIK AGARD



ACROSS

1 Big-headed hunters

5 Skip

9 Dual degree for a physician-scientist

14 ___ mike (piece of filmmaking equipment)

15 *Dos al cubo*

16 Pepper grinder?

17 Image at half-court

18 Sporting group sporting leaves

20 "I see now"

21 More peculiar

22 Sudden problem

23 "I'll tell you what freedom is to me: ___": Nina Simone

25 Composition

27 General whose orders are often eagerly awaited?

28 Succeed

29 Activist who co-founded the organization Black Trans Liberation

31 One of a pair of archers?

33 Surname anglicized from Ua Laoghaire

34 Lorna ___ cookies

35 Blueprints

36 Person who might be on your case?

37 Michigan, for one

38 "I was following until that part"

40 Fall down spectacularly

44 Carpet-cleaning company's vehicle

45 Eyelid bump

46 Travel smoothly

47 "___ Is Betta Than Evvah!" (1976 album)

49 Exterior

51 In stitches

52 Public opinion?

54 Banyan or baobab, e.g.

55 Fifty past

56 ___ and ahs

57 Part of Q.E.D.

58 They may be rough

59 Mavens

60 French cosmetics brand

DOWN

1 Not perfectly circular

2 "Hell, yeah!"

3 Conclude a remote workday

4 Unwind after packing?

5 Food-processor part

6 ___ coffee

7 Thing that's cast

8 "I personally can't imagine acting like that, but I guess we're all different"

9 U.F.C. sport

10 Puts on

11 Nursery equipment

12 Was allowed input

13 Slayer hater?

19 Disney-reboot title character whose mother is pushed off a cliff by a pack of Dalmatians

24 Dry gulches

26 Product discussed by Sole Collector

29 Number neighbors?

30 Author whose 1813 novel inspired Ibi Zoboi's "Pride"

32 Convenient, in a way

34 Like public speaking, for many

36 Unpopular and then some

38 Broadway star NaTasha ___ Williams

39 Part of a very hot shower

41 ___ del Fuego (South American archipelago)

42 "Hand to God!"

43 Central principles

46 Salad green related to mustard

48 Poker payment

50 Resound

53 9-Down victories, for short

Solution to the previous puzzle:

K	F	C	S	■	S	L	U	R	■	S	P	I	F	F
O	A	H	U	■	Y	E	T	I	■	T	A	K	E	R
F	R	O	N	T	L	O	A	D	■	L	I	E	T	O
I	M	P	R	O	V	S	H	O	W	■	D	A	I	S
■	■	■	A	L	I	■	■	F	O	A	L	E	D	■
A	N	T	■	D	A	T	A	■	R	E	E	F	■	■
P	U	R	I	■	M	O	C	K	D	R	A	F	T	■
E	N	E	M	I	E	S	T	O	L	O	V	E	R	S
■	S	E	E	I	N	S	I	D	E	■	E	C	O	N
■	■	H	A	R	D	■	N	I	C	K	■	T	I	L
■	O	U	N	C	E	S	■	■	L	L	C	■	■	■
B	O	G	S	■	Z	I	P	Y	O	U	R	L	I	P
I	M	G	U	R	■	M	O	O	N	M	O	O	N	S
O	P	E	R	A	■	B	O	R	E	■	P	U	C	E
S	H	R	E	W	■	A	R	K	S	■	S	T	A	T

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**

THE NEW YORKER

The 2024 Desk Diary

Remember your takeoffs and landings and all your thoughts in between.

Shop all seven colors at newyorker.com/deskdiary

Scan to shop.


ANOUSHKA SHANKAR


YUJA WANG


MICHAEL BUBLÉ


SIR ANTONIO PAPPANO

LET THERE BE MUSIC

In the beginning, there is a movement. Made of tension and release, inspiration and serenity. From minor to major, one voice, then another, then a dozen or more… Soothing, moving, empowering. As profound as our memories, and as bright as our hopes. It's at once a call and response. Crafted by inspiration, perpetuated through passion, it continues to resonate with every generation. It is as vital as breathing and as essential as moving. **In many ways, it is the purest expression of life.**

#Perpetual

PERPETUAL 1908

ROLEX

FOR AN OFFICIAL ROLEX JEWELER VISIT ROLEX.COM
ROLEX ♛ AND PERPETUAL ARE ® TRADEMARKS. NEW YORK