

New Haven Review

Deirdre Bair has a Simone de Beauvoir affair to remember 6

Ross Douthat feels otherworldly about fantasy master Robert Jordan 18

Matthew Cheney gets let down 24

Steven Stoll says Karl Marx had at least one capital idea 30

Eva Geertz of New Haven says her heart is where her home is 44

Jonathan Kiefer mourns his mother, who may have kept him out of Yale 52

Lizzie Skurnick's poetry has something for morning, something for evening 56

Elizabeth Edelglass's story is set during another war, one worth fighting 64

Nicholas Day offers a course on three new food books 82

Rudolph Delson on how to score with women, readers 88

By the Letters

*Fear and gloating at a
Simone de Beauvoir
conference*

Deirdre Bair

January 9, 2008 was the one hundredth anniversary of Simone de Beauvoir's birth, and I was invited to Paris to speak at an international conference celebrating it. It was convened by Julia Kristeva, the justly honored literary critic, feminist writer, and practicing psychoanalyst, in cooperation with Beauvoir's adopted daughter and literary executor, Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir. The planning committee was international and the invited speakers came from fourteen different countries, so it seemed that everything was primed for a love-fest honoring one of the most influential thinkers and writers of the twentieth century.

Eventually, after the normal academic backbiting and infighting had played itself out, the program unfolded smoothly, with one huge exception that I am certain will go down in biographies and memoirs (with history books sure to follow). I wonder which of the written versions will become definitive, because none of the witnesses can agree on what took place. This was an eerie parallel to my paper topic: I discussed how and what we remember, and how and why we choose the stories we tell, not only to others, but to ourselves.

I have to admit that I've been disturbed by the recent spate of so-called critical and theoretical writings on Beauvoir, most of which reduce her to one of two interpretations: a laundry list of her bed partners, or (even worse) what I call the "ME, ME, ME!" school of criticism, where nothing she wrote has any validity until the speaker filters it through his or her response to it. Most of the "ME" responses remind me of what I say when I'm asked to read a memoir: If you want me to examine the lint in your navel, it had better be colorful. And unfortunately, most of this writing is far from it. I was determined that my paper would not waste a word on her love life, and I certainly wasn't going to trot out any "deep waves of emotion that overwhelmed me when I first read..." to quote from one such hapless, colorless paper.

Instead, I planned to talk about Beauvoir's four volumes of autobiography and whether they were a burden or a boon for historians, biographers, and critics. I had taken to (tritely) calling them the elephant in the room because the passage of time has surrounded them with an aura of literal truth, so that no one can write anything about twentieth-century French history or culture without citing them as a primary source. In trying to assess them, I had read a lot of neuroscientific research about how the brain retains and stores information as well as how it reveals and presents it, not only to the person whose mind is undergoing scans, but to everyone with whom the person communicates. In short, these pictures of the brain show how we must now question almost everything we previously took for granted about what autobiographers, biographers, and historians have told us. Neuroscientists call this mapping the human mental representational system, but the rest of us just call it memory, whether real, false, or reconstructed.

I intended to rewrite that paper, replacing academic jargon with plain English for this article, but something happened at the three-day *colloque*—the French word for conference that we all used—that made what I wrote about the uses of memory come alive in ways that proved the neuroscientists' theses. As the colloque progressed, I was struck by how my highly academic paper about real, false, and reconstructed memory corresponded to the memory and interpretation of a particular encounter between two of the major players. I witnessed the event itself, heard from others differing views of what took place, and then—almost before it was over—I was amazed by how the encounter had morphed into fact.

Confused? Well, so am I, slightly, so let me start by telling you what happened and what triggered the event-to-be-remembered at the concluding dinner in the famed Paris eatery La Coupole. Those who are familiar with the world of Sartre and Beauvoir will recognize the players; those who know recent French intellectual history will

know the bystanders and observers. I'll set the scene by describing them. Julia Kristeva directed the colloque with grace and dignity. Sylvie le Bon de Beauvoir gave it her full cooperation, but she also gave her considerable opinions. Sylvie is a sixty-ish woman, the adult companion of Beauvoir's last years, whom Beauvoir adopted so that Sylvie could inherit her estate and become its executor (only a legal relative could do so in France when Beauvoir died). Sylvie controls all rights and permissions and, for scholars who hope to do research, she is the one who grants access or not. She is the force to be reckoned with in Beauvoir studies, and she is indeed a force.

This partially explains the backbiting and jousting for position as the planning committee set up the program. Kristeva strove for the inclusion of as many persons as could reasonably speak in a three-day session, while Sylvie strove to settle whatever personal scores she held by insisting on some and excluding others. To both women's credit, they compromised, and the roster of speakers was mostly dignified, of high quality, and of interest to the more than four hundred persons who paid 20 euros (30 dollars) to attend. Alas, there were very few young faces among the attendees, who were mostly old and retired pensioners, probably there to relive the glory days of existentialism at the Deux Magots or Café de Flore.

The speaker who drew the largest and most eager audience was Claude Lanzmann, who held the distinction of being the only man with whom Beauvoir ever lived in a domestic relationship. She was forty-four and he twenty-seven when their six years of cohabitation began in a twelve-by-sixteen-foot room in a shabby hotel, with bathroom down the hall. Later, when their affair was long over and they were just good friends, he made his brilliant film, *Shoah*, with most of his financial backing courtesy of Beauvoir.

Lanzmann's talk marked the first session of the colloque. I think the audience was expecting to hear about what it was like for two creative people to live and work practically on top of each other in such a small space, but instead Lanzmann told them coyly about

how good Beauvoir was in bed. He said repeatedly that he was the last of the six lovers she had in her life (hah! little does he know!), and strongly (smirkingly?) he hinted that he was the best.

Then came the bone of contention: He told the audience that he has three hundred letters from Beauvoir, all filled with protestations of passion and undying love, and (with a mock wringing of hands) what, oh what, shall he do with them? The audience gasped in surprise while Sylvie glowered. Lanzmann continued: Rare-book dealers from the United States routinely offer him piles of money, but of course he's French and he wants the letters to stay in France (understood here is that French libraries expect donations and don't pay, and he wants money). Well then, he asks dramatically, shall he publish them? He has the audience on the edge of their seats by now. He pauses before continuing slowly, drawing out every word and enjoying every moment. He would love to publish the letters. After all, the public has a right to read them, but even though he owns the actual paper on which they are written, oh dear, Sylvie owns the copyright and therefore can keep the words from being printed.

The salivating audience groans. To give them just a taste, he infringes Sylvie's copyright by reading one aloud, of the "darling you are a magnificent lover" variety, a love letter typically embarrassing to everyone but the recipient. Sylvie was furious. By reading it aloud, he had, as the lawyers say, published it.

Copyright law is much the same in France as in the United States, and Lanzmann soothed the audience, hungry for more, by saying there might be a solution for the other 299 letters: He could sell them to an American university library, where scholars could read and paraphrase the content in their own writings, thus bypassing Sylvie. Or—again another dramatic pause—he could simply burn them in the fireplace on the next cold night, for after all, they are very, very personal and perhaps they should simply be destroyed.

With his every proposal, the audience moaned or cried out, either in agreement, concern, or fear that the letters would somehow be lost for posterity. Lanzmann toyed with their emotions, smiling

on the podium while Sylvie sat festering in the audience, her cheeks mottled with crimson anger. Kristeva, a kind and soothing presence throughout the often-fractious colloque, sat tranquilly, her eyes hidden behind dark glasses and her smooth face no doubt reflecting her analytic training as she showed no emotion at all.

If Kristeva's husband, the celebrated critic Philippe Sollers, was in the audience during Lanzmann's talk, I didn't see him, but his was the last presentation of the day. Sollers's topic, like Lanzmann's and almost everyone else's, was ostensibly Beauvoir's love life but was actually more of a meandering Sollerian (to coin a phrase) collection of random witticisms that had as much to do with Soller as with his subject. But never mind; he's smart and charming and he gives good value in everything he says or writes. His leaping, darting reflections on Beauvoir's bed partners and love life in general were light and amusing and a pleasant contrast to the turgid literality of Lanzmann.

My talk was smack dab in the middle of the day, between these two, the last one before lunch and one hour late because of all the delays caused by various ministers in the Sarkozy government who seized the podium to gush effusively about what Simone de Beauvoir meant to their personal lives. By the time I spoke, the crowd was famished and ready to eat their programs, but to my amazement nobody left. I launched into a serious discussion of the concept of memory and how scientific research requires us to rethink all forms of autobiographical remembering. I talked about one study that examined how one person's memory differs from the memories of all others who shared the same experience. I discussed how memory influences narrative construction, i.e., how memory contributes to the construction of the Self through the creative act of writing about one's self. Interspersed between these two investigations lay one more, of how memory influences and is influenced by what we write in letters or personal communications, what we might call the fact versus the fiction of what our subjects choose to write, and how we, the scholars and readers who study them, choose to interpret them.

I told my audience that we needed to keep in mind the idea of

reconstruction, the term psychoanalysts use to describe the techniques that a person uses to recover the experiences, emotions, and events of his or her past. Scientists tell us that no matter how sincerely—even desperately—a writer of autobiography and memoir strives to discover the “real” reality and the literal truth of his or her Self, it is almost impossible to do so.

I thought about this three days later, when the colloque was ending. The program was running late and still going strong at 7 p.m. when Sylvie began the farewell summation. All the speakers were invited to a celebration dinner at La Coupole that was to start at 7:30, and it was clear we would not get there on time. Nor could anyone change into glad rags, no time even to wash faces or brush hair in the cavernous Refectoire des Cordeliers where the talks were given; everyone would need to rush for the Odeon metro to go straight to the restaurant.

Naturally, everyone hoped Sylvie would just tell us that our papers were brilliant, thank us for participating, and let us get to dinner, but she didn’t. Yes, she paid the ritual compliments, but then she paused for effect. She had a little problem, she told the audience coyly; everything in the colloque had been gloriously positive but there was just one thing that was *sooo negative*—long pause here and much simpering—well, should she or should she not tell the audience what was upsetting her? Of course the audience roared, clapped, and stamped its collective feet. Of course everyone wanted to know what she meant.

It was Lanzmann, she confided. How could he possibly want to embarrass poor dead Simone by publicly reading one letter and publishing the rest—this from the woman who, way back in 1990, had allowed to be published Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s correspondence in which the couple discussed how Beauvoir would pimp her high school students for Sartre’s delectation, and how she, too, would take these young girls to bed so they could compare notes. On and on Sylvie went about Lanzmann’s effrontery, totally losing her audi-

ence's sympathy in the process. When she finished, the sound was more of footsteps rushing for the metro than of applause for her.

We were all late to La Coupole and were hustled into a private dining room. Those who care about such things busied themselves by pretending to be merely ambling around the tables, while in reality they were busy switching their place cards for more advantageous seating. Kristeva's table was at the side of the room but no one messed with it since every seat was filled, starting with her husband, and including Sylvie and some of her friends. In the middle of the room where everyone could see them, place cards for Claude Lanzmann and his wife sat conspicuously alone at a table for ten. My French colleagues told me this was intentional, that no other luminaries had been assigned to this table so the Lanzmanns would be surrounded by *hoi polloi*. My table was between the Lanzmann and the Kristeva-Sylvie-Sollers tables, in clear sight of both. The only jousting my friends and I did was to fight over who would get the seat with the best view of both tables.

The Kristeva-Sylvie-Sollers table was fully seated when the Lanzmanns walked in. They stood beside their table, chatting to the few people who dared to brave Sylvie's disapproval by greeting them. Philippe Sollers walked over to the Lanzmanns and saluted them warmly. Everything seemed peaceful and conciliatory, so everyone at my table relaxed and began to chat as we poured wine and passed bread.

This is where everything I said earlier about memory comes into play, and where I wonder about how an event becomes a historical moment, and how that moment becomes locked into a biographical fact.

Suddenly, a horrendous crash came from the Lanzmann table. Everything was strewn about, chairs were overturned; the people who had moved place cards to sit there were splattered with red wine. They were all rushing to the fringe of the room where the only vacant places at table were left. A grim-faced Sollers strode back to

his table and took a seat with his back to the rest of the room. It was eerily silent; nobody moved; nobody said anything. Nobody except me, girl reporter that I used to be.

“What happened over there?” I asked some of the wine-spattered ones as they rushed past. One said, “Sollers shoved Lanzmann’s wife.” Another said, “Lanzmann’s wife fell against the table.” Another said, “Lanzmann lost his balance, fell, and tipped over the table.” This was all very interesting because I watched Lanzmann leave the room before the brouhaha began and he still was nowhere to be seen. Waiters were scurrying to right the chairs and clean the table. Lanzmann’s wife stood quietly until they had finished; then she and one other woman sat down. The woman promptly attacked her salad and ate diligently. Lanzmann’s wife seemed stunned and sat there frozen. Suddenly, Sollers got up and crossed over to her, sat down, and embraced her. She began to cry, and he began to kiss her and smooth her hair, trying to soothe her. This went on for quite a while.

Then he stood up, pulled her up by her hands, and persuaded her to come to his table, where a place was made, not only for her but also for her husband.

When Lanzmann returned from wherever he had been, he seemed pleased to discover that his place had been set directly across from his mortal adversary, Sylvie. The various courses were served and cleared away; wine flowed as waiters fanned out to all the tables with bottle after bottle. Again there was an unexpected eruption as shouting, finger-pointing, and cursing came from the Kristeva-Sollers table. Sylvie was jabbing her finger and screaming obscenities at Lanzmann. Sollers was pounding the table and shouting, but his remarks were more along the lines of mediation than antagonism. Lanzmann’s deep baritone boomed out from time to time, mostly in what sounded like loud guffaws. The subject was his letters and he was clearly enjoying himself immensely, for only he had the power to decide what would be done with them.

At my table, where the only young scholars who had partici-

pated in the colloque sat, we began to analyze what we had just seen. Our papers had all tried to move Simone de Beauvoir out of her bedroom and back onto an intellectual podium, so our conversation evolved naturally into what actually happened when the table was overturned. What did we see, we historians and biographers from France and America, and how would we recount it when we wrote or talked about it in times to come? Several of the younger scholars were already turning it into memoir, and were busy taking notes on how it affected everything from their digestion to their dignity. Very quickly, our multicultural, multi-age group realized that the only thing we could say with certainty was that a table was overturned, wine was spilled, and clothes were stained.

But who pushed whom? What triggered the push? How could such unseemly anger mitigate so quickly into camaraderie, especially when we looked over at the combatants' table and saw Lanzmann and Sylvie embracing as if they were each other's long-lost best friend? What did this mean—that he had given in and surrendered the letters? No, we were told, they were only wishing each other a fond good night, and promising to meet again soon.

An old woman who had been a heroine of the Resistance in World War II (and had probably known Sartre and Beauvoir better than anyone else in the room) shrugged her shoulders as if to say, This is how existential fist fights always resolved themselves. To her, we Americans were naïve to take it seriously.

One of the younger scholars asked if the incident we had just witnessed might someday be written about with the same critical intensity as, say, one of Sartre's and Camus's falling-outs. One of my French peers said what a sorry thing it would be if that happened, for it would just show the poverty and paucity of contemporary intellectual argument as compared with those mind-enhancing debates of the mid-twentieth century.

Everyone asked why I was so quiet and not contributing to the discussion. "Because I'm probably going to be the first to get it into print," I said, thinking of my promise to publish here. As I went

around the room to say my farewells, what to write weighed on me. All I could think of was how differently the multitude of people who witnessed this single event interpreted it. What more could I write than: Somebody was angry, one person shoved another, a table was overturned, wine was spilled, and everyone kissed and made up?

—and, in a paraphrase of the old television quiz show: Will the real reality please stand up!

Farewell, My Master

*We'll meet in Two Rivers,
Robert Jordan*

Ross Douthat

In the long-gone days when my fantasy-novel obsession was

at its height, I occasionally meditated on the alarming possibility that one of my favorite authors would die before he had managed to finish unspooling the multivolume story that I hung on. This was before every moderately successful genre author could claim a dozen fan sites parsing his every convention appearance and LiveJournal posting, but the photos and about-the-author paragraphs on the fat, shiny hardcovers—fantasy novels are required by law to gleam—suggested that Terry “Sword of Shannara” Brooks, David “Belgariad” Eddings, and all the rest were into middle age at least. In the case of Robert Jordan’s early books—he had just completed *The Dragon Reborn*, the third installment in his bookshelf-busting Wheel of Time series, when I discovered him—the author’s picture was an artist’s sketch, depicting a red-haired, Falstaffian figure with a flowing beard, and the biography was terse. It concluded by promising that Jordan would keep writing “until they nail his coffin shut.”

And so he did. Shortly after his death, from a rare blood disease, I found my way to his personal blog, where, once the diagnosis was handed down, he and his family members had corresponded with fans more faithful than I, filing updates on his medical condition and his progress through *A Memory of Light*, the final book in the Wheel of Time. He would beat the disease, he swore; he would finish the book. In June 2007, he apologized to his readers for only posting once a month: “I am trying to put every spare moment into *A Memory of Light*,” he wrote, and “there aren’t too many of those spare moments right now. My meds induce fatigue, so it is hard to keep going. I’ll fight it through, though. Don’t worry. The book will be finished as soon as I can manage it.”

Three months later, last September, with the book still not quite finished, Jordan—or James Oliver Rigney as I suppose I ought to call him, as Robert Jordan was a pen name—was gone.

It had been three years since I'd read a word he'd written, for all that once upon a time he'd been my favorite novelist in all the world—or any other, for that matter. For a shameful moment after hearing of his death, I couldn't even recall the title of the most recent Wheel of Time installment. Was it *Crossroads of Twilight*? *Path of Daggers*? I knew I had read it, out of a sense of duty to my teenage self if nothing else; I just couldn't for the life of me remember what it was called (*Knife of Dreams*, the internet reminded me) or whether it had been the ninth or tenth or even the eleventh (and so it was!) volume in the saga.

It felt strange to go back over the blog entries from his illness, and then to keep up with the site over the next few weeks, reading the posts left by his wife and friends after his passing, looking at the photos from the funeral and the tributes that fans left in the comments section. On the one hand, there was the peculiar intimacy of the internet age: the chance to peer into the personal life of a writer I had worshiped from afar as a teenager and known only from the sparse biographical details that Tor Books provided to his readers. To hear his voice through the blog, casual and unmediated, not telling stories but just talking. To hear from his wife, Harriet, long a presence on the dedication pages of his novels; to see her picture and the pictures of his family. To hear about where he went to church, what he liked to eat and drink, the songs he liked to sing. To see his Charleston, South Carolina, home, and even photographs of the inner sanctum itself, the carriage house where he wrote his novels, where the floors were piled with books and the walls were hung (of course) with antique swords.

And then there was a feeling of embarrassment or guilt, as though because I had allowed my fandom to lapse over the years, I was somehow trespassing on a grief reserved for more devoted readers. As though I were attending the funeral of a friend or lover I'd abandoned years before and remembered far too late to make a difference.

Jordan lived long enough, at least, to see his chosen genre

become cooler than it has ever been before. When I was younger, fantasy languished in science fiction's shadow: The two were lumped together in the bookstore under the inexact and irritating rubric "sci-fi/fantasy," but science fiction enjoyed greater popular-culture cachet, both among the moviegoing masses (for whom science fiction meant *Star Wars* and *Aliens* and *The Terminator*, and fantasy meant *Willow* and *Legend* and *The Neverending Story*) and the hipster literati, who were considerably more likely to name-check *Neuromancer* than *Gormenghast*, Philip K. Dick than Ursula K. Le Guin. It was clear, to me at least, that a writer might hope to be reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* if his genre novel involved androids or clones or alien life forms; swap in elves or trolls or centaurs, and no dice.

It isn't hard to see why this might be: In a technology-mad, forward-looking society, it stands to reason that science would be cooler than magic; that the future would be sexier than the past; that dystopias would be hip and elegies square. Moreover, the entire modern fantasy genre has shivered for decades in J.R.R. Tolkien's long, long shadow. Contemporary science fiction has its much-imitated icons, too, but no single author bestrides the landscape the way that Tolkien does with fantasy, even as the singularity of his gifts makes slavish imitation the sincerest form of folly. No contemporary writer can hope to match the depth and detail of Tolkien's vision, his books' linguistic precision and mythological complexity, and the extent to which *Lord of the Rings* and its attendant works feel like found objects from a premodern past rather than works dreamed up in early twentieth-century Oxford. Yet many of his successors have too often tried, piling map upon map, appendix upon appendix, volume upon volume, striving to match Tolkien's strengths as a fantasist rather than improving on his weaknesses as a novelist.

This is where Jordan's saga lost its way, in the end. He was never going to write well enough to transcend his genre roots

entirely, but at his peak he was a wonderful middlebrow novelist, striking a near-perfect balance between world building, plotting, and characterization. But he didn't know where to stop building: There were always more characters to introduce, more customs to elaborate on, more interesting locales to visit, and more history and mythology to unpack. He was like a painter furiously adding detail to the landscape, never finishing the action in the foreground. His world sprawled; his story fizzled.

Yet he leaves behind a genre landscape that's been transformed, and I like to think that his achievements—both the wonderful books he wrote and the audience he built for them—helped pave the way for fantasy's burgeoning coolness. The genre has come to the masses, in the form of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* adaptations and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and all their imitators. It has come to the highbrow realm, where authors like Susannah Clarke, Neil Gaiman, and China Miéville are being name-checked by the same people who used to confine their genre references to *A Scanner Darkly*. And it may even be coming to HBO, of all places: The best of Jordan's high-fantasy successors, George R.R. Martin, is having his (unfinished! hurry up!) Song of Ice and Fire saga developed for the small screen by the same channel that gave us *The Sopranos*, *Deadwood*, and *The Wire*, and I can't imagine a more perfect fit.

I like to think two other things as well, where Jordan is concerned. First, I hope that his unfinished final book, which will be polished and padded into shape for publication by another novelist, will bring his saga to an overdue but triumphant conclusion, and that it will include enough of his own voice that I'll recognize the writer I loved when I storm through the book in a single day. Second, I like to think that his fellow fantasist C.S. Lewis was right when he suggested that in Aslan's country (God's, that is), no good thing is ever lost—and that this promise extends to the realms we fashion in our imagination as well as the world we actually inhabit. I hope that James Oliver Rigney is being permitted to explore the lands that he dreamed up—that he's walking the streets of Tar Valon and Ebou

Dar, sailing the Aryth Ocean and crossing the rugged Aiel Waste.
And I hope that I can meet him there some day—in the Two Rivers,
perhaps, where his great, unfinished story started, years ago—and
shake his hand, and thank him.

No Direction Home

The novel as betrayal

Matthew Cheney

Foreigners

By Caryl Phillips

Knopf, 2007

Ours is a hybrid age, an age of mixing cultures and histories, an age of migrations and transmigrations. Such an age deserves hybrid forms to explore the life it breeds and to delve down into the sources of its textures. The hope is that those forms will express more than can be expressed otherwise and will points toward truths invisible to less eclectic lenses. One of the strengths of Caryl Phillips's oeuvre is that it is difficult to box up with convenient labels and ship off as widgets and comfort food. It sings and talks and hectors and hums. It walks and chews gum at the same time.

Phillips habitually melds political, cultural, and aesthetic concerns, mixing and matching tales and voices, revisiting favorite obsessions and bugbears in different contexts as he searches for the concrete implications of abstract terms: race, identity, home. His first two novels, *The Final Passage* and *A State of Independence*, told tales of people between places—in the former, of people leaving the Caribbean; in the latter, the reverse. With *Higher Ground*, he introduced a technique that he would offer variations on in many of his later books: stories of people at different points in history, linked by theme (in this case, an assistant to slave traders in the 19th century, an African-American prisoner in the 1960s, and a woman who as a child escaped the Holocaust). Phillips's next three novels, *Cambridge*, *Crossing the Water*, and *The Nature of Blood*, continued to use multiple voices to tell thematically-related stories, and the books' power came from their polyphony, as readers were forced to fill in gaps and make connections between times and spaces in a mosaic of individual lives. *A Distant Shore* and *Dancing in the Dark* continued to build novels from various points of view and narrative modes, but the fragments were linked not only by theme, but by characters, maintaining some elements of Phillips's collage structure while creating more traditionally unified novels. With his latest book, *Foreigners*, though, Phillips has returned to the structure he

introduced in *Higher Ground* and used to particularly strong effect in *Crossing the Water* and *The Nature of Blood*: multiple stories, separated by time, linked by implication. It is not as effective a book as the earlier ones, not as varied and not as resonant, but it offers a few moments of great beauty and insight.

In “The Pioneers: Fifty Years of Caribbean Migration to Britain” (from his 2001 collection of essays, *A New World Order*), Phillips writes: “Race and ethnicity are the bricks and mortar with which the British have traditionally built a wall around the perimeter of their island nation and created fixity. On the inside reside patriotic Britons, who are British by virtue of their race (white) and their culturally determined ethnicity. On the outside of the wall are the foreigners with their swarthy complexions, or their Judaism, or their smelly food, or their mosques, or their impenetrable accents, or their unacceptable clothes, or their tongue-twisting names, or their allegiance to Rome.”

Foreigners gives life to these ideas by presenting the reader with three stories. The first, “Dr. Johnson’s Watch,” investigates the life and death of Samuel Johnson’s “faithful negro servant,” Francis Barber, who to the horror of many of Johnson’s friends was named the principal beneficiary in the great writer’s will. Despite this, Barber died in poverty. How he came to such an end is the subject of the story, told from the point of view of a journalist who goes in search of Barber sixteen years after Johnson’s death.

The second section of the book, “Made in Wales,” tells the story of Randolph Turpin, who in 1951 defeated Sugar Ray Robinson and became Britain’s first black world-champion boxer and, for a moment, one of the most famous men in the world, and one of the most beloved in Britain. His fame didn’t last, however, and his later years were filled with misery and debt, ending in suicide.

The third section, “Northern Lights,” tells of another bad end: that of David Oluwale, a Nigerian immigrant whose difficult life in Leeds concluded with his being beaten by police officers who had routinely harrassed him; his body was found in the River Aire.

Each section has a distinct tone, voice, and point of view. “Dr. Johnson’s Watch” is a first-person account, and the diction is similar to that of eighteenth-century writings (though Phillips does not go as far in imitating that age’s syntax as, for instance, Thomas Pynchon did in *Mason & Dixon*), allowing it a certain distance and irony. From faux journalism we move to more straightforward journalism: “Made in Wales” is similar in structure and tone to Phillips’s book of reportage and meditation, *The Atlantic Sound*, and it would not feel out of place as an article in a magazine like *The New Yorker* or *Harper’s*. The events of “Northern Lights” are close in time to those of “Made in Wales,” but their presentation is different: Here Phillips lets us get to know David Oluwale through the voices of people who encountered him during his life, and through documents that present different facts, opinions, and moments from that life.

Foreigners is a less satisfying book than many of Phillips’s others: less complex, less engaging, less than the sum of its parts. Where the narratively unconnected pieces of *Higher Ground*, *Crossing the Water*, and *The Nature of Blood* (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, nearly all of Phillips’s previous fictions) worked together in ways that produced multiple resonances within the books, in *Foreigners* the occasional resonances are murky, and the second and third sections contain many passages that are exceedingly dull. Phillips’s work has often suffered sluggish pacing from his inability to distinguish vivid detail from mucilaginous detail, but in *Foreigners* this weakness overwhelms everything else the book has to offer, because in the absence of more ideas and connections to carry us through, the details become numbing.

“Dr. Johnson’s Watch” is the liveliest of the book’s sections (it is also about half the length of the other two), partly because in sustaining a single and distinctive narrative voice, the story implies various levels of meaning, and many questions are left unanswered and unanswerable. The matter-of-fact narration of “Made in Wales” only comes alive when Phillips inserts himself into the story at the end, and the potential for insight of “Northern Lights” goes

unrealized, because the different voices and perspectives are not different enough to justify the technique, and every added item comes to feel more like padding than like provocation to thought.

Thought, presumably, is what Phillips wanted these portraits to cause, but *Foreigners* is too schematic in its juxtapositions, too purposeless in its hybrid forms, to present a coherent vision. Or perhaps the problem is more that the vision is too coherent—three black men whose lives ended wretchedly in England. That Turpin and Oluwale could die as wretchedly in the twentieth century as Barber in the eighteenth is a sad fact, but hardly a surprising one. The various juxtapositions within *Foreigners* seldom produce any emotional connection to the situations, and, without more material for intellectual stimulation, the book often becomes tedious.

The elements of the stories that attracted Phillips to them remain compelling, but the book ultimately offers us less to think about than many of Phillips's more straightforward essays, and it offers us less to care about than his more vivid fictions. The strength of, particularly, *Crossing the Water* and *The Nature of Blood* emanates from the breadth of their concerns—a breadth that encouraged readers to make radical connections. Those connections are far less radical and far more obvious in *Foreigners* than in almost any of Phillips's previous books.

The Best Hated Man

A life with Karl Marx

Steven Stoll

Marx had never set foot in my house. His name appeared in the *World Book Encyclopedia* shelved in the family room but nowhere else among the few books my parents owned. I knew only one person who had read Marx: my uncle. Gentle, spectacled, and fiercely devout, he came of age in tear gas; in that truth-telling fog he perceived that the Oakland Police Department represented the American mega-machine and its imperialist war in Southeast Asia. My uncle gave me my first lesson in political economy. At the kitchen table in my grandmother's kitchen he held up a banana. Its price, he said, contains the labor added to it in cultivation and harvesting, but the poor people who perform that labor receive a pitiful wage, nothing near what they require to lead a decent life. In capitalism, the laborer is paid only enough to survive; the rest of what he earns goes to the capitalists. This is the valorization of labor. The people would not have their energy sucked out of them for much longer, and looking right at me he said, "There's going to be a revolution, and everything is going to change."

I was fascinated, but *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom* had just come on, and I excused myself to watch Marlin Perkins shoot sleeping darts into lions for no reason whatsoever. Exposing the unseemly innards of capitalism disturbed me more than I could say, because I could not imagine things any other way. Capitalism functioned as the operating system of American society. Take it away, and, I was sure, we would be eating grass clippings and roasting neighborhood pets. Worse, we would be communists. Never mind the Constitution—growing up during the Cold War taught me that the free market defined Americans. Unregulated business enterprise, vigorous shopping—that's how we expressed our liberty. Ronald Reagan could so easily demonize Marx as the evil genesis of the Evil Empire because no one in public life drew a coherent distinction between the regime and the philosopher it claimed as its own. Marx

became unmentionable in polite company, which only made him more curious to me.

Soon after I turned thirteen, I came home from school to find *The Revolutionary Worker* in the mailbox with my name on it, a bar mitzvah gift from my uncle. The *Worker* is the publication of the Revolutionary Communist Party, a Maoist organization dedicated to overthrowing the capitalist government of the United States. At the time, my uncle lived in the Salinas Valley of California, where he picked lettuce and endeavored to organize Mexican farm workers into a revolutionary force. My parents were bewildered by the publication, though they did not prevent me from reading it.

I huddled with it in my room. The cover had a man bent low in some wet and steamy street, teeth gritting, picking up a red flag. The red flag, the militant commemoration of May Day, the giddy scenarios for a brush-fire uprising, in which (to take one example) economic depression would send an army of the dispossessed against the Capitol—all of this terrified and amazed me.

Ronald Reagan confronted me on one side, Warren Beatty on the other. *Reds*, Beatty's 1981 epic of the Russian Revolution, presented the birth of the Soviet Union with erotic energy. It featured John Reed, Louise Bryant, and Emma Goldman; it included a sympathetic portrayal of Grigory Zinoviev, who stood with Stalin against Trotsky, turned against Stalin after Lenin's death, and was murdered by Stalin in 1936. I knew nothing of leftists, and the only political extremists I knew of were the conservative firebrands who yelled and threw chairs late at night on public-access television. All I knew was that Marx made people passionate about injustice and starting the world anew, providing a language for how to imagine some other condition of society.

I sat down with the Communist Manifesto in a used-book store, a haggard, low-slung place with cement floors and sagging shelves. In the quiet of the stacks I chose an edition published in the 1930s and opened it:

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.”

History had meaning; it tended toward a culmination; it had a driving force. Capitalism prepared the way for the communist revolution, and Marx genuinely marveled at it: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.” The struggle took place around capital—not just money but a certain use of money, represented by the value created by the banana workers. Once that value was accumulated, their employers used it to buy more land, plant more trees, and hire more workers. Marx’s solution for ending the struggle was to wipe out everything I had been taught to respect and admire, including private property. I remember his furious anger rising like heat off the brittle pages, and I remember the sense of inevitability it carried. I experienced the book as an elaborate threat, shaded with the possibility of violence. Squinting into the daylight after the gloom, I put my hands in my pockets and walked down Long Beach Boulevard. The situation turned out to be far worse than I had imagined. If I took Marx seriously, I had to pick a side: the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, my uncle or my mother, fighting the power or going to law school. Philosophy had never before made me want to throw up.

My four years at Berkeley coincided with Ronald Reagan’s second term, and the street performers and itinerant radicals in Sproul Plaza owed their livings to him. It wasn’t until later that I learned he had said this before a packed convention of real estate agents in 1987: “How do you tell a Communist? Well, it’s someone who reads Marx and Lenin. And how do you tell an anti-Communist? It’s someone who understands Marx and Lenin.” What a relief to know that nothing of any importance or value lay in the intellectual foundation of the opposition. Reagan made it safe for people to

become passive ideologues. In the mean time, my professors made a communist out of me by assigning the forbidden texts, and I became an enemy of the state by discussing the Manifesto under coastal live oaks with my comrades who also had papers they needed to write that evening. I also studied the Russian Revolution in detail, including the motives and thinking of Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

In fact, almost no one among my classmates spoke in favor of revolution. The ideology of the Bolsheviks looked like secular religion, a creed vaguely Christian in its faith that the first shall be last and that heaven could be created on earth. Though students sitting under the same trees not long before had come to a different conclusion (students including my uncle), the book in my hands did not provide me with an operable philosophy. I could leave the question aside, however, because my interests had settled on American history, especially the formation of cities, the settling of the West, and the cultural landscape of ordinary places. Marx didn't have much to say on these subjects (or so I assumed), and I was more than happy to get away from him.

When he showed up again I hardly recognized him. I read *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* at St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the summer after I graduated from Berkeley. I had gone to wait tables, walk in the mountains, and read in isolation. I ended up enrolling in a great-books program. The *Manuscripts* changed how I looked at Marx. He was twenty-six years old when he began to work though political economy, recording his first thoughts in a notebook. It depicts Marx struggling with his greatest inspiration, the most important intellectual force in his life, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Marx had never known Hegel, but he became a leading light among the Young Hegelians who read and debated the Master after his death in 1831. Marx owed his idealist conception to Hegel but began to sketch out his own materialist view. Hegel's world-historical process stressed the movement of Spirit—the transcendent rationality of the universe that acted through humans. Marx substituted

Hegel's philosophical terms with economic ones and the Master's ethereal sense of "becoming" with a hard-grained class struggle. But that's not what grabbed me at the age of twenty-two. The in-your-face critique of society, especially money and a life dominated by earning it, thrilled me. In it, I saw alternatives for myself.

What should be our life's activity? Marx saw people dehumanized by their work. "The worker becomes a slave to his object.... The terminus of this slavery is that he can only maintain himself as a physical subject so far as he is a worker, and only as a physical subject is he a worker." He called money the only "true need produced by the modern economic system." I did not want to begin the world anew, but I did want to begin myself. Marx skewered capitalist self-discipline with the argument that a life dedicated to making money caused estrangement from the things that make life worth living: "The less you eat, drink and buy books; the less you go to the theater, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save—the greater becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your capital. The less you are, the less you express your own life, the greater is your alienated life." I feared being a slave to a salary in a job that left me empty.

Marx's partner, Friedrich Engels, offered another insight: "The struggle of capital against capital, of labor against labor, of land against land, drives production to a fever pitch at which production turns all natural and rational relations upside down." I had witnessed rapid change in the landscape of my childhood as it disappeared into the familiar suburban pattern, but I lacked the language to think of it as anything other than progress, even if ironically. I never understood that the destruction of one landscape and its replacement with another represented a logic embedded in capitalism. In other words, progress is not an absolute value or a force of nature. It is an idea about the course of events.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the Soviet Union soon after, I wondered if Marx had gone the way of the French Physiocrats or

Ptolemy—superseded by other findings, no longer considered relevant or even factually correct. I did not accept the absurdity of an end to history and the final triumph of liberal capitalism, but it did seem that Marx's philosophy had failed. Marxist history only confirmed his irrelevance. With a few notable exceptions, the programmatic way these historians sought to verify Marx—like physicists verifying Einstein—made for narrowly argumentative, deterministic writing. But around the same time, during my first years in graduate school, I began to read environmental history, which appealed to me for the way it confirmed the centrality of materialism. By materialism I mean the way that production and consumption, buying and selling, and the flow of matter through human hands influences the way we see the world. The nineteenth century felt like a heavy weight to carry around in my head. The enormity of the changes taking place in North America demanded a synthesis of some kind, and I went looking for someone alive at the time who put it all together: bison near extinction, passenger pigeons decimated, rivers polluted with human and industrial waste, forests cut over throughout the Northeast and the Midwest, farmers rebelling on the Great Plains, railroads crossing the deserts, a financial panic and depression in 1893.

Who formulated all of this into a materialist portrait of the times? I expected to find it in political economy.

Political economy is not economics. It considers how a society organizes labor and resources, how it uses land and collects revenue from trade and taxes, the role of government policy in the creation of wealth. If anyone should have taken notice of scarcity and the destruction of natural capital, it should have been the political economists. But that is not what I found. Instead, they inhabited a happy fantasyland of their own creation, in which nature always met human needs. Some writers openly referred to Providence—the God-given sufficiency enjoyed by a virtuous people. Others assumed that since civil society required inexhaustible resources, those resources

must exist. Without infinite plenty to feed expansion and stave off a crisis of confidence, the story of progress told by most political economists makes no sense. When I looked for someone writing at the time who looked critically on this sunshiny world, there he was again.

I had arrived at the first volume of *Capital*, the book Marx completed in 1867, combining all his previous economic thought. To my amazement, he had read everything published in any language on political economy over the previous century. He encompassed the study, placing him in a stunning position to interpret it, and he hated almost all of it. His own voice sounds unlike any other at the time—rigorously lucid, unstintingly materialist. No Providence here, and no utopia. Instead, Marx developed a description and analysis of capitalism so arresting in its scope and depth that I felt as though I had discovered the Rosetta Stone of some lost language. I opened the book thinking that it would be as dense as Hegel; I found a writer determined to be understood by regular people. *Capital* reads like a nineteenth-century version of *Political Economy for Dummies*.

It begins with the commodity. People use things, and use gives things value. Think of your favorite pen or garden tool as having use value. But when people offer things for sale, they create exchange value. A commodity is anything with a use value that also has an exchange value. Marx asks this question: What kind of society is built around exchange value? What happens when the commodity becomes the generalized form of all products? Commodities circulate, and in circulating they get exchanged for the universal means of exchange: money. Marx defines capital—the center of his entire argument and the basis for the system that depends on it—as a specific kind of circulation, described in this way in Part 2, Chapter 4:

The simplest form of the circulation of commodities is C—M—C, the transformation of commodities into money, and the change of the money back again into commodities; or selling in order to buy. But alongside of this form we find another specifically different form:

M—C—M, the transformation of money into commodities, and the change of commodities back again into money; or buying in order to sell. Money that circulates in the latter manner is thereby transformed into, becomes capital, and is already potentially capital.

In the first formulation, both Cs are identical. A cobbler sells his shoes, uses the money to buy more leather, and goes home to make more shoes. Leather is leather. But in the second formulation, the two Ms do not equal each other. The second M contains the added surplus value of the transaction—the profit. The money generated by the sale of commodities is surplus value, and it remains surplus value until or unless it is used to generate more surplus value. Investment turns surplus value into capital. To paraphrase Forrest Gump, capital is as capital does. Passages like this one have the power of knocking the sleep from our eyes because they demystify.

Marx made capital visible and defined its unsettling imperatives. The holders of capital want it to earn as much surplus value as possible. They seek out fresh resources, more powerful machines, and new populations of workers and consumers. The pasture land near where I grew up produced more money in the form of new homes than it did by raising milk cows. Thus the building boom in southern California followed logically from the uses of capital. This simple calculation carried with it all sorts of implications—more roads, cars, and smog, along with a sprawling, homogenized landscape that required federal and local taxes to keep it viable. Marx made it possible to isolate capitalist thinking, to evaluate its claims and identify those who benefit and suffer. This is critical political economy—all the more relevant in a time when neoconservative economists dominate public discussion about markets and trade. They have become adept at relegating Marx to obscurity. If they can shut down the critique, they're one step closer to eliminating all reasoned opposition to their project. They brand Marx a utopian at the same time that they put forward what is perhaps the most radical plan for restructuring national sovereignty, human geography, and

economic institutions ever imagined.

In the meantime, I had begun to teach *Capital*. It became impossible for me to think about environmental change or to teach about it without a critical tool in hand. Students wanted more, and they told me so. Rather than keep my reading to myself, I brought it to the seminar table. I taught political economy and environmental history together in order to follow the money, trace the motives, and pick apart the human conventions that lay behind a more neutral voice I had often heard (including from myself) that called capitalism part of “change,” making it seem inevitable, or part of the natural order of things. Some students seemed nervous about the subject, so, taking a phrase from a poster I’d seen in a doctor’s office, I made the seminar a “safe space” to talk about capitalism. It worked. I had the most vocal supporters of Adam Smith picking apart the nature of the commodity and the circulation of capital. They wrote their papers in grand style, like the critical political economists they had become. They made me proud.

And yet Marx promoted a global utopia of his own. The terrible truth is that the same ideas I experienced as liberating stand accused of the most horrific tyranny of the twentieth century, including the murders of tens of millions of people: Stalin’s purges, the Cultural Revolution in China, the Cambodian genocide of Pol Pot, and Fidel Castro’s execution of thousands of his political opponents. Marx’s thought can be read as totalizing. His rigorous critique served as a process of elimination, winnowing away all competitors until his own view stood alone. Even the people who most influenced Marx, like Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach, eventually fell under the same sword, as he claimed to have superseded them, to have absorbed them into a more comprehensive system.

The totalizing quality of *Capital* and the Manifesto suggests a world unto itself, where Marx’s language describes Marx’s processes, leading to Marx’s outcomes in historical pageants defined by Marx. It’s not difficult to see how someone might decide to step inside the categories and view everything with their impeccable internal

logic. It explains the past, present, and future, gives each individual a place in the struggle, defines a way forward graced by inevitability, and applies to every place where those on the bottom confront their taskmasters at the top. The absolutism that seeps from the Manifesto leaves no space for reform or compromise; indeed, Marx rejects politics as fatally infected by the controlling interests of the bourgeoisie. Once in power, Lenin and Stalin shut down free speech, launched a war against all remnants of the old regime, and executed anyone who said a contrary word.

The way out of the utopian hellhole is to split the singularity of the author: There are two Marxes, not one. The distinction is actually rather common in discussions of Marx. Here is the political theorist John Gray on the question: “Marx perceived that capitalism is an economic system that unsettles every aspect of human life.... Far from being utopian, his account of capitalism is a vital corrective to the utopian visions that have distorted politics over the past generation. It is Marx’s vision of the alternative to capitalism that is utopian.” The revolutionary Marx is dead (or should be). The economic Marx lives on. Marx clearly meant his political economy to serve as the rationale for revolution and to inspire people to resist, but Stalin’s purges are no more written in *Capital* than the Crusades are written in the Gospels. We can take what we want and be aware of the contradictions, both in the philosophy we parse and in ourselves.

The subject opens other questions. Did he believe in freedom? Yes. He might have had an authoritarian personality, but I think he would have recoiled at Bolshevik oppression. Peter Singer, author of *Karl Marx: A Brief Introduction*, suggests that Marx would have been among the first of Stalin’s victims. He hated servility and sought to derive an economy in which no one would be subservient to anyone else. In communism, the state was to dissolve, not swell into a party-dominated, KGB-ridden leviathan. One of his most

important accomplishments was to extend a conception of freedom to the economy, arguing that political liberalism does not guarantee freedom from wage slavery.

What else did Marx get right? Surplus value and the valorization of labor. Walk into any big-box store. Look at the quantity of goods passing over the scanner and then consider the wages paid to the workers. At \$10 an hour, someone working the floor at Wal-Mart makes \$80 a day. A shopper walks in right after the doors open in the morning, takes a DVD player off the shelf, and buys it. In the time it takes to complete that transaction, Wal-Mart earns back the wage it pays to one of its employees in a day. For the rest of the day, all the value the worker earns is surplus value. This is not to say that the company has no other costs, but the worker has produced her wage with seven hours to go before punching out. Marx's observation holds true for any kind of work and helps us to understand the place of labor in the economy, why paying workers as little as possible is always the goal of capital, and why Wal-Mart is the world's largest company.

Beyond this, as Engels said over his friend's grave, Marx discovered "the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production." Marx realized that capital contained the need to constantly perpetuate itself, so that any piece of land purchased with surplus value must earn surplus value, so that the commodities it produces must be sold for surplus value in order to pay wages that both represent and earn surplus value. Capital has an incessant need to expand, to cover more space, new people, and fresh resources. No one thanked the political economist for revealing the inner workings of the system for everyone to see, and Engels referred to him without exaggeration as "the best-hated and most calumniated man of his time."

What did Marx get wrong? The universe does not exhibit rationality, and there is no discernible historical process. There is historical change, but Marx and Hegel believed that some force—spiritual

or social—actually forced or guided that change in a single, inevitable direction. Worse, Marx rejected two things that I cannot: politics and the market. Marx had little faith that any political system embedded in a capitalist society would ever result in equality or justice. Everyone can point to a travesty that gives us reason to doubt, but there are only lousy options. Democratic process is a compromise, exactly what Marx's utopianism could not tolerate. And while the market has swallowed almost every function, every commodity, and driven the environment to the breaking point, destroying it is not the solution. Markets existed long before capitalism and will exist long after. Markets simply express the human volition to dispose of property through exchange, and people have been doing that for a very long time. If markets define capitalism, then ancient Greeks and medieval Arab merchants would qualify. The creation of capital, and the social relations represented by wage work, land rent, and interest, define capitalism; so does investing in technology to increase scale and productivity.

Marx sought to abolish markets because he wanted to abolish private property, which he took as the ultimate source of capital. The problem is not markets but the overwhelming power we give them to organize human affairs. The market is a good slave but a bad master.

The same might be said of capital itself. Marx could not have known that a century on, the corporation would emerge as the most powerful institution on earth, given the authority to change the legal codes of sovereign states, to hold patents on forms of life, to control the resources of vast regions. Terminator seeds, which produce infertile plants, thus forcing farmers to purchase seeds rather than select them themselves, not only render food genomes private property, they weld farmers to centers of authority and scientific knowledge that farmers never needed before. Capital manipulates the working poor into thinking that they belong to corporate "families," when these workers have really entered experiments in social engineering intended to discourage them from unionizing for higher wages. Workers exchange their loneliness for a sense of belonging that is no

more a family than the moon is a lump of cheese. And yet, Marx also could not have predicted the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, or, for that matter, the Ford or Carnegie foundations. He could not have imagined that capital might be employed for human improvement and reform, or that capitalists like George Soros would endeavor to limit the operation of the free market on the grounds that it created vast inequality.

I learned something from Marx that no one else could have taught me: how to look at the material world and see social relationships, not just the phenomena of economic growth or suburban sprawl or a heap of trash in a landfill. I see these things as having political and social meaning, for both the people they serve and those who pay the price. The world does consist of classes. And though class might not be as rigid as Marx believed, many of the world's people are fated to die in the poverty they are born into. I try to see the meaning written in the ways humans make things, use things, and trade things, and I am trying to live without the market wherever possible. And though Marx rejected democratic institutions, what else can we do but work within them? The very ambiguity that he could not tolerate is the one we most need. Not all contradictions can be resolved, in history or in our own lives—something else that Marx, with all he got right, got wrong.

A Rare Thing Indeed

*A veteran New Haven
bookseller and the town she
calls home*

Eva Geertz

“People can’t really believe I’m from here.” I have spent my entire adult life saying that to myself. Nearly every dinner party I’ve ever attended; nearly every person I’ve ever met at any job I ever had; my internist; my hair cutter; almost everyone I’ve met while living here, has been surprised to learn that I grew up here. But for me the here is really here: New Haven, on York Street.

I know there are other people like me around here because I went to elementary and high school with a few people who are still around; our paths cross every few years. Do they constantly feel that they have to explain that they grew up here? I don’t know. Perhaps it doesn’t come up in their day-to-day existence the way it’s always come up in mine. But I know that I am constantly aware that the streets I walk on when I go to work are the same streets I toddled on in the early 1970s. The Clark’s Dairy where I splurge on milkshakes in the summertime is the same Clark’s Dairy where my father taught me to eat an ice cream cone around 1974. My brother was, at the time, at the Neighborhood Music School, attending his weekly guitar lesson. My brother has a good ear but no musical talent, and does not play any musical instruments as an adult, but learning how to eat an ice cream cone proved to be an invaluable and indelible experience for me, a skill that has stayed with me through the years.

There is a class of people like me who grew up in New Haven. It is a multi-faceted class, but one can make generalizations about it: our parents were people who came here from somewhere else (New York or perhaps Chicago?) to take a job at Yale or some other noble institution. They taught, or they made money, or they did Good Works, or they engaged in some combination of the three. Their children were raised to achieve, and trained to go to excellent colleges. After college, they were supposed to leave New Haven and move to a big city (New York; perhaps a renegade would have chosen Chicago) and do something important along the lines of

teaching, making money, or doing Good Works; ideally some combination of the three.

As a result of this upbringing, many of my peers are now distinguished and/or well-to-do something-or-others, and not in New Haven. There are some who are respected or distinguished something-or-others here, having come back to New Haven after completing their doctorate or their medical residency or something like that. I am sure that while their parents are glad they're around, they're also a little mystified: Why would you come back to New Haven once you'd *left*? The whole point of everything we did for you was, you were supposed to *leave*.

I came back to New Haven after college because I had no money to relocate to my city of choice (Chicago, natch). I didn't plan to come back, and it was supposed to be temporary. I took a bookstore job because it was the only job I was offered. My goal was to save money to relocate, but it's awfully hard to save money when you're earning five dollars an hour. New Haven was a much cheaper city then (it was 1993) but even so, I was barely getting by. I got fired from my bookstore job as soon as the winter-course book rush was over, and panicked because I had no idea what I would do next, but I got lucky. Another bookstore owner asked me to work for him: he owned a shop that specialized in out-of-print and rare books. He offered me better pay and better hours. I loved the store, and had been a customer since it first opened. I took the job, even though it meant staying in New Haven, thinking, "How often in life am I going to have the opportunity to work in a store like this? Life will be Skittles and beer."

Life was good for a few years. I lived cheaply and fairly comfortably, in a ratty, grad-student kind of way, and I learned snappy comebacks to the inevitable questions that pissed me off. Customers would unfailingly ask me, "So, what do you really do?" "Are you in grad school?" "Are you thinking about grad school?" "Have you ever considered going to grad school?"

I wasn't a grad student. I was a bookseller with a sub-specialty in the world of used, rare, and out-of-print books. I learned the trade and went to book fairs and had a really good time. I was becoming skilled at something, and it was nice: I was still in New Haven, but I had dug myself a little niche. It was slightly marginal, but I was presentable enough to pass as respectable. I had found my calling: I was a book person.

When I felt blue or frustrated, I re-read books by Laurie Colwin, who seemed to specialize in describing underachieving young women who just wanted to be left alone yet also wanted, simultaneously, to be appreciated for their quirks, their taste in rock music, and their generally bad attitude toward everyone else. I embraced a novel that fell into my hands by chance, Elinor Lipman's *The Way Men Act*, which is set in a college town and is narrated by a woman who returns to her hometown (it's based on Northampton, I believe) after doing a stint in California and finds herself constantly vexed by town-gown social stresses. These books appealed to me because they reflected some better version of myself back at me, or because they gave me a sense of hope for my own future, which seemed hazy and unpredictable. Lipman's heroine was a floral designer on Main Street; I was a bookseller on Audubon Street. I read these novels and told myself everything would be okay.

One day a rare book firm in Portland, Oregon, contacted me to offer me a chance to interview for a position. I was surprised and thrilled, and flew to Oregon to meet the owners and check out the city, which was becoming a trendy place to live. I spent a week out there hoping I'd fall in love with the place, but I didn't. I thought it was fine, but I didn't *like* it. Still, I figured I should go. I was in my mid-twenties, I had no romantic attachment keeping me in New Haven, and it was one of those How Often In Life Will This Happen? things. So I bought a one-way plane ticket and began to plan to have my things shipped west. Another surprise came when the owner of

the bookstore on Audubon made a very nice offer to keep me working for him.

I thought about it. Since I didn't really like Portland; since the money the Portland business had offered wasn't so astounding; and since moving is a pain in the ass, I felt a little sheepish, but I stayed in New Haven and kept my job on Audubon Street.

Shortly thereafter, rents skyrocketed in Portland, and shortly after that, I became involved with the young man I would eventually marry. I was infinitely grateful that I'd stayed in New Haven, and began to see that being here was really a great thing in ways I couldn't have anticipated in 1993. I felt that New Haven may have been unfashionable and uncool, but that in terms of bang for my buck, there wasn't another city where I'd rather live.

I had job I loved; a tiny, cheap one-bedroom apartment I adored; and a daily routine that I cherished. I lived alone, worked minimal hours, and lived basically on my own terms. Should I have given this up to move to a bigger city to try to make my name? Plenty of people move to the big city and slink out with their tail between their legs, deeply in debt, miserable, humiliated.

I stayed in New Haven. My time was my own. I wasn't beholden to anyone. I seemed to be happier than many of my peers.

As time marched on, the rare-book business changed, much as new-book bookselling changed. The store I had worked at for seven years was affected by the rise of the internet; I quit before I was let go. I looked for and found other jobs in rare books, but after a few years I found myself in the strange position of being offered the position of book buyer at Atticus, a linchpin for the literary community of New Haven for decades. I took the job at Atticus, though I explained to the owner that while I meant well, I wasn't truly qualified for the position, having focused on rare books for ten years. I wasn't sure that good intentions would be sufficient to equip me for the job. Still, given the opportunity, it was something I ought to do. My husband thought it would be a mistake not to take the job. I would be

contributing to the community, he pointed out, working at Atticus. I would be part of downtown street life again. I would help town and gown find neat things that they wouldn't know about otherwise. I would be part of the new guard of the New Haven bookselling community, since so much of the old guard was closing shop.

I felt a sense of mission in taking that job that I hadn't felt in a long time. And I suspected that being someone who'd grown up in New Haven—around the corner from Atticus—would truly be an asset, not just a parlor trick.

I didn't last very long at the store; taking the job had been a gamble and I realized it wasn't a very good fit. I quit after two years. But, it's funny: during those two years, I had familiar conversations over and over again. It was almost like being on Audubon Street again. No, I hadn't gone to Yale. No, no PhD. The difference was that, as the buyer for Atticus, I would go to dinner parties and always have people telling me what an incredibly cool job I had. (When I worked in rare books, people asked me what I did and then had no response.) And as the buyer at Atticus, no one asked me what I was in real life. In a way, I earned respect being the buyer at Atticus that I'd never previously enjoyed, but I still felt that I was hovering on the edges of too many communities without ever being part of any of them. I maintained my marginal status without trying.

I expanded my repertoire of snappy answers to cover new routine questions, such as "How can I get a book published?" I was often hounded to order a local author's book, which tested my diplomatic skills, of which I have famously few. I hold the fairly unpopular view that being a local author is not automatically sufficient reason for a bookstore to stock your book. Bookselling is hard enough these days and every ordering decision is complicated. The author's place of residence shouldn't be the only reason a book is carried by a store. I never got good at saying no, but I said it a lot. Bookselling in New Haven means saying no to a lot of local writers who may be able to write a book, even a good book, but do not understand

bookselling. I'm sure this is a problem in every college town, in any place where there's a bookstore, even. Whatever: It was a professional challenge I was happy to leave behind when I quit.

I suppose I could have left any of these jobs and entered a graduate program somewhere to try to improve my professional lot, to become qualified in something more than just recommending books to people. But academically, as well as professionally, I'm not an achiever; I'm not even particularly ambitious. Liking to read is not the same thing as liking to be a student. I was a rather mediocre student. I was not interested in sucking up to professors, perhaps because I'd grown up around them and didn't think they were particularly worth sucking up to.

Much as I am not professionally ambitious, I am not even a driven or ambitious reader. I read relatively crappy books and then re-read them, when a better person would be devouring Victorian novels or trying to wrap her brain around Milton. I don't read for self-improvement or for professional betterment. This may have been my downfall as the buyer for Atticus: I never really understood why someone would read with an agenda, rather than just reading for pleasure. I just can't relate to that way of thinking. I tried to cater to the many reading publics that live in New Haven—there are many more than you may realize—but in the end, I left retail bookselling.

I miss jobs where I could browse catalogues, chat with wonderfully batty customers, and leave at the end of the day exhausted but filled with stories—and now I do other stuff. But I still have no plans to go back to school, and I'm still in New Haven. I have not, as is sometimes said of me, worked in every bookstore in town. I never worked at Book World, or Whitlock's, or Elm City Books, or the Yale Co-Op, or the Foundry. But I did work at stores that had big windows at street level and they made me visible and part of New Haven in a way I wouldn't have been had I been more ambitious, gotten a library degree, and thrown myself into librarianship. I didn't achieve, but I did try, in my own perverse way, to do good for my hometown.

My willful New Haven adolescence turned into willful adulthood in New Haven. I never thought I'd be here at this stage of life, but here I am, married, a homeowner. I appreciate New Haven a lot more now than I did when I was eighteen, and I hold it to be an incredibly underrated city, particularly for the Northeast. Sometimes I'm pissed at myself for still living here, but most of the time I'm glad to be around town, glad to know New Haven the way I do, remembering now-defunct bookstores, cafes, restaurants, and clothing stores. There have to be some people here who grew up here, after all. If everyone's an import, a city loses its soul.

Not so long from now I'll be wandering around my neighborhood with a little one in a stroller. We'll probably stay in New Haven for a while yet; at least, my husband and I have no immediate plans to leave. Our child may well eat her first ice cream cone, which I hope will be chocolate chip, like mine, at Clark's Dairy. She'll be like me in some ways, I imagine, maybe she'll have my eyes or hands or whatever. But I'm pretty sure she'll take after me in this regard: she'll be *from here*, just like her mother.

Alma Mater Fight Song

*What if Yale had actually
said yes?*

Jonathan Kiefer

My mother died before I could determine whether she'd

plotted to keep me out of Yale. When I applied to transfer there from the perfectly fine university at which I'd spent my freshman year and realized I hadn't heard a reply, I asked her about it. "Oh yeah," she said. "They sent a letter a while ago; you didn't get in." It was as if she'd never have mentioned it had I not inquired. When I asked if I might have a look at that letter, she said she'd thrown it away.

That's going on fifteen years ago now, and it's still bothering me. I hadn't applied to Yale the first time around, partly because I'd grown up in Clinton, just a few towns away from New Haven, and I'd figured college should take me further afield. Mostly, though, it was because I didn't think there'd be any point. I didn't have what it took, nor any delusions to the contrary, either. I'd declared myself pretty clearly not Yale material. Plenty of folks from my high school were putting in for it, and these were flare-bright and promising and highly achieving people, palpably my betters.

Which in retrospect is why I'd have preferred to remain among them for another four years, instead of with the intellectually inert livestock that seemed so alarmingly common at my perfectly fine university. Those people did make me feel smart, it's true, but only until I suddenly felt dumb for somehow winding up surrounded by them. My petition for transfer was a tantrum of elitist impatience. And, in fact, it got me admitted to another Ivy League school. That letter came to me directly, and it did wonders for my sense of superiority to the livestock, if not for my perspective.

But the Yale situation remained a mystery. I began thinking maybe I'd actually been accepted. I began thinking maybe my own mother had lied to me, deliberately withholding what might have been the greatest opportunity of my life. I tried to understand why she might do that.

We'd never been able to decide or agree on the distances at which we preferred to keep each other. Thanks in part to her bipolar disorder, her marriage to my father collapsed when I was very young. She never remarried. She stayed alone in a series of apartments in Middletown and I moved with my two older brothers and my father to Clinton. Connecticut's heartland and its coast seemed so far apart to me in those days, and I took my parents' separation hard. Visiting my mother on weekends left me an emotional wreck, often bawling my way out of school on subsequent Monday mornings because I missed her so much. I don't remember getting over it.

One of my brothers went to Wesleyan. We could see his dorm from my mother's apartment windows. But he and she visited each other infrequently; they developed a kind of standoff that would last until her death. The other brother didn't go to college. He went to drugs, and to fraud, and to prison. By the time I'd gotten established at the prep school from which my betters would eventually be matriculating to Yale, my mother told me she didn't want to be a parent anymore. Maybe she didn't say those words. But I think she did, and I know she meant them.

I sympathized. All my life, I'd known her as a gentle, beleaguered soul. Even at her most frustratingly distant, even when obviously she was wracked by her illness, I could feel for her, and cherish her innocence. Real anger only comes when I think about that unseen, nearly unmentioned letter from Yale.

I stayed put at the perfectly fine university and got as perfectly fine an education there as I was willing to earn. I endured the livestock and in time even found a few betters from whom to glean profundities. I was incalculably enriched. The trustees were calculably enriched. I went on with my life.

My brother had me on the phone the day after my mother's stroke. He asked if I had her living will handy. To my surprise, I responded with deceit. I put the phone down and sat still for a minute; I was pretending to go retrieve the document from safekeeping while in fact I already had it right next to me on the couch. I discovered

that I was ashamed of my expectations.

Maybe my mother was ashamed of hers.

In insecure moments, regret pinches me like a fouled joint that forecasts incoming weather fronts. My mind goes back to wondering. What if I actually got in? I've confided this to girlfriends, who've found it unsettling. "You'd never have met me," they kindly say.

"Yeah," I think and sometimes say. "But Yale." Extraordinary people come and go from our lives no matter where we are.

As a journalist, I can imagine situations in which I'd need to verify somebody's academic history, including admission decisions of decades past. Whether or not that information would even be obtainable, I can see myself getting to the bottom of it with brevity and confidence. But what kind of a jackass calls an admission office after fifteen years to double-check on himself?

Mr. Kiefer?

Yes.

Thank you for holding. Okay, I have managed to track down your information here.

Oh, great.

Yeah. We turned you down. You were right.

Oh.

Pretty clearly not Yale material.

Um.

Oh, and one other thing.

What's that?

You're a terrible son.

So I haven't called.

The Connecticut coast and heartland seemed exquisitely close together when I returned there for her final days. We had no chance to communicate. I couldn't ask at last about Yale, nor ask forgiveness for having to ask.

Ten Poems

Lizzie Skurnick

But Wait, There's More

The spray of shiny spoons fanned in a circle.
The huddle of plastic bowls encircled

By concentric wrap; four more steaks.
Six more knives, a stake

Plunged in the moist center
Of flesh rotating in its concentric

Huddle, seared on the axis
Of its very being. Ask us

Anything. This knife can slice
Through a tin can; ice

Can stay frozen for up to 24 hours.
They'll be gone in an hour.

See, you will not melt inside.
You will be seared on both sides,

An audience who eats
While pre-heating,

Who bites further into flesh
Than is flesh

And wishes for sleep
While still dreaming. Asleep

At the wheel, hard tread of road
—Towards what? more endurable road?—

And the dark eclipse of screen
In the distance. As Seen

On stilled to ellipsis, pinprick suns,
Bright mouths open for every other sun.

Choose Your Preferences

The catch is that you can't.
Scrabbled down to bedrock
That sunblanched

Array—narcoleptic tree
Beside the dust-kicked barn,
Stiffened scrub-brush crabgrass

And the dusty paths, rusted
Shovel tangled in a line
That laps the bright horizon.

Against the sun, one antique user set
Forty miles from any living thing
In a backlit ring. And with its

Descant hum, information
Gathering, one bright cloud
Primed to thunder over.

Ghazal (Morning)

Have you ever been in bed
And wanted to go back to bed?

You could say a dog is a reason to get up every day—
What if I don't want to get up every day—

Or that there must be something in the paper
That will flood down the street like any other paper.

Have you ever been in bed
And wanted to go back to bed?

Ghazal (Afternoon)

Someone outlawed ice-cream trucks;
Now only the rumble of long-distance truckers.

Outside the streets are empty
And the air, sucker punched. Emptied.

Even the sun has a sound:
A dark whale sounding.

Viola or violin, live or radios played.
And the children. What else, playing.

Ghazal (Evening)

There is always someone shouting in the street
Or someone shouting in the street to be quiet.
Only a short time ago there was light, half-light—
Gone like a sponge plunged in water.

Now an aureole around the toilet's tank, the fridge,
The light and liqueur—love's dumb hum.

Love's companions, the shades. You could say
They go or I go, but no one is going anywhere.

Rake

Of course you wind up in a heap.
Don't mistake this for remove.
Love can be a parallel, a rack-
and-tine array with teeth
For every groove. It isn't cheap.
It's only earth. For whatever
That seems worth. As if leaves
Minded when they fell. That
To be seen is to be swept away.

Bill

Right away, you're old news:
a sheaf of past hungers and crimes
shoved under some pile. Tedious
illustration—some say accusation—
of long-ago trials. Illustrate for all

that you're worth: You might
as well detail the facts of my birth.
I prefer circulars, greasy-laid plans
that come off on your hands.
They lie, as I do, in particulars:
Something for sale in some aisle.
Where I went, who I saw, what
I tried: I'm not what's inside.
And still you arrive—you won't go—
So let's see. Let's see what I owe.

Ring

It's foolish to say I hear bells,
but I think that's the name,
"Bells." ("Bells 2"?) It was playing
the day I met you, informing
the world that you're mine,
you'll come when I call, your
heart lit to the ceiling, loopy
with feeling. A brilliant cut
snapped open, snapped shut
in full circle, trilling, you
want me to answer. I do.

Hi-Tech Hotel Valencia, Spain

Laptops in the lobby
And a spangle-steel

Frieze on an angle:
It is. Conceptual,

Your hotel. Intellectual.
I can't figure the knobs
In the shower or why
Cut-glass divide is a style.

I need doors. Privacy.
Performance anxiety,

You've said. The night-
stand has programmable light

For the bed. And four feet.
Dirty feet, spread on that white.

They

Is it better when they're on
the way or already know

what they're doing? One
thing's certain: They've

studied the problem.
They've got people

for this. Someone
is sure to be on

the way. Buzzing,
Omniscient they:

Hive that holds
the honeycomb—

Guileless cloud,
Predictive task.
An intent needle.
They've said that

they're coming, and
There you stand for the
step on the stair, the knock
and the cough and the silence.

Waiting to see who it is.

What Was Hers

Elizabeth Edelglass

“Give a shake,” Pop hollered, rattling the bathroom door to get Izzy out.

Eyes closed, Ruth was in bed with her new husband Al in one of their faraway enlisted-man rented rooms before he shipped out. Eyes open, she was home alone in her narrow twin less than ten feet from the commotion, Indian summer the only thing making her sweat.

She lingered over dressing—maybe Pop would get called out on an early plumbing job—checking stockings for holes, bending to straighten seams. When her last pair of nylons was shot, she’d have to settle for cotton stockings like so many girls at work, for the war effort. Ruth worked the early shift bent over a microscope at the lab where she’d met Al, who was somewhere in the Pacific now—his letters arrived with all the important words blacked out so they read like a child’s grammar lesson, fourth grade conjunctions—*if...and.... but....* Now her deskmate was Valerie, a short birdlike brunette whose knees didn’t reach the way Al’s had, his trousers skimming Ruth’s stockinged leg her very first day on the job. In a month they’d set a wedding date, never mind Ruth hadn’t yet asked his birthday or his middle name.

After Al enlisted in the Navy, preferring a hammock to a fox-hole, she traveled with him to his postings—from Jacksonville to Puget Sound—faraway places where people acted as if they’d never seen a Jew before. Now here she was back home in Newark, taking the bus downtown to the lab, giving piano lessons in the cramped living room after work, helping her mother peel potatoes or onions or apples for strudel, hand-writing weekly bills for her father’s plumbing customers, as if she’d never left.

Ruth stepped into the high-heeled pumps she’d taken to wearing lately. Every part of her was long and lanky, from her sallow face, with its random freckles that looked more like blemishes, to

her size-nine feet. Even at the wedding she'd worn flats with her Orbach's suit, thinking not to make Al self-conscious about being shorter. Then, on his last night before shipping out, he whispered in her ear, in the dark, that he'd fallen in love with her because of her height—how proud he felt to have a statuesque glamour girl on his arm. Statuesque, he said. Al, who never seemed much for words in the light of day. Glamour girl.

The kitchen telephone rang—a leaky sink somewhere, or a busted water heater—time for Ruth to open the bedroom door, her door at last. She'd grown up sleeping on the living room couch. Her brother Joe—younger, but a boy—had the bedroom until he went off to Virginia to become a doctor. Lucky Joe, who'd failed his army physical on discovery of a heart murmur, secret protection lurking all those years inside a strong man's chest. Now youngest brother Izzy had the couch, and Ruth had the bedroom with its solid hardwood door, her own, different, protection.

This morning it was her mother on the phone, not her father hollering at some customer to hold his horses. Ma, who never got calls, yet here she was nodding as if the person on the other end could see. When she hung up, she stood for a moment, still, then returned to her usual self, spitting into a skillet to see if it was hot enough to fry an egg.

Ruth's father was at the table bent over the *Forverts*. He read the Yiddish paper first, then local politics and obituaries in the *Star-Ledger*. "She has a head like a horse," Pop snorted, licking the tip of a pencil and circling something on the page—some new office construction in need of a plumber or a meeting of the brotherhood from his town in the old country. Black hairs curled at the back of his neck exposed above the U of his undershirt.

"Who?" Ruth asked. Only Izzy shrugged over his eggs. Izzy had proper freckles across his pale nose to match his boisterous red hair—an all-American boy with a strap of schoolbooks at his feet, except for the chopped-herring sandwich in his lunch sack. Then he unfolded from the table, six feet practically overnight and desperate

to finish high school before getting drafted.

“Meet me at the bank,” Pop said without looking up at Ruth. God forbid he should forget this was payday at the lab. Now that Ruth was living back home, he figured what was hers was his. She had to hike crosstown at lunchtime every other Monday so he could hand her check and deposit slip with his bankbook to one of the young tellers—Claire or Lucille, never matronly Mrs. DaRosa—and put out his hand for a few dollars back. Then he’d lick a blackened thumb to peel off a couple of bills for Ruth—coffee and bus fare.

Ruth grabbed her lunch Ma’d packed, applying lipstick on the fly, Izzy lumbering after. She’d pick up breakfast coffee and a nickel roll from the Italian deli near the plant.

“Who phoned?” she asked out on the street.

“Fanny, I guess,” Izzy said. Fanny was Ma’s unmarried cousin who worked in the garment district, powdered her face, and always added something unexpected to her black suits—pearl buttons, a snippet of gold braid. Schmattes, Pop called her getups, but they weren’t rags. Pop wouldn’t recognize style if it bit him.

“So early?” Ruth’s long legs kept easy pace with Izzy.

“Must be important.” From New York to Newark was long distance.

“It’s probably money,” Ruth said.

“It’s always money.” Izzy turned toward school as if heading into battle.

Ruth continued alone, her narrow skirt hugging her bottom the way Al’s hand might, nudging her uphill to the bus stop.

In her friend Millie’s kitchen after work, Ruth scanned the *Evening News* for word from the Pacific. At home she’d have to start with Europe, reading aloud to Ma, who never heard from her family in Russia anymore on account of the war. At Millie’s she could study the paper in peace while Millie’s mom fixed iced coffee and store-bought cookies. Millie’s mother was born American.

Tonight the headlines were all Italy. “It’s the other side of the

dateline over there,” Millie said. “Whatever you’re looking for hasn’t happened yet.” Millie was in personnel at the lab, had gotten Ruth the job working opposite Al after watching patiently for a vacancy at a two-man desk with a nice Jewish boy.

“It’s tomorrow there, not yesterday,” Ruth said. “Whatever’s happened happened, even if the paper doesn’t say so.”

“Never mind, honey,” Millie’s mom said. “We’re going shopping for Rosh Hashanah. Come, you’ll feel better.” Millie’s mother bought Millie a new dress for the holidays every year, thinking to catch a fella’s eye in shul, but Millie kept her eyes on her prayerbook, patting her hair to be sure her wig was on straight. Millie’d lost her real hair to some dermatologic disorder that only a few close girlfriends knew about. That’s why she gave Al to Ruth instead of keeping him for herself. Millie had secrets she wouldn’t share with any man.

“Her ma’s waiting,” Millie said. She understood about Pop and the bank and no money for a new dress.

First thing inside the door, before saying hello to Ma, who was gruffly massaging a chicken, Ruth riffled through the envelopes on the kitchen counter, looking for one of Al’s patchwork letters. If she found one, she’d climb into bed with it, alone, behind her locked door. Ma could beat the hell out of that chicken by herself.

Finding only bills, Ruth rolled up her sleeves and started peeling an onion for the cavity of the chicken. There’d be the root end of a carrot in there, too, and the leafy celery top nobody otherwise ate. Ruth did the onion first, to get the tears out of the way.

“Shah, Ruthie,” her mother said. “Tomorrow will come a letter.” She started in on another onion with her big kitchen knife, rapid-fire slicing and not a single tear nor a drop of blood shed.

Then Ma lit the gas, loaded the chicken into the oven with a final slap, and told Ruth about her cousin Fanny needing an abortion. She told it straight, no introduction or explanation, bent over dirty pots in the sink, so Ruth shouldn’t see her face during the telling.

“Who?” Ruth said. “How?”

“Who is a no-good married man she been seeing already for

years. And if you don't know how, I feel sorry for Al come the end of this war."

"You know what I mean, Ma. Fanny's too old." Fanny was older than Ma, the first to come to America, alone, the brave one as far as Ruth was concerned. She had Ma's nose and the same wrinkles around her eyes, Fanny's carefully concealed by pancake makeup.

"How old you think my mother was when my sister was born?" Ruth's mother had sisters back in Russia, one born after she and Pop left for America, the same age as Ruth. Ruth's mother and her mother had been pregnant at the same time. And now, with no letters from home, who knew?

Just then Lilly Smoltz arrived for her piano lesson, scrubbed the way her mama cleaned her up every week. Ruth sat next to her at the old upright, the one she used to practice on downstairs at Mrs. Malter's when she was a kid. When she got good enough to earn a few bucks, Pop and Mr. Malter carried the piano up with the brute strength of their arms and backs.

The living room was musty from Izzy's rumpled bedsheets and masculine underwear stuffed in a breakfront meant for china and knickknacks. Ruth wished for an electric fan like Millie had in her bedroom. Millie also had a big double bed in her room, even though she never expected to share it. Ruth hadn't ever pictured a double bed in what she thought of as Fanny's tiny downtown apartment. Fanny never invited the family to come to her; she came to the family, arriving from time to time off the bus, with her pocketbook and her packages.

As Lilly Smoltz stumbled over scales, the aroma of roasting chicken distracted Ruth. She considered the possibility of Fanny's swelling abdomen while her own flat belly rumbled with hunger.

Of course it was about money. Fanny needed money for the abortion. A doctor she had, if you could call it such—Fanny had New York friends with unexpected knowledge. But it cost a hundred dollars, Ma said. A hundred dollars, when a house call for the flu was less than a buck.

Ruth used to think of Fanny as rich, because she brought chocolates when she came to visit and bits of bright fabric stitched into clothes for Ruth's doll, also a gift from Fanny, a handmade rag doll that appeared out of Fanny's big pocketbook one long-ago happy birthday. But those were childhood ideas of rich. Ruth had long since understood that the doll clothes were fabric scraps smuggled out of the shop in Fanny's pocketbook, just like the fancy buttons and trim that kept changing the look of Fanny's same old black suit. And the chocolates? Maybe gifts from the long-time no goodnik.

At dinner that night, Ma asked Pop for money to buy Ruth a new mattress, something Ruth didn't know she needed.

"It's not right," her mother said, "a woman to sleep where a growing boy been. I know what Joey does on that mattress. Regular. Who you think changes the sheets?"

Izzy's face flushed red as his hair.

"Whadaya think, I'm made of money?" Pop retorted. Every extra nickel he was saving for Joe's tuition down in Virginia—fifteen hundred unimaginable dollars.

In the end, Pop reached into his pocket and peeled off three dollar bills for Ma to buy a brisket for the holidays. But he'd expect to eat that brisket on Wednesday night after shul.

Tuesday after work, while a pot of Rosh Hashanah soup

simmered on the stove, Ruth sat at the kitchen table with her mother making a list—how to raise a hundred dollars for Fanny:

1. Sell something. All Ma owned of value was a pair of earrings from Russia that she wore every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Golden in color, they were probably just brass, but the only thing left that her mother had once touched.

2. Ask Al's parents. Al had authorized the government to mail his paycheck to his parents, who earned pennies stitching bedsheets and undershorts in their basement tailor shop. Ruth could travel to Brooklyn to beg a few dollars, which some would say were rightfully

hers, but they needed the money to eat, Al claimed. He was a good and caring son. He would be a good husband.

3. Ask Millie. This was a real but horrifying possibility. Her parents had a little money from her father's liquor store, and her mother might understand, being born in America. But this was not something Ruth could talk to Millie about. She could talk about pimple creams and breath mints, but not about the one thing that was the rationale for such bodily improvements. Not about sex. Sex and its messy aftermath. Not with Millie, who she'd always thought would end up like Fanny. Alone.

It turned out to be a short list, too short. The family circle Ruth didn't bother to write down. That was Pop's family—his brothers and their wives that he'd once saved his nickels to bring over. Fanny was Ma's relative, and Pop would never ask the brothers for money to help her, just like he'd never brought the rest of Ma's family out of Europe when there was still a chance. If Pop didn't care about them, they didn't exist.

"We'll get from Papa," Ma announced nonetheless.

"He won't give, Ma. You tried."

"Then we don't ask."

"From his pockets? When you wash his pants?"

"Nah," her mother spat. "You think he got a hundred dollars in his pocket? Anyway, he holds onto those pants like glue. Even when he takes a bath, he puts them on the bathroom hook where he can keep an eye. The bank, that's another story. You know where he keeps that book with the money. You know them ladies."

"We can't," Ruth said. "Pop has to sign."

"So? You been signing his name all these years on the bills. And how much in that bank you earned? More than a hundred I bet." Ma removed her glasses to wipe on her apron, the better to focus on Ruth eye-to-eye, no wavery glass in between. "If we don't help, Fanny tries to do it herself," she said. "There are ways, you don't wanna know."

That night Ruth lay in bed listening to the sounds of the apartment quieting down—her father passing gas in the bathroom, Izzy’s jazz on the living room radio turned down low. She closed her eyes and touched her breasts the way Al would, trying not to think what would happen if there wasn’t enough money for Joe to stay down in Virginia, if he came back home to reclaim his bed, his door. A married woman shouldn’t have to sleep on the living room couch.

On Wednesday, Ruth left work early to help her mother with Rosh Hashanah. “I’ll cover for you,” Valerie said, “she’ll never miss you,” referring to old Miss Milgram, their boss, who took her power seriously with all the men gone to war. Valerie kicked off her shoes and stretched bare feet onto Ruth’s chair—she’d taken to drawing those fake seams up the back of her legs with eyebrow pencil, while Miss Milgram wore patriotic cotton hose that left her legs the color of overripe apricots. “I’ll say you’re in the bathroom with a bad case of the monthlies,” Valerie laughed. “She don’t remember woman problems. You coulda left at noon and she’d believe me!”

Pop and Izzy walked to shul for evening davening while Ruth and her mother set out dishes and wine glasses on Ma’s lace tablecloth and counted up how much money they’d scrounged together without resorting to anything illegal. Ruth had some piano lesson money that hadn’t already been spent and breakfast money from skipping her morning roll and coffee. Ma had saved a dollar on the brisket by buying second cut, although Pop would curse the butcher for fatty meat. There was a sugar bowl in the kitchen where Ma kept coins rescued from the couch cushions and occasionally from the washing machine if Pop was careless, and a small loan could be obtained from Millie ostensibly for Ruth to make one of those phonograph recordings they’d been discussing to mail overseas to Al. Millie would want to come along to make the record, but Ruth could say it would be personal, and Millie’d assume she was going to talk dirty.

They figured they could come up with eighteen dollars, maybe nineteen if Pop lay down on the couch for a nap after shul tomorrow. You weren't supposed to carry money in your pockets on the holidays, but that never stopped Pop.

At supper, Pop sure enough cursed the gristly brisket. Ma took away his plate and brought more soup with a gizzard and heart that nobody else cared to eat. He lifted the bowl to his lips for the last slurp, then went off to bed exhausted from a hard day of plumbing and praying, while Ruth's mother stayed in the kitchen to grind up the leftover meat for stuffing inside a knish.

They spent the next day in shul, Pop and Izzy in the sanctuary and Ruth with her mother up in the women's balcony. "They should switch places with us," Ruth commented, peering down at the motley group of aging men and boys left home from the war. "There are more of us." The balcony was crowded with robust women and fatherless children past a certain age—hardly anyone home to make babies nowadays.

"You should live so long," Ruth's mother said, patting her hand. Ma wore a drab brown dress and hat along with her mother's earrings, golden light dancing off her earlobes when she bent her head, not in prayer but in quiet communion with someone's three-year-old clambering back and forth across the row of old ladies' laced-up feet. Her prayer book remained unopened on her lap.

This was Ruth's second Rosh Hashanah as a married lady. Last year in Jacksonville, when Al couldn't get off base for the holiday, Ruth secretly lazed in her room listening to the radio. She didn't know if Al would be down there right now chanting under a prayer shawl, or would he be gabbing on the sidelines like Pop, shaking hands and swapping stories? Would he pray for her if she told him about theft and abortion? Would she tell him?

A young mother with a plump baby sat next to Ruth and leaned over the railing to make sly eye contact with her husband down below, peeking from beneath his prayer shawl, pale and myopic. What

illness kept him home from the war, allowing him to create this baby reaching gluttonously for the breast?

Ruth and her mother left shul early to get a meal on the table. “So,” Ma said. “OK for Monday, you and me?”

“I don’t know, Ma,” Ruth said. She knew her mother meant the plan to go to the bank for Pop’s money. Ma’s plan.

“What’s not to know?” her mother said matter-of-factly. “Fanny needs.” She paused. “And Fanny, we can help.” Ruth suspected Ma was thinking of the rest of her family back in Europe. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Ruth walked to shul with Pop and Izzy, while Ma stayed home. Ma didn’t believe in prayer, said it had never served her well.

On Sunday morning Pop got called out early—an Italian lady with a leak under the sink, a flood in her kitchen, and Sunday dinner to get on the table before her family got home from church. Ruth could hear the hysterical pitch of her voice from the receiver at Pop’s ear, an accented jumble of vowels and the occasional hard-spat consonant. Pop tried to explain about turning off the valve, but between his English and hers, forget it. He dragged Izzy out of bed to help, even though he always said Izzy was useless on a plumbing job, not like Joe, who could bend pipe with his bare hands.

While they were out was a good time for Ma and Ruth to look for the bankbook.

“You show me where,” Ma said. “I take. You don’t even gotta touch.”

“His brown workpants. The ones he wore last payday,” Ruth said.

But last week’s workpants were already washed and back in the closet, neatly ironed by Ma, pockets empty. Ma felt under his side of the mattress, used a hairpin to pick open the box where he kept his burial insurance and secret Masonic papers.

When they came home for lunch, Ruth sneaked out to the truck to check the hidden compartment of Pop’s toolbox, underneath

the ratchet wrenches, while Ma kept him busy with gefilte fish and boiled eggs and questions about the Italian lady. How many children? A healthy meal, she feeds them? She and Pop hadn't had such a lengthy conversation since God knows when, but the bankbook was nowhere to be found.

After lunch, Pop hoisted himself from the table and actually pecked Ma on the cheek before leaving with a handful of phone messages. Izzy had sidled off to the toilet, but Pop rattled the bathroom door, demanding he get his tuchis back in the truck or else.

"Must be in the pants he's wearing," Ruth said later, as Ma washed and she dried.

"I will get tonight, after you and Izzy are asleep. When he washes up in the bathroom."

"You said he takes his pants into the bathroom."

"Not always." Ma crossed her arms, waiting for the kettle to whistle.

Pop was tired that night. He'd wrenched his back pulling out a cracked toilet and sat with a hot-water bottle after supper, counting his day's earnings, smoothing a few dollar bills, sorting nickels and dimes and hand-written IOUs. When a coin rolled under the stove, he knelt on the floor with a wooden ruler, poking and cursing until it danced back out, even though it turned out to be just a penny. Then he pushed himself up and went off to bed looking stooped and old.

But Ma was as good as her word. Later, Ruth heard a few moments of creaking bedsprings and feral grunting coming from her parents' bedroom, followed by the sound of water running and Pop whistling in the bathroom. She tried not to imagine her father naked at the sink, stretching and soaping his flaccid penis, scrubbing away all musky traces of her mother.

Once again Ruth skipped Monday lunch, even though it wasn't payday, this time to meet Ma at the bank. Ma insisted on coming, leaving the brisket knish in a warm oven for Pop's midday meal, along with a story about going to the women's doctor—something

about bleeding, he wouldn't want to hear more.

Ruth found Ma out front in the noontime sun, in her brown shul dress and hat, and guided her into the cool interior, to one of the high desks with deposit and withdrawal slips in neat cubbyholes. Ma unclasped her pocketbook and handed over the bankbook, still warm from where the pocketbook had been clutched against her chest. The paper was soft and worn, with just a hint of the aroma of Pop's spittle from licking his finger to page through, assessing his worth.

Ruth turned to the latest balance: \$1,053.69. Not enough for Joe's tuition. Ruth imagined Pop calculating how many dollars he'd get paid at the end of each job, if he got paid, keeping a mental tally against the payment deadline for Joe. Ruth could withdraw the eighty-two dollars she and Ma needed to make a hundred for Fanny, or she could withdraw eighty-two cents—either way, Pop would surely notice.

Ruth dipped a pen into the inkwell and wrote EIGHTY-TWO DOLLARS on a withdrawal slip. At the x, she dipped again and signed Pop's name. Moe Robin. She blotted, trying to act casual. Was the M too rounded, in a feminine way? Had she added the right flourish at the end of Robin, the way Pop drew it out to a final dot of confirmation? She could tear this one up and try again, but that might attract more attention than a slightly imperfect signature during the lunch-hour rush. But where was the lunch-hour rush? The one day Ruth needed a crowd, the bank seemed unusually empty.

"Stay here," Ruth whispered, placing a firm hand on Ma's forearm. She would be conspicuous enough in front of the teller without Ma by her side. Ruth considered the tellers, Claire and Lucille, with several patrons each in their lines, and old Mrs. DaRosa helping a lady in white gloves with nobody else waiting. Mrs. DaRosa wouldn't be so familiar with Pop's signature, and the shortest line would make for the quickest getaway.

Ruth positioned herself at Mrs. DaRosa's station while the old teller's schoolteacherly voice instructed the white-gloved lady on

the intricacies of writing a check. Mrs. DaRosa was an anomaly. Teller jobs were usually reserved for the young girls, the Claires and Lucilles who dropped out of high school, wore makeup, and stood in the alley out back on break smoking and snapping gum and talking about boys. Mrs. DaRosa had married young before her husband shipped out to the first war where he died, so they said, and she'd been at the bank ever since. Ruth imagined her black oxfords planted firmly behind the first window on the left, glasses dangling from their chain over her black-clothed bosom all these years, as if she'd been farsighted back in the twelfth grade.

Claire's and Lucille's lines dwindled as Mrs. DaRosa patiently walked the white-gloved lady through check writing once again, but Ruth stood her ground. It was at this very window that Mrs. DaRosa had typed the forms when Pop brought eleven-year-old Ruth to open her first dime-a-week savings account. She'd been tall for her age, bony and flat-chested despite the pangs of her first menstruation, red-faced that her mother had told Pop. But he'd been surprisingly proud, not shaming, gifting her a silver dollar and bringing her to make her first deposit. While Mrs. DaRosa had lifted her glasses to her nose for typing, Ruth had stared at that year's pointy-breasted girls behind the other windows and wondered if they were staring back, knowing her secret.

Suddenly, Ruth was face to face with Mrs. DaRosa, handing over the withdrawal slip with Pop's bankbook. Mrs. DaRosa lifted watery eyes to gaze at Ruth over her glasses. Once, Ruth was sure she'd seen Mrs. DaRosa cluck disapprovingly when, in a hurry to repair a burst boiler, Pop had let her handle his deposit of Ruth's paycheck into his account. Now the old lady held the bankbook in one hand and the withdrawal slip in the other while her eyes perused the cavernous space of the bank, past the uniformed guard at the front door, past Ma standing alone in some unanchored middle space, then up and down Ruth's very body, coming to rest in the vague vicinity of her midsection. Then she briskly stamped the withdrawal slip and counted out the bills onto the counter.

“Next,” she called. She was already glancing past Ruth.

Ma had sex again with Pop that night. When Ruth heard him whistling and washing in the bathroom, she knew Ma was returning the bankbook to his pocket. He’d spent the day on a big job running pipes for a restaurant, and then the customer had stiffed him, said come back tomorrow for your money—a blessing in disguise because it meant he hadn’t headed straight for the bank, reaching for his missing bankbook.

The blessing didn’t last. When Ruth came home from work on Tuesday she found Ma in the kitchen stirring cut-up chicken and potatoes for Pop’s favorite stew, usually a good night. But Pop stormed home wild about his missing eighty-two dollars, pointing to the dated withdrawal in the bankbook, hollering Ma was a thief, threatening to call the police—and this the time of year, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when he was supposed to be asking forgiveness.

Tall Ruth felt small next to Ma, who drew back her shoulders and faced Pop with a stare of bewildered innocence. He raged and tore apart the apartment, slamming drawers and snatching sofa cushions, then back into the kitchen, his anger puffing his chest, filling the room. When he approached Ma with a raised hand, she flicked her own thin fingers, motioning Ruth to her room like a child. But Ruth had never been that child with a room to hide in whenever Pop was angry at she-never-knew-what. So she stayed beside Ma, the thrum of her breath countering the roar of Pop’s fury.

“Come,” Ma taunted, spreading her arms, palms up to heaven. “You think I got it on me? Have a look.” And she unbuttoned her blouse, right there in the kitchen, yanked up the cotton underwaist, revealing a white flash of belly unused to the light of day. No bills fell out, no cash on the kitchen floor. Ma had hidden the money safely, even Ruth didn’t know where. She tried to imagine a place Pop wouldn’t look—the dirty laundry hamper? the drawer where Ma kept her monthly rags?

Pop advanced, raised hand looming, big as a frying pan, then starting to fall. But not at Ma's face. There on the counter lay the knife Ma had used to dismember the chicken, its sharp blade glistening pink from fat and bits of sinew. Ruth's mind flew, measuring the distance between each of them and the knife, who'd reach it first, Pop or Ma or could it be herself? Even Pop's hand seemed to pause while she imagined, the kitchen suddenly quiet as if everyone had stopped breathing.

Then the door flew open and Izzy stumbled in, full of excuses, studying late at the library or so he said, banging the door shut with a jolt that Ruth felt from her heels to her hair. Pop must have felt it too. His hand moved again, grabbing not the knife but the nearby wooden spoon, flinging it across the room, spraying hot brown gravy over the floor and part of the wall, barely missing Izzy's pale face as he ducked.

"Cover yourself," Pop snarled, waiting for Ma to pull her blouse over her breasts before marching to the sink to wash for dinner.

Ma wiped up the gravy and served the stew like it was an ordinary night, Pop tearing apart a chicken leg, all the while carrying on that he was poor now.

"As if you wasn't before," Ma muttered.

Pop threatened he'd have to send for Joe to come home.

"Why he needs to go so far anyway?" Ma said, "with his heart murder."

"Heart murmur," Pop sneered, "and it don't stop him, strong like ox."

"Murmur, shmurmur," Ma said. "You don't got enough money anyway." She'd seen the balance. She knew how much medical school cost.

"Whadayou know?" Pop said. "I make."

"So now you make a little more." She plopped another chicken leg onto his plate.

Ruth took the train to New York the Sunday after Yom

Kippur, alone. Ma never went into the city. She met up with Fanny at Schrafft's, Fanny's favorite. Fanny liked a nice meal of chicken à la king served by a waitress. When Ruth arrived, she was already seated, sipping hot tea, wearing a black hat edged with some kind of fringe set aslant over a cap of dark finger curls. A pair of white gloves lay across her pocketbook. She was short like Ma, with the same plump bosom resting amiably on the table. She didn't get up, so Ruth couldn't see what was happening down below—her belly already straining the buttons of her skirt?

"She'll have ice cream," Fanny told the waitress she'd summoned with a crook of her finger. "Hot fudge, yes? For me, enough with the tea."

Ruth waited until the dripping plate of ice cream appeared in front of her before handing over the money, folded discreetly into one of Pop's billing envelopes rubber stamped MOE ROBIN PLUMBING AND HEATING. She laid it on the white tablecloth between them without touching hands. Something about this exchange made her feel closer to Fanny despite their age difference, like equals, united in shared female business.

Two ladies nibbling cream-cheese sandwiches at the next table gazed sideways as Ruth lifted her hand from the envelope. The restaurant hummed with female voices, the occasional portly older gentleman caught out on a Sunday walk with his wife looking large and out-of-place. In the far corner was a soldier in uniform, a pretty girl at his side—all his limbs intact? Ruth tried not to stare.

"Who is he?" Ruth dared to ask, leaning closer. Fanny smelled of talcum powder and rose water and just the slightest hint of sweat. "How did you meet?"

"A businessman," Fanny said, pouring tea from a china pot. "Very nice suit. Used to ride my streetcar, only he got off more uptown, a nicer neighborhood. One day ... stayed on."

"And the baby? What does he say about the baby?"

Fanny set down her teacup and removed her eyeglasses, peer-

ing at Ruth with deep-set eyes. "Ruthaleh, Ruthaleh," she said. "Some things you can't tell a fella. You should know, a married lady."

Fanny dabbed at her face with her napkin, her black brow in stark contrast to white-powdered cheeks. "So, whadaya hear from Al?" she said at last, setting her glasses back on her nose, staring at Ruth's ice cream without reaching for a taste.

"Not enough," Ruth said, her stomach clenching around the sudden cold. "Every few weeks a letter like a crossword puzzle, half the squares blacked out."

"Men, all talk or none," Fanny said, lifting her face with a crooked smile. "And us, never satisfied. But Al's okay, I guarantee, just too busy to write. Mine, on the other hand, such a talker, every other day saying he gonna leave his wife."

"What if this time he means it?" Ruth glimpsed the envelope on the tabletop between them.

"If ... if ..." Fanny reapplied her lipstick right there at the table, a deep red the color of Shabbos wine. "If my grandmother had a beard, she'd be my grandfather." When she returned the lipstick to her pocketbook, she slid the envelope off the table and snapped it shut inside as well.

"Tell your Mama I will pay back," she said. "Me, she can trust." Then she slipped her hands into her gloves, finger by finger, working the supple white cloth, only slightly soiled, over each knuckle, palm, and wrist. When she rose to leave, she didn't look pregnant, just voluptuous in the breasts and in the hips, standing so erect that Ruth found herself sitting up straighter. The ladies at the next table glanced across briefly. But the few older gentlemen in white collars and ties turned to stare as Fanny passed, waiting until the heavy plate glass door slammed shut behind her before turning back to their food and their wives.

He Is the Eggman

The past and future of scientific cooking

Nicholas Day

Kitchen Mysteries

By Hervé This

Columbia University Press, 2007

Molecular Gastronomy

By Hervé This

Columbia University Press, 2005

Food: A History of Taste

Edited by Paul Freedman

University of California Press, 2007

Hervé This makes a really good hard-boiled egg. He doesn't cook it for ten minutes in boiling water; he doesn't start by putting it in cold water, either. Instead, he places the egg in an oven that's exactly 149 degrees Fahrenheit for an hour, or a few hours, or overnight. The resulting egg is supposedly soft, fragile, tender—extraordinary. A Celsius degree higher and the yolk is firmer but pliable. A French chemist, This discovered that the amount of time you cook an egg doesn't matter much.

What matters is the temperature: At 154 degrees, the yolk proteins coagulate; at 184 degrees, the egg white firms up. Which is why boiling an egg—nudging it ever closer to 212 degrees—is a bad idea.

Molecular gastronomy is basically the field of figuring out exactly what's happening inside an egg yolk; Monsieur This is the grandfather of the field. The discipline occupies the space between home cooking and industrial food science, but its discoveries have made molecular gastronomy into, if not a cuisine, a style. It's the approach that inspires—to pick a weird-science chef at random—Homaro Cantu at Moto in Chicago when he cooks with a surgical laser or serves images of food printed on edible paper rather than the food itself. With several books translated into English, including the recent *Kitchen Mysteries*, This, who is something of a showman, has become molecular gastronomy's popularizer.

If you can popularize an approach, that is, that results in sentences like these:

When a green vegetable is heated, some of its cells burst, releasing various organic acids. The hydrogen ions of these acids react with chlorophyll molecules (which contribute to the green color of green vegetables) because these molecules contain a large square chemical pattern, the porphyrin group, at the center of which is a magnesium atom.

Apparently, people get awfully excited about magnesium atoms: Both of This's recent books have been highly successful, receiving lots of adjectives in the glossy food world. *Kitchen Mysteries* took off so fast that the publisher briefly ran out of copies. It has received up-front placement in bookstores, often alongside the just-out *Food: A History of Taste*, a collection of academic writings on the historical role of taste. A decade ago, both books would have been shelved somewhere more obscure; the current interest in food hasn't stopped at eating it.

Hervé This's success isn't a total surprise. Food-science books have been around for years—Harold McGee's monumental *On Food and Cooking* established the genre a quarter-century ago. In fact, as scientists have accumulated more and more technical knowledge about cooking, many cooking books have successfully turned from competence (how to roast a chicken) to curiosity (how a chicken roasts): see Russ Parsons's *How to Read a French Fry*, Shirley Corriher's *Cookwise*, Robert Wolke's *What Einstein Told His Cook*. The trend is partly ironic, because over the same period almost everyone agrees that Americans have lost elementary cooking skills and knowledge. These days the real question isn't how the protein structure in a soufflé functions. It's not even how best to make a soufflé. It's, well, what's a soufflé?

What distinguishes This from other kitchen-science writers is his supreme impracticality. (Note the how-the-hell-do-I-do-this technique for a perfect hard-boiled egg.) McGee, who wrote *On Food and Cooking* after finishing a doctoral thesis on Keats and (metaphysical) taste, published a very technical book that somehow always stayed close to the counter. Parsons and Corriher wrote about science explicitly to clue in the clueless cook. But Hervé This is different; he's the hyperactive party guest who won't let you blow out the candles until you understand why carbon dioxide smothers the flames. Cake? Who cares about the cake?

An example: In a chapter in *Kitchen Mysteries* on tenderizing meat, he describes an experiment by a late colleague who injected

fresh pineapple juice, using a hypodermic syringe, into half of a pork roast. After roasting, the untreated roast pork was normal, but the treated half “was almost reduced to puree. Naturally, the meat had a distinct pineapple taste, but isn’t there a recipe for pork with pineapple?” The experiment’s point is that the powerful enzymes in pineapple juice can tear apart meat proteins. But the tossed-off “naturally, the meat had a distinct pineapple taste” offers the definitive argument for why our man is not the ideal person to be giving cooking advice.

Kitchen Mysteries has a lot that’s fascinating: why fat has flavor; how to tell an unpeeled raw egg from a cooked egg; why to add vinegar to water for poaching eggs. (There’s a lot on eggs.) But the book is also a lurching, almost free-associative tour: An interesting partial explanation of tea’s continuing popularity in Britain—adding milk before boiling water eliminates the bitterness of tea leaves—is followed by a few paragraphs on why tea spouts drip so much. (His not-entirely-practical advice: Pour before purchasing.) An examination of pectin never addresses the key jam-making question—the taste differences between packaged pectin and fruit-derived pectin—and includes this official, empirically verified insight: “The quality of the jam depended heavily on the quality of the fruit used in it.”

Mind you, there’s something satisfyingly quixotic about a man whose list of unanswered questions, which make up the final section of *Kitchen Mysteries*, includes: “Is it true that a suckling pig served at the table must have its head cut off immediately, or its skin will not be tender?” And it is pleasing to know, in the way that having caricatures confirmed often is, that there is a laboratory at the prestigious Collège de France that looks like a pantry, stocked with butter, flour, and eggs.

To an almost comical degree, Hervé This is the stereotypical man of science. In *Molecular Gastronomy*, he writes, horrified, “We cook today the way people cooked in the Middle Ages, content to mechanically execute fixed recipes—this at a time when space probes are being sent to Mars.” (It’s a sentence custom-built for parody:

“We still put on our pants one leg at a time—this at a time when...” To eliminate (to expunge!) inefficiencies, the author has collected twenty-five thousand culinary precisions—instructions, maxims, old wives’ tales from cookbooks—and he’s determined to empirically test them all. As This has written elsewhere, “Without more knowledge, culinary books cannot be regarded as reliable.” They must be purified of falsehoods! Here we have a technocratic cuisine: Food must be solved. His books are the exaggerated endpoint of the kitchen-science genre. The only thing left is for the flavor laboratories on the New Jersey Turnpike to publish their patented chemical formulas.

The current high-pitched interest in food has brought new attention not just to the intricacies of food science but to the intricacies of food history. You can see it in the popular rise of *Gastronomica*, a sexy but inarguably academic journal that is now sold in the checkout line at Whole Foods. University publishers like Columbia and California are trumpeting their now-mainstream food books, cultural histories of everything from pasta to Camembert.

Among the best of the recent work is *Food: A History of Taste*, a collection of essays about what people have wanted to eat, and occasionally eaten, from prehistory to Hervé This. Edited by Yale professor Paul Freedman, who argues in the first chapter for the importance of taste as a tool for looking at social history, *Food* is illustrated as lavishly as many art monographs. (Freedman also provides superbly dry captions, such as, “This meal in a bathhouse/brothel from a German manuscript of about 1470 is allegorical rather than an accurate portrayal of ordinary medieval dining habits.”)

A few chapters are dull, but the finest are outstanding, including essays on imperial China, documenting the cosmopolitan restaurant scene in the capital of the Song Dynasty (a contemporary reminiscence reads like a post on Chowhound), and the birth of medieval Islamic cuisine. “Muhammad,” we learn in the latter, “was a man who enjoyed what might be considered good, honest, country cooking, or at least the Arabian Desert version.” (But he didn’t go for

roasted lizard. Asked whether it was *haram*, the Prophet reportedly said, “No, I just don’t like it.”)

If contemporary food culture seems to have entered a late-Baroque period—see the use of hypodermic syringes—it is something of a consolation to read about dining in ninth- and tenth-century Baghdad, when “dozens of cookery books and specialized culinary tomes” were in wide circulation and a respectable guest “was expected to know a bewildering variety of topics related to dining, from which wines went with which dishes, to how to stack desserts in an eye-pleasing manner, to the latest culinary innovations in spices, to famous poems suitable for recital during dinner.”

No word, however, on their recommended cooking temperature for eggs.

How to Win Her Love

An expurgated excerpt

Rudolph Delson

Introduction

To adore and be adored by a woman—a woman whose whole body you crave and whose whole spirit you admire—is bliss. And this bliss can easily be yours! You need only have indomitable courage, a comprehending soul, and noble hilarity—virtues that are the ultimate subjects of this short and edifying book. More immediately, this book will also tell you:

- The spirit in which to begin to love;
- How to care for yourself in order to be irresistible to women;
- Where to find the woman you want;
- How to approach her; and
- What to say and do that you may earn and keep her affection forever.

Along the way, you will learn everything you need to know about your duties and pleasures as a lover. Come, and, whoever she is you desire, I will tell you how to win her love.

I. How to Begin, in General

First, concentrate on love. For example, if you are a lawyer or a cowboy, do not speed straight from the courthouse or the cattle ring to a date with your lover. You will sue her, or herd her, and it is unlikely that she will love you for it, or love you as much as you deserve to be loved. Your only vocation when you are with her should be pleasure, and in particular her pleasure—but your pleasure as well, as you can only make her happy if you are happy yourself.

An encyclopedia of love would include entries on: fumigation, where to have sex when your apartment is undergoing; hair, inno-

vative terms of appreciation for brown; inner tubing, how to catch up to gorgeous girls who sweep past you while; jealousy, combat-ing; Sunday, the perilous nature of second dates on; wrestling, how rough you should be while; et cetera. The point is, these are the terms you should organize your thoughts around when you think about her, as opposed to legal or livestock terms.

Prayer is not going to do you much good in love, but if it will clear your head and make you more of a joy to be around, then, by all means, pray for her love every time you see her. Pray that you can be as abundant, enticing, and ripe with tart sugar as a cluster of Concord grapes. Pray that she will cry out: “Enough, you wonderful man! Put down that damned cluster of grapes and kiss me!”

Remember that you are a lover, and most likely a fine one, as you are reading this book. Remember that, in love, you are the only one who can make efforts on your own behalf (and if you do not know the story of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, you should). And remember that, in general, the proper attitude is playful.

How to Begin If You Have Never Had a Lover

Perhaps you have never had a lover before. Well, be glad! Your luck is about to change! A few words:

First, be patient. She wants you to fondle her; you have waited this long to fondle someone; you can wait another week, or another two weeks, if it will make her love you more. [Advice concerning heavy petting expurgated by the *New Haven Review*.] However, if she makes you wait more than about a month to do something simple like put your hand down her pants—maybe she is not the girl for you. You should never settle for any woman who is not enthusiastic to have you touch her everywhere.

Second, do not worry if you feel like “vagina” is an awkward word to say. In fact, few people like the way it sounds. Unfortunately, there are few alternatives. P----? C----? Just do your best.

Third, give her constant pleasure. But temper your eagerness

for bringing her pleasure and for being in her presence with deference to her moods and with absence from her life.

Finally, do not be nervous, or if you are nervous, do not speak of it overly. Nerves pass quickly, but so do girls who are tired of soothing a nervous boy. Her feelings and desires are as important as yours—more important than yours, in fact, because they are harder to recover if they are lost—and so you must never make her feel that you are pursuing your own desires rather than hers. [Further insights concerning heavy petting expurgated by the *New Haven Review*.]

But relish everything you do for the first time as though you were also doing it for the last, and your girl will be moved deeply. Tell her, your first lover: “I’ve never really done this before, I’m so happy it’s with you, I’ll smile on this memory broadly in my dotage!” She will be flattered and will kiss you passionately.

How to Begin If You Have Had a Lover Before, But It Has Been a Long Time

Odor and good cheer are matters of high importance for the bachelor of long standing. Neither you nor your apartment should smell abandoned or desperate. Never keep tissue paper within reach of your bed, even if it means that you have to walk over the icy floorboards at six in the morning to blow your nose—or whatever it is you want other people to imagine you do with those bedside tissues. [Obscene wisdom concerning cleanliness and masturbation expurgated by the *New Haven Review*.] I mean this both in the particular, and as a metaphor. No woman wants to bear the burden of making you happy, and if a woman senses that you are abandoned or desperate, she will not fall in love with you. People like happy people, and it is your duty to yourself to be happy.

The best way to be happy, even when you do not have a lover, is to pursue—with tenacity and glee—commerce, politics, art, agriculture, mineral extraction, timber extraction, celebrity, or whatever

it is that you most respect in worldly accomplishment. Religion can also be a good thing to pursue, but do not mix politics with religion, as that is anathema to love. Ideology in general is anathema to love. Love thrives on expediency, pragmatism, and compromise, not on philosophy, values, or principle. There is a reason that Walt Whitman is sexier than Ezra Pound, and it has nothing to do with the beards.

But when pursuing these worldly vocations, you must keep your heart pure, so that when a good prospect arrives, you will be ready, and she will know it. Therefore, you should never shout in anger, never spread malicious half-truths, never betray your friends, and always look for opportunities for everyone you know to become rich simultaneously. Do not repeat jokes you heard on television; rather, invent a sense of humor that is exclusively your own. If you can afford it, buy some land in the country, clear it of invasive thistles (for exercise) and plant it with native trees (for shade). Dress better than you need to when you go to the photocopier's. Read poetry in translation on the roof of your home in the autumn, when it is windy. The point is, take the high road, and, if necessary, take antidepressants, too. Never forget that love awaits you on every public bus, on every subway, in every airplane. You should be ready to cast everything aside, your most valuable contract and your most cultivated contact, in order to pursue love! And, as I said, make sure that, when you meet her, you smell pure and sound fulfilled.

Invent an imaginary wife and write letters to her, if that is what it takes to keep in practice being considerate. The things you do to please your imaginary wife will also please women whom you have yet to meet.

How to Begin If You Have Just Left Your Lover

What pleasure in being free of someone you could not love—for her repetitious moods, for her slovenly finances, for her impossible prudishness, for the unhappy history the two of you came to have

together. Now you can find someone new! And, encouraged by your own decisiveness in making the break and redolent of the cologne of an unhappy affair successfully ended, you will draw women to you. You might even fall in love with the cute waitress, the one with the green glasses, who served dinner to you and your ex the night you ended the affair. Think of your pleasure in undressing someone new, for the first time, in the early morning hours, when her shift at the restaurant is over, when her breasts are so alluring, backlit by the moonlight that makes her muslin curtains glow blue!

Only make certain that you have been true to your vocation as a lover. Were you really patient enough with that lover you just left? Did you try your utmost to make her happy, and to make yourself happy? If not, you need to pause, reflect, and renew your devotion to love. Otherwise, you risk falling into lechery, vanity, cynicism, or hedonism. There is little happiness in any of these, except hedonism, and then only for short periods, and only if you manage to avoid venereal disease. And none are likely to lead to love.

If you do have venereal disease, have it treated by a competent and confidential doctor. Of course you will have to inform every new lover of your condition before you risk infecting her. This may be unpleasant, but anything else is a crime, and this book is not for criminals.

All of which is to say—no matter how free you felt the moment you left your lover, you are not free of your same old body and your same old mind. So be good! And if your ex pleads to see you again, politely say no.

How to Begin If Your Lover Has Just Left You, or Has Just Died

It will be all right. Just remember: Do not dwell on your losses, dwell on your prospects. Whomever it is that you really crave—a plump au pair who knows some great guitar licks and who will fondle you under the table at a chowder house in Maine; a rich whore who will dye her hair blonde, maintain lean, muscular thighs, and wear gaudy

make-up and stiletto heels while you perform cunnilingus; an Ethiopian fertility goddess; whomever—I promise you that there is just such a girl out there to love you.

There are only two known cures for a broken heart: the passage of time and the arrival of new love. Do not believe the devils who say that there is a third cure, namely, winning your old love back. That is a lie, and if you are an adult, you should not believe lies. Be happy, ceaselessly pursue diverse worldly triumphs, and the time will fly until a voluptuous traveling saleswoman from Addis Ababa, carrying a suitcase of sample ceramic idols, makes her way toward you at an industry fair, hoping to confer with you about your orders and her ardors. However, it is also necessary to undertake certain specific steps.

First, once any woman has made it clear that she wants an affair to end, you must never speak to her again. This may be difficult, but if you are not sometimes willing to undertake something arduous, you cannot expect your glowing victory, to be loved again by a beautiful and better woman! And anyway, it is never worth the loss of dignity for the brief, weak palliative of “talking about it.”

Second, avoid thinking about your ex while you masturbate.

Third, take solace in music.

Fourth, you must empty your life of everything that might draw your old lover back in. Return her contact lens solution and her filthy sports bras. If she owes you money, or vice versa, resolve that immediately. Clear her out so that you may have some peace of mind to think what you would really like next.

Fifth, study this book.

If the woman you love dies, grieve, and then, when you are done grieving, find a new woman to love. It is unseemly to seek the love of a new woman while actually dressed in mourning. However, some women cannot resist a man in grief. Especially if he is accompanied by a small child who is also dressed in black, and if it is early on a summer afternoon, and if the man and child are silently sharing an apple and cheese on a wooden bench under a leafy esplanade in

a breezy European port. What woman could resist such a sight? So, by all means—if it happens accidentally, and a woman falls in love with you while you and your son are mourning in Europe—go ahead and sleep with her. She may even let you talk about your dead lover. Most likely it will make you sad to sleep with another woman for the first time after your lover has died, but soon that sorrow will pass away, and then you can return to enjoying the living women that surround you. You must be the judge of what is best.

Contrariwise, if you can arrange to have a woman around at the moment you die, someone who can massage you intimately as you slip away, it may be a good idea to do so. I have not tried it myself, but it seems like a good idea, dying in someone's embrace. Do not, however, die of a heart attack during sex. It is in poor taste, and will traumatize the woman that you love, as it will force her, if only briefly, to make love to a corpse non-consensually.

How to Begin If You Already Have a Lover, and Want a Second Lover Simultaneously

Sometimes two women will have their distinct and irresistible charms, and you can afford yourself unprecedented delight by fulfilling needs that no one single woman could comprehend. This one insists that you kiss her ears, that one forbids it [several further, albeit obscene, juxtapositions expurgated by the *New Haven Review*]. The possibilities!

Bear in mind, however, that in the midst of all this gratification you are giving yourself, your duty to each of these two women remains undiminished—you must make both of them happy. And also know that, most likely, you are failing in that. Because, unless you have their mutual consent, if you are sleeping with two women, you are probably deceiving at least one of them, and thereby making that one unhappy, even if she does not know it.

Also, it may be difficult to remember whose stories are whose. Which one has the troublesome brother; which one needs to be

pinched; which one does not know about your indigestion. Whatever you do, do not take notes to keep this straight. Better to make a verbal gaffe than a written one.

All of which is to say that the only complication in having multiple lovers instead of having just one is in deciding which of them will get to know about which of the others. The rest is mere logistics. But if you do decide to deceive a woman, then do it with dignity. This means: Never deceive a woman whom you do not want to lose; arrange assignations so that you will not be caught; and, if you are caught, acknowledge what you have done, and accept your punishment quietly and humbly, even if it means losing the love of your life. To deceive someone you love and cannot bear to be without; to allow clues of your deception to accumulate; or to deny acts that you have knowingly and consciously sought to complete—these are the deeds of a hypocrite and a fool. As a man, you should do everything, including treachery, to the best of your ability, and you should stand and accept the consequences of your deeds without excuse.

Still, if you must travel for work, having a lover in every city you frequent is an easy way to sample a smoking banquet of divergent physiques and talents without risk of discovery.

II. How to Be Lovable, in General

In order to be loved, you must be lovable. And you cannot fake it, either.

For example: A man who is a professional chef in the winter and a professional massage therapist in the summer will exude a potent aphrodisiac—the promise of sensual pleasure for any woman he takes a liking to. However, this is only because the pleasure he takes in kitchen and body work is genuine. The man who flips through a local alternative weekly newspaper, pays for a single cooking class (“Marisco with Mario”) and a single massage class (“The Sensual Foot”), and hopes thereby to impress prospective dates with what he has learned will simply seem like sleaze.

Or, for example: Say you are chasing a girl who only sleeps with well-cultured men. It is no good trying to impress her by taking her to the opera if you are not already the sort who listens to Verdi for pleasure. For one thing, she will see through your ruse; and for another, the notion that opera makes you cultured is at least one hundred years out of date; and for a third thing, much of Verdi's work is in fact quite dull. Which is a wretched thing to realize for the first time during the second act of *Un Giorno di Regno*, while gazing at the curve of your sophisticated darling's now unobtainable breasts, as they rise and fall beneath the spaghetti straps of her black velvet gown.

In other words, in order to be loved, you must be lovable, but you must also be yourself. So, what to do if you are not lovable? What to do if you are not handsome enough to inspire a woman to love you, or rich enough, or clever enough? You will have to improve yourself, my fellow. You must be pleasing to the senses and the mind, and you must enjoy the hobbies and habits that make you so—or risk loneliness. It can be laborious to improve yourself, but it is never impossible. Let this book be your tutor, and let the following parable be a spur to you, if you ever find yourself discouraged:

In Hawaii, there were until recently hundreds of colonies of finches. Isolated by water and by lava flows, in just a few decades the mating songs of different finch colonies would diverge—and in just a few centuries their plumage would diverge too, and in just a few millennia, their beaks and bones and eyes. As it happens, several years ago biologists found a colony of finches reduced to a single member, a lone male of breeding age. Fortunately, this male was virtually identical to the males in a nearby colony, and so the biologists thought that perhaps they could match this lonesome male, the last of his kind, with some of the females of the neighboring tribe. As it happened, however, the females from that neighboring patch of island were able to detect subtleties in their suitor's song, differences in pitch and cadence that were inaudible to the human researchers, but that rendered the bachelor bird repugnant to the lady birds he

loved. The more longingly he sang, the less attention the females paid the heartbroken wretch. The biologists were about to resort to artificial insemination, but the bachelor bird died before they could make their attempt. This last specimen of Lewis's Red Palm Nut Finch is preserved, and on display, at the biology department of the University of Hawaii.

Women are like that. There is no single song you can learn to please them all. But men are not like that. They can learn new songs. Still, you do not want to die a virgin finch. So you must organize your life to accommodate the fact that most women prefer men who are fit, funny, and affluent to men who are not.

How to Have the Sort of Body She Must Love

It is fortunate that different women love differently shaped men because there is little that you can do to change your height or your ethnicity. Waste no time trying to become short Panjabis, you tall men of Kenya. Many other traits are mutable, but ultimately you must find a woman who likes your shape so much that, when you come in the door, she leaps up and springs into your arms. Genes are important, as is youth, but exercise and diet will help you enormously. No lazy man can expect to capture glory in love. You want her to slap your ass, grab your nipples, muss your chest hair, strum your belly, hang off of your shoulders, and then [obscene litany expurgated by the *New Haven Review*]. Do whatever it takes to have that sort of body.

A good way to begin is to stand naked in front of a mirror for at least four minutes a day, looking at yourself from different angles. Be neither proud nor complacent—only observant. Then, fifty push-ups, fifty sit-ups, and thirty minutes of heart-racing, lung-bursting running should be your daily minimum—though if you enjoy basketball, bicycling, boxing, or the like, anything can substitute. As long as you have reason to believe that next week your stomach and ass will be firmer than they were this week, and your arms and chest broader.

If you cannot find the time for these simple routines, surrender the hope of winning the love of a beautiful woman. Begin yoga, swimming, folk dancing, and recreational walking at a young age—when you are old, they will be all you can manage, and so you should find a taste for them early.

Stay hydrated and eat laxatives and fiber as necessary for regular and satisfying bowel movements—because it is hard to be joyous in love when you are constipated. Psyllium husks, coffee, aloe vera oil, droplets of herbal bitters, whole grains, and fresh fruits will help you shit consistently and heartily. It is all right to feel elated, and even to weep, after a good bowel movement. Do not mention these things to a woman until after you are certain of her love, however, as some women are squeamish at first. Later, talking about your bowels can help her to talk about hers, as well as her menstruation, her moods, and anal sex—all of which are important conversations to have. It is a good idea to keep incense in your bathroom, [mildly profane justification for keeping incense in your bathroom expurgated by the *New Haven Review*].

Which is to say, it is important to understand your own digestion and metabolism. If you feel you are too fat, you should:

- 1) Determine how much you would like to weigh;
- 2) Determine how much you need to eat in order to feel happy;
- 3) Calculate the extent to which the daily caloric intake required by (2) exceeds the daily caloric intake consistent with (1); and then
- 4) Do however many hours of exercise are necessary to burn off the excess you calculated in (3).

This is the only diet that works. You should enjoy all sorts of foods, and learn both to cook them and the restaurants that serve them, so that, when your girl has a craving, you can delight her by satisfying it expeditiously. Still, I recommend fresh, local vegetables, flavorful cheeses, and well-butchered meats. These will make you

strong, with glorious skin and clean muscles, and will also make you happy. If you maintain a religious diet—kosher or halal or vegetarian—it is probably best to find a woman who does the same, because no woman likes to give up foods that she enjoys. Veganism impresses no one except other vegans. [Obscene caveat concerning veganism and fellatio expurgated by the *New Haven Review*].

Some women like the smell of a sweaty man, but more specifically, what they like is the smell of a generally well-groomed man who is just back from a soccer match or a dance recital. If your sweat is more than an hour old, no one is going to like the smell of it. So, shower and wear cologne subtly. That well-known trick—spraying cologne in the air, then walking through the falling mist—was invented by a woman. So, remember to ask for tips. If you see a man ten years your senior who has handsome teeth and impressive arms, why not ask him about products, stores, exercises? And women with a particular flair for looking beautiful every day should be politely interviewed for tips. What woman would not like to hear a man ask her, “What’s the secret of your world-historical skin?” Perhaps she will love you just for that, and in any case, she can teach you valuable things about loofahs, tweezers, and creams.

Vanity should never be indulged, but neither should you be ashamed of being fastidious; no worthwhile woman will mistake your desire to appeal to her eye for homosexuality. If any woman ever asks you if you are gay, ask her what made her wonder and ask her if it bothered her. (Most likely it will be something you said, and most likely it did not.) Then assure her that the only ass you crave is hers and [obscene recommendations concerning the gratification of desire and women’s asses expurgated by the *New Haven Review*]. Then she will know you are straight, and you can ask her, without fear, to [likewise] or whatever would give you pleasure.

In other words, you should assess yourself constantly with a woman’s eye, and follow yourself with a woman’s nose, and make the necessary adjustments to seem sexy. If you have doubts, ask your

female friends. The vocabulary you acquire will help you later in befriending potential lovers.

How to Dress in Order to Be Loved

Your clothes are a chance to display your taste and to flatter your body. Be the best dressed man in your circle, but do not overtax the imaginations of the women you pursue. Among hippies, for example, you should smell of camping, wear a hempen palette, sew your own pantaloons from calico, and arrange your shirts and pouches so that when you ascend the trampoline, your girl can admire your chest and back. Among hippies, do not wear bespoke, charcoal-gray, chalk-striped trousers and jackets with brightly polka-dotted silk linings from Holland; do not wear brown, ostrich-skin loafers from Milan; do not wear luxurious pink ties with pearl tie-pin and complimentary handkerchief from Hermès. Hippie girls will not feel comfortable falling into the arms of a man wearing such finery, and besides, where in her yurt are you going to find a clean and moth-free hook on which to hang your wools?

Among hipsters and fashion plates it will be impossible to be the best-dressed man. In such circumstances, you should then make a virtue of modesty, and settle for having, say, the best pair of rubber bathing slippers anyone has ever seen, or the best homburg, or the best collection of vests.

No matter how fat and formless you feel, do not try to hide your shape under your clothes. No woman is going to be deceived by the voluminous bag of an XXL white t-shirt. And no woman is going to think you are funny or cool because your t-shirt has a slogan or logo that is supposed to be funny or cool. It is not funny, it is not cool, and she can see your tits, big guy. If you want her to gleefully snuggle up to your petting and fondling, you had better hope she likes her men large, or lose the weight.

The point is, you should own clothes that women will

compliment. Even women who cannot flirt know how to trade compliments about clothes, and so you should dress well enough that a pretty girl whom you overlooked, but who is interested in your attentions, will be able to come up to you and say: “Where did you find that green corduroy jacket with the cappuccino brown elbow patches and mother-of-pearl buttons? May I try it on? And would you be so kind as to hold my blazer while I do? And, do you like my tolerant smile and the scrumptious jiggings of my breasts as I snuggle giddily into your fine, rare coat?”

This is a summary. A more exhaustive approach to the sorts of clothes that attract the respect of men and excite the pulses of women is to be found in my short treatise entitled *How To Dress Well*. However, there is no space for that here! Instead, we leap to:

A Valediction

You need no longer be alone. Gorgeous and ingenious women will give themselves to you, unreservedly—and all because you, with your own talent and your own exuberance, will make them happy. Think of the hot glow of sexual satiety, the opiate of climactic laughter, the peace of love. Find resolve in the promise of these delights, and with that resolve and kind good cheer, go. And, in your later years, when sons and friends ask you how you found such luck with women, tell them firmly how to win her love.

Deirdre Bair won the National Book Award for her biography of Samuel Beckett. She lives in New Haven.

Matthew Cheney's fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Rain Taxi*, *Locus*, *Las Vegas Weekly*, *One Story*, and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. He is a columnist for *Strange Horizons* and the series editor for *Best American Fantasy* (Prime Books).

Nicholas Day is a freelance writer. He lives in New Haven.

Rudolph Delson's novel *Maynard & Jennica* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 2007.

Ross Douthat is a senior editor of *The Atlantic*. He grew up in New Haven and attended Hamden Hall Country Day School.

Elizabeth Edelglass is the library director for the Department of Jewish Education of Greater New Haven and a past fiction fellow of the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. Her stories have won national prizes and appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Passages North*, *Lilith*, and *American Literary Review*. She lives in Woodbridge, Connecticut.

Eva Geertz is a bookseller. She lives in New Haven.

Jonathan Kiefer is arts editor at the *Sacramento News & Review*, an alternative weekly newspaper in northern California.

Lizzie Skurnick's poetry has appeared in *Barrow Street*, on *Morning Edition*, and in *New York* magazine online. The recipient of residencies from Yaddo, Ucross, the VCCA, and elsewhere, she is executive online director of *Girls' Life* magazine.

Steven Stoll is senior fellow at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis and the author of *The Great Delusion: A Mad Inventor*, *Death in the Tropics*, and *the Utopian Origins of Economic Growth*, forthcoming from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He lives with his family in Woodbridge, Connecticut.

