

Lethem's vibrancy enlivens 'Cartoons'

BY PHILIP MCFEE
ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Oh, to be a kid again. Halloween has just passed, Christmas is on the way, and people just want to go back.

But it's painfully obvious you can't. You've been assigned, assessed and otherwise assisted into adulthood — youth isn't an option anymore.

Nostalgia: It's a way of life.

New York novelist Jonathan Lethem is one of a school of writers who have recently achieved success via reversion. Michael Chabon,

REQUIRED READING A bi-monthly series spotlighting new literary releases and industry trends by A&E Editor Philip McFee

and Dave Eggers and Lethem have all recently departed from literary high-mindedness to embrace graphic novels, genre fiction and fun in general. It's good to see that fella again.

The once-everyman Eggers has embraced the awkward pretense that once drove him, launching him into the atmosphere of literary accessibility. Chabon's efforts fluctuate between penning quips for superheroes and waxing intellectual on the high-falutin' aspects of comics.

Lethem stands at a point in his career where his prose has become mature, yet his energies are still raw and uncommitted. "Motherless Brooklyn" put him on the stage, and his follow-up, "Fortress of Solitude," was one hell of a solo.

So, when a young writer from the world's most varied, neurotic city throws his ample imagination in reverse, the results are gold.

His latest, "Men and Cartoons" (Doubleday, \$19.95), is a slim collection of left-field stories on topics ranging from superhero emulators to fatalist talking sheep.

"The Vision," his inaugural story, concerns the exploits of a man in his neighbor's brownstone in the Big Apple. His neighbor, a childhood

BOOK REVIEW

JONATHAN LETHEM
MEN AND CARTOONS

acquaintance of his, once masqueraded around as a comic book character. Just wait.

In "The Dystopianist, Thinking of His Rival, Is Interrupted by a Knock on the Door," Lethem paints a paranoid scene that comes to climax with the aforementioned suicidal ewe.

His stories, carefully restrained in their zaniness, run the gamut of subject materials — a return to his fantasy roots in "Access Fantasy," a comic artist coping with his memory in "Planet Big Zero."

Lethem's deadpan lends a distinct humanity to his oddball subjects, as in "Super Goat Man," a tale of a mediocre superhero's faltering. Lethem's touch is light, blending conventional prose with the inherent absurdity of fantasy writing — "My junior year at Corcoran College, in Corcoran, New Hampshire, Super Goat Man was brought in to fill the Walt Whitman Chair in the Humanities."

For a brief collection, Lethem holds up his end, lending his ironic eye and emotional acuity to each piece. It's a slight offering, but it's been a year of variety, from William Vollmann's 3,000-plus page "Rising Up and Rising Down" to Nicholson Baker's sneeze "Checkpoint."

Lethem should be commended, though, for switching gears from urban epic to light but fashionable short fiction.

His pieces are, as promised, about "Men and Cartoons," where the absurd comes home for dinner and mania mixes with mundanity.

And they're fun — and, for a hot author with a hot subject, a little guilt-free pleasure is the best you can ask for.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Historic drama premieres today

'Forest' centers on Romanian strife

BY JIM WALSH
ASSISTANT ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Combining a range of undergraduate students and faculty from different disciplines, a play opening today in the Center for Dramatic Art sheds new light on educational drama.

"Mad Forest," written by British playwright Caryl Churchill, explores the lives of two families living during the Romanian revolution of 1989.

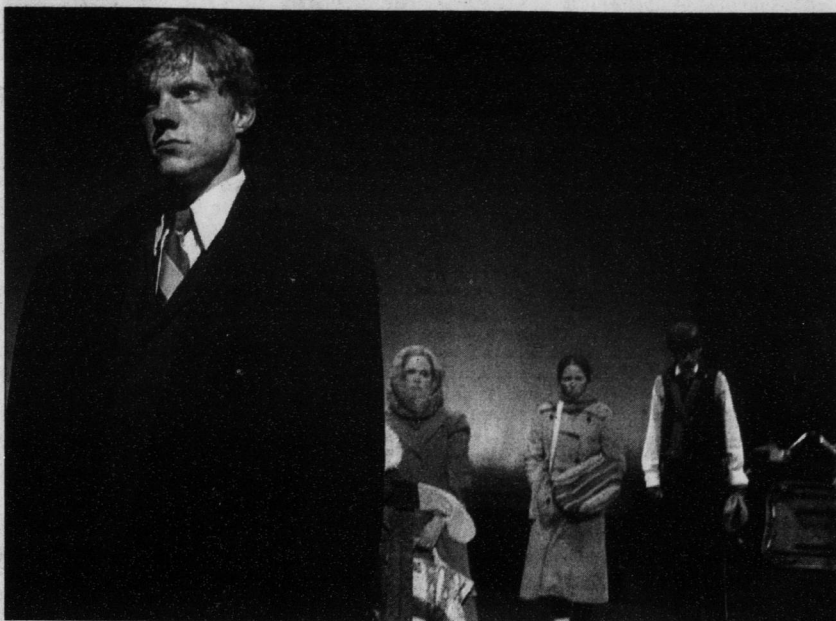
Director Julie Fishell, who is also a faculty adviser in the Department of Dramatic Art, said the cast talked about the history of the revolution throughout the project.

"As an educator I felt a mission to connect story telling and story tellers," she said.

The play — part fact, part historical fiction — is divided into three sections. In one, the actors recreate interviews with Romanian citizens, employing native dialects and diction.

"The dialect has been kind of hard to learn," said senior Tim Matson, who, like the rest of the cast, plays multiple characters in the show. "Speaking Romanian is hard because we have no basis for it."

To aid in rehearsing the language, the cast enlisted the help of native Romanian Nicolae Harsanyi, gifts and exchanges specialist at Davis Library. Harsanyi recorded pronunciation guides for students and spoke with them about his firsthand knowledge of



DTH/BRADY NASH

Members of the cast of Studio 3's "Mad Forest" perform during a dress rehearsal in the Center for Dramatic Arts on Thursday night. The play explores the lives of two families living during the Romanian revolution of 1989.

the conflict.

"I was out in the streets," he said. "I was one of the revolutionaries. Watching their performances in the rehearsals, it was not an unpleasant experience. It brought me back into a historical moment."

Robert Jenkins, director of the Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies, also served as an adviser for the production, providing the cast with more his-

torical background.

The collaborative elements allowed actors to combine extensive knowledge of the historical situation with their own realities, said senior Katie Cunningham, who produced and acted in the show.

"There is an experience that takes place between us as we act and the museum that takes place," she said.

"Mad Forest" examines an event that is still fresh in many minds.

Fishell said the story, little more than a decade old, had personal significance for her. She said students will learn from the story because of the human nature of the performance.

"Geographically it's really far removed," Matson said. "Chronologically it's really close."

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

New E. coli cases prompt concerns from officials

BY JORGE TELLEZ
STAFF WRITER

Two more people in Mecklenburg County who have been diagnosed with E. coli bacteria have called into the question the supposition that the outbreak originated at the N.C. State Fair's petting zoo.

As of Thursday, the state Department of Health and Human Services had confirmed 24 cases of E. coli across the state, most of them in people who had attended the fair.

"We have no confirmation that these cases have been originated at the State Fair," said Brian Long, public affairs director for the N.C. Department of Agriculture. "All the animals at the fair are checked by certified veterinarians."

But Long recognizes that the animals could have been infected with E. coli before they displayed any signs of being sick.

"We have hand-sanitizing stations at the petting zoos or where people could have contact with animals. We try to educate people about the hygiene at the fair."

Jeff Engel, state epidemiologist, said there is not much the state can do if the bacterial infection originated at the State Fair. More than 836,000 people attended the event from Oct. 15 to Oct. 24.

Dr. Mary Covington, UNC Student Health Services medical director, said there have been no

reports of E. coli in Orange County. "Anyone can get it, but the disease affects children and elderly the most," she said.

E. coli is a highly contagious disease transmitted by consuming contaminated food or having contact with infected animal feces. The symptoms include bloody diarrhea, sometimes accompanied by abdominal cramps, nausea and vomiting.

North Carolina usually sees less than 100 cases of E. coli per year. But in November 2001, Robeson County experienced a large E. coli outbreak, with more than 200 cases reported. Investigations concluded that the outbreak was caused by butter made for a school fair.

Experts recommend that when symptoms are detected on children, parents should not send them to school or day care in order to prevent the spread of the disease.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Scholarship organization to hold fund-raiser

BY ALI GRAY
STAFF WRITER

Attending high school might seem natural to students in Chapel Hill, but to those in many less fortunate countries, that concept would be completely foreign without financial support.

To make education a reality for these children, a group of UNC students banded together nine years ago to form Students for Students International, a completely student-run scholarship organization.

In the past six years, the group has paid for 67 deserving scholars in Zimbabwe to attend top boarding schools because of the country's lack of public education.

At 7 p.m. tonight, S4SI will host its first annual dinner auction at the Carolina Club in the George Watts Hill Alumni Center to raise money for its scholars.

"Everybody's working together for the auction," said senior Claire Shoolin, co-director of the Tanzania Education Project for S4SI.

"We tend to be a pretty collaborative group."

Woody Durham will serve as the emcee for the auction, which

will also feature an appearance by UNC men's basketball coach Roy Williams and performances by campus a cappella groups. The event is expected to attract between 120 and 150 people.

"We hope to raise \$50,000," said sophomore Maile Lesica, co-director of fund raising. "Hopefully, it will be even bigger next year."

The 60 items on the auction block include LASIK eye surgery, trips to New York City and Los Angeles, a puppy and children's clinics with varsity athletes. Tickets are \$40 per person or \$75 per couple.

"I'm just so passionate about this cause," said senior Candice Woodcock, S4SI executive director. After spending a summer doing service projects in Kenya, Woodcock said she was inspired to become involved in the program.

"That experience changed my life," she said. "I saw how important (education) was and how it could really change someone's position in life."

When the program started, the students focused on Zimbabwe and chose recipients based on financial need and merit. Because of recent political unrest in

Zimbabwe, the group decided to implement new scholarships for girls in Tanzania.

"We decided to choose only girls because Tanzania is 99.9 percent Muslim, and only one in 13 high school graduates is female," Woodcock said.

Tanzania is also subject to polygamy and patriarchy. Woodcock said if a family cannot afford to educate all of their children, the parents only will educate the boys because of limited funds.

Several group members spent their summers traveling and interviewing applicants in Tanzania as part of the selection process for scholarship recipients.

"Many countries in Africa are in such a bad state, but the students we talk to are so eager," Shoolin said. "We're looking for women who have the power to change things."

To raise money for scholarships, the organization holds events such as charity nights at Top of the Hill restaurant, a pillow fight in the Pit and the Adopt-a-Scholar program.

S4SI members are focused on growth within the program. Lesica said they are hoping to make the auction an annual event that will add significantly to their ability to fund students around the world.

They also are working to spread the program to other universities within the United States. Plans are being made to expand to Duke University and Harvard University with hopes to start scholarships in Latin America, Lesica said.

"Hopefully in the next five to 10 years, we'll really get the organization to be a global thing."

Contact the Features Editor at features@unc.edu.

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