

■ nonfiction

OF VIOLENCE OR VALOR

**A JOURNALIST CHRONICLES
THE RISE AND FALL OF A
BALKANS WAR CRIMINAL**

by Wesley Yang

Beloved mass murderer: We would like to think this epithet names something too paradoxical to exist.

But there have always been hard men who thrive on violence and do the dirty work of the nation-state or the revolution, just as there have always been people willing to deny or minimize their crimes, to glorify their strength, and to honor them in death. Stalin and Mao are perhaps the most infamous on a long list.

Zeljko Raznatovic, better known as “Arkan,” is the most recent addition to this club. During the conflicts following the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Arkan led a paramilitary outfit consisting of as many as 10,000 Serbian nationalist thugs, crooks, and soccer fans who rampaged through Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina murdering, robbing, raping, and “ethnically cleansing” Muslims and Croats. He was also, toward the end of his life, Serbia’s most famous, powerful, and admired man.

Christopher S. Stewart (GAL ’96), goes in pursuit of Arkan in *Hunting the Tiger: The Fast Life and Violent Death of the Balkans’ Most Dangerous Man* (Thomas Dunne Books), following him from his delinquent youth in Josip Broz Tito’s communist Yugoslavia to his 2000 assassination in a Belgrade

hotel lobby. The book is a vivid mixture of investigative journalism, historical survey, and the journalist’s encounters with some unsavory men he spent three years tracking down. “Getting people to talk about [Arkan] is a risky endeavor,” Stewart says. “If they talk at all, they want to do it anonymously. And if you ask about him, they become immediately suspicious of you and monitor the rest of your time in Serbia.”

Maintaining a judicious take on Arkan’s career and the complicated politics of the region, Stewart traces his evolution from petty thief to hit man for Tito’s secret police and partner in President Slobodan Milosevic’s bid to secure a Greater Serbia. Throughout, Arkan operated with impunity, protected from domestic arrest, and aided in crossing borders—and breaking out of international prisons—by the UDBA, a KGB-like state spy agency. Stewart quotes Arkan’s former UDBA handler: “[He] was pathological and prone to do things most other humans wouldn’t think of. He would hurt you or kill you without thinking twice. That was important to the agency.”

As the country broke into ethnically defined states, Arkan began his transition from mob boss to warlord, fueled by his private army. In Bosnia and Croatia, Milosevic’s national army would surround a



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ARKAN, PICTURED UNMASKED, LED A SERBIAN PARAMILITARY CREW HE CALLED THE TIGERS (NAMED FOR THE PET HE KEPT AT HOME), WHICH EXECUTED THOUSANDS.



PHOTO © RON HAVIV/VII

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HAPPY FAMILY
(GROVE/BLACK CAT)
WENDY LEE
GSAS '06



In the shameful fallout of a romantic affair, Hua Wu, the thoughtful protagonist of Wendy Lee's debut novel, abandons her college education in Fuzhou, China, leaves behind the beloved grandmother who raised her, and joins the ranks of illegal immigrants in New York City's Chinatown. Anonymous outside of the restaurant where she works, Hua seizes the chance to care for a Sinophile's adopted daughter, Lily, for whom she serves as a valued conduit to Lily's lost Asian heritage. But feeling increasingly isolated and marginal, Hua channels her ambition and heartache into a love for her new charge—with surprising consequences. Her lonely quotidian struggles are an engrossing read told through Lee's simple, graceful prose and a character's insightful narration.

—Suzanne Krause

SIX NIGHTS ON THE ACROPOLIS
(COSMOS PUBLISHING)
GEORGE SEFERIS
TRANSLATED BY
SUSAN MATTHIAS
GSAS '00, '06



Career diplomats rarely win Nobel prizes in literature and, less often still, publish intimate tales about brothels, artists, and civic unrest in the birthplace of hedonism. So this novel—the only one by the 1963 Nobel laureate, published posthumously in 1974 and translated into English for the first time—is a treat for readers game to follow this formidable talent's Athenian experiment in Modernism and bildungsroman. Drawing largely from George Seferis's personal life and rife with intellectual debates, this character-driven existential soap opera alternates between narrative chapters and confessional, cryptic diary entries—all of which is made accessible by Susan Matthias's capable, clear translation.

—S.K.

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 30)

town, put up roadblocks, and shell it from a distance before paramilitary groups “rushed the town and mopped up” after. Arkan’s “Tigers” were the most ruthless of these units, committing countless atrocities, reportedly including the slaughter of more than 200 hospital inmates. He also made as much as \$50 million in looted contraband and black-market trade, served a term as an elected member of Parliament, and married Yugoslavia’s biggest pop star. Insisting that he was nothing more than a soldier protecting oppressed Serbs in the disputed territories, Arkan poured his money into a series of legitimate businesses (including a soccer team) and demonstrated a swaggering defiance of the West that many of his countrymen admired.

Soon after NATO’s bombardment of Serbia brought an end to the war in Kosovo and broke Milosevic’s grip on power, Arkan fell victim to the violence that had enriched him, murdered by a 23-year-old ex-cop moonlighting as a mob enforcer. No one knows exactly why Arkan was killed, but many speculate that he knew too much about Milosevic to live. Fathoming how so many ordinary Serbians continue to admire Arkan in spite of his crimes proved hardest for the author to grasp, though he offers a hypothesis. “You have a people that is suffering so much, and they’re just looking for anything to empower them,” Stewart says. “Arkan was one of a few people powerful enough to stand up to the world when the world was against them, and they sort of just forgot about everything else that he did.” ■



ILLUSTRATIONS © DC COMICS

LAST MAN STANDING

BRIAN VAUGHAN CREATES A FANTASY WORLD RUN ENTIRELY BY WOMEN

by Carly Berwick

If men suddenly disappeared from Earth, would the women left in charge put a moratorium on war? Lay down arms and spontaneously form socialist cooperatives with high-quality child care?

That’s not exactly how it plays out in the comic book series, *Y: The Last Man* (Vertigo), by Brian K. Vaughan (TSOA ’98). When a mysterious plague wipes out every living thing with a

Y chromosome except 22-year-old, wisecracking amateur magician and escape artist Yorick, the sole survivor is left to roam the globe—along with his pet monkey. Electricity and food are scarce. Governments are slow to reconstitute. Roving bands of militant Amazons, rogue Israeli militias, Russian spies, and frontier survivalists are chasing some to destroy him, some to put

him to their own nefarious uses. But all Yorick wants is to find his girlfriend, Beth, last seen on an anthropological research trip in the Australian outback. Along the way, he picks up a tough, bodacious government minder, code name Agent 355, and a brilliant scientist who just might have a clue as to how to fix the whole mess.

The 60-comic series has been wildly successful, in part because

it merges old-fashioned storytelling with a classic “what-if” sci-fi scenario, the death of men. It has earned critical raves from *Entertainment Weekly* and *Publishers Weekly*, which wrote that Vaughan and series

illustrator Pia Guerra’s “vision of the surprise and horror to come is so beautifully ordinary, it’s entirely convincing—and addictive.” The books have been translated into numerous languages, including Spanish, French, and German, and have

sold, Vaughan estimates, in the hundreds of thousands. *Vertigo*, an imprint of DC Comics, does not release sales figures, but independent comics stores confirm that *Y* has been a top seller since it debuted in 2002.

A writer and producer for the ABC television series *Lost*, Vaughan initially conceived of the bumbling last man—full of hang-ups about sex before marriage and prone to wisecracks from bad 1980s movies—when he was a new graduate of the Tisch School of the Arts’ Rita and Burton Goldberg Department of Dramatic Writing. At that point he was already a published author on *X-Men*, *Swamp Thing*, and *Batman*, having been recruited by Marvel Comics editor James Felder when he came to NYU to teach a writing workshop. While most of the women in *Y* look like

variations of Angelina Jolie, goofy antihero Yorick is portrayed as any half-shaven, bed-head-prone twentysomething—a new millennial version of Archie. And extraordinary as

Y merges old-fashioned storytelling with a classic “what-if”—the death of men.

Yorick’s experiences are, they mirror, in some ways, Vaughan’s youth at a Catholic boys school in Cleveland, which had a sister school he sometimes visited. “The experience of walking through the hallways and the stares you would get,” he says, “you would feel like such an invader in a safe space.”

Though the final issue appeared earlier this year, Vaughan isn’t sitting around popping champagne or mourning his characters. He’s hard at work in Los Angeles on other books and has completed several screenplays, including an adaptation of *Y*. But don’t expect all of his new stories to imagine fantastical worlds. Vaughan’s still a fan of such local heroes as Spider-Man and Batman. “I like mainstream,” he says. “I like everything. I’m not a fundamentalist.” ■

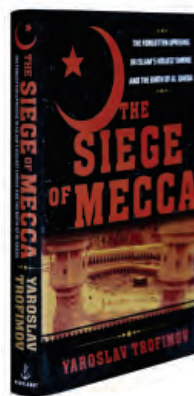


BRIAN VAUGHAN'S DARK VISION OF A MALE HOLOCAUST COMES TO LIFE IN PIA GUERRA'S ILLUSTRATIONS (UPPER LEFT AND ABOVE PANEL).

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THE SIEGE OF MECCA: THE FORGOTTEN UPRISING IN ISLAM'S HOLIEST SHRINE AND THE BIRTH OF AL QAEDA (DOUBLEDAY)

YAROSLAV TROFIMOV
GSAS '93



That there was ever a massacre at Mecca is news to many. Yet in 1979 armed Sunni extremists, disgusted with Saudi Arabia's increasing westernization, held the city's Grand Mosque and its worshippers hostage for two weeks. Obscured by an information blackout and the West's preoccupation with the crisis unfolding in Shiite Iran, the Saudi royals scrambled to dislodge the rebels, shelling the sanctuary and causing hundreds of casualties. *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Yaroslav Trofimov reconstructs events through eyewitness accounts and declassified documents, ably contextualizing the religious and geopolitical landscape of what he calls the first large-scale “international jihadi movement in modern times”—which would crystallize the violent ascent of Muslim fundamentalism and inspire a young Osama bin Laden.

—Nicole Pezold

TIGER, TIGER (GROVE PRESS)
GALAXY CRAZE
GSAS '97



In her second novel, *Galaxy Craze* (the actress-turned-author's real name) revisits May, the adolescent narrator of her much praised 1999 debut, *By the Shore*. Now 14, May is as troubled as ever by her bohemian mother, Lucy, who is dissatisfied with an emotionally absent husband. Once more overtaken by an urge to flee convention and London's city limits, Lucy takes May and her younger brother, Eden, on holiday to a California ashram. Amid stark sunshine and communal life, Lucy shirks her motherly duties and tends instead to her bejeweled guru. Meanwhile, May's own insecurities are suspended when she is captivated by a sensual young believer. Neither the mother's discontent nor the daughter's angst find salve; they are only exposed with a beguiling literary lightness of touch. —N.P.

TRYIN' IT ALL, TOGETHER

**DONNA GRANT MAKES UP
ONE-HALF OF A SUCCESSFUL
(AND INSEPARABLE) WRITING DUO**

by Anna Weinberg

When Donna Grant (SCPS '85) decided to write a novel, she knew there was only one way she would do it—with her best friend, Virginia DeBerry. The pair had already made it in modeling, launched and sunk a magazine, and spent enough time together that the DeBerry family considered Grant a relative. As it turned out, their literary voices combine to make crowd-pleasing novels that *Publishers Weekly* says are “guaranteed to tug at readers’ heartstrings.” Since penning their debut book in 1989, Grant and DeBerry have followed up with five more—including 1997’s *Tryin’ to Sleep in the Bed You Made*, an *Essence* best-seller and winner of the Merit Award for fiction from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association.

Their latest book, *Gotta Keep on Tryin’*, is a long-awaited sequel to *Tryin’ to Sleep* and, like the others, explores the rewards and complications of female friendships. It centers on Gayle and Patricia, a pair of polar opposites who’ve been friends since kindergarten.

Like their heroines, the authors are in many ways opposites—one all light and optimism, the other more dark and brooding. “My husband calls us Pollyanna and Darth Vader,” Grant says. “I would be the Darth.” But both insist

that the friendship between their characters is not modeled after them. In the 25 years they’ve been friends, Grant says, “We have never had an argument that caused us to stop speaking.”

Their relationship, however, did not seem destined for closeness. They met while working as plus-size models, when Grant was taking what she calls a “rather circuitous” route to college. A friendship blossomed even as they competed for the same few jobs. “It was clear that both of us were not going to get the same assignment, which could have caused a lot of friction, except that

somehow it didn’t,” Grant says.

Modeling led to the chance to work on the editorial side of magazines and in 1986 they launched the plus-size fashion magazine *Maxima*. When it folded, the two brainstormed other magazine options but kept coming back to the idea of writing a novel together. They pitched one agent, who found a publisher with a hole in its schedule, and Grant and DeBerry landed a contract, with just one hitch: They had four months to complete the book. Writing night and day, it was their first test.

Published under the pen name Marie Joyce, *Exposures* tells the story of a white, wealthy, glamorous photographer working in the heyday of 1980s fashion. At the time, Grant explains, “the term *chick lit* wasn’t even around. And there was black ‘serious’ fiction, but it really wasn’t until *Waiting to Exhale* was published in 1992 that publishers took note of the large readership that was dying for contemporary stories about African-Americans.” After the success of their first book, the pair rethought their goals and decided to write

under their own names and feature black heroines.

When the co-authors finish a book, they can’t tell who wrote what. Grant is more detail oriented and DeBerry more focused on the big picture, though, Grant says, “in any given sentence, she might have written the beginning and I’ve written the end.” Her partner agrees but says some differences do emerge as a result of their opposing temperaments. It’s not that Grant wants to kill off their characters, DeBerry says—“though she has lobbied for that on a few occasions”—it’s more that she wants to “explore and exploit their dark sides.”

The two remain inseparable. Grant lives in Brooklyn but keeps a room at DeBerry’s house in New Jersey. In January, they will publish their sixth book, *What Doesn’t Kill You*. They have also founded 4 Colored Girls Productions, a company to produce a film version of *Tryin’ to Sleep*. Though the collaboration shows no signs of slowing, both reserve some ideas for future solo efforts. Grant says, “At some point I will have to explore my inner Darth.” ■

FRIENDS GRANT (RIGHT) AND DEBERRY HAVE AUTHORED SIX NOVELS TOGETHER.



PHOTO © BILL WYLIE

fiction

In a Different Way

RENOWNED SCHOLAR AND PSYCHOLOGIST TURNS TO FICTION

by Suzanne Krause / GSAS '08

Twenty-six years after sparking what some have called a revolution with *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, her book about gender and morality, renowned psychologist Carol Gilligan has now turned her gimlet eye to novel writing. Her debut effort, *Kyra: A Novel* (Random House), a contemporary variation on the theme of Dido and Aeneas from Virgil's *The Aeneid*, traces the emotional complexities of the title character's passionate relationship with her architectural career and her lover Andreas, a musical conductor and theater director.

The novel isn't Gilligan's first step into creative writing; her 2002 play, *The Scarlet Letter*, tells the story of an adult Pearl and has toured college towns on the East Coast. The native New Yorker is University Professor at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

WHY START WRITING NOVELS NOW?

I had studied literature in the past and always felt the arts, because of their associative methods, had access to truths about the human experience—particularly where truths were layered, and so the use of metaphors and images made possible a much deeper exploration into human experience. That's always been what interests me, whether in psychology or literature.

HOW DID THE CHARACTER OF KYRA COME TO YOU?

The novel rose very specifically in response to a moment that focused certain questions to me about love—what love is, and what a risk love is—and what happens when a man, Andreas, does something without knowing how his actions will register on Kyra, the woman he loves. And it shakes her whole sense of reality. I didn't want to do research on that question; what I wanted was to enter it more deeply.



PHOTO © JOYCE RAVID

HOW WAS WRITING IT DIFFERENT FROM YOUR NONFICTION WORK?

It felt very risky. You turn on your computer and it's a blank screen, and there's no data to look at. A painter friend says every new picture is like jumping off a cliff, so to take that first step over the edge was like "Ugh!" But I loved that process. In a strange way it felt easier to me. If I look at my academic writing, it's so much about voices—listening, hearing, providing resonance for people's voices. So, in some sense, the shift to fiction was just that the people whose voices I was listening to did not exist. ■

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BLOOD KIN
(VIKING)
CERIDWEN DOVEY
GSAS PHD CANDIDATE



When a rebel commander overthrows the government, three presidential servants are taken captive—the deposed president's unassuming portraitist, chef, and barber. These background players serve as narrators, offering a peek into the corruption, secrets, and deception that lie behind power. Without revealing the characters' proper names or the time and place in which the story is set, Ceridwen Dovey's dark debut novel, which is being published in 11 countries, reads like a fable. But the sex, betrayal, and murder in what *Vogue* calls "part erotic thriller, part menacing political allegory" keep the reader mesmerized until the final elegant twist.

—Renée Alfuso

KILLED CARTOONS: CASUALTIES OF THE WAR ON FREE EXPRESSION
(W.W. NORTON & COMPANY)
EDITED BY DAVID WALLIS
GAL '89



While political and social cartoons sometimes spark controversy in the nation's newspapers, editor David Wallis offers evidence that the public sees only the tamest material. Featuring cartoons recently nixed by editors in an ever-shrinking and ever-careful branch of media, *Killed Cartoons* unveils too-risque-for-print works by Pulitzer Prize winners Garry Trudeau, Doug Marlette, and Herbert Block, as well as unearthed, censored material by Norman Rockwell and Anita Kunz, among others. The illustrations take stabs at the usual American pressure points: sex, race, religion, and war. With anecdotes for each killed cartoon—some likely to disturb any reader who values a free press—Wallis pulls back the curtain to reveal some of journalism's most provocative and hilarious lost commentary.

—Jason Hollander