

# Natural Selection

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

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## FISCAL CLIFF: The Next Big Challenge for Science

CHRISTINA PYRGAKI

*A version of this article appeared on The Incubator blog on February 14, 2013.*

For the last 35 years, the University of Lake Superior has published a list of banished words—words in the English language that are deemed over-used, misused, or useless. Topping the 2013 version<sup>1</sup> was a term that no American has been able to escape in recent months: fiscal cliff.

While I agree that “fiscal cliff” has been overused, I do not know if it is fair to call it misused or useless. The term paints a clear picture of an entire nation standing on the edge of a cliff, in grave danger of falling off with a single misstep. This analogy is not too far from the reality that the US faces, as our society truly is standing on a financial precipice.

Several articles published over the past year have described our ominous situation and have attempted to figure out how it all began. My favorite, posted in *Forbes Magazine* in November 2012<sup>2</sup>, talks about the Congressional passing of the Budget Control Act of 2011<sup>3</sup>, which dictates the automatic, across-the-board cuts in federal spending. Congress never really intended for this sequester<sup>4</sup> to go into effect. It was meant more as a threat to coerce opposing parties to cooperate. But it looks as though the aforementioned parties, un-

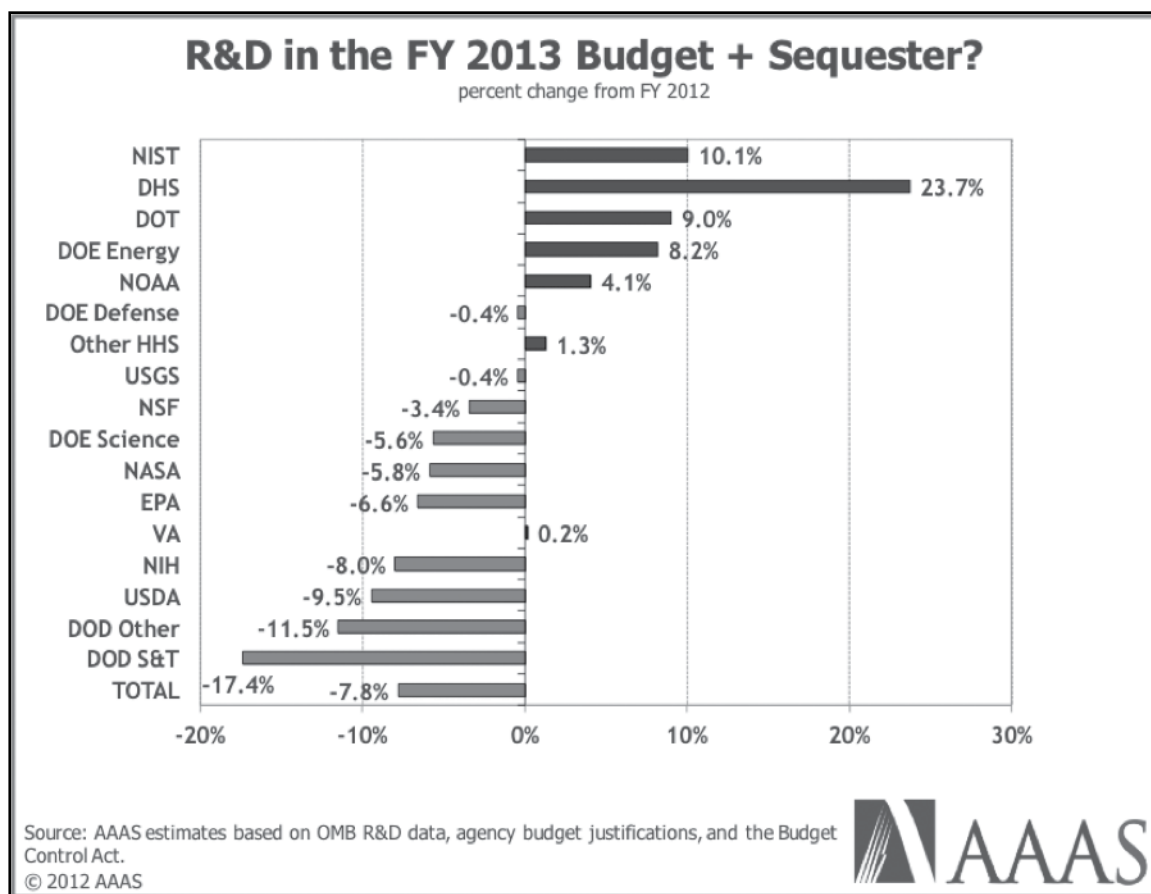
able to find common ground in this contentious political landscape, must make good on that threat. Many government programs will feel the strain now that the sequester is going into effect—among them one area that is particularly dear to us here at The Rockefeller University: scientific research funding.

As shown in the graph above, key science funding sources such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will take a serious hit as a result of the sequester. According to the Office of Management and Budget<sup>5</sup>, the sequester would reduce the budgets of the NIH by \$2.529 billion, the NSF by \$586 million, and the Department of Energy Office of

Science by \$400 million.

NIH Director Francis Collins stated<sup>6</sup> that these budget cuts would translate into about 2,300 fewer grants (which is approximately 5% of the new grants awarded by NIH in 2012), and is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the sequester’s actual impact on scientific research. In addition to a reduction in new grant awards, funding levels of non-competing renewals will be lowered. In essence, the future of federally-funded biomedical research is in jeopardy.

These measures were supposed to go into effect on January 1, 2013; however, Congress and the White House reached



a temporary deal, giving Congress until March 1, 2013 to further debate and negotiate. While some saw this postponement as a “pathetic punt,”<sup>7</sup> others saw this delay as an opportunity to influence the decisions of elected officials with regard to which federal funds will be slashed and by how much. During the past few months, via blog posts, social media, and printed press, many scientists have focused on bringing attention to the detrimental effects of the sequester on scientific research, and the efforts to bring awareness to broad audiences have not tapered down. As a matter of fact, these efforts have intensified since the news of the sequester going into effect sunk the scientific community with apprehension on March 1. Under no circumstances, however, should this news lead us to passively accept what elected officials have in store for scientific research. We still have time to change the way the sequester will affect science, and both scientists and non-scientists need to take the duty of protecting science seriously!

As informed citizens, what can we do in the name of science research?

All Americans, and especially the scientists among them, should exercise their power as active members of society.

Aside from voting, citizens have the right and the obligation to voice their concerns and push for change when their live-

lihood is being threatened. When voices unite and amplify, there is a good chance of being heard. When you hire a contractor to redecorate your house, you do not stay out of the process and hope that he or she won't decide to paint your living room hot pink. You supervise, and when you see hot pink paint, you tell the contractor that you disagree with his choices and you are not willing to live with them. Similarly, citizens should let elected officials know that they are not willing to live with these officials' questionable decisions, and that they need to do the job for which they were hired: maintain the integrity of our society and protect the individuals that comprise it.

Every citizen and researcher should make a compelling case to his or her elected officials explaining why science funding should be protected. The website of the organization Research!America<sup>8</sup> contains invaluable tools and instructions on how to contact and even meet with the people who have the power to shape the future of scientific research in this country. We all need to use these tools and make our voices heard, because in contrast to what you might believe, politicians listen to their voters. They have to. They do, after all, work for us!®

#### References:

1. [www.lssu.edu/banished/](http://www.lssu.edu/banished/)

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2. Rick Ungar, “The Fiscal Cliff Explained,” *Forbes Magazine* November 10, 2012

3. <http://budget.house.gov/budgetcontrolact2011/>


4. See definition of sequestration in the glossary of political economy terms at [www.auburn.edu](http://www.auburn.edu)

5. [www.whitehouse.gov/omb](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb)

6. Paige Winfield Cunningham “NIH Director Francis Collins: Medical research at risk,” *politico.com*, January 16, 2013.

7. Ruth Marcus “On the fiscal cliff, a no-big-deal deal,” *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2013.

8. [www.researchamerica.org/](http://www.researchamerica.org/)



## Ever Consider Branching Out?

Attend *Natural Selections'*  
 Annual Open Meeting:  
**Thursday, April 11 at 5:30 pm**  
 in the Faculty Club

**Everybody is welcome**  
**Opportunities for**  
**involvement in various**  
**aspects of production**

# RU Art—Architecture Edition

CARLY GELFOND



The Wallace K. Harrison Estate, newly restored in 2009. Photo credit: Javier Haddad

For years, every morning on my way to work, as I hurried along the white marble pathway leading from the driveway to the buildings on the North end of The Rockefeller University's campus, I stared uncomprehendingly at the exterior of the long, low building, formally known as Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall. What an eyesore, I would think as I passed. I knew I should be more open-minded, but I just didn't get it, and I couldn't help but wonder about the person who designed it—a person with aesthetic taste so strikingly different from my own that he could consider something like this beautiful. Who was this guy? One day I finally decided to look him up.

Wallace K. Harrison, who died in 1981 (and whose funeral was in Caspary Hall on the Rockefeller campus), was a world-renowned architect with an impressive body of work to show for himself. Besides the Abby, he was responsible for the United Nations (UN) headquarters, the Time-Life Building, and much of Lincoln Center, including the Metropolitan Opera House, among many other landmarks. But it was the major role he played in the designing of Rockefeller Center in the 1930s that put him on the map as an architect—a project that resulted in his forming a lifelong friendship with Nelson Rockefeller, who had been assigned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (Nelson's father) to work with the Center's planning team. This was the beginning of a long association with the Rockefeller family that would bring Harrison commissions ranging from the Rockefellers' private homes to the Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Mall in Albany to—you guessed it—additions to The Rockefeller University. In a nutshell, Harrison became the Rockefeller family's house architect.

Nelson Rockefeller grew to greatly admire Harrison during their long friendship, calling him "the person who, next to my mother, had the greatest impact on my life in terms of understanding the relationship between the cultural creations of our times and the environment from which they spring." But Harrison had his share of critics too, who often argued that his work was overly conservative.

I was intrigued when I read of the criticism that one of his buildings was met with—a structure sheathed entirely in white marble, which, as was the case with many of his works, had a futuristic air. It was this very air, however, that some said underscored its conservatism, in that it gave the project the appearance of a place

inspired by 20s or 30s predictions of cities of the future.

Most of Harrison's larger buildings, like the UN, adhered to what was called the "International Style," a Modernist movement that first appeared in Europe in the 1920s and was seen in the US shortly thereafter. The most common characteristics of this style were a radical simplification of form, a rejection of ornamentation, the use of glass, steel, and concrete, and the transparency of buildings, a Modernist tactic for integrating interior and exterior space. Anybody seen the

Abby lately? It looks an awful lot like this.

But Harrison apparently had another side, too, and many of his smaller buildings and private residences have been described as more "lyrical," including the use of round spaces, loose, flowing forms, and romantic curves—which starkly contrasted with many of his bigger Industrial Style works. Fortunately, these design elements are also part of Harrison's architectural oeuvre at Rockefeller, embodied by the President's House and the dome-shaped Caspary Auditorium—which, I learned, when first completed, was covered entirely in blue mosaic tile.

You can learn a lot about a person, obviously, when you see where he lives, and this is true fivefold for an architect who designs his own home. Harrison indeed designed his own home, and The Harrison Estate, as it's known today, in Huntington, New York is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It's a stunning house—white, with a flat roof, floor to ceiling windows and sliding glass doors, and an emphasis on horizontal lines and simplified details. There are circles used everywhere—in the living room, dining room, studio, pool, and even in the concrete paving stones in the walkways; in the coming years, the circle would be omnipresent in Modern architecture.

Rockefeller scientists might be interested to know that Harrison saw his home as a laboratory for his ideas. He would later use many of these ideas in his commissions, and some of them would be picked up by other architects working in the Industrial or other Modern styles. The house was also a common gathering place for many of the key figures of the twentieth century, where, besides Nelson Rockefeller, the architects Robert Moses and LeCorbusier, and the artists Marc Chagall and Fernand Léger, often visited. Léger, in particular, spent most of the years during the Second World War in residence at The Harrison Estate, where he painted large murals in the main house living room and at the bottom of the circular swimming pool.

I'm glad I made the effort to gain an appreciation for the man behind Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall. Harrison truly brought his work home when he made his estate a testing ground for new ideas fresh off the boat from Europe. These ideas gained an entry to the US via Harrison's property, and some of them made their way to the Rockefeller campus. As I pass the Abby in the morning now, that is something I appreciate. ◉

## In Our Good Books

The reading suggestions have been kindly provided by staff members of the downtown bookstore McNally Jackson.

*Fated* by S.G. Browne

From the acclaimed author of *Breathers*—an irreverent novel about fate, destiny, and the karmic consequences of getting involved with humans.

Over the past few thousand years, Fabio has come to hate his job. As Fate, he's in charge of assigning the fortunes and misfortunes that befall most of the human race—the 83% who keep screwing things up. Frustrated with his endless parade of drug addicts and career politicians, Fate has to watch Destiny guide her people to Nobel Peace prizes and Super Bowl MVPs. To make matters worse, he has a five-hundred-year-old feud with Death, and his best friends are Sloth and Gluttony. And worst of all? He's fallen in love with a human.

Getting involved with a human breaks rule number one, and about ten others, setting off some cosmic-sized repercussions that could strip him of his immortality—or lead to a fate worse than death.

*The Mole People* by Jennifer Toth

Almost twenty years after its original publication, this book remains a relevant and shocking account of life in the underground layers of New York City. Inter-

weaving profiles of tunnel dwellers with inquiries about what it means—culturally, historically, politically, and economically—to live underground, Toth creates a harrowing portrait of an alternate humanity, and one that is only steps away from your daily commute.

*Photo by Sammy Davis, Jr.* by Burt Boyar

Sure, Sammy Davis might seem a bit cheesy to the average twenty-first century hipster. The idea of this book might make you cringe. Think what you want, the man had a central position in the zeitgeist of his time. He also carried a camera everywhere he went. I dare you to take a look. These photos are better than you think they'll be.

*The Hunger: A Story of Food, Desire, and Ambition* by John DeLucie and Graydon Carter

A page-turning memoir from the chef of The Waverly Inn, New York City's vaunted celebrity gathering spot.

*The Hunger* is an insider's romp through the crazy life of the restaurant business, told by a journeyman chef who fought his way to the top. Trapped in a dead-end job, John DeLucie called it quits and invested his meager savings in a ten-week cooking class. Upon completion, armed with no professional experience and the barest of basic skills, he walked into the renowned

gourmet shop Dean & DeLuca and asked for a job. The next day he found himself chopping forty pounds of onions in the prep-kitchen basement. A glamorous new chapter had begun. DeLucie worked his way up the bumpy NYC food chain, from executive chef at La Bottega to Nick & Toni's in East Hampton, eventually finding his way to The Waverly Inn, which he opened with publishing magnate Graydon Carter and several partners. It was here that John married his mastery of simple but unique flavors with Carter's A+ list of glitterati to create downtown's hottest eatery.

*The Hunger* tracks John through the pitfalls of cooking for a living, as well as the roller-coaster rides that became his personal life. Woven into the grit are the stories behind some of DeLucie's signature recipes, including New York's "best high-end burger" and the now famous truffled mac and cheese. Here is John's tale about food, desire, and appetite—and how one person overcame all odds to make it in the fiercely competitive world of food.

McNally Jackson is an independent bookstore that is well worth a visit; they have a fantastic selection on their shelves. The store is located in NoLiTa at 52 Prince Street between Lafayette and Mulberry. Visit them on the Web at <http://mcnally-jackson.com>. ☉

## Hitting the Paywall

DANIEL BRISKIN

Approximately two years ago, in March 2011, *The New York Times* introduced their paywall, the digital barrier against accessing more than 20 articles per month without subscribing (subsequently, access has been further reduced to only ten articles per month for non-subscribers). Although the *Times* was not the first publication to limit access to content, their paywall arguably caused one of the greatest brouhahas in regards to upsetting the status quo of modern news distribution. For many people, the *Times* acts as the default source for nuanced analysis of current events of import, both domestic and international. After providing free online service for over a decade, abruptly demanding that consumers pay for a once free service caused a widespread uproar.

Paying for goods and services is the normal way to conduct business, so to make people pay for online access to the *Times* only fits with the economic norm. Justification and precedent certainly exist in asking users to pay for content—all businesses have general operating costs they must cover, and decreasing advertising revenue only increases the difficulty of running a profitable newspaper. The reason people became upset is that, overnight, a free service became exclusive. Although the *Times* has been singled out thus far, it is not the only company to use paywalls: so do *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Times*, and others.

Some people may argue that news and political analysis available on free internet

sites such as CNN, Slate, or Reuters is of the same quality as that found behind the paywall of the *Times* or *The Economist*. However, while the purpose of these different categories of sites is to provide information to the public in a for-profit manner, the information they choose to provide is, intentionally, different. As a non-scientific comparison of the information available on these sites and what the different readers seek, as of the afternoon of March 9, 2013 the "most shared" article on Slate was titled "Leggings Aren't Pants. They're Superior." In contrast, the "most recommended" article on *The Economist* was a nearly 3,000-word analysis on Venezuela after Chávez.

Paywalls do not simply block news;

*continued on page 5*



This Month Natural Selections interviews Sara Schaafsma, a postdoctoral associate in the Laboratory of Neuroscience and Behavior.  
Country of origin: The Netherlands.

## New York State of Mind

**1. How long have you been living in the New York area?** I have been in NYC for a bit over a year.

**2. Where do you live?** Faculty House, Upper East Side. Crawling distance from the lab.

**3. Which is your favorite neighborhood?** The Lower East Side.

**4. What do you think is the most over-rated thing in the city? And underrated?** Overrated: parades. They sound like fun, but in the end it's just a couple of people walking by, waving a flag.

Underrated: New Yorkers. Americans always complain that New Yorkers are rude. I disagree (except when they are behind the wheel. What's wrong with them then?!). Maybe it's because Europeans are even ruder, but to me New Yorkers are almost always extremely nice and helpful.

**5. What do you miss most when you are out of town?** The possibility to do something exciting every minute of the day or night, whenever you'd like.

**6. If you could change one thing about**

**NYC, what would that be?** I would make the city bike-friendlier. I love to bike in the city and visitors also enjoy it a lot. But drivers are not used to bikes, often don't see them, and don't know how to share the road with them. That makes biking a lot more stressful than it should be.

**7. What is your favorite weekend activity in NYC?** I always very much enjoy just walking around in one of the many cute neighborhoods. Of course it also includes going out for brunch and dinner in one of the many amazing restaurants in the city. I will drink different beers from different microbreweries and end the night with a concert or show.

**8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC?** That's hard to choose. But I was very much impressed by the combination of the *Sleep No More* show and the party "Carnival des Corbeaux" that followed. It was a very unreal, carnal, mysterious party in an awesome, disturbing setting.

**9. If you could live anywhere else, where**

**would that be?** I love the experience of living in a new place. I love big cities, but could definitely also see myself living on an African plain for a while.

**10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker?** Not really, although most New Yorkers I meet aren't originally from NYC. That does make me feel welcome to feel like a New Yorker. But I just haven't lived here long enough to truly feel as a New Yorker would. ☺

*Hitting the Paywall, continued from page 4*

myriad other sites use them to restrict full or premium access to content: software providers distribute free/cheap versions and charge for premium software packages; media sites such as HBOGO are for paying subscribers; and of course scientific journals such as *Nature*, *Cell*, and *Science* demand fees for accessing the majority of their articles.

Thus, paywalls create a clear division between those who have access and those who do not. While this divide can be for something as banal as having access to Spotify on an iPhone versus only on a computer, the difference created could also be between having access to the information needed to make informed decisions, be it in regards to political opinion, the financial decision of how to invest, or the professional decision of what project to pursue.

In the end, the paywall is a somewhat paradoxical creation. My comrades and I relish taking advantage of all the different content sources I have discussed; we cannot enjoy reading from a news source with typographical errors or generally lower-level diction and syntax. However, we can-

not individually afford to pay for all of the content desired. Therefore, when the *Times* paywall went up, my peers and I shifted our outlook, such that we were willing to pay for our content, but only as efficiently as possible. Groups of friends began to distribute subscription costs with a few considerations in mind: to what services do we already subscribe? Are there redundant subscriptions among us? Are there services to which we do not subscribe that we would like to receive? Using these questions as guides for planning subscriptions, conglomerates were formed of a few people sharing usernames and passwords, dividing costs and sharing services. In the end, passwords could carry greater power than cash to normalize subscription costs.

By paying less mon-

ey to content providers, I decrease their ability to provide me with the content I desire. Unfortunately, I am currently unable to offer a solution to this conundrum, other than to make more money and pay for my own subscriptions (which, as much as I would like, simply isn't going to happen in the near future). Perhaps the *Times* and others should simply be happy that someone ponies up for their content rather than simply pirating it. ☺

### NATURAL SELECTIONS



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## CULTURE DESK

### Book review: *The Melancholy of Resistance* by László Krasznahorkai Interview: George Szirtes (translator of *The Melancholy of Resistance*)

BERNIE LANGS

After years of feasting on nonfiction books, I find myself binging on works of fiction these days, and most recently, of all things, Hungarian prose. Having read the German W.G. Sebald and the Austrian Thomas Bernhard, who both write with no paragraph breaks, I was not taken aback when I realized that the book my brother had insisted that I read, *The Melancholy of Resistance* by László Krasznahorkai, had none as well. Yet, in comparison to the other two, this book was dense, lengthy, and boasted long, convoluted, and incredibly beautiful sentence structures. In fact, that's an understatement. The language of this book is a tour de force. It is a lesson in how the writer's sheer passion for his craft sweeps the reader into the palm of his hand, to be taken on a journey, which is a touch surreal and more than a touch apocalyptic.

*Melancholy* tells the tale of a small Hungarian town that receives a visit from an odd circus, the main attraction of which features the remains of a gigantic whale. It is the dead of winter and expectant crowds build as they believe that something magical is in the air around the circus. The colorful, simple, and overly good-hearted character, Valuska, gets caught up in the goings on, which culminate late in the book when the crowd reaches a frenzy. There are pages and pages of writing devoted to the inner machinations of Valuska and his intellectual, older friend, Eszter. The reader rides along with the powerful and difficult sentences, until the last pages, which are devoted to a horrific, yet scientific, analysis (the subject of which I will not reveal for those who wish to read the book).

As soon as I finished reading *Melancholy*, I located the translator of the book, George Szirtes, and emailed him exultant congratulations on a triumphant piece of work. Mr. Szirtes lives in the UK and has won acclaim and awards for his work as a translator and as a long-standing poet. He graciously agreed to answer a few brief questions for *Natural Selections*.

**Bernie Langs (BL):** How did you come to get the commission to translate *Melancholy*? How much did you interact with Mr. Krasznahorkai while working on the translation?

**George Szirtes (GS):** I think New Directions [Publishing Company Corporation] commissioned me on the basis of my other fiction translations, particularly Kosztolányi's

*Anna Edes*, which I first translated for Quartet and then was picked up by New Directions. I'm not entirely sure. There was no interaction between the author and myself until near the very end.

**BL:** I once asked an Italian whether I lose something by reading the works of the ancient Romans in English and not in Latin. He laughed and asked me, "Well, do I lose something by reading Shakespeare in Italian?" I found the language in your translation transfixing and engrossing. But how much are we English readers missing from the flavors, textures, etc. of the original?

**GS:** What are readers missing? Frankly, I don't know. The flavors, textures etc. of the English are bound to be different from those of the Hungarian, but then the reader of the translation is not Hungarian. Translation is not a matter of effecting a direct transfer, but of finding favorable circumstances for the book to survive as a voice. It is therefore vital for the translator to hear the book as a voice, a voice that is partly text-as-language and partly an imagined, but convincing, trick of speech. The first draft is an attempt at direct transference; the second is the building of a voice.

**BL:** The book is without paragraphs, and the sentences are long and convoluted. How much of a struggle was it to translate? How long did it take you?

**GS:** New Directions insists it took me ten years. I think it took me six. I was working on a great many things in the meantime—in fact, I generally am. I also have a feeling that Quartet might have started the project but that New Directions took it up. Beyond that, it was my first Krasznahorkai book and it took time to adjust to a voice, in which the long paragraph and the long sentence form such an essential part. It was finding the right English language circumstance that took time. The voice had to avoid sounding stilted in English. It had to be odd but natural: a little nagging, a little insistent, a little comical, a little muttering, a little prophetic, and, at an underlying level, deeply apocalyptic. One has to lodge one's sense of such qualities in a language that behaves differently. That's done by instinct, of course, not by calculation.

**BL:** I am reminded in *Melancholy* of works written by Thomas Bernhard and W.G. Sebald. There is also a hint of Kafka. I thought the book

was a masterpiece. Do you think it will stand the test of time and be remembered as a major piece of fiction?



George Szirtes.

**GS:** I actually introduced Krasznahorkai to Sebald at the UEA [Creative Writing Course]. I had suggested Max [Sebald] as a possible blurb writer. Unfortunately I forgot to tell him and he rang me one day, sounding cross at having received a great pile of paper. I apologized profusely and he laughed and said he thought it was a marvelous book. He went on to write the blurb and, a couple of years later when Krasznahorkai came to England, we went to Max's office and had some coffee. Yes, I do think the book will stand the test of time. It is not only marvelous for its voice, but the thoroughness of the concept—all those macrocosms and microcosms—offers a vast architectural space for the imagination to inhabit. In some ways it is my favorite Krasznahorkai. But yes, Bernhard and Kafka, certainly.

**BL:** You are well known as a poet. How do you enjoy working as a translator as compared to the creativity of writing your own work?

**GS:** I am a poet first and a translator second. At one time I was an artist too but the poetry always takes precedence when it comes. I started translating after my first return visit to Hungary in 1984 and have been going ever since without a break. Sometimes I resent the time, but I am always glad to have done it, provided I think I have done the original some justice. And I have learned a good deal in the translating process, both about poetry and prose. I think translation is an act of shadow creation or shadow boxing. It keeps you fit and informs your own technique. You are using the same creative muscles in translation as in your own writing, but you don't have to invent everything; you just have to listen intensely, both to the original and to your own stream of language. The act of intense listening is the key to writing generally. In many ways, but far from all, I feel the translation is my work as much as the author's, that the author is in fact one of my own potential masks. You learn the mask as a joint creation. ☉

## For Your Consideration—Crystal Ball Edition Part II

JIM KELLER

Admittedly, last month's column was thrown together between health battles, and birthday and Oscar celebrations—oh wait, those last two were on the same day, no lie! Without further ado, I give you the remainder of a short list of films—some of which you might be hearing about for years to come as they, too, stake their claim in Oscar glory.

*The Counselor* (director: Ridley Scott):

**Why you might like it:** A lawyer-cum-drug trafficker finds himself in over his head.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** The film features Brad Pitt and Michael Fassbender—arguably two of the best, working actors of our time. Moreover, it could find Scott in the running for Best Director for the fourth time since 2001's *Black Hawk Down*.

*Labor Day* (director: Jason Reitman):

**Why you might like it:** It's an on-screen adaptation of Joyce Maynard's novel of the same name, set in the 1980s, which concerns a depressed single mom and her son who unwittingly offer a wounded, frightful escaped convict a ride. As police search the town for him, the two gradually learn his true story and their options become increasingly limited.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Kate Winslet excels in taught, period dramas and there's no reason that she wouldn't do well here. This brings to mind *Revolutionary Road* and *Little Children*, the latter of which earned her a Best Actress nomination, and the former, which should have. Both of these were adapted from the novels that preceded them.

*Elysium* (director: Neill Blomkamp):

**Why you might like it:** In the year 2159, where the very wealthy live on a man-made space station and the remaining population resides on a ruined Earth, a man risks his life in a mission to bring equality to these two worlds.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Blomkamp's first feature film, 2009's *District 9*, was a cinematic vision and earned four Oscar nominations including Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay. *Elysium* is my most anticipated film of the year.

*Monuments Men* (director: George Clooney):

**Why you might like it:** Based on Robert M. Edsel's book, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*, the film depicts a race against time as a crew of art historians and museum curators unite to save renowned works of art before their destruction by Hitler during World War II.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Despite the aesthetically unpleasing title, Clooney's films are well-crafted and often end up in the Oscar wheelhouse. What's more, 2005's *Good Night and Good Luck* earned him a Best Director nomination.

*The Spectacular Now* (director: James Ponsoldt):

**Why you might like it:** It's a teen drama about a hard-partying high school senior's relationship with the not-so-typical "nice girl" and how it affects his life philosophy.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Ponsoldt made a splash last year with *Smashed* at the Sundance Film Festival. This year, his film made its crowd-pleasing debut there and earned its co-leads, Shailene Woodley, and Miles Teller top acting honors.

*A Most Wanted Man* (director: Anton Corbijn):

**Why you might like it:** Based on John le Carré's novel, the film follows a Chechen Muslim as he gets caught up in the international war on terror after he illegally immigrates to Hamburg, Germany.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Corbijn's *The American* (2010) wasn't able to best his debut, 2007's *Control*, but I'm interested to see what he can do with a le Carré novel.

*The Fifth Estate* (director: Bill Condon):

**Why you might like it:** It's a look at the heady, early days of WikiLeaks, which covers the controversial, history-changing information leaks that led to its demise as well as the relationship between founder Julian Assange, and his early supporter/eventual colleague, Daniel Domscheit-Berg.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Virtually everyone is fascinated by Assange and his story—I'm no exception, and with Benedict Cumberbatch and Laura Linney on-hand, it's got to be good!

*Oldboy* (director: Spike Lee):

**Why you might like it:** It's an English language adaptation of Chan-wook Park's masterful, South Korean film based on a Japanese manga of the same name, which depicts the release and subsequent obsessive mission of a man held hostage for 20 years in solitary confinement to determine the identity of his captors. Through this quest he finds he's still trapped in a web of torment and conspiracy.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** The initial film won the Grand Prize of the Jury at 2004's Cannes Film Festival. This version features Josh Brolin in the title role along with Elizabeth Olsen and Sharlto Copley.

*Nebraska* (director: Alexander Payne):

**Why you might like it:** An aging boozehound of a father and his son trek from Montana to Nebraska to claim a million dollar Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes prize.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** I'm a long-time fan of Payne's work and am not often disappointed by the fruits of his labor. I have a hunch that this seemingly straightforward, simple tale will ultimately be more complex.

*Blue Jasmine* (director: Woody Allen):

**Why you might like it:** While details on this one haven't been revealed, according to a Sony Pictures Classics press release, the film stars Cate Blanchett in "the story of the final stages of an acute crisis and a life of a fashionable New York housewife."

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Sometimes he flops, but you've got to hand it to Allen for cranking out one film per year—year after year. Who doesn't want to see Cate Blanchett in this role?!

*The Way, Way Back* (directors: Nat Faxon and Jim Rash):

**Why you might like it:** The film is a coming of age story about a boy's relationship with a park manager over the course

of one summer. It marks the directorial debut from Faxon and Rash who won the Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar for 2010's *The Descendants*.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** The film premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival to rave reviews.

*The East* (director: Zal Batmanglij):

**Why you might like it:** It's about an operative of an elite, private intelligence firm, who finds her priorities change after she infiltrates an anarchist group known for executing covert attacks upon major

corporations. Also, you enjoyed Batmanglij's collaboration with co-writer/actress, Brit Marling, in 2011's *Sound of My Voice* and want to see more.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** I'm a fan of Batmanglij and Marling, but am intrigued at the prospect of seeing Ellen Page in an anarchist role.

*Lowlife* (director: James Gray):

**Why you might like it:** The film stars Marion Cotillard as an innocent immigrant woman tricked into burlesque and vaudeville until a magician tries to save

her and reunite her with her sister who is being held on Ellis Island.

**Why I've got my eye on it:** Besides having an outstanding cast, which includes Joaquin Phoenix and Jeremy Renner, Gray's films *The Yards*, *We Own the Night* (2007 and 2008, respectively) and most recently, 2008's *Two Lovers*, have all been nominated for the Palm d'Or—the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

Speaking of Cannes, the next issue will be a preview of those films set to cross the Croisette. ☺

## Life on a Roll



*Mirror* by Elodie Pauwels

