

text . . . was a constant presence in American life, the idioms and diction and syntax incised in collective memory through the King James translation became a wellspring of eloquence.”

Alter, who teaches Hebrew and comparative literature at the University of California, Berkeley, identifies William Faulkner as the last major American writer to be strongly influenced by the King James Version, though more thematically than linguistically. In such novels as *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), Faulkner’s biblical allusions not only provide signposts to the morality of key characters in fictional Yoknapatawpha County but also add allegorical weight to his contemporary dramas.

Has appreciation of the literary style of writers such as Faulkner or Melville vanished forever? Alter laments that “teachers of literature and their hapless students have tended to look right through style to the purported grounding of the text in one ideology or another.” They

and others are missing the “deep pleasure” of the “play of style in fiction,” and the fine mental connections and discriminations it affords.

ARTS & LETTERS

The Art of Life

THE SOURCE: “The Art Is Alive” by Emily Voigt, in *Isotope*, Fall-Winter 2009.

A DINNER PARTY IN PARIS.

Frog on the menu. It sounds pretty straightforward until the catch: In attendance is the frog himself, still alive. The meal being served—coincidentally frog steaks—is tissue cloned from the guest of honor. It’s not the future; it’s a piece of performance art titled *Disembodied Cuisine*. Welcome to the weird world of bioart.

“The idea of manipulating life in the name of aesthetics is nothing new,” says Emily Voigt, a writer based in New York City, but recently, art in which biological materials are used “has been growing rapidly in popularity and ambition.” *Bioart* is the catchall label for works of this kind,

which range from bacteria that have been genetically engineered to glow in bright colors to a torn leaf repaired with grafted-on human scab cells. Many artists who 10 or 20 years ago were tinkering with silicon and circuits are today playing with cells and DNA.

Many bioartists present their work as a critique of what they see as the recklessness of modern science. Oron Catts, the man behind *Disembodied Cuisine*, directs SymbioticA, an “artistic laboratory” at the University of Western Australia, where participants can attend “workshops on how to build a home lab for no more than the cost of a laptop” and receive instruction in DNA extraction, genetic engineering, and selective breeding. Catts gives voice to the question raised by bioart: “Should [artists] be allowed to work with life?” But to him, the question is just as relevant for science as it is for art; in his view it’s science, not art, that has produced “the most challenging images of the 20th century.”

Another bioartist Voigt profiles, Adam Zaretsky, believes that even if

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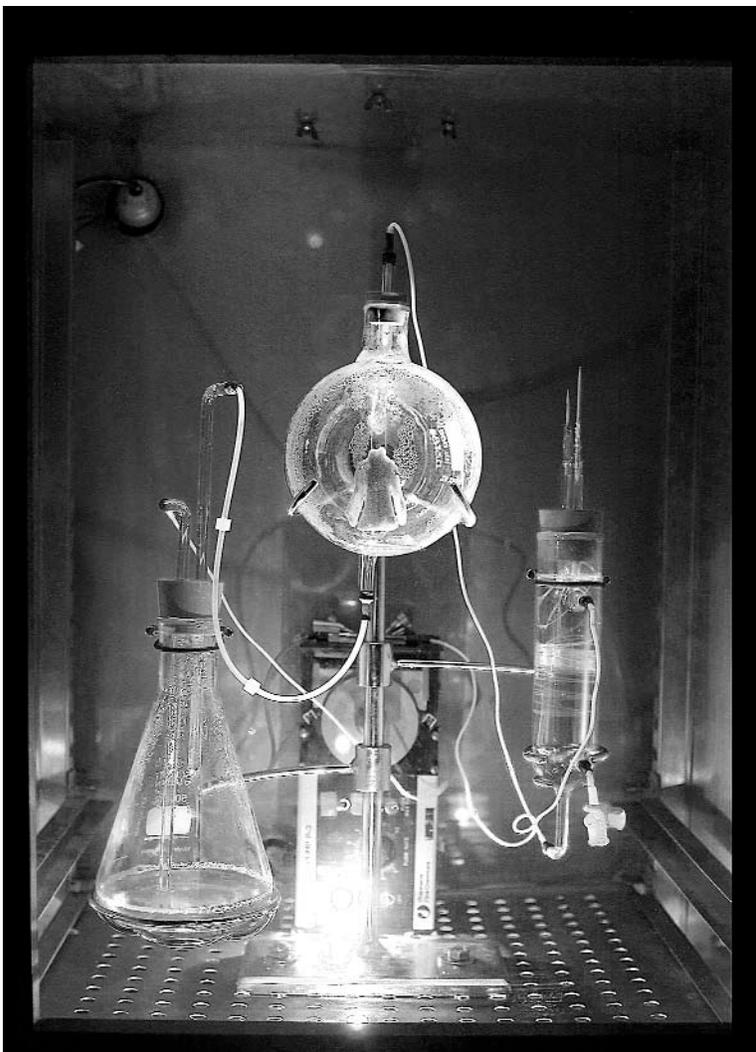
This “Oates”—this quasi-public self—is scarcely visible to me, as a mirror reflection, seen up close, is scarcely visible to the viewer. “Oates” is an island, an oasis, to which on this agitated morning I can row, as in an uncertain little skiff, with an unwieldy paddle—the way is arduous not because the water is deep but because the water is shallow and weedy and the bottom of the skiff is endangered by rocks beneath. And yet—once I

have rowed to this island, this oasis, this core of calm amid the chaos of my life—once I arrive at the university, check my mail, and ascend to the second floor of 185 Nassau where I’ve had an office since fall 1978—once I am “Joyce Carol Oates” in the eyes of my colleagues and my students—a shivery sort of elation enters my veins. I feel not just confidence but certainty—that I am in the right place, and this is the right time. The anxiety, the despair, the anger I’ve been feeling—that has so transformed my life—immediately fades, as shadows on a wall are dispelled in sunshine.

—JOYCE CAROL OATES, author of, most recently, *In Rough Country*, in *The Atlantic* (2010 Fiction issue)

Michelangelo's Passion

THE SOURCE: "Loving Strokes" by James Fenton, in *Times Literary Supplement*, April 9, 2010.



***Victimless Leather*, a tiny jacket "grown" from mouse stem cells, "deconstruct[s] our cultural meaning of clothes as a second skin by materializing it and displaying it," its creators explain.**

his experiments with *E. coli* or other bacteria cause harm or suffering, they are also "introducing important questions into the public consciousness." He admits, "My art is ethically suspect. . . . My friend sat down with me and said, 'Well, you know, you say you're critiquing it and then you're actually doing it.' And I was like, 'You might be kind of right.'"

The first major bioart exhibition was held in 2000 in New York's Hell's

Kitchen neighborhood. Eduardo Kac, a Brazilian artist credited with naming the genre, had a piece on display in which he translated a verse from the Bible into Morse code, then used the resulting dots and dashes to write DNA code. Which verse? Genesis 1:28, in which God commands that man "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

ART HISTORIANS HAVE LONG speculated whether a set of drawings Michelangelo Buonarroti made for his friend and patron Tommaso de'Cavalieri in 1532 reveal a not-so-secret love. In one of the drawings, "Ganymede," an eagle's talons grip a young man around the shins as it bears him aloft. "To many," James Fenton writes, "this looks like buggery—buggery, to be sure, of an exceedingly unusual kind . . . but buggery nevertheless." Also fueling the gossip are a number of passionate love sonnets the artist wrote to the young nobleman. "The artist protests a chaste love," Fenton says, "but he does so with a passion that, for a modern sensibility, can only with difficulty be conceived as chaste." At the time Michelangelo presented the drawings, he would have been 57; Tommaso may have been as young as 12, though he was more likely at least in his teens.

During his life, Michelangelo (1475–1564) fastidiously guarded access to his drawings. "*Non mostra cosa alchuna ad alchuno*," his agent wrote to the Marquis of Mantua: He doesn't show anything to anybody." Rival artists often sought out such sketches for clues about techniques they could appropriate—indeed, 50 sketches