

explain why, as sociologist Thorstein Veblen suggested in a controversial 1918 essay, Jewish scientists such as Albert Einstein thrived in the anti-Semitic culture of Germany. And Dunbar's research points to another fruitful avenue: diversity. The laboratories he studied all held regular group meetings where knotty problems were tackled en masse. Labs in which the scientists were all in the same field were much less efficient at solving such puzzles than those that included researchers from unrelated fields, partly, Lehrer says, because the scientists were forced to explain their experiments in abstract terms that allowed for more creative ideas to emerge.

## SCIENCE &amp; TECHNOLOGY

## Skin Story

**THE SOURCE:** "The Naked Truth" by Nina G. Jablonski, in *Scientific American*, Feb. 2010.

HAIRLESS SKIN MAY NOT SEEM a very notable human trait when compared with our use of

advanced tools or spoken language, but our fur-free epidermis is among the significant distinctions that set us apart from our closest primate relations, writes Nina G. Jablonski, a professor and head of the anthropology department at Pennsylvania State University.

Protohumans probably started losing their hair in response to a change in climate about three million years ago. The lush region in east and central Africa that sustained australopithecines dried out, and the fruits, leaves, tubers, and seeds that were once abundant disappeared, as did fresh water. These human ancestors had to abandon a relatively leisurely foraging way of life and take a more active approach to finding the calories and water necessary to keep them alive. It was also around this time that australopithecines began to hunt for meat. All this extra activity put these hairy human ancestors at constant risk of overheating; soon enough, that body hair thinned out.

Furry creatures employ specialized tactics to keep themselves cool: Dogs pant; cats lie low in the heat of the day. The little bit of hair that humans retain on the tops of their heads also helps people stay cool by shielding their scalps from the sun. But for primates, sweating is the *modus operandi*. And thanks to our nearly hairless skin and an abundance of eccrine glands (between two and five million), humans have the most efficient sweating system around—so efficient, in fact, that on a hot day it's possible for a human to outrun a horse in a marathon.

Jablonski writes that our unique skin led to the emergence of other distinctly human traits. She speculates that our skin and sweating abilities made possible "the dramatic enlargement of our most temperature-sensitive organ, the brain." Human modes of communication such as facial expressions and body language replaced raising our hackles. Skin may not be very deep, but it goes right to the core of who we are.

## ARTS &amp; LETTERS

## Writing Into the Void

**THE SOURCE:** "The Death of Fiction" by Ted Genoways, in *Mother Jones*, Jan.-Feb. 2010.

IN THE INTERNET AGE, EVERYONE is a poet, a blogger, an e-mailer. More than 800 MFA pro-

grams around the country pump out a steady supply of newly minted wordsmiths. The death of literature, it would seem, has been greatly exaggerated. But in *Mother Jones*, Ted Genoways, the

editor of the literary journal *Virginia Quarterly Review*, provides reason for pause. When everyone's a writer, no one's a reader—at least to judge from the state of American literary journals.

In these days of academic belt-tightening, literary journals, which proliferated on campuses in the last few decades, have become easy targets. Standard-bearers such as *TriQuarterly Review*, *New*

*England Review*, and *Southern Review* have seen their budgets and staffs slashed or are threatened with elimination altogether if they don't break even.

In their heyday half a century ago, Genoways notes, university-based literary journals were vital forums for serious fiction and public debate. "Consider this: When Wilbur Cross was elected governor of Connecticut in 1930, an unlikely Democratic victor in an overwhelmingly Republican state, his principal qualification was his nearly 20 years as editor of *Yale Review*."

The fact is that no one reads such journals now, Genoways says. The average literary journal prints fewer than 1,500 copies. Yet the volume of submissions to these publications has exploded. In a blog posting on *Virginia Quarterly Review's* own Web site after Genoways published his essay, the magazine's editors noted that every year 10 times as many people submit to the magazine as subscribe to it. "And there's very, very little overlap. We know—we've checked."

Writers know there's no audience for what they do—many of them aren't reading the stuff themselves—so, writes Genoways, they "have become less and less interested in reaching out to readers—and less and less encouraged by their teachers to try." The echo chamber has had an effect. Major magazines that once regularly published fiction have ceased to do so—*The New Yorker* and *Harper's* being the exceptions. "One would think that

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the rapid eviction of literature from the pages of commercial magazines would have come as a tremendous boon to lit mags. . . . But the less commercially viable fiction became, the less it seemed to concern itself with its audience, which in turn made it less commercial, until, like a dying star, it seems on the verge of implosion." As evidence that fiction has ceased to concern itself with things that matter, he notes the dearth of fiction written about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; journalists and war vet memoirists have taken up the publishing slack.

Genoways proposes a new era of invigorated literary journals. "With so many newspapers and magazines closing, with so many commercial publishers looking to nonprofit models, a few bold university presidents could save American literature, reshape journalism, and maybe even rescue public discourse from the cable shout shows and the blogosphere." But that can only work if young writers "swear off navel gazing" and "write something we might want to read."

## ARTS AND LETTERS

## Grandeur in Stone

**THE SOURCE:** "Sculptors of the American Renaissance: Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Daniel Chester French" by James F. Cooper, in *American Arts Quarterly*, Fall 2009.

THE CIVIL WAR LEFT BOTH THE North and the South bruised and battered, but the Industrial Revolution ensured that prosperity returned fairly quickly. Soon enough, the search was on for a culture appropriate to a rejuvenated America's growing role on the world stage. Thus dawned the American Renaissance, a period when "art was at the heart of American civic life," writes James F. Cooper, editor and publisher of *American Arts Quarterly*.

Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Daniel Chester French, arguably two of America's greatest sculptors, exemplified the period's mix of mastery, ambition, and gravitas. French is best known for *Lincoln*, the 19-foot-tall statue of the 16th president that sits inside the grand memorial on the National Mall, while Saint-Gaudens won praise for accomplished memorials to contemporary luminaries such as Robert Gould Shaw, the Civil War colonel who commanded one of the U.S. military's first black regiments, and Navy admiral David Glasgow Farragut. Both sculptors were inspired by the moral authority and aesthetic excellence of Greco-Roman sculpture. But they also had unique strengths and influences.

Of the two men's work, French's was more traditionally neoclassical. He was particularly concerned with shape and form; like Michelangelo's,