

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
Carey Perloff, Artistic Director Heather Kitchen, Executive Director

PRESENTS

WORDS ^{on} PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

Blackbird

BY DAVID HARROWER

DIRECTED BY LORETTA GRECO

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

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Image courtesy John Patterson

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Una (Jessi Campbell). Photo by Kevin Berne.



Ray (Steven Culp). Photo by Kevin Berne.

CHARACTERS, CAST, AND SYNOPSIS OF *BLACKBIRD*

Blackbird was commissioned by and premiered at the 2005 Edinburgh International Festival. The first performance took place at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh, on August 15, 2005. The London premiere opened at the Albery Theatre on February 7, 2006, followed by the New York premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club, April 10, 2007.

CHARACTERS AND CAST

PETER/RAY

Steven Culp

UNA

Jessi Campbell

THE SETTING

The present. England.

SYNOPSIS

Late one evening, Una arrives at the plant where Ray (who now goes by the name Peter) works. Surprised and discomfited by her sudden appearance, Ray ushers her into the garbage-strewn company staff room in order to hide her from his coworkers.

Ray tells Una that he is very busy and has little time to speak to her. He asks her whether she has come alone, and indeed why she is there at all. He is troubled by her presence and wants her to leave. He suggests that they leave the building to talk outside. Una closes the door, keeping them both in the room.

When Ray asks Una how she found him, she tells him that she was leafing through a trade magazine when she saw his face in a company photograph. Unnerved, Ray again suggests that they go outside to continue their talk. Una diverts him, revealing that she has written letters to him over the years since they last saw each other. She confesses that she was encouraged to write to him and tell him exactly what she thought and felt about him, but they were never meant to be sent. He asks her why she drove so far to see him and confront him. He protests that he did not agree to this meeting and that she has no right to subject him to humiliation. He leaves the room, she calls after him, and he quickly returns.

Ray is nervous around Una and claims he did not recognize her when she first appeared; he thought she might have been a journalist trying to trick him. Una then asks Ray how many other 12-year-old girls he has had sex with—who else would he expect to see?

Una asks whether Ray has a girlfriend, and whether or not she knows about his past relationship with Una. He admits that he is seeing someone but refuses to tell Una anything about her. Una describes how her father died—of shame, she says—and shouts at Ray that her father wanted to kill him. Upset, she suddenly reaches for her bag. Ray, afraid that she intends to hurt him, grabs her bag and searches it, but finds only tissues and a bottle of water, and the photograph of him torn from the trade magazine.

They discuss Ray/Peter's new name and identity. She asks how much his girlfriend knows about his past. He responds that he has told his girlfriend the facts, that when he was 40 he had a relationship with a minor and served time in jail for it. He has also told her that it was a mistake. Una accuses Ray of looking happy in the photograph, and that he looks as though he has forgotten everything that happened between them. She reminds him that, if their affair had happened a few years later, his name would now be on the sexual offenders' register and that he would never be allowed to forget what he did to her.

Una tells him that she thinks about what happened every day, and Ray seems genuinely sympathetic. Una asks Ray about photographs he took of her when she was 12, wondering whether they ended up on the Internet. Ray assures her that he burned them. He makes it clear that he believes he is not a pedophile.

Una tries to leave, but Ray stops her. He wants to explain. She relents, and together they reconstruct the past. Ray remembers their first meeting, at a barbecue at her parents' house. He is adamant that he had no sexual feelings for her then, that he was just being friendly. Una ridicules his attempt to prove this. They discuss the notes Una used to leave for Ray, in



Steven Culp and Jessi Campbell rehearsing *Blackbird* at A.C.T.
Photo by Kevin Berne.

which she teased and flirted with him. Ray says that she seemed so much older than her age then, more mature than his current girlfriend, even. Together they remember their first kiss in the park, and how Una called to Ray to join her in the bushes so their intimate interaction would not be seen.

Una remembers the evening they spent together in a guesthouse on the coast, where they had sex—her first time—and how Ray left her alone in the room afterward and did not return. After waiting a long time, she went looking for him, terrified, in that unfamiliar town, but she could not find him; she was discovered late that night by a couple, who called the police. Una then describes her experience of his trial, how her parents blamed her when they found out what had happened, and the pain and shame of the following years trying to come to terms with what happened.

Ray tells Una that he never forgot about her, and that he wrote her letters from prison, which she never received. He then describes the night at the guesthouse from his point of view: overwhelmed by what they had done, he went for a walk; he did come back for her, but she was already gone. He was afraid of what might have happened to her, and when he couldn't find her, he ran away, eventually turning himself into the police.

The lights in the break room suddenly go out. Ray leaves to find out what happened and returns cursing his coworkers, who have all left for the night. Una becomes angry with Ray and taunts him about his new girlfriend. He accuses her of being ill, and she attacks him. They struggle. Una falls to the floor in pain.

Una describes her life now: she has a job and recently broke up with her boyfriend, who knew nothing about her past. Suddenly Ray kicks over the garbage can, and they are soon playing together, kicking bits of trash around the room. They move closer, and Ray admits that he still thinks about her. They kiss. Their embrace becomes more passionate, and they fall to the floor and begin undressing each other. Ray pulls away. A female voice is heard outside the door calling his name—"Peter!"

The door opens and a 12-year-old girl appears. She says that she and her mother are waiting for Peter (Ray). He tries to get her to leave and meet him at the building entrance, but the girl wants to stay with him. She sees Una and asks who she is. He tells her Una is a friend and urges her out the door.

Una looks accusingly at Ray as he insists that he just takes care of the girl, who is his girlfriend's daughter, that he has not desired anyone that young since his relationship with Una, who was "the only one." She tries to stop him from following the girl out, but Ray leaves. Una is alone.

BLACKBIRD

Comments Made to A.C.T. Cast and Staff by Director Loretta Greco

Why aren't you happy? You should be happy." A man says this to a young girl at a bar-beque and so launches a relationship that defines these people for the rest of their lives. David Harrower puts these people in a room together 15 years after this event, giving them the opportunity to restore, to reconstruct their histories, to re-examine together something they've each been wrestling with internally, passively, by themselves. He puts them in a room and simply allows the play to happen. Right there before us. To reconstruct what might have at one time been pure. What was this extraordinary relationship? Illegal, illicit, clandestine—yes, but for three months these two people believed, against all odds, against all authority, that what they had was bigger and more pure. They planned even to run away together. So this is a play about a lot of "re's": reconstructing, redeeming, releasing. Hopefully redeeming at the end. These characters find a way to reclaim themselves. For 15 years, who they are has been defined by other people: authorities, social workers, prison officials and inmates. So finally they get a chance to say, Maybe *this* is what it was, and to maybe move on.

One of the questions that has stuck with me in thinking about this play is, Is this a love story? I think it's interesting that I haven't found that particular word, "love," useful in working with actors during the audition process. Somehow it never comes to me as an active, or insightful tool. What I find myself instinctively saying again and again is that their relationship is the event that defines their lives from that moment forth. Some of us only get one life-defining moment, and for them this is it.

Piecing together a puzzle that helps them to identify the truth of the past and present (which allows a future) remains exciting to me as a way to look at the play. Our need to attempt a re-construction of history, which we know can never be wholly or accurately conjured. Why do we insist on piecing together the truth of the past when we know it will be elusive and incomplete at best? Resolution? Comfort? Absolution? Release? I think in the case of *Blackbird* some of what's exciting about the puzzle piecing is how ferociously active it is—for Una, especially, who begins the ritual; her passive burden of shame is, for the first time, replaced by an aggressive assertion of blame and a call for accountability from Ray.

This play is as much about the nature of truth as anything else. What is the truth? What did happen? And how, 15 years later, can we rename the truth, re-invent it, re-imagine it? It's all so slippery.

Along with redemption . . . restoration, construction, and deconstruction are active words that keep coming into play as I work with the text. In the simplest of ways, Una is here to seek her own restoration, but before she can even begin that process she has to deconstruct piece by piece the new identity Ray has painstakingly built over the last 15 years. A new name hardly scratches the surface when it comes to the sturdy construction of “Peter” that Ray has built in order to sublimate his guilt, shame, and fear. Meanwhile Una has not been given the opportunity to re-invent herself, nor does she seem to have the impulse to deny the label she’s been given—she’s fucked her way through 83 (but who’s counting?) men in order to live out what she’s both experienced and been labeled for the last 15 years—she knows from the minute she sees Ray’s photo in that magazine that her future depends on traversing the past. While she depends on going back, the Ray she finds at the top of the play doesn’t want to just move on . . . he HAS moved on. Years and years ago.

At first I thought that the circular way the text works evoked the communication challenges of the British; but I’ve come to believe that their circuitous routes of language speak to all of our intimacy challenges as human beings—our fear of being too vulnerable, too honest, too available, too direct.



Director Loretta Greco. Photo by Kevin Berne.

Harrower’s language has the tautness and the judiciousness of Pinter; it’s got the muscle of Mamet and Shepard; it’s got the punch and the messiness of Albee. But it’s Harrower’s. It’s just his. This play is the most unique thing I have read in years and years and years. It is so exquisitely circuitous.

Una talks about having other people name what happened. The courts decide that, psychiatrists decide, they name it something that Una and Ray never would have used, so they’ve had to appropriate language in order to try to find words around “abuse” and “pedophile” and “abuser.” I’m circling like they do, but I’m intrigued by this idea that Una talks about, that the psychologists tried to help her think about hope, think about the future, and to imagine what a hopeful future would look like.

I want to make sure that this is not just about being tempted into something forbidden, but that the issue 15 years later really is about how can we come together and find better

names for what this relationship was. We all have something in our pasts that we haven't gone back to, that we haven't resolved, and there is something in the idea of having a chance to go back 15 years later to try and make something good out of it. I think there's something hopeful about that; there is something redemptive about going back in the end. There is also something extraordinary about a girl coming back as a woman to right something, an act of her childhood. There is something extraordinarily brave and ferocious and scary and vulnerable about that, too.

In terms of how we present the play to the public, my feeling is that the challenge is not to mislead. Each performance should be an uninterrupted period during which, for most of it, we are able to empathize with both characters and humanize not only them as individuals but also the relationship. I think that the "p" word [pedophilia] is just not useful, because you can't humanize a pedophile, there's just no way to do it. I think what Harrower does at the end of the play when that 12-year-old girl walks in . . . that's when the floodgates should open. All of the questions of truth and trust open up when we're reminded of what a 12-year-old girl really is, what she looks like—she's there, and we can't deny that. But the challenge is how to have Ray not judged up to that point.

It's important for us to pay justice to how complicated and how interesting that grey area is, that is neither definitively black nor white, and then at the end people will make their own judgments. Our job is to help people stretch in a way that allows them to see that the play raises more questions, really complicated questions, about sexuality, about human nature, about relationships, about love, all of it. I just want audiences to be as open as possible for as long as possible.



Jessi Campbell in rehearsal at A.C.T.
Photo by Kevin Berne.

I have a six-year-old girl, and I see all these young people and how early they're being sexualized. This is very hard material for me. But I'm trying as hard as I can to see both sides, because I also remember being young, preteen, and looking at my dad's friends. Not that they were hot-ties and I was thinking about sex; it was about getting validation from somebody who is already in the world. I think that for Una, love means something else, because it's so much about her wanting to jumpstart her adulthood.

I am a woman, I am a mom, I am a wife. I am an artist. I like plays that are emotionally messy and complicated, and I think that's how I respond to this play, that these people are so brave, so fearless, coming into this room and staying there. I like the complications. I like that Harrower doesn't tell us what's right and wrong, and he never tells us what is truth. Ray might be the best surrogate dad ever for that kid who comes in at the end. This thing that happened with Una really may have been a once-in-a-lifetime event. I like that we don't know.

I'll say this: I saw a lot of actors [in auditions for this production]. We did an astounding search for these two individuals. You would have thought we were casting a musical; the process was really very muscular. So much of what both Steven [Culp] and Jessi [Campbell] bring to this is a kind of humanity and a kind of "best intentions." These characters are people who are doing the best they can in every moment. I think that one thing that made me exhale [with relief] when Steven walked into the room was just that I liked him. I wanted to know more about him. It was easy for a lot of other actors to do something else with the role, and I think the beautiful thing is that Steven brings a kind of likeability, so that when people see him, even if they have some preconceived notion, they will realize there is something else going on there.

It's going to be a huge challenge, but I think the audience is going to be surprised by their reactions. I find myself shocked at the things I'm thinking about now that I've been working on this play for a while.

ON THE SCENIC DESIGN

The [setting] is a small plant that assembles, packages, and loads out both dental and pharmaceutical equipment, from pills to dental floss, etc. The action takes place in the break room; there would be another room that would be the formal cafeteria where they'd get their formal meals, but this is the place where they can smoke (because they still do smoke in England), and this is where they would grab, on their breaks, sustenance from the delicious and wonderful vending machines [*laugh*]. This is also where Ray stashes Una when she surprises him.

When [scenic designer Robert Brill and I] started to work on this, we didn't want to make the room too fancy or upscale, and it started to look like a bad "NYPD Blue" set, so we tried to give it some sense of decor, a place where employees are encouraged to come and unwind for their ten or fifteen minutes. We also wanted to provide a landscape that would juxtapose the debris—the leftover sandwich and the pack of chips, and god knows what else, the packet of ketchup and the half-drunk soda, that have been strewn about.



Photo of the *Blackbird* set model by scenic designer Robert Brill

What's incredible is that it all happens within these four walls. The wall is not really opaque, so you have a sense that there is a whole world beyond this room, of Ray's employees and colleagues, whom we sometimes see passing through. The door remains open for a bit before it's finally closed, but everything happens in here. There are two vending machines that will emit a kind of bizarre light of their own. In that one moment when the lights go out, that is the only light that will shine. There is a set of lockers. The people on the line, depending on what they're doing, wear a series of things that sometimes look like they're heading off into space when they're dealing with real pharmaceutical assemblage, but primarily we're thinking they're in lab coats, so this room is a place where people keep their lab coats, can throw their jackets, personal things. And behind the lockers there is a little bench.

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There are no helicopters; there are no surprises. The biggest surprise is a 12-year-old girl who walks in when we almost think we know . . . just when we think, Phew!, the door opens and in walks a 12-year-old and we suddenly realize, hmmm, maybe none of what we know is the truth. That's the biggest surprise scenically, is that a human being walks in at 12 years of age.

There is a series of fluorescent lights hanging above the table, and then behind, in the hallway, there is one of the longest fluorescents you've ever seen, and really that is it [for the set]. I found it extraordinary when we were doing *Lackawanna* [*Blues*, directed by Greco for A.C.T. in 2002], the way that this [grand] theater can be made to feel so intimate. It's

just so deceiving. [*Lackawanna* writer/solo actor] Ruben [Santiago-Hudson] and [accompanying guitarist] Bill [Sims, Jr.] got out there, and the relationship with the audience was so full and one-on-one and immediate. Robert [Brill] has tried to do the same thing here, pulling everything down, so that the fourth wall is about inviting each of you to go with us in trying to piece this puzzle together. At the very downstage edge there is a little piece of black carpet, which is just that hint of fourth wall. There is this little black floating box. For me, there is something interesting about the sense of this world unto itself that the set helps to depict, but at the same time it helps bring our eye down so we are not seeing the level of instrumentation. It keeps us right there in that room with the characters. That's all there is. A shiny charcoal floor and blue plastic chairs—the better to throw at each other.

The one other thing that I think is important is that we've kept it in England. The New York production has set the play in the United States, and I'm sure that's going to be lovely. Carey and [A.C.T. Associate Artistic Director] Johanna [Pfaelzer] and I did wrestle with the question because, of course, we're here in this country and we want the story to be viable for an American audience. I think we all came to the conclusion, however, that we should keep the setting in Britain, because: A) there was something about the score of the [British] language, and B) there was something about the slight distance that might allow people to enter the play more readily than if they're thinking about someone just down the block.

The other thing is that the United States is the land of reinvention. Madonna is alive and well as an American pop star because it's in our blood as Americans that we believe we can reinvent who we are every five years. Ray/Peter has painstakingly found a way to do that, and I think it has cost him enormously to construct this other identity.

There is also something about those two people looking across the water at Amsterdam and the thought of going somewhere. What would they be looking at in Manhattan—Coney Island? I couldn't quite figure out how that idea would translate. Because for me that idea is big—even though it's a half-baked plan—the idea that, even for a moment, they believe they could run away and start a life together. That's been excised from the New York production, because that's how they've made it American.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Playwright David Harrower

David Harrower was born in Edinburgh and now lives in Glasgow. His first play, *Knives in Hens*, was first produced at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, in 1995 and has been seen in more than 20 countries worldwide. Other plays include *Kill the Old*, *Torture Their Young* (Traverse Theatre) and *The Chrysalids* (NT Connections, Royal National Theatre, London). *Presence*, his third original play, was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in 2001. Harrower has

also adapted versions of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, first staged at the Young Vic in 2000; Chekhov's *Ivanov*, performed at the National Theatre in 2002; and Büchner's *Woyzeck*, performed at the Edinburgh Lyceum in 2002. His play *Dark Earth* premiered at the Traverse in August 2003, and his new version of von Horvath's *Tales from the Vienna Woods* was performed at the National Theatre later that year. *Blackbird* was commissioned by the Edinburgh International Festival and premiered there in August 2005. It subsequently transferred to London's West End in February 2006 and was recently performed at the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York. *Blackbird* was short-listed for the Saltire Society's Scottish Book of the Year and won the Scotland Critics' Award for best play in 2006 and the Laurence Olivier Award in 2007.

“WITH MYSTERIES INTACT”

An Interview with Playwright David Harrower

BY JESSICA WERNER ZACK

In conversation, Scottish playwright David Harrower discusses his writing with a refreshing modesty and perceptible bewilderment at the mysterious nature of his own creative process. He quickly debunks the myth of the omniscient writer, holding his characters' fates securely in hand. Instead, Harrower admits to an astonishment that accompanies his success and an openness to letting his characters' lines and lives roam freely into situations that can surprise even their creator.

Speaking just a week after *Blackbird* earned the British theater establishment's highest honor, the Olivier Award for best new play, Harrower said with a laugh, "I'm still not sure how the play actually works." That may be little comfort for the playgoer looking for an easy summation of his plots or purpose, yet Harrower makes clear that the powerful emotional connection audiences feel with his work is inextricably connected to his own need to write dramas that "leave some mysteries intact, some questions left unanswered. If I ever find I know what my plays are about, that's when I start worrying, because as soon as I start reducing it to knowing what's going on, I'm in trouble."

At age 40, Harrower is considered one of Scotland's most gifted playwrights and has already created a substantial body of dramatic work celebrated for its compelling ambiguities and densely poetic, even enigmatic, language. His first play, *Knives in Hens*, first produced at Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre in 1995, has become one of Scotland's biggest theatrical exports. Written in exceptionally spare language, the play exerts a disquieting power as it charts a medieval peasant woman's journey from subservience to an adulterous husband to a mature, vengeful awareness. Translated for production in more than 20 countries, *Knives in Hens* solidified Harrower's reputation worldwide as a writer whose plays haunt as well as entertain.

In the decade following his spectacular debut, Harrower wrote *Kill the Old, Torture Their Young* (1998) and *Dark Earth* (2003), as well as several adaptations and translations of European classics. Each successive drama has been well received by audiences and critics alike, but he had yet to recapture the austere beauty of his debut work—until *Blackbird* premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2005 and set the theatrical world buzzing even louder. The one-act, two-character play received the Scotland Critics' Award for best play before transferring to the West End in 2006. Productions have since been

planned in 17 other countries, including this month's opening at Manhattan Theatre Club and *Blackbird's* West Coast premiere at A.C.T.

Wrote a theater critic in the *Scotsman*: "Somehow Harrower has sidestepped the familiar Sunday supplement debates about the evils of pedophilia and opened up alarmingly grey areas of emotional ambiguity. He did this without any suggestion that he condoned a relationship that was socially and criminally unacceptable, yet he kept us on the edge of our seats."

Harrower spoke to A.C.T. Contributor Jessica Werner Zack in February, just before rehearsals for the A.C.T. production began in San Francisco.

YOU'VE SAID THAT YOUR INITIAL INSPIRATION FOR WRITING *BLACKBIRD* WAS A REAL-LIFE STORY YOU READ IN 2003 ABOUT A U.S. MARINE WHO HAD TAKEN OFF FOR EUROPE WITH A 12-YEAR-OLD GIRL, ALTHOUGH HE CLAIMED TO BELIEVE SHE WAS 19. WHAT ABOUT THAT STORY INTRIGUED YOU ENOUGH TO EXPLORE IT IN THEATRICAL TERMS?

I wasn't exactly inspired by that story, but it inspired a series of thoughts that resulted in this play. I am wary of trying to dramatize real-life events. But I remember that story caught my eye and I started wondering about it. When did he find out her true age? What would it have been like when she told him? Did he know when he first saw her? Would he have still gotten on the plane with her? It was pure curiosity on my part, and I started thinking more about it. This image came to me of a man and a girl standing looking at the sea, and I just couldn't shake it. It was really that image that became [my primary inspiration].

YOU'VE MADE SURE NOTHING IN THE PLAY IS PORTRAYED IN BLACK OR WHITE TERMS. INSTEAD, YOU EXPLORE SOME OF THE DECIDEDLY GREY AREAS THAT CAN EXIST IN HUMAN BEHAVIOR, IN RELATIONSHIPS.

Absolutely. For me, the pedophilic angle is not the [play's] most interesting angle. In fact, it's probably the least interesting. The event did happen, but to me there was no point in going over the argument [of whether it was morally wrong] and becoming a referee standing in judgment of these characters. People know it shouldn't happen, and there's no point in me confirming what people believe. It was very important to me to let these two characters in this room together say anything they want to each other without me censoring it. And they *can* say anything they want to each other because they are the only two persons who knew exactly how they felt or what they wanted.

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU CHOSE TO HAVE RAY AND UNA MEET 15 YEARS AFTER THEIR INITIAL ENCOUNTER SO THAT THEY ONLY FLASHBACK VERBALLY TO THE EVENTS IN THE PAST.

When I had the realization that I could make them both two adults now, struggling over the memory of what had happened between them, that's when it all sort of locked into place. For me, it's what we carry within us, how we believe we are made up, and what memories we hold on to that shape us. It's what makes us the people we are. We walk around at any given moment, the sum of what we carry with us.

SEEING THEM NOW, A WOMAN OF 28 AND A MAN OF 55, MAKES US REALIZE HOW AGE BECOMES LESS CONSEQUENTIAL OVER TIME. THEY COULD RECONNECT AND THEIR AGE DIFFERENCE MIGHT RAISE AN EYEBROW OR TWO, BUT IT WOULD NO LONGER BE MORALLY AMBIGUOUS.

Absolutely. I wanted that tension between the memory or the picture they paint for themselves and what is possible between them now.

I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND YOUR NOT WANTING TO STRESS THE PEDOPHILIC ASPECT OF THIS. YET, YOU TREAD SOME DANGEROUS TERRITORY PORTRAYING WHAT THEY HAD AS A LOVE AFFAIR OR EVEN A CONSENTING RELATIONSHIP.

I knew it was dangerous ground and I thought I might get some flak for it, but, surprisingly, I got letters from women thanking me, congratulating me, standing firm that they had relationships when technically children, but that they knew exactly what they were doing. We can choose to query that if we want, but I'm not going to take that [certainty] away from them. I've talked to a few women who have been in relationships at this [very young] age with much older men and firmly believe that what they had was a love affair. That really surprised me.

It's very possible that the experience Una had with Ray, illegal or not, may have come to represent one of the most important events in her life, for bad or for good. Probably mostly bad, I don't know. I'm not entirely sure what has happened to her, nor where she's left at the end. It's a mystery. It was a seismic experience for her and now, coming back as a 28-year-old, it's conceivable that she's reconnecting with all the resentment, desire, and fear she has harbored all these years.

IT'S INTERESTING TO HEAR YOU, THE PLAYWRIGHT, USE THE WORD "MYSTERY." SO IT'S POSSIBLE TO WRITE A PLAY AND HAVE CERTAIN THINGS REMAIN MYSTERIOUS EVEN TO YOU?

I think the *best* way for me to come out of a play is with some mysteries intact, some questions left unanswered. My writing is such that there is a real ambiguity to it. There is mystery. It may be two things at the same time, and that is a quality I'm not entirely displeased with.

AN AUDIENCE WATCHING *BLACKBIRD* WILL SURELY QUESTION WHY UNA HAS GONE TO SEE RAY, WHETHER SHE'S SEEKING REVENGE, UNDERSTANDING, OR SOME KIND OF CLOSURE. DID YOU HAVE TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION FOR YOURSELF?

I didn't have an answer in the beginning, but I probably created an answer for myself during the writing. But I'm going to keep it to myself [*laugh*]. Sorry.

ONE BRITISH REVIEW OF *BLACKBIRD* CALLED THE PLAY "SURPRISINGLY COMPASSIONATE" GIVEN THE SUBJECT MATTER. WAS IT CHALLENGING FOR YOU TO ACHIEVE A DEGREE OF EMPATHY FOR RAY, WHOM IT'S EASY TO SEE AS HAVING PREYED UPON UNA?

I guess I had to. I couldn't vilify him or demonize him because he's a character I have created, and he would stand no chance of being of interest if I were to take a moral view of him. When I wrote [*Blackbird*], I had no real idea about what sympathy would be created for this man, and I was kind of surprised there was actually more sympathy than I thought there would be. That said, we can't turn away from the fact that there are real people much worse than him that actively seek children, and we as a society have to decide what we do with these people.

YOUR WRITING STYLE HAS GREAT CONCISION AND HEWS CLOSELY TO HOW PEOPLE SPEAK IN LIFE, IF NOT IN PLAYS, IN TERMS OF ITS MANY INTERRUPTIONS AND BROKEN SENTENCES. DO YOU INITIALLY WRITE THIS CONCISELY, OR IS IT THE RESULT OF A LOT OF REWRITING?

This play actually came out like that. I wrote this in about a month. Once I started, I just wrote and couldn't stop writing. It came out almost in one go. It was extraordinary. I was very conscious of wanting to write in a language that indicated these two characters' mental state, so the language in effect reflects the fact that they are circling around something. They can't finish sentences, they can't be too definite, because if they're definite about something they don't know what effect it's going to have on the other person. That's something I've really taken from Shakespeare, the idea of language conveying its meaning in the actual words chosen by the characters themselves.

KNIVES IN HENS, YOUR FIRST PRODUCED PLAY, WAS AN IMMEDIATE AND TREMENDOUS SUCCESS. WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE LIKE FOR YOU AS A YOUNG WRITER TO ACHIEVE SUCH ACCLAIM WITH YOUR FIRST GO?

It was an extraordinary thing to have happen. I wrote it when I was 27 and it was produced when I was 28. It ran in Germany for about three years, and it sent out these reverberations and then other countries picked up on it. I don't want to sound like an idiot savant here [*laugh*], but I had no idea why. It was quite an unusual, strong little story. It's something to do with, I guess, the fact of creating a language to convey your thoughts, to convey your feelings about the world. I think if it hadn't had that strand to it, it wouldn't have gotten anywhere. But it really burrowed into why we use language, what we need it for, and it did get an extraordinary response from people. I had taken quite a risk with the language and it was quite dense, with a real cryptic quality to it as well. So, yes, it was fantastic for a young writer.

PINTER IS OFTEN MENTIONED AS A POSSIBLE ROLE MODEL FOR YOU, STYLISTICALLY. WHAT CAN YOU SHARE ABOUT YOUR THEATRICAL INFLUENCES?

I've got to say, I came to theater quite late. I wrote short stories for a while, as I was washing dishes in a restaurant and doing these cruddy jobs, and as I was writing the stories I found I couldn't be bothered writing the descriptive stuff, so they just came out with the dialogue. And this was even before I discovered Pinter, but I was thinking about what language could be used to do, what it could convey, how it could be used to hide things as well as reveal things.

I didn't go to theater much. I had never shown much interest in it before, but I went to the library and I started reading what was there in the library. Some of the early stuff that really got hold of me was Brian Friel's plays.

HAVE YOU BECOME THE KIND OF WRITER NOW WHO IMAGINES THE STAGE AS YOU'RE WRITING, HEARS YOUR WORDS IN ACTORS' MOUTHS? OR DO YOU STILL WRITE IN THE MORE LITERARY TRADITION, CREATING YOUR OWN WORLD IN YOUR HEAD?

The latter. I see this sort of film in my head, like these two people [in *Blackbird*]. One of the things I've found while writing plays is that I see the characters from a distance, and if I'm writing for film or TV I see them in close-up. It's quite bizarre to think about.

MAYBE YOU'VE BEEN INFLUENCED BY YOUR OWN VIEWING OF FILMED MEDIA, SINCE THE CLOSE-UP ONLY EXISTS WITH A CAMERA.

Right, and absolutely not in theater. You've just got whole bodies on the stage, in the physical space, and how they approach or walk away or circle around each other. I've become just obsessed with theater and how it allows and encourages me to write language that can't exist anywhere else. That's really important to me.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *BLACKBIRD*'S TITLE? DID IT COME TO YOU EARLY, OR AFTER YOU'D COMPLETED THE PLAY?

It's quite simple really. My memory is that I needed a title quite quickly and I had been listening to some music and it was John Coltrane, or was it Keith Jarrett, the pianist, playing the standard "Bye Bye Blackbird." It was an improvised take on the standard. And this felt like an improvisation. You know, how long do I keep these two people in the room? I felt like a musician in many ways, sustaining what these two people could say and do to each other, improvising in a sense. And I also thought that maybe ["Blackbird"] was something he had called her, or maybe he was playing the Beatles' *White Album* on the way to the coast. It wasn't encapsulating, just more suggestive, to help me. But it turns out there is a tale about Saint Benedict, which I found out about afterwards. I love the story, this disguise as a blackbird. I wish I had known about it beforehand because I would have claimed it as my own [*laugh*].

YOU'VE SAID IN AN EARLIER INTERVIEW THAT YOU DON'T THINK THEATER SHOULD BE DIDACTIC OR EVEN TOO ENGAGED WITH THE EXTERNAL WORLD. BUT YOU ALSO EXPRESSED INTEREST IN WRITING SOMETHING THAT RESPONDS TO CURRENT EVENTS. COULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT A BIT?

That was sort of a rhetorical question to myself, asking how I should be responding to the world. I'm constantly caught between using my plays to explore current things within the world, and creating small dramas. I don't know exactly how people see *Blackbird* in this sense; it just stands alone as a good, intriguing piece of theater. I know that when things get too didactic for me, I just switch off. Certain writers, certain voices, they just become too shrill for me. I've always preferred a quiet, more skewed look at something. There are lots of other writers writing about the state of Britain, race relations, sexual relations, identity issues. I'm not a writer who necessarily takes a subject and comments on it. I've got to find a different way of representing something, and in that way I'm kind of a contradiction. I would love to be a great sane political voice, but I can't be because I am not that. I've got to be what I am, a quiet unsettling voice.

PARING DOWN A DRAMA TO BASIC MORTAL COMBAT

BY MELENA RYZIK

Two months ago, as the winners of the Laurence Olivier Awards, Britain's version of the Tonys, were being announced in a posh hotel ballroom in London, the playwright David Harrower, one of the nominees, was sitting in his local pub in Glasgow, downing Guinness. His competition in the best new play category was so stiff—including *Frost/Nixon* by Peter Morgan (screenwriter of *The Queen*) and *Rock 'n' Roll* by Tom Stoppard, the favorite—that he didn't see the point in making the trip.

"I didn't want to go down there, put on a suit, get drunk, get the suit crumpled and fly back with nothing—with a headache," Mr. Harrower said.

Besides, "it was a Sunday night," he said. "Sunday night is drinking night."

And like the best drinking stories, this one has a twist: He won.



Steven Culp and Jessi Campbell in rehearsal at A.C.T.
Photo by Kevin Berne.

The next morning he flew to New York, where *Blackbird*, a taut two-character drama about an illicit affair between a young woman and an older man, is having its American premiere.

Yes, Mr. Harrower said, he does kind of wish he'd gone to the ceremony. Winning "shocked me, absolutely shocked me," he said last week, on his second trip across the Atlantic since the Olivier, a bronze bust of its namesake, has taken up residence on his mantel. The theatrical establishment was equally surprised: Not only was Mr. Harrower the dark horse, but *Blackbird* is not exactly audience (or award show) friendly.

Set in a gray office conference room it deals unflinchingly with provocative subjects like sexual power plays, pedophilia, and the dark pleasure of abusive relation-

ships. Told in real time in spare, brusquely poetic language, it has a car-wreck effect that can leave audiences stunned into silence.

Sitting in a restaurant in his Midtown hotel, dressed in a muted grey argyle sweater, Mr. Harrower, 40, with his shaven head and blond eyelashes, would seem the antithesis of a provocateur. He is soft-spoken and a little nervous, green enough to worry about seeming naïve and savvy enough to worry more about seeming pretentious. About the only thing that suggests his propensity for shock is the curse words that litter his conversation.

Mr. Harrower denied being part of the “in yer face” school, a group of young British playwrights like Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill who are known for their confrontational works and with whom he is sometimes lumped. “I was always gentler,” he said, “and more pernicious.” But this play, at least, was intended to scandalize. “I want people shaken up,” Mr. Harrower said.

The story is based on a newspaper account of a man who traveled abroad to meet a 19-year-old woman he had encountered in a chat room online, only to discover that in real life she was much younger. That the couple pursued the relationship anyway intrigued Mr. Harrower, but it was a difficult play to write. An early draft, written for the Edinburgh International Festival, with its comparatively large budgets, had 15 characters, four locations, the ghost of Marvin Gaye (don’t ask) and a performance by a children’s choir (ditto).

“You kind of have to go to these stupid places, sort of, to get back,” Mr. Harrower said ruefully. “So I went there. And then a genocide happened.” Exeunt a dozen characters. Though he’d labored over drafts for more than nine months, he wrote the final version of *Blackbird* in just four weeks.

“It will never be that easy again,” he said. “It was something to do with the language as well. There’s not much punctuation in it. I found that I couldn’t do full stops, because they were too adamant, too finishing. The form kind of mirrors the uncertainty of people circling around each other. I couldn’t use normal across-the-page stuff, so if you look at it, it’s very sculpted. It looks rather beautiful, even if I say so myself.”

The result onstage is a staccato, Mamet-like dialogue that unfolds slowly.

“It was a revelation actually,” Mr. Harrower said, “because I don’t usually write like that.”

Born and raised in Edinburgh but now based in Glasgow, he had a stop-and-start-and-stop college education; he never graduated. Instead he worked some menial jobs (“I took dishwashing to a whole new level,” he said) before sitting down, at 24, to become a writer. For two years he lived off unemployment checks and self-discipline, schooling himself with library books and working for eight hours a day.

About a decade ago he had a breakthrough with *Knives in Hens*, another tersely worded play about a woman hemmed in by language. It won awards in Europe (though none in Britain, he noted), was translated into many languages, and ran for three years in Germany. Several other plays followed, but Mr. Harrower winces when he talks about them; his adaptations—Pirandello, Chekhov, and Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck*—were more successful than those original works in his view. Though he’s creating television and film projects for the BBC, he prefers writing his own stuff for the stage. “It’s the only place where I can properly feel the voice that I hear in my head,” he said.

Of course the Olivier changed the way that echoes.

“Someone sent me the list of previous winners [which includes Mr. Stoppard, Arthur Miller, and Martin McDonagh], and I just thought—this is going to sound a bit gauche—but I just thought, ‘I’ve written a play that stands with these,’” Mr. Harrower said, still sounding awed and intimidated.

“There’s actually no enjoying of it,” he said of the acclaim. “Post-*Blackbird* I’ve got to rethink what I’m going to write about, what my style is, what my voice is. Now the pressure’s on.” Cue the cursing: “The next one better be good.”

Excerpted from the *New York Times*, April 9, 2007. © 2007 New York Times Company. Reprinted with permission.

BLACKBIRD

BY JOHN LENNON AND PAUL MCCARTNEY

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to be free

Blackbird fly
Blackbird fly
Into the light of the dark black night

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise
You were only waiting for this moment to arise
You were only waiting for this moment to arise

BYE BYE BLACKBIRD

BY MORT DIXON AND RAY HENDERSON

Pack up all my care and woe
Here I go, singing low
Bye bye blackbird

Where somebody waits for me
Sugar's sweet, so is she
Bye bye blackbird

No one here can love or understand me
Oh what hard luck stories they all hand me
Make my bed and light the light
I'll arrive late tonight
Blackbird, bye bye

No one here can love or understand me
Oh, oh what hard luck stories they all hand me
Make my bed and light the light
I'll arrive late tonight
Blackbird, bye bye

OBSERVATIONS

FROM *LOLITA*, BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature, which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as “nymphets.”

It will be marked that I substitute time terms for spatial ones. In fact, I would have the reader see “nine” and “fourteen” as the boundaries—the mirry beaches and rosy rocks—of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea. Between those age limits, are all girl-children nymphets? Of course not. Otherwise, we who are in the know, we lone voyagers, we nympholepts, would have long gone insane. Neither are good looks any criterion; and vulgarity, or at least what a given community terms so, does not necessarily impair certain mysterious characteristics, the fey grace, the elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, insidious charm that separates the nymphet from such coevals of hers as are incomparably more dependent on the spatial world of synchronous phenomena than on that intangible island of entranced time where Lolita plays with her likes. Within the same age limits the number of true nymphets is strikingly inferior to that of provisionally plain, or just nice, or “cute,” or even “sweet” and “attractive,” ordinary, plumpish, formless, cold-skinned, essentially human little girls, with tummies and pigtails, who may or may not turn into adults of great beauty (look at the ugly dumplings in black stockings and white hats that are metamorphosed into stunning stars of the screen). A normal man given a group photograph of school girls or Girl Scouts and asked to point out the comeliest one will not necessarily choose the nymphet among them. You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!), in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs—the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate—the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; *she* stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power.

Furthermore, since the idea of time plays such a magic part in the matter, the student should not be surprised to learn that there must be a gap of several years, never less than ten I should say, generally thirty or forty, and as many as ninety in a few known cases,

between maiden and man to enable the latter to come under a nymphet's spell. It is a question of focal adjustment, of a certain distance that the inner eye thrills to surmount, and a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight.

© 1955 by Vladimir Nabokov.

What knowing watchfulness in the eyes of a 12-year-old . . . at once guarded, yet guileless. She is the very picture of contradiction: on the one hand diffident and ambivalent, on the other forthright and impatient; half pertness and half pout. She disarms me with her sure sense of her own attractiveness and, with it, her direct, even provocative approach to the camera. Impossibly, she is both artless and sophisticated; a child and yet a woman.

Sally Mann, *At Twelve*

If something hurts me, the hurts I suffered back then come back to me, and when I feel guilty, the feelings of guilt return; if I yearn for something today, or feel homesick, I feel the yearnings and homesickness from back then. The tectonic layers of our lives rest so tightly one on top of the other that we always come up against earlier events in later ones, not as matter that has been fully formed and pushed aside, but absolutely present and alive. . . .

Now escape involves not just running away, but arriving somewhere. And the past I arrived in as a legal historian was no less alive than the present. It is also not true, as outsiders might assume, that one can merely observe the richness of life in the past, whereas one can participate in the present. Doing history means building bridges between the past and the present, observing both banks of the river, taking an active part on both sides. One of my areas of research was law in the Third Reich, and here it is particularly obvious how the past and present come together in a single reality. Here, escape is not a preoccupation with the past but a determined focus on the present and the future that is blind to the legacy of the past which brands us and with which we must live.

The Reader, by Bernhard Schlink,
translated from the German by Carol Brown Janeway

THE MYTH OF ST. BENEDICT

Even though he lived thus sequestered from the world, Benedict, like the Desert Fathers, had to struggle with temptations of the flesh and the devil. One of these struggles is described by Gregory. “On a certain day when he was alone the tempter presented himself. A small dark bird, commonly called a blackbird, began to fly around his face and came so near him that, if he had wished, he could have seized it with his hand. But on his making the sign of the cross, the bird flew away. Then followed a violent temptation of the flesh, such as he had never before experienced. The evil spirit brought before his imagination a woman whom he had formerly seen, and inflamed his heart with such vehement desire at the memory of her that he had very great difficulty in repressing it. He was almost overcome and thought of leaving his solitude. Suddenly, however, with the help of divine grace, he found the strength he needed. Seeing near at hand a thick growth of briars and nettles, he stripped off his habit and cast himself into the midst of them and plunged and tossed about until his whole body was lacerated. Thus, through those bodily wounds, he cured the wounds of his soul.” Never again was he troubled in the same way.

—*Dialogues*, St. Gregory

<http://www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/BENEDICT.htm>

The beautiful song of the blackbird makes it a symbol of temptations, especially sexual ones. The devil once took on the shape of a blackbird and flew into St. Benedict’s face, thereby causing the saint to be troubled by an intense desire for a beautiful girl he had once seen. In order to save himself, St. Benedict tore off his clothes and jumped into a thorn bush. This painful act is said to have freed him from sexual temptations for the rest of his life.

<http://ww2.netnitco.net/users/legend01/raven.htm>

CHAPTER TWO: HOW HE OVERCAME A GREAT TEMPTATION OF THE FLESH

Upon a certain day being alone, the tempter was at hand: for a little black bird, commonly called a merle or an ousel, began to fly about his face, and that so near as the holy man, if he would, might have taken it with his hand: but after he had blessed himself with the sign of the cross, the bird flew away: and forthwith the holy man was assaulted with such a terrible temptation of the flesh, as he never felt the like in all his life.

A certain woman there was which some time he had seen, the memory of which the wicked spirit put into his mind, and by the representation of her did so mightily inflame with concupiscence the soul of God's servant, which did so increase that, almost overcome with pleasure, he was of mind to have forsaken the wilderness. But, suddenly assisted with God's grace, he came to himself; and seeing many thick briars and nettle bushes to grow hard by, off he cast his apparel, and threw himself into the midst of them, and there wallowed so long that, when he rose up, all his flesh was pitifully torn: and so by the wounds of his body, he cured the wounds of his soul, in that he turned pleasure into pain, and by the outward burning of extreme smart, quenched that fire which, being nourished before with the fuel of carnal cogitations, did inwardly burn in his soul: and by this means he overcame the sin, because he made a change of the fire.

From which time forward, as himself did afterward report unto his disciples, he found all temptation of pleasure so subdued, that he never felt any such thing. Many after this began to abandon the world, and to become his scholars. For being now freed from the vice of temptation, worthily and with great reason is he made a master of virtue: for which cause, in Exodus, commandment is given by Moses that the Levites from five-and-twenty years and upward should serve, but, after they came to fifty, that they should be ordained keepers of the holy vessels. [Numbers 8:24–26]

PETER: Somewhat I understand of this testimony alleged: but yet I beseech you to tell me the meaning thereof more fully.

GREGORY: It is plain, Peter, that in youth the temptation of the flesh is hot: but after fifty years the heat of the body waxeth cold, and the souls of faithful people become holy vessels. Wherefore necessary it is that God's elect servants, while they are yet in the heat of temptation, should live in obedience, serve, and be wearied with labor and pains. But when, by reason of age, the heat of temptation is past, they become keepers of holy vessels; because they then are made the doctors of men's souls.

PETER: I cannot deny, but that your words have given me full satisfaction: wherefore, seeing you have now expounded the meaning of the former text alleged, prosecute, I pray, as you have begun, the rest of the holy man's life.

—*Medieval Sourcebook:*
Gregory I (Dialogos): Second Dialogue (Life of St. Benedict)

DEFINING PEDOPHILIA VS. CHILD MOLESTATION

PEDOPHILIA

There is some debate regarding the exact definition of pedophilia. Pedophilia and child molestation are not identical, though the common tendency—and sometimes the psychiatric and legal tendency—is to treat the terms as interchangeable. In its most specific sense, pedophilia refers to “the preference for sexual activity with young children.” Here, it is considered a preference, not an action—a psychosexual mental disorder that may or may not ever be acted on.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, pedophilia belongs to the group of psychosexual disorders called *paraphilias*:

Pedophilia is categorized in the DSM-IV as one of several paraphiliac mental disorders. The essential features of a paraphilia (sexual deviation) are recurrent, intense, sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors that generally involve [either] nonhuman subjects, the suffering or humiliation of oneself or one’s partner, or children or other nonconsenting persons.

The book cited above, the DSM-IV, is the definitive medical text for diagnosing mental disorders. It sets the standard for the criteria and terminology used in describing mental pathology.

DSM-IV CRITERIA FOR A DIAGNOSIS OF PEDOPHILIA

Over a period of at least six months, recurrent, intense, sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children (generally age 13 or younger) . . . cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. . . . The person is at least age 16 years and at least five years older than the child or children.

This definition of pedophilia can obviously create some complex situations, both psychiatrically and legally speaking. The DSM-IV equates “prepubescent child” and “age 13 or younger.” Are all 12- and 13-year-olds prepubescent? No—many girls go through puberty as early as 10 or 11, and some 13-year-olds can physically resemble adult women much more than they resemble prepubescent children. Is the man who engages in sexual activity with one postpubescent “almost-13-year-old” girl suffering from the identical mental disorder as

the man who does the same with a 4-year-old? That neither adult should not touch *anyone* of that age sexually is a legal and moral certainty, but is it appropriate to mandate the same psychiatric treatment for both of them?

CHILD MOLESTATION

In 1985, an influential paper on child molesters was written, called “The Child Molesters—Clinical Observations.” This paper laid the foundation for most current study of abusers, classifying them into types and discussing the behaviors and motivations of each type.

In this paper, the term *child molester* “refers to a significantly older person whose conscious sexual interests and overt sexual behaviors are directed either partially or exclusively towards prepubertal children.”

This definition differs from that of pedophilia in that:

- It specifies *conscious* sexual interest in children.
- It includes both interest *and* behavior to be present, not just interest.
- It does not diagnose a mental disorder, it describes an action.
- It specifies only that the young person be prepubertal, rather than assigning a numerical age.

The discrepancy between how the psychiatric and legal communities define a “child” leads to huge legal complexities; many defense attorneys have employed the “Lolita” or “bad seed” image to undermine the credibility of victims caught in that highly charged, shifting territory between puberty and the age of 13.

Essentially, pedophilia is a psychological diagnosis, seeking to describe a subjective mental state. It is considered an illness, for which there is treatment, but may also involve action. Meanwhile, child molestation is an objective, legally prosecutable action. The imprecise relationship between the two is fuel for plenty of thought—and debate.

SEXUAL ABUSE

A list of activities legally construed as sexual abuse when committed with a child (from www.childwelfare.gov) includes a wide range of behaviors, such as:

- Oral, anal, or genital penile penetration
- Anal or genital digital or other penetration
- Genital contact with no intrusion
- Fondling of a child’s breasts or buttocks
- Indecent exposure

- Inadequate or inappropriate supervision of a child's voluntary sexual activities
- Use of a child in prostitution, pornography, Internet crimes, or other sexually exploitative activities

Sexual abuse includes both touching offenses (fondling or sexual intercourse) and non-touching offenses (exposing a child to pornographic materials) and can involve varying degrees of violence and emotional trauma. The most commonly reported cases involve incest, or sexual abuse occurring among family members, including those in biological families, adoptive families, and stepfamilies. Incest most often occurs within a father-daughter relationship; however, mother-son, father-son, and sibling-sibling incest also occurs. Sexual abuse is also sometimes committed by other relatives or caretakers.

Sources: "Fact Sheet: Pedophilia," American Psychiatric Association (1997), Medem Medical Library, http://www.medem.com/medlb/article_detailb.cfm?article_ID=ZZZUZRUZGLC&sub_cat=355; "The Child Molesters—Clinical Observations," by A. Nicholas, Groth, Ph.D., William F. Hobson, M.S., Thomas S. Gary, M.Ed. (Haworth Press, Inc. Binghamton, NY, 1985), Mental Health Association of Westchester, <http://www.mhawestchester.org>; "Sexual Abuse," Child Welfare Information Gateway (2006), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/types/sexualabuse/>; "A Coordinated Response to Child Abuse and Neglect: The Foundation for Practice," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/foundation/foundationc.cfm>.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (CHILD MOLESTATION)

BY GAIL HENDRICKSON, R.N., B.S. (MAY 25, 2000); REVIEWED BY GAYLEN KELTON, M.D. (OCTOBER 9, 2006)

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF THE INJURY?

It is not always easy for an adult to recognize when sexual abuse has taken place.

A child who has been sexually abused may:

- act seductively
- be excessively curious about sex
- develop frequent urinary tract infections
- engage in inappropriate sex play with other children
- feel threatened by physical contact, closeness, or a certain person
- have bruises, bleeding, pain, or itching in the genital area
- have nightmares
- have poor self-esteem
- have a premature understanding of sex
- have separation anxiety (excessive fear of being separated from parents)
- lack confidence
- masturbate excessively
- wet or soil his or her bed

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES AND RISKS OF THE INJURY?

Sexual abuse happens to children of all religions, ethnic origins, and income levels. Most often the abuser is someone the child knows, rather than a stranger. A person who was sexually abused as a child is more likely to become an abuser as an older child or adult.

Adolescents who have been abused are at higher risk for other health problems. We do not yet know whether the health problems came before the abuse, or if the abuse increased the risk for the health problems.

These problems include:

- adolescent pregnancy
- alcohol use, including binge drinking
- cocaine abuse
- risky sexual behaviors, including intercourse before age 15 and multiple partners
- smoking

- suicidal attempts or thoughts
- unhealthy weight management, including eating disorders

HOW IS THE INJURY RECOGNIZED?

An abuser can make the child very fearful of telling anyone else. An adult should believe a child who says he or she has been sexually abused. Children rarely lie about sexual abuse.

When sexual abuse is suspected, the child should be taken to a healthcare professional who is trained to deal with and recognize sexual abuse. He or she will ask the child to describe what happened. He or she also will look for injuries to the mouth, rectum, and genital areas.

If the abuse took place recently, the healthcare professional may do a special examination to check for sperm or semen stains. Child protective services officials need to be notified.

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR THE INJURY?

Child protective services officials monitor sexual abuse cases. Sexually abused children and their families need professional evaluation and treatment. Child and adolescent psychiatrists can help abused children regain a sense of self-esteem. They can help them cope with their feelings of guilt about the abuse and begin the process of overcoming the trauma.

Individual psychotherapy and group counseling may help. Much of the healing for many survivors takes place in a support group of other survivors. There is strength, comfort, and hope in hearing the stories of others who share their pain.

Antidepressant medicines may be tried, but they are not usually as successful in treating depression in children as they are in adolescents and adults. The child should be checked for sexually transmitted infections. Girls of childbearing age should be tested for pregnancy.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF THE TREATMENTS?

Antidepressant medicines may cause mild and usually temporary side effects in some people.

The most common side effects are:

- agitation
- constipation
- dizziness
- drowsiness

- dry mouth
- nausea

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER TREATMENT FOR THE INJURY?

Long-term effects can include posttraumatic stress disorder. Although this nervous disorder can have many causes, in this case it is a result of physical, mental, or sexual violence.

The victim may have the following conditions:

- depression
- feelings of anxiety
- feelings of isolation
- irritability
- nightmares and flashbacks
- a tendency to avoid other people

Children who have been sexually abused usually develop low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness, and an abnormal perspective on sexuality. They may become withdrawn and mistrustful of adults or attempt suicide. Some sexually abused children become child abusers or prostitutes in later years. They are also at higher risk of abusing alcohol or other drugs to dull the pain.

A person who has been sexually abused most often needs long-term, sometimes years of, psychotherapy to come to terms with what has happened. It can be difficult for an adult to come to terms with sexual abuse that occurred when he or she was a child. It may result in changes in the abused person's life. In some cases, divorce results when a spouse cannot live with a partner's pain and becomes frustrated at not being able to do anything about it.

Excerpted from "Child Abuse," <http://uimc.discoveryhospital.com/main.php?id=2781>, © 2006 University of Illinois Medical Center at Chicago.

A SUMMARY OF BRITISH CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE LAWS

Another area of disagreement about the scope of the law concerns the control of the sexuality of the young, which may be justified on moral, utilitarian, or protectionist grounds. The age a girl must reach before it becomes legal for a man to have sexual intercourse with her varies considerably. In the United Kingdom it is sixteen, but it was once only ten (19 Eliz. 1, chap. 7 [1575–76]), and it remained as low as twelve until 1875. . . .

Some jurisdictions make a distinction between cases of contact of an adult with a child or adolescent and cases involving only contacts between young persons. In the United Kingdom both situations are treated by statute as “indecent assault,” leaving those responsible for bringing prosecutions to exercise discretion in what one hopes will be a fair and reasonable manner. . . .

The widespread use of imprisonment for nonviolent sex offenders is hard to justify. Most of these men are more pathetic than dangerous and stand in need of treatment and welfare rather than punishment, which can be more readily accomplished in a facility in the community. Inside penal institutions they are the butt of harassment and sometimes sexual assault. In the English system many of them appeal to be put under “Rule 43,” which means that they are segregated for their own protection and may spend protracted periods in virtual solitary confinement.

“Sex Offenses and Offending,” by Donald J. West, *Crime and Justice* 5 (1983): 183–233

ASSAULT OF A CHILD UNDER 13 BY PENETRATION

It is a specific criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to engage in sexual penetration with a child under the age of 13. Consent is irrelevant to determining whether the offence has been committed. A person commits the offence if he intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person with a part of his body or anything else, where the penetration is sexual, and where the other person is under 13. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment. The victim cannot be convicted as an accessory to this offence, even if the offence takes place with the victim’s voluntary assistance, since the offence is designed to protect the victim (*R v Tyrrell* [1894] 1 QB 710 [CCR]).

Oxford Dictionary of Law (Oxford University Press, 2006);
Oxford Reference Online, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t49.e271>.

RAPE OF A CHILD UNDER 13

It is a specific criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to engage in sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 13. Consent is irrelevant to determining whether the offence has been committed. A person commits the offence if he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with his penis, and the other person is under 13. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment. Owing to the requirement that rape of a child under 13 can only be committed through penetration with a penis, it is clear that the offence can only be committed as a principal by a man; a woman can only be convicted of the offence as an accessory. The victim cannot be convicted as an accessory, even if the offence takes place with the victim's voluntary assistance, since the offence is designed to protect the victim (*R v Tyrrell* [1894] 1 QB 710 [CCR]).

Oxford Dictionary of Law (Oxford University Press, 2006);
Oxford Reference Online, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t49.e146>.

SEXUAL ACTIVITY WITH A CHILD

It is a specific criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to engage in sexual activity with a child under the age of 16. Consent is irrelevant to determining whether the offence has been committed. A person (A) over the age of 18 commits the offence if he intentionally touches another person (B), where the touching is sexual, B is under the age of 16, and A does not reasonably believe that B is over 16. If B is under the age of 13 the defendant is liable to a charge of sexual assault of a child under 13 and the question of his mistaken belief in B's age becomes irrelevant. The maximum penalty varies according to the touching involved, ranging from six months' imprisonment and a fine to 14 years' imprisonment. The victim cannot be convicted as an accessory to this offence, even if the offence takes place with the victim's voluntary assistance, since the offence is designed to protect the victim (*R v Tyrrell* [1894] 1 QB 710 [CCR]).

Oxford Dictionary of Law, (Oxford University Press, 2006);
Oxford Reference Online, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t49.e3617>.

AGE OF CONSENT

WHAT IS IT?

The age at which you can legally have sex.

WHAT ARE THE RULES?

In England, Scotland, and Wales you have to be over 16 to have homosexual (gay) or heterosexual (straight) sex. In Northern Ireland you have to be 17 to have homosexual or heterosexual sex. “Sex” means penetrative sex, oral sex, or masturbating together.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU HAVE UNDERAGE SEX?

The law sees it as sexual assault—it’s a criminal offence. The details are:

Even if she agrees, a boy who has sex with a girl under 16 (17 in NI) is breaking the law. If the girl is 13–15, the boy could go to prison for two years. If she’s under 13, he could be sentenced to life imprisonment.

A girl age 16 or over who has sex with a boy under 16 can be prosecuted for indecent assault. However, if you’re a consenting couple and around the same age as each other, it’s unlikely you’d be prosecuted (although if one of you is under 13 this might not be the case).

SO, ONCE YOU’RE 16 IT’S OK TO HAVE SEX?

Well, it’s legal, except with someone who’s in a “position of trust” over you. People trusted to look after you, like teachers, carers, and doctors, are in a position of trust. It’s illegal for them to have sex with under-18s in their care. Just because you can have sex, doesn’t mean you should. Do what feels right for you and make sure you understand what sex is about and get clued-up on safe sex before you do anything.

**AGES OF CONSENT AROUND THE WORLD
(MALE-FEMALE SEX)**

Albania	14	Ecuador	14
Algeria	16	Egypt	18
Argentina	13/16	El Salvador	16
Australia	16-17/18	Eritrea	18
Austria	14	Estonia	14
Azerbaijan	16	Ethiopia	15
Bahamas	16	Finland ³	16
Belgium	16	France	16
Belarus	16/18	French Polynesia	
Bolivia	14f/16m	(Tahiti)	16
Bosnia	16	Gabon	18
Botswana	16f/14m	Germany ⁴	14/16
Brazil ¹	14/18	Greece	15
Brunei	14/16	Guam	16
Bulgaria	14	Guatemala	18
Burkina Faso	13	Haiti	18
Cambodia	16	Honduras	14/17
Canada ²	12/14/18	Hungary	14
Chile	14	Iceland	14
China	14	India	16
Hong Kong	16	Indonesia	16f/19m
Taipei	16	Iran	Must be married
Colombia	14	Iraq	18
Costa Rica	15	Ireland	17
Côte d'Ivoire	15	Israel	14-16
Croatia	14	Italy	14
Cuba	16	Japan ⁵	13-18
Cyprus	13/17	Jordan	16
Czech Republic	15	Kenya	16
Denmark	15	Lebanon	15/18/Married
Dominican Rep.	18	Malaysia	18/Married

Mexico ⁶	12–18	Turkey	18
Moldova	14	Uganda	18
Monaco	15	Ukraine	16
Morocco	15	United Arab Emirates	18/Married
Namibia	16	United Kingdom	16–17
Nepal	16	United States	16–17
Netherlands	16	<i>except</i>	
New Zealand	16	Colorado ^{II}	15/17
Nigeria	13	Delaware ^{II}	16/18
Norway ³	16	Florida ^{II}	16/18
Oman	Must be married	Idaho ^{II}	16/18
Pakistan	Must be married	Iowa ^{II}	14/16
Paraguay ⁷	14/16	Missouri ^{II}	14/17
Peru	14	Montana	16/18
Philippines ⁸	12/18	North Dakota	18
Poland	15	Oregon	18
Portugal ⁹	14/16	S. Carolina ^{II}	14/16
Puerto Rico	16	Tennessee	18
Qatar	Must be married	Texas ^{II}	17
Romania	15	Utah ^{II}	16/18
Russia	16	Virginia	18
Rwanda	16	Washington ^{II}	16/18
Saudi Arabia	Must be married	Wisconsin	18
Singapore	16	Traveling Citizens	18
Slovakia	15	Uzbekistan	16
South Africa	16	Uruguay	15
South Korea	13	Venezuela	16
Spain	13	Vietnam	18
Sri Lanka	16	Yemen	Must be married
Sudan	Must be married	Zimbabwe	12/16
Sweden	15		
Swaziland	18		
Switzerland	16		
Syria	13/15		
Thailand ¹⁰	15/18		
Tunisia	20		

¹In Brazil, authorities may not choose to prosecute if the younger partner is aged 14 to 17 and does not lodge a complaint.

²In Canada, consensual activity with those over 12 may not be an offense if the accused is under 16 and less than two years older than the complainant. The exception is anal intercourse, to which unmarried persons under 18 cannot legally consent according to national law, although provincial laws may vary.

³In Finland, sex with someone under 16 is not deemed sexual abuse of a child if “there is no great difference in the ages or the mental and physical maturity of the persons involved.” Similarly in Norway, a prison sentence may not be imposed “if those who have committed the act of indecency are about equal in age and development.” In both countries, lesser punishments may nevertheless be imposed.

⁴In Germany, sexual intercourse is legal from the age of 14 provided the older partner is aged under 18 and provided they are not “exploiting a coercive situation” or offering compensation. In addition, sex between one partner aged 14–15 and another aged under 21 is legal unless the older partner “exploits the victim’s lack of capacity for sexual self-determination.”

⁵The age of sexual consent in Japan is 13 years of age, although prefecture law usually overrides federal law raising the age up to 18.

⁶In Mexico the federal law varies according to the age gap between partners and is often overruled by regional laws.

⁷Paraguay sets the age of consent at 14 within marriage and 16 outside of marriage.

⁸The age of sexual consent in the Philippines is 12 for all, but contacts with minors (under 18) are an offense if the minor consents to the act for money, gain, or any other remuneration or as the result of an influence of any adult person.

⁹In Portugal it is illegal to perform vaginal intercourse with a minor between 14 and 16 years old “by taking advantage of their inexperience.”

¹⁰Although Thailand’s age of consent is usually said to be 15, the laws can be interpreted to allow prosecution for sex with someone under 18.

¹¹In some U.S. states a lower age applies when the age gap between partners is small, or when the older partner is below a certain age (usually 18 or 21).

THE SEX LIVES OF TEENAGERS

Developmentally appropriate behaviors on the part of the girls are often perceived as sexual. Smiles can be seen as seductive, a certain walk as provocative, a phone call as manipulative. Even the biologically determined appearance of breast buds can be viewed as willfully sexy. An all too common reaction to the developing bodies of adolescent girls is for their peers, both male and female, to call them “sluts.” Many girls discuss their fears of being labeled. Some consciously shut off their sexuality; others show anger; and still others decide to flaunt it. If they are sluts, so be it, they’ll act like sluts; in fact, they’ll become the slut to end all sluts. . . .

Interestingly, adult perceptions of pubescent “sexiness” often reveal more about the adult than the child. That is, there is always a lot of projection of the adults’ own desires and fantasies onto adolescents. In many ways, the slut label is the 20th-century counterpart for the scarlet letter. It punishes girls for being sexual, for being powerful, or just for being different. . . .

Both biology and culture are conspiring to speed up the sexual development of children—boys and girls. It has long been recognized that girls are developing almost two years earlier than they did 30 years ago, due to improved nutrition and a decrease in infectious diseases. Girls with the earliest sexual maturation are hit hard and struggle with more dissatisfaction with their appearance and lowered self-esteem. They also suffer from higher rates of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Why? It is hard for these girls to accept their changing bodies in a culture that values thin, prepubertal bodies for girls.

Boys, too, are developing two years earlier. Generally assumed to be an advantage in a world where their sexuality is encouraged, early development in boys is beginning to be recognized as a mixed blessing. Boys who mature earlier than their classmates have better self-esteem and are more popular than other boys, but they are also more likely to get involved in dangerous risk-taking activities, including substance and alcohol abuse. Part of the explanation for this may lie in the fact that because they look older, they may be more likely to develop friendships with older peers who initiate them into risky behaviors.

The Sex Lives of Teenagers, by Lynn Ponton, M.D. (2000)

About 20 percent of adolescents have had sexual intercourse before their 15th birthday—and one in seven of the sexually experienced 14-year-old girls has been pregnant, according to a report released yesterday by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

The report, an analysis of seven studies conducted in the late 1990s, offers a comprehensive look at the sexual activities of 12- to 14-year-olds, a group often overlooked in discussions of adolescent sexuality.

“1 in 5 Teenagers Has Sex Before 15, Study Finds,”
by Tamar Lewin, *The New York Times*, May 20, 2003

The younger a teenaged girl is when she has sex for the first time, the more likely she is to have had unwanted or nonvoluntary sex. Close to four in ten girls who had first intercourse at 13 or 14 report it was either nonvoluntary or unwanted.

About half of those aged 12–14 report having been on a date or having a romantic relationship in the past 18 months. Among those youth 14 and younger reporting a romantic relationship, about a quarter are with someone two or more years older—girls far more than boys. Relationships between a young adolescent (aged 12–14) and a partner who is older by two, three, or more years—compared to relationships with someone only slightly older, the same age, or younger—are much more likely to include sexual intercourse. For example, 13% of same-age relationships among those aged 12–14 include sexual intercourse. If the partner is two years older, 26% of the relationships include sex. If the partner is three or more years older, 33% of the relationships include sex.

Science Says: The Sexual Behavior of Young Adolescents,
National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy,
[http://www.teenpregnancy.org/works/pdf/sciencesaysSexual%20
BehaviorYoungAdolescents.pdf](http://www.teenpregnancy.org/works/pdf/sciencesaysSexual%20BehaviorYoungAdolescents.pdf)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER . . .

1. What happened the night Ray and Una ran off together? Why did he leave her alone? Why did he come back? How did she feel when she believed he would not return for her? What went through his mind when she was not in the room when he returned? How do the experiences they each have had since that night affect how each of them feels now about that night? How does memory affect how they feel about that night?
2. Many of the lines that Ray and Una say to each other are unfinished, their thoughts expressed incompletely. What do you think of the language in the play? How does the way the characters speak make you feel? Does it sound like everyday conversation? How might the language be different? How would the play be different if it were?
3. How would the play be different if the gender roles were reversed, i.e., if a young man came back to confront an older woman? Would it be more or less disturbing if an older woman had a sexual relationship with a young boy?
4. Who had the power in the relationship when Ray and Una were together 15 years ago? Who has the power at the beginning of the play? Who has the power at the end? What are the turning points in the play where the dynamic shifts?
5. It is said that there are at least two sides to every story. How do Una and Ray's versions of past events differ? Whose version is more true or right?
6. Based on how each of them describes the beginning of their relationship, who, in your opinion, is responsible for the affair? Do you think Ray was/is a predator? Do you think Una pursued him? Would that make Ray's actions "forgivable"?
7. Both Ray and Una have experienced some kind of "rehabilitation" over the last 15 years, he in prison, and she with counseling and social workers. Have they "recovered"? How have those experiences changed their perspectives on their previous relationship? How have those experiences shaped who each of them is as an individual today? Do you think either of them will be able to forget or forgive? How will this event affect and inform their relationships with other people from now on?
8. Think about the events that have shaped your life. How do you feel about them as they are more distant in the past? How do they affect you now?
9. What do you think the relationship is between Ray and the young girl who enters at the end of the play?

ALTERNATE ENDING

The published script of David Harrower's *Blackbird* ends as you see it in the A.C.T. production, with Ray following the young girl out and leaving Una alone in the room. Peter Stein, director of the Albery Theatre production of *Blackbird* in London, added the following final scene to the end of the play, with permission from the author:

Music

Una follows Ray into the car park. She jumps in front of his car, forcing him to stop. She grabs his keys and throws them on the floor. They wrestle, he smacks her, and then she hits him over the head with a wrench. He collapses, covered in blood. They struggle, bleeding heavily on the car park floor as the lights go out.

What effect might this scene have on the audience? Why would the director want to include it? How else might the play end?

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION...

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