

FROM ARRANGEMENT OF PARTS

With my mother, I see a group of small brown and gold ducklings, their black bills no larger than a fingernail. The duck parents are there. Eleven ducklings total.

A few children hover near the edge of the pond on a fence, ripping up grass and throwing it at the ducks, hoping to coax them out of the water. Miraculously, they are successful. The ducklings all make eleven impossible jumps and begin to stab at the grass. They are within arm's reach. I am with my mother. We watch.

The children continue to throw grass at the ducks. They reach out to touch them, but never follow through. My mother *tsks* loudly at the small violence we're witnessing, hoping to shame the parents into reining in their children. One parent does so half-heartedly. The mother duck hops up on the grass with her babies. The small beads of her eyes are on the side of her face – she cranes her neck to look at the children directly. She eats some grass with the ducklings, lets them roam close to the little hands. When one reaches out, she makes a motion like she will bite. The child squeals and retracts. My mother *tsks* again.

But there is centuries of evolutionary training in the mother duck. She signals to her ducklings to get behind her – they do, quickly. She stands, neck craned, watching the children, falls into the water, followed by eleven little drops. She and her male

counterpart turn their eyes at the water – they are counting the young. My mother gets a great photo of this.

Ducks frequently propagate via rape. Drakes have unusually large phalluses for a bird – oddly shaped, barbed. Some female ducks have several false-vaginas, so their rapists are less likely to fertilize their eggs. The ends of their actual vaginas are like a corkscrew, so they can flex and block unwanted sperm from entering.

Thus the bizarre corkscrew phalluses of unusual length in the male duck.

There is a white doctor in South Africa who created female condoms with “teeth” to prevent rape and to aid in catching the culprit. People tell her it is a medieval contraption. Her response: —It's for a medieval deed.

VAGINA: ORIGIN late 17th cent: from Latin, literally “sheath, scabbard.”

—The woman's body / *is* a grave; it will accept / anything (Louise Glück).

The doctor was inspired to create the toothed condom when a rape victim came in and said “I wish I had teeth down there.” The feminine anticipation of violence. An anticipation so worthwhile the feminine body reshapes itself for the violent act.

The numbers bear this out.

Still, this is agency.

For nearly a year now I have been listening to little else than Sam Cooke. You are now hooked. We look at pictures of Sam Cooke. There is also a lingerie/bikini model named Sam Cooke. Portrait of Sam Cooke, his shirt collar wide, smiling; Sam Cooke on the cover of *Maxim*. Sam Cooke arms open; Sam Cooke barely hiding her nipples; Sam Cooke smoking over a microphone; Sam Cooke with her breasts exposed.

I learned about Sam Cooke's death when writing poems using last words before death. Sam Cooke's (according to his killer): —Lady, you shot me!

Etta James saw the body.

In the live album at one point: —Everybody's with *me* tonight!

And he's right.

Him with his white shirt showing a nice collarbone.  
Him with his head so beaten Etta James thinks it wasn't self-defense. Maybe I want to believe her because her voice thrills me too. Because I want to believe in the goodness of Sam Cooke beyond his voice.

But he had a lot of secrets. A lot of anger. But it all went down in a \$3-an-hour motel.

## {NOTES}

DUCKS FREQUENTLY...

From WNYC's Radiolab radio episode "The Surreal Strangeness of Reproduction," April 11, 2009. I have a lot of trouble with Radiolab. Generally it is a show of bad journalism and bad science for the sake of entertainment. The episode that illustrated this to a horrifying degree was entitled "Yellow Rain," which aired on September 24, 2012. In it, host Robert Krulwich and producer Pat Walters interview a Hmong man, Eng Yang, who experienced the poison yellow rain firsthand as deployed by the Pathet Lao in the 1960s. The interview was translated by Yang's niece, Kao Kalia Yang. Krulwich and Walters also interview scientists, others, and concluded that yellow rain was "bee poop" as explained by Harvard scientists.

Krulwich asked Yang about this. Through his niece, Yang "explained Hmong knowledge of the bees in the mountains of Laos, said we had harvested honey for centuries, and explained that the chemical attacks were strategic; they happened far away from established bee colonies, they happened where there were heavy concentrations of Hmong." Krulwich's tone shifted, and he pressed Yang, through his translating niece, "Did you, with your own eyes, see the yellow powder fall from the airplanes?" He claimed this was all "hearsay." Kao Kalia Yang stopped interpreting. She questioned why a scientist at Harvard should be able to make any claims about

her uncle's experience: "My uncle says for the last twenty years he didn't know that anyone was interested in the deaths of the Hmong people. He agreed to do this interview because you were interested. What happened to the Hmong happened, and the world has been uninterested for the last twenty years. He agreed because you were interested. That the story would be heard and the Hmong deaths would be documented and recognized. That's why he agreed to the interview, that the Hmong heart is broken and our leaders have been silenced, and what we know has been questioned again and again is not a surprise to him, or to me. I agreed to the interview for the same reason, that Radiolab was interested in the Hmong story, that they were interested in documenting the deaths that happened. There was so much that was not told. Everybody knows that chemical warfare was being used. How do you create bombs if not with chemicals? We can play the semantics game, we can, but I'm not interested, my uncle is not interested. We have lost too much heart, and too many people in the process. I, I think the interview is done."

Kao Kalia Yang wrote an incredible article on the events surrounding the interview, entitled "The Science of Racism: Radiolab's Treatment of Hmong Experience" published in *Hyphen Magazine* on October 22, 2012. It is very much worth reading.  
<http://www.hyphenmagazine.com/blog/archive/2012/10/science-racism-radiolabs-treatment-hmong-experience>

Drakes' genitals are considered especially strange in the world of ornithology considering the fact most male birds have remarkably small genitalia.

Elif Batuman's *New Yorker* article "Natural Histories: A journey in the shadow of Ararat" of October 24, 2011 states, "[The white-headed duck] has one of the longest penis-to-body ratios of all vertebrates. Its pliant, corkscrew-shaped penis is longer than its body, with a spiny base and brushlike tip. The first time [an ornithologist] observed one of these out-growths, he thought the duck had been disembowelled [sic]."

THERE IS A WHITE DOCTOR...

"South African doctor invents female condoms with 'teeth' to fight rape" by Faith Karimi, *CNNWorld*, June 21, 2010.

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/06/20/south.africa.female.condom/index.html>

Dr. Sonnet Ehlers invented Rape-aXe, a condom inserted by women who had reason to believe they would be entering a situation in which there was the potential of someone raping them. "The woman inserts the latex condom like a tampon. Jagged rows of teeth-like hooks line its inside and attach on a man's penis during penetration." The condom and hooks are only removable by a doctor, and the man is unable to urinate while the condom remains on his penis. Dr. Ehlers hopes that the condom will be removed with authorities standing by to make an arrest.



In the 2000 a 72-year-old retired South African anaesthetist, Dr. Jaap Haumann, created a similar though more crude version of Ehlers' Rape-aXe. Dr. Haumann's anti-rape device involved a tampon-like shell that housed a spring blade that would slice the tip of the penis off in the event of unwanted sexual intercourse.

“‘Killer tampon’ to give rapists the chop” by Willem Steenkamp, *IOL News*, December 22, 2000.  
<http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/killer-tampon-to-give-rapists-the-chop-1.57525#.UA-L-WGm-z4>

“VAGINA: ORIGIN ...

Via <http://oxforddictionaries.com>.

—THE WOMAN'S BODY...

Louise Glück, *The First Five Books of Poems*,  
“Dedicated to Hunger,” 133

FOR NEARLY A YEAR NOW...

The live album is “Sam Cooke Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963.”

Sam Cooke died at 33 in December of 1964. He was killed in the manager’s office at the Hacienda Hotel in South Los Angeles wearing only a jacket and shoes. The manager, Bertha Franklin, told police that Cooke broke into her office in a rage and attacked her when she claimed not to know the whereabouts of the woman he was with earlier that evening. Franklin stated she shot him as an act of self defence, then beat his head with a broomstick when he charged at her again before collapsing on the floor. It was ruled a justifiable homicide.

Cooke had checked into the Hacienda Hotel with Elisa Boyer. Boyer later fled their hotel room along with some of his clothes for fear Cooke intended to rape her. She called the police from a telephone booth outside the hotel.

There is some controversy over Cooke’s death, with many claiming that Boyer and Franklin were in cahoots, as some large amount of money Cooke was carrying with him went missing, and the fact that Boyer was later arrested for prostitution (the assumption being a prostitute is unable to tell the truth or fear being raped by a man).

Others believe that Sam Cooke’s death was part of a larger conspiracy. Etta James writes in *Rage to Survive: The Etta James Story*, “[His] head was practically disconnected from his shoulders...His hands were broken and crushed...No woman with a



broomstick could have inflicted that kind of beating against a strong, full-grown man” (151).

Just after Cooke died, “A Change Is Gonna Come” was released as a single. Before his death, Cooke played the track for Bobby Womack, asking “What’s it sound like?” Womack responded, “It sounds like death.” This is via “Sam Cooke And The Song That ‘Almost Scared Him,’” unattributed, NPR Music.

<http://www.npr.org/2014/02/01/268995033/sam-cooke-and-the-song-that-almost-scared-him>