

SEXUAL-MISCONDUCT
RECOMMENDATIONS

TRANSFER STUDENTS
ADMITTED

PRINCETON'S
DIGITAL ARCHIVES

PRINCETON ALUMNI WEEKLY

WHEN SMART MACHINES ARE BIASED

Olga Russakovsky is
working to change that



“Bad things happen — wars, plagues, parents abandoning their children, the heartless preying on those with hearts — and no one, not a human or a god, will intervene.”

— *From Kinder Than Solitude*
by Yiyun Li

Her 2009 novel, *The Vagrants*, is set in a Chinese provincial town named Muddy River where a brutal public execution of a counterrevolutionary takes place. In 2010, Li was chosen for *The New Yorker*'s list of best young writers and was awarded a MacArthur Foundation “genius” fellowship, which cited her “intimate and elegantly constructed portraits of people largely ignored by history — Chinese nationals as well as expatriates in the United States.”

Three friends are haunted by their childhood in China — and the mysterious poisoning of one of their playmates — in the novel *Kinder Than Solitude* (Random House), published in 2015. One passage lays out the novel's disquieting theme: “Bad things happen — wars, plagues, parents abandoning their children, the heartless preying on those with hearts — and no one, not a human or a god, will intervene.”

I Write to You in Your Life, Li's first book of nonfiction, interweaves reflections on the struggle with depression that landed her in the hospital with an homage to writers whose works provided a lifeline. “I am aware that, every time I have a conversation with a book, I benefit from someone's decision against silence,” she writes. She found particular comfort reading the letters and journals of fellow writers. “Marianne Moore would write to Elizabeth Bishop and say, ‘We are devastatingly lonely here.’ It helped me to know that these moments happened in other writers' lives, and I'm not alone in feeling that.”

Li writes movingly of her friendship with the late Irish author William Trevor, which was sparked by a fan letter she sent to him. Visiting him near the end of his life, she muses of their bond, “We are solitary travelers, having crossed paths in the land of stories.” ♦ *By Jennifer Altmann*

IN SHORT

We all know that some bacteria are good, and now a new bacterium that may be able to aid in environmental cleanup has been discovered. Civil engineering professor Peter Jaffe and research scholar Shan Huang have discovered a **FRIENDLY MICROBE**, which they dubbed A6, that can break down ammonium — a component of sewage and fertilizer runoff — removing it from wastewater before it is flushed into waterways. As reported in *PLoS One* in April, A6 has the ability to work in anaerobic environments, making it potentially cheaper than oxygen-dependent methods of sewage treatment.

We often think of countries clashing in terms of warfare, but politics and international affairs professor Melissa Lee contends that nations most often weaken their rivals more subtly. A perfect example, she says in a paper published in *International Organization* in April, is Russia's undermining of Ukraine in recent years through fomenting internal dissent and government dysfunction. Examining 78 countries over the past 50 years, Lee found that such **“HOSTILE NEIGHBORS”** are quite common and recommends that diplomats planning statecraft consider the subtle forms of manipulation countries use across borders.

Smart kids might not always top the human popularity pyramid, but nerds can get their revenge in the animal kingdom. A study by ecology professor Daniel Rubenstein, neuroscience professor Asif Ghazanfar, and Ipek Kulahci *14 has found that **CLEVER LEMURS** are more popular than their witless peers. In an experiment involving a grape inside a clear box, the first lemur to devise how to access the fruit through a drawer was revered by other lemurs, who lavished grooming and other attention on the

primate Einstein. The study, published in *Current Biology* in April, is the first to show a connection between intelligence and social standing in animals.



Physicians worldwide have called for limits on antibiotics to help slow the development of **ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT BACTERIA**. Instead, a new report by scientists including some from the Princeton Environmental Institute (PEI) has found that antibiotics prescriptions increased globally by nearly 40 percent from 2000 to 2015. The study, which included PEI senior research scholar Ramanan Laxminarayan, Professor Simon Levin, and Eili Klein *12, calls for more government regulation, particularly in developing countries.

A new study led by ecology professor Andrea Graham has found that **MICE LIVING IN THE LAB** have at least one advantage over their country cousins: They develop fewer parasitic worms. Published in *PLoS Biology* in March, the experiment compared indoor mice to those raised in a special outdoor facility, finding the latter were exposed to bacteria that exacerbated growth of worms in their gut. The findings question the accuracy of mice-based studies in sterile labs, and ask how they might be different if done in more open, real-world environments. ♦ *By Michael Blanding*