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## Vessel's Dr. Rebecca Gomperts on Providing Abortions to Women in International Waters

'Vessel' follows the Dutch physician who founded Women on Waves, which provides abortion services on a boat in international waters to women in countries with restrictive laws.



Protesters call it the "Ship of Death."

Since 2001, Women on Waves (WoW), a Dutch non-profit organization, has chartered a yacht to countries with restrictive abortion laws. It docks in places ranging from Ireland to Morocco, and women in desperate need of abortions board the ship (sometimes in disguise), sail into international waters, and undergo a medical abortion—a non-surgical pill that combines the drugs misoprostol and mifepristone. The whole operation is possible due to a loophole in international law whereby when on a vessel in international waters, the laws of the flagship country apply. Women on Waves boat is a Dutch ship, and in the Netherlands abortion is legal up to six-and-a-half weeks into a woman's pregnancy.

Women on Waves was founded in 1999 by Dr. Rebecca Gomperts, a Dutch physician and activist. She's the subject of *Vessel*, a new documentary premiering at South By Southwest. Filmmaker Diana Whitten trailed Gomperts for seven years, capturing contentious missions to Spain and Morocco.

The festival setting of Austin, Texas couldn't be more apt for Gomperts and Whitten. With the recent closure of an independently owned abortion clinic in Harlingen, the Lone Star State has become key in the fight over abortion. Currently, Texas has only 19 abortion clinics (down from 44 in 2011). New restrictions that went into effect at the end of November require abortion

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doctors to obtain admitting privileges from a local hospital within 30 miles of their clinic, which led to several closures. Furthermore, in September, the new Texas law will require that abortion clinics abide by the codes of ambulatory surgery centers—health care facilities where surgical procedures that do not require an overnight stay are performed. Only six abortion clinics in Texas meet the standards to qualify as an ASC.

“I couldn’t ask for a more ideal place in terms of drawing that connection between the realities of women here and the realities of women abroad,” said Whitten.

“Control of people’s lives is the domain of religion—whether it’s moral control, ethical control, or social control,” added Gomperts. “The reality is that whatever religion people are, they still have abortions. In the U.S., there’s supposed to be a separation of church and state, but as we see here, it doesn’t really exist. There’s a huge influence of religion on political life. As long as that separation is not taken seriously, religion is going to be a problem. It’s a total farce.”

Gomperts, a striking woman in her 40s, has always had a penchant for social justice. After attending medical school in Amsterdam—as well as art school—she dabbled in radiology, before eventually becoming an abortion provider.

“There was no light bulb moment, it was just something I was drawn to,” Gomperts told *The Daily Beast* in Austin. “What essentially motivates me is the right to autonomy and self-determination. It’s a fundamental human right.”

After becoming an abortion provider, Gomperts interned at a hospital in Guinea, Africa, and witnessed firsthand the perils of women struggling to obtain abortions.

“There were constantly women coming in there on the verge of shock, infected, and bleeding because of botched abortions,” said Gomperts. “I thought it was a problem of healthcare provision, not because it was illegal. Greenpeace educated me politically.”

Gomperts served as a doctor aboard Greenpeace’s vessel *Rainbow Warrior II* and began canvassing abortion providers in places like Mexico. Then, with the help of a seaman, she hatched the idea for *Women on Waves*—a floating clinic serving women in countries banning abortion. With funding from ten private donors, the first abortion ship, *Aurora*, set sail for Ireland in 2001. It was equipped with 20 doses of RU-486 (the abortion pill), birth control pills, condoms, and a mobile surgical abortion facility (designed by Gomperts herself). As many as 100 women rang the *Women on Waves* hotline pleading for abortions, but when the ship docked in Ireland, it was met with a flood of journalists and protesters. Fearing an international incident, the Dutch justice minister claimed that *Women on Waves* had failed to acquire the necessary medical licensing to perform abortions, and the mission was, well, aborted.

*Women on Waves*’ second mission to Poland in 2003 didn’t fare much better. Protesters and anti-abortion organizations hurled red paint at the boat and pegged Gomperts and her crew with eggs. They also threatened to photograph women who boarded the boat. The following year, its vessel was blocked from docking in Portugal by two Portuguese Navy warships sent by the government.

“There’s constant intimidation to try to stop our work from happening,” said

Gomperts.

Even Whitten, during the making of *Vessel*, received various threats—letters about murdering baby-killers and the like.

“Someone subscribed me to *American Baby* magazine recently, which was very weird,” said Whitten. “I don’t have a baby... and it was my home address.”

According to Gomperts, she is the only paid member of Women on Waves. The rest of the crew is comprised of volunteers, and women who come onboard don’t have to pay a dime. The operation is funded by private investors in the Netherlands, as well as donations. Gomperts and Co. rent a ship for about a week for each mission, and the average cost of a campaign, she says, is around 30,000-40,000 Euros.

In 2008, Women on Waves docked in Valencia, Spain. The ship was met with a mixture of protesters and women’s rights activists. In one gripping scene in the film, harbor patrol agents on a tiny motorboat attempt to lasso a rope around the Women on Waves ship’s helm and pull it from the dock. As the ship is being pulled away, Gomperts brandishes a knife and cuts the rope.

“We helped four women in Spain get abortions,” said Gomperts. “Unfortunately, the numbers on the ship are minimal, because it’s tough for us to get women onboard, or for the ship to come in and go out.”

Most of the work, then, is provided by Women on Web—an offshoot of Women on Waves that helps educate women in need of abortions get access to abortion pills. By Gomperts’s estimation, the site answers 100,000 emails a year in 12 different languages.

“There are very few major health problems out there that require such a simple remedy,” said Gomperts. “It’s just a pill. That’s it. There was similar opposition to birth control, the morning-after pill—every contraceptive. Abortion pills should be available in pharmacies like the morning-after pill. Women would be able to take their lives into their own hands and take the medication as needed with the proper instructions.”

Women on Waves and Women on Web also encourage women in countries that have outlawed abortion to take the drug misoprostol—one of the two drugs found in the abortion pill. When taken in high doses, misoprostol has an 80 percent chance of inducing a miscarriage, and since it’s sold as an over the counter ulcer remedy, it’s fairly easy to obtain.

The most recent mission to the Women on Waves vessel to Morocco, but they were kicked out immediately.

“What was interesting about Morocco was that it was the first country where they don’t even pretend there’s a rule of law,” said Gomperts. “Morocco is a police state. They didn’t give a shit about any legal procedures. Our lawyer in Morocco wasn’t even allowed to get to the ship while the police were searching it, so we were worried they’d plant drugs onboard. The police even went to the homes of local activists who were working with us to intimidate their parents.”

According to the World Health Organization, 21.6 million women experience an unsafe abortion worldwide each year, while 18.5 million of these occur in developing countries. Also, 47,000 women die from complications of unsafe abortion each year—though these are the

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only ones that have been tabulated—and account for approximately 13 percent of all maternal deaths.

“The most important misconception is that abortion is rare, or that it’s ever going to be rare,” said Gomperts. “Abortion will always be a normal medical procedure. One in three women in the U.S. have had an abortion. And worldwide, it’s almost every woman. More people die from using Viagra than from abortions. It’s one of the safest medical procedures. It’s safer than giving birth.”



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Eli Lake



# Mideast Ally Blasts U.S. Over Accused Terrorist Story

In a rare rift between two close allies, the usually discreet United Arab Emirates has gone public over its exasperation with the State Department.

Since 9/11, one of America's closest allies in the Middle East has been the federation of seven sheikdoms known as the United Arab Emirates. Wedged between Iran and Saudi Arabia this wealthy country does \$27 billion a year in trade with the United States and has modernized its military with American arms.

This close alliance is now straining after a rare outburst from the UAE. The dispute centers on a single paragraph in the State Department's annual human rights report about the failed efforts of Islamists to form a political party inside the emirates. The UAE issued a public response Monday asking why the report never acknowledged evidence that the leader of this party was now running a jihadist training camp in Syria.

The UAE almost always conducts its diplomacy behind the scenes and rarely issues any public criticism of the United States. But in recent years the UAE's rulers have quietly seethed at how President Obama has managed affairs in the Middle East and particularly his support for the toppling of America's former client in Egypt, Hosni Mubarak.

For the emirates, a small country that quietly funded a mission to train a counter-piracy force in Somalia and has waged a political war against Islamist extremists in the Middle East, a few lines in a voluminous government report was an insult.

The UAE is angry that the report makes it appear that the founder of the Ummah Party, Hassan al-Diqqi, is just a regular democratic organizer.

"Emirati diplomacy, like that of other conservative Arab Gulf states, is usually done discreetly," said Simon Henderson, an expert on the Gulf region at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "To issue a news release is extraordinary and suggests a diplomatic rift with Washington which the Obama administration should quickly deal with."

The last time any Emirati official went on the record with a bad word for the United States was in 2010 after the State Department spokesman compared the UAE to China and Iran for threatening to cut off Blackberry service if the provider did not share

the call data of its users with the government.

In a statement, the UAE's ambassador responded in 2010 that his government was only asking Blackberry to hand over the same kind of information that Blackberry already gives willingly to the United States (this was before *the Guardian* and *Washington Post* published NSA documents to prove it).

This time around the UAE is angry that the State Department's human rights report makes it appear that the founder of the Ummah Party, Hassan al-Diqqi, is just a regular democratic organizer. (The report calls him Ahmed al-Dakki, but the Daily Beast was able to confirm with the State Department that he is al-Diqqi)

Al-Diqqi attempted to form the Ummah party in 2012 following the arrests of several prominent Islamists. At the time the UAE denounced al-Diqqi for his ties to jihadist organizations and prohibited the formation of the party.

“There is a section of each human rights report that highlights the elections and political process of a country including the status of political parties,” said Carole Jackson, a State Department press officer. “The point was that citizens do not have the right to form political parties in the United Arab Emirates.”

The *Washington Post* reported last year that al-Diqqi had appeared in a YouTube video as the leader of a jihadist militia in Syria appealing for donations. More recently, another senior member of the UAE's Ummah Party, Abdul Rahman Omeir al-Naimi was designated by the Treasury Department as a financier of al Qaeda.

But none of those updates made it into the latest State Department Human Rights report. A section on al-Diqqi says, “In 2012 several citizens led by (al-Diqqi) announced the formation of the country's first political party, called ‘Al Umma.’ There were no updates on (al-Diqqi) or the ‘Al Umma’ organization at the end of the year.”

What some at the State Department might regard as an oversight was interpreted as a major slight by the UAE. “The Ummah oversight would seem to suggest that a recalibration of the report's findings is necessary and that it therefore provides an unbalanced picture of the human rights situation in the UAE,” the UAE's ministry of foreign affairs said in a statement Monday.

Jackson said, “Al-Diqqi was highlighted in last year's report because he announced the formation of a political party. We did not have any 2013 update on the formation of political parties, including those referenced in the previous year's report.”

On a side note Al-Naimi's human rights organization, Al-Karama Foundation, is a source for one claim in the Human Rights report's section on Algeria. In that case Jackson acknowledged an error. “Those references to al-Karama should have been edited out and it was an editing error that left them in,” she said.

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To be sure, the UAE is not a western democracy. In 2009 a video tape was first aired by ABC News that showed Sheikh Issa bin Zayed al Nahyan, the brother of the UAE's crown prince, savagely beating and torturing a man with the assistance of men in UAE police uniforms. In December of 2009, an Emirati court found al-Nahyan not guilty.

At the same time, the UAE has not had the wide-scale uprisings that have led to massive human rights abuses from other



states in the region such as Bahrain and

Syria.

One UAE official who is close to the issue told the Daily Beast, “The critical mischaracterization contained in the report would appear to point to the State Department’s inability to understand the dynamics of the UAE.”

It is by no means the only irritant in the relationship. In Obama’s first year in office, the emirates signed a nuclear deal with the United States whereby Abu Dhabi forswore any rights to build up its capability to enrich nuclear fuel. This year the Obama administration has quietly signaled that it would be willing to accept such an enrichment capacity with the UAE’s chief adversary, Iran.



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BOOKS 03.10.14



# The Man Who Knew Russia Best:

# George Kennan's Revealing Diaries

What would America's most insightful strategist of Russia make of the invasion of Crimea? A new collection of his diaries reveals much about the man and his fine mind.

George Frost Kennan, America's most influential 20<sup>th</sup> century diplomat, wouldn't have been at all surprised by Russia's recent military incursion into Ukraine. Indeed, it could very well be said that he predicted such a development as early as 1997. "I have been rendered most unhappy," wrote the former US Ambassador to Moscow, by the admission of "Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to membership in NATO."

How was such a development "to be reconciled with the assurances to the Russians that they need not worry, that the extension of NATO's borders to the east has no military implications?" Indeed, Kennan saw nothing in the rapid and reckless expansion of NATO "other than a new Cold War, probably ending in a hot one, and the end of the effort to achieve a workable democracy in Russia."

By that point, Kennan had been worrying about US-Russian relations for well over half a century. And he had shaped the course of those relations profoundly. As the number two man in the American embassy in Moscow in the waning days of World War II, Kennan waged a lonely crusade to persuade his superiors, especially the ailing Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to remove their rose-colored glasses and see Russia for what it was, not what they wished it to be.

**"Nothing could keep them from seeking again some outlet for the basic need of the human being to feel that he is doing something important and fruitful and necessary."**

Stalin had proved an indispensable ally, the conventional thinking in the FDR administration went. Surely he intended to honor his commitments to respect the freedom and self-determination of all peoples in shaping the postwar world, regardless of Marxism's doctrinal hostility to the democratic capitalism? Surely, he should be dealt with in a spirit of cooperation, and granted massive American aid for reconstruction, along with the other allies?

As every casual student of the postwar era knows, it took about a year after the War ended in Europe for those illusions to be put rest. Kennan did more than any other individual to bury them. On February 22, 1946, not long after Stalin's "iron curtain" had descended over Eastern Europe, Kennan fired off to Washington the longest telegram in American diplomatic history. In 5000 words, with laser-like precision, he described

the nature of postwar Soviet foreign policy, locating its sources deep in imperial Russia's long history of expansionism and paranoia about the



intentions of foreign powers. Then—as if that wasn't enough for one telegram—he proceeded to lay out a brilliantly conceived counterstrategy for the United States.

Stalin, said Kennan, would paint the capitalist West out to be an implacable enemy of the Soviet state, bent on its humiliation and destruction. He was deeply hostile to the West, especially the United States. “We have here [in the Kremlin],” wrote Kennan, “a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the US there can be no *modus vivendi*, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life destroyed ... if Soviet power is to be secure.”

Nonetheless, there was reason for optimism. The new Soviet empire in Eastern Europe was composed of proud and talented peoples who would not submit to the Soviet domination forever. Marxism was a doctrine of alluring but false promises. Taken all together, the Soviets possessed a lousy political system. In time, it would inevitably collapse of its own weight.

In view of these realities, the United States “must pursue a policy of long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” through “the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of continually shifting geographical and political points.”

The “long telegram” changed everything, and fast. Everyone important in the Truman administration read it. Virtually everyone, certainly Harry Truman, believed it. In a matter of weeks, “containment” became the master American strategy for the waging the Cold War. And so it remained for the next 45 years.

George Kennan would go on to play a pivotal role in the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, the postwar reconstruction of Japan, and the reconfiguration of the disjointed foreign policy planning process in Washington. After leaving the State Department in the early 1950s following a short stint as ambassador to the Soviet Union, he returned to Princeton University, where he had been an undergraduate, and took up a second, equally celebrated career as a scholar, public intellectual, and behind-the-scenes foreign policy “wise man.”

Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did the prophetic brilliance Kennan's ideas come fully into view. Just as Kennan predicted, the Soviet Union had imploded. Democratic capitalism had won the Cold War not with a bang, but a whimper.

Yet as Frank Costigliola's irresistibly readable *The Kennan Diaries* makes plain, for all the recognition he received for his work as a diplomat, George Kennan was deeply ambivalent about diplomacy as a profession. The Foreign Service paid more attention, Kennan claimed, to “backslapping cordiality with members of [local] governments and diplomatic corps than on the real work of the mission.”

But then again, George Frost Kennan was a deeply introspective man. Like the Puritan ancestors he never succeeded in escaping, he found fault with just about everything, especially himself. Aspirations always fell short of achievements. Insecurities abounded, and Kennan, it seems, pretty much always had his knickers in a twist about something. As one close friend remarked, “It isn't easy being George Kennan.”

For those who knew him best, he remained a study in contradiction. He was an “idealist and a realist at the same time,” said his close friend, the British

Diplomat Frank Roberts. Kennan clearly thirsted to be among the common people wherever he found himself. In these well-sculptured diary entries, he seems to drink up their energies and yearnings with great feeling, but he was also a first-class intellectual snob with a clear preference for meritocracy over democracy. He took a dim view of the impact of Latinos and Blacks on America's WASP culture core.

The diary is a compelling and extraordinarily rich chronicle. It served its author as very much more than a place to record private observations about the events of the day. Here he worked out much of his thinking on the weighty moral and geopolitical issues of the postwar world, and here he reflected on his own failures and successes, personal and political. Castigliola deserves high praise for turning 8000 pages of raw material into an accessible, inviting book that skillfully balances insights into the public and private man.

There's no quarrelling with his assertion that the entries were "written in elegant, insightful prose." Next to Lincoln, it's hard to think of any government official in American history who wrote so evocatively. Kennan had a passionate, lifelong interest in the craft of writing, and the diary was clearly a place to hone his craft. He was something of a frustrated poet, and a keen observer of landscapes, both physical and moral.

As Kennan drove down out of the hills to Frankfurt not long after the Big War, he saw that "the sky was still bright in the west and the stars were out. In the villages people were out strolling, enjoying the first evening of fine spring weather. There was brisk vehicular traffic all along the road, and most of it German. I thought of the whole ... area stretching off behind us in the dusk; and it seemed to me that you could hear the great low murmur of human life beginning to stir again, beginning to recapture the rhythm of work and life and change, after years of shock and prostration ... Nothing could keep them from seeking again some outlet for the basic need of the human being to feel that he is doing something important and fruitful and necessary." Moving stuff. *The Kennan Diaries* contains many other keenly observed descriptions of people, places, and events.

After serving as ambassador to Yugoslavia between 1961 and 1963, Kennan returned to Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. For the remainder of the Cold War, as an academic and public intellectual, Kennan served as a trenchant critic of Washington's application of the containment strategy. In frequent appraisals of America's cold war initiatives, he invariably saw the hole rather than the donut. He despaired over the militarization of US foreign policy, and thought it foolish for the United States to challenge Communist adventurism in places like Vietnam, which hardly seemed a vital interest of the West. In Vietnam, and elsewhere, Kennan felt Washington hunted aside adroit political strategy and diplomacy in favor of a ham-fisted militarism.

He wrote at length about the dangers of the nuclear arms race. In 1982, as President Reagan's pronouncements toward the Soviet Union became increasingly strident, Kennan noted that the "military policies and even more the rhetoric of these two great countries are on a collision course, and I feel quite helpless in the face of the situation." The Soviet Union had "indulged in polemical exaggeration and distortion" for 60 years, "but what of my own government and its state of blind military hysteria?"

In his later years, he continued to lament his government's disregard for the

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most constructive aspect of containment—the call to reinvigorate American society and democratic values by addressing the issues of poverty, racism, inequality, and the disintegration of a sense of common purpose and community. Here, it seems the personal was inextricably intertwined with the political, for Kennan often wrote—and dreamed—about the beauty and happiness that only community could provide, but in an immensely productive life of just over a hundred years, he never seemed to have escaped what one friend called “a haunting sadness, deep in

him.”

With these *Diaries*, then, Mr. Kennan has come through one last time with a book that illuminates in intricate and imaginative ways not only his times, but himself.



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Andrew Romano



## 'True Detective' Finale Review: Close to Perfection

Sunday's finale of 'True Detective' was the perfect conclusion to a series that has come close to perfection. To stick around any longer would have broken the spell.

On Sunday night, the first season of HBO's deep, dark crime drama *True Detective* came to a close. It wasn't your average season finale. Usually with a show you love—*Mad Men*, *Game of Thrones*, whatever—you know your favorite characters will be returning in a year or two. Their narrative will continue. But *True Detective* is different. From the start, creator Nic Pizzolatto designed it as an anthology series. One story per season. Beginning, middle, and end.

This means that, as of Sunday night, the tale of Rust Cohle, Marty Hart, and the 17-year search for the man who murdered Dora Lange is officially over. The Yellow King is a thing of the past. Carcosa is no more. And Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson won't be coming back. The second season of *True Detective* will tell a different story—with different characters, different actors, and a different setting.

And I, for one, couldn't be happier.

I thought Sunday's finale ("Form and Void") was the perfect conclusion to a series that has come as close to perfection over the course of its eight all-too-brief episodes as any I can remember. To stick around any longer—as much as I adore Rust and Marty and the whole Carcosa mystery—would have broken the spell. And to tie things up in any other way would have betrayed what the first season of *True Detective* was all about.

Before I explain why, let's review what happened in "Form and Void."

Or rather, let's review what didn't happen. (Warning: stop reading now if you haven't seen the finale yet. The rest of this review will consist of nothing but spoilers.) We didn't meet a tentacled Yellow King from another dimension.

We didn't step through some sort of mystical portal and enter the Lovecraftian land of Carcosa. We didn't reenact the Vietnam War or discover that Marty's father-in-law had raped Marty's daughter. We didn't find out that Marty was really the killer, or that Rust was really the killer, or that the guy at the banh mi place was really the killer. We didn't fulfill the Internet's wildest expectations.

Instead, we got exactly the finale that Pizzolatto had promised us all along: no alarms, no surprises—for the first three-quarters of the episode, at least. "I cannot think of anything more insulting as an audience than to go through eight weeks, eight hours with these people, and then to be told it was a lie—that what you were seeing wasn't really what was happening," he told me earlier this year. "The show's not trying to outsmart you."

And so Marty, on a hunch, searched through the canvassing photos that he and Rust had snapped in 1995 while investigating the Lange murder near Erath. He stumbled on a shot of a freshly painted green house. "Why green ears?" he asked his partner, referring to the police sketch of the so-called "spaghetti monster" who had chased a young girl through the woods decades back. "Maybe [the killer] painted that house," Marty suggested. Before long, Rust and Marty had dug up the contractor's name— Childress and Son. That led them to the Childress homestead, a decaying white clapboard building in the middle of the Louisiana swamp, which in turn led them to Errol Childress: the lawnmower man, the illicit grandson of Sam Tuttle, the man with the scars, the spaghetti monster, the killer.

Childress sure was creepy: married to his half-sister, who was apparently raped by his grandfather; surrounded by decrepit dolls; in the habit of referring to sex as "making flowers"; prone to adopting a James Mason accent for no discernible reason. Childress even kept his dead father Billy bound up and rotting in a nearby shack, *Psycho*-style. But after leading Rust into some sort of a brick building clearly designed by the same twig-loving decorator who had created all those devilcatchers, the spaghetti monster finally met his match. Rust was stabbed. Marty was hatcheted. Childress was shot in the head.

In short, our detectives got their man.

And that's it. That's all that "happened," plot-wise, in "Form and Void." But a lot more was going on—especially in the last 15 minutes of the episode.

As enjoyable  
as this sort  
of literary  
trainspotting  
can be, I also  
consider it  
window  
dressing.

I'm sure that the web will spend most of this week obsessing over the more supernatural elements of Sunday's finale. *What did the drawings on the side of Childress's shack—an ascending figure with antlers surrounded by black stars and flowers—really mean? Why did Childress tell Rust to "take off [his] mask"? And what the heck did Rust see in the domed "Carcosa" throne room before Childress leapt from the shadows and stabbed him? Was it some sort of astronomical hallucination? Or was he "mainlining the secret truth of the universe" again?*

But as enjoyable as this sort of literary trainspotting can be, I also consider it window dressing. The true meaning of *True Detective* doesn't have all that much to do with Robert Chambers or the stories he wrote way back in 1895. Instead, the true meaning of *True Detective* is about the power of storytelling itself.

I've advanced this theory before. But the final moments of "Form and Void"—the conversation between Rust and Marty outside the hospital where they've been recuperating after their bloody encounter with Childress—made the show's intentions clearer than ever.

In the earliest episodes of *True Detective*, Pizzolatto established a clear dichotomy. On the one hand, there's investigation—storytelling as a search for the truth. On the other hand, there's religion—storytelling as an escape from the truth.

It's no accident, for instance, that the religious task force led by the Rev. Billy Lee Tuttle swoops in during Episode 2 and tries to stymie Rust and Marty's investigation (as I wrote last week). It's no accident that when the case subsides, Marty joins Promise Keepers. It's no accident that before she died, Dora Lange told her friends that she had been "going to church." And finally it's no accident, as we learned in Episode 7, that Tuttle's Christian charter schools were feeders—and Tuttle's ministry a cover story—for the pagan Yellow King-Carcosa cult that seems to be some sort of sadistic Tuttle family tradition.

Pizzolatto could have made the Tuttles a clan of psychopathic murderers. He didn't. He made them a clan of psychopathic murderers who subscribe to a very specific theology: a theology that alludes, crucially, to *The King in Yellow*—an external narrative that is supposed to create insanity, or as Pizzolatto "prefer[s]" to put it, "deranged enlightenment," which sounds a lot like a skeptic's view of religion as a whole. In other words, both Christianity and "Carcosa" are stories. Stories people tell themselves to escape reality. Stories that "violate every law of the universe" (as Rust once put it).

Of course Christianity and the Carcosa cult aren't the same thing. *But take your "fairy tales" too far*, Pizzolatto seems to be arguing, *and you can wind up in some pretty sick places*.

There is, however, an antidote.

Throughout *True Detective*, Pizzolatto has linked blindness—an unseeing state—to the victims of the Carcosa cult. Dora Lange was wearing a blindfold when she was discovered in a prayer position at the base of that tree. ("In order to effectively pray you're going to have to ignore some very basic facts about the world," Pizzolatto once told me. "In order to mean it.") Marie Fontenot was wearing a blindfold on the gruesome videotape that Rust found in Billy Lee Tuttle's safe. And even Errol Childress chimed in during Sunday's finale. "It's been weeks since I left my mark," he said in his jaunty British accent. "Would that they had eyes to see."

But when Rust and Marty once again partner up in Episode 7—when they once again became true detectives, or storytellers in search of the truth—Rust delivers a line that pits what they do against what storytellers like Errol

Childress do.

"I won't avert my eyes," Rust says. "Not again."

On *True Detective*, investigation—"looking for narrative [and] build[ing] a story, day after day," in Marty's words—is how you "see the light." In the season's final scene, Marty and Rust leave the hospital. They still bicker like brothers, but their bond is strong. In a rare moment of vulnerability, Rust tells Marty he "shouldn't be here." He says that when he was unconscious, he could sense "[his] definitions fading" in "the darkness"; he felt "nothing but" his dead daughter's "love." He wanted to let go, but then he woke up. He begins to weep.

Marty puts a hand on his partner's shoulder and tries to comfort him. "Hey," he says. "Didn't you tell me one time ... you used to make up stories about the stars?"

"Yeah, I was in Alaska," Rust says. "I never watched a TV 'til I was 17. Wasn't much to do there. So I'd look up at the stars and make up stories."

Rust pauses for a moment. "I tell you, Marty," he finally says. "I been in that room, looking out those windows, just thinking. It's just one story. The oldest."

"What's that?" Marty asks.

"Light versus dark," Rust says.

And that's the power of storytelling. Sure, you can tell stories about black stars. You can even choose to believe them. But you can also tell stories, like Rust and Marty, that shed light on things. The great achievement of Season 1 of *True Detective* is that Pizzolatto, McConaughey, Harrelson, and director Cary Fukunaga have created a show about a subject this serious—the ways that narrative itself can generate both good and evil—that is also, somehow, a grand, intoxicating entertainment: brilliantly acted, beautifully directed, and never, ever dull.

Eventually, Marty responds. "I know we ain't in Alaska," he says. "But it appears to me the dark has a lot more territory."

At first, Rust agrees. As it says in Genesis 1:2, "the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep." But then he reconsiders.

"You're looking at it wrong," he mutters. "The sky thing."

"How's that?" Marty replies.

"Well, once there was only dark," Rust says. "You ask me, the light's winning."



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## Bravo's 'Online Dating Rituals' Reveals American Males Are Creepy and Want Sex

Bravo claims to unmask the *Online Dating Rituals of the American Male*. Unfortunately, in the age of virtual meat markets like Tinder and OkCupid, it's ten years too late.

In 2005, ABC ran a special documentary series called *Hooking Up* on what was then the new frontier of online dating for women in their late twenties. As a high school student, I wondered if I would someday be intrepid or—as these women were not-so-subtly stigmatized as—desperate enough to enter this uncharted world.

Fast forward to 2014. I'm an online dating veteran with hundreds of virtual and dozens of in-person exchanges under my belt. And I'm not the only one. According to the Pew Research Center, 11 percent of all Americans who use

the Internet have used an online dating site, and that number jumps to 38 percent among people who are single and looking. To say that online dating is widely pervasive is an understatement, which is why Bravo seems a little late to the game with the *Online Dating Rituals of the American Male*.

The network claims the series “unmasks the world of the booming online dating culture from the male perspective.” Men line up multiple dates in the same day (shocking!) and other scoundrels use online dating to “bang” as many women as possible (scandalous!). Really though, we would have to go back at least a decade for this to count as real “unmasking.” The premiere attempts to juxtapose the good and the bad of heterosexual male online daters. Based on the pilot episode, the behavior is not as eye-opening as it is eye-roll inducing.

“It’s not that long. It’s like a hockey puck. It’ll get in there.”

The quintessential creeper is Alex, a 29-year-old who “dates online because it makes getting laid a lot easier.” I’d like to say right here that if Alex didn’t flirt with sexual harassment on his dates (more on that), he would have won me over for his honesty and painful insecurity that manifest as boorishness. Alex is the bad guy, if we’re defining “bad” on a scale of what women would bring homes to their moms (which Bravo seems to presume we are). He has the sketchiest and vaguest professional pursuits; he’s a car salesman who dabbles in his father’s bail bond business. (The scene of him muting calls during a workday afternoon while scanning online dating photos of only women with bikini shots is really all the evidence you need.)

The lines that Alex, or “PrimeTime99,” spouts are stand-alone gems: “This girl is an alcoholic. She probably has self-esteem issues. I like that.” and “Someone who has that much insecurity to lie online is probably easy to sleep with.” Unsurprisingly, he’s as sexually aggressive as one would expect a man who claims “a little ass grab here or there never hurt nobody” to be. He does, in fact, regularly grab his dates’ buttocks without permission, and like a blue-balled high schooler tells one lady, “Don’t be such a prude.”

It’s truly masterful that he hasn’t been banned from dating sites or, you know, arrested.

He tells one lucky lady, “I have a dog’s tongue. I will rock your world.” He later speaks about his penis completely unprompted: “It’s not that long. It’s like a hockey puck. It’ll get in there.” Then, during the post-date interview, he makes the image way worse (and contradicts himself): “I’ve got a salami that’s smooth, long, and tasty in my pants.” What possesses him to think that women will find his penis analogies appealing is unclear, but his constant reminder that he used to be overweight make suggests a host of insecurities

driving his wildly inappropriate dirty talk.

Then there's Marcus, a 36-year-old divorcé in Los Angeles looking for his next wife online because he's starting to wonder "did love forget about me?"

Marcus is the good guy, presented as a reliable businessman-type; his various professional pursuits in the art world and fitness training industry are not quite clear, though, he rocks suits really, *really* well.

Yet, while he is the stereotypical "good guy" he's pretty self-righteous and irritating in his quest for love (which *does* actually resonate with real life online dating). On his first date, Marcus takes out a woman, Michel'le, who seems perfectly normal—as normal as the actress/model can be—except that the footage of her is pretty obviously spliced to make her seem flighty and self-obsessed.

Somehow, Michel'le's story about waking up from a date with a man who hosts strippers (which, to be fair, was weird) qualifies as Marcus's worst online dating experience. Really, Marcus? One quirky and slightly sexual story during the course of dinner counts as your worst? You're not even being melodramatic in a good, Bravo reality TV-show sort of way—you're just being annoying. Try having an OkCupid guy who won't even pay for your Rolling Rock attempt to make out with your face right after you tell him your grandpa just had a heart attack. Then you can talk about "worst online dating experiences."

But even if Michel'le was a narcissistic *Girls Gone Wild* alumnus with the IQ of a box of raisins, it wouldn't excuse Marcus's deceptive, wimpy, and douche behavior. When she offers to reveal her real age because he's been pestering her about it all night, he tells her to hold off and save something for the next date. Of course, Marcus has no intention of spending another minute with her, but is too pathetic to step out of his guise as the suave, sophisticated "good guy." His spineless duplicity confirms that the good guy is actually pretty much a louse.

Marcus even walks out of another date with a girl named Mindy while she finishes her meal. Bravo, though, somehow tries to cast her as a slutty slob for a) enjoying food and b) mentioning she is on her period (again, scandalous!). We don't buy it though—clearly he's the jerk.

The poor foot soldier of love, having survived two nightmare dates, manages to strike gold with a woman with a great bikini shot named Chloe. The episode closes with the two of them kissing and eating ice cream on the couch after Marcus tells her his most recent date went so badly. Yes, men, that is totally the protocol when you come over late at night: make it painfully clear we are you're sloppy seconds.

"After this crazy road, I think I am going in the right direction," Marcus professes with certainty during this second (just the second!) date. The prematurely rosy ending rings hollow and artificial and, ultimately, is just not that fun to watch.

These men don't seem as desperate or even peculiar as the women of *Hooking Up*. That may be because bachelors tend to be depicted far more positively and glamorously than their female counterparts who are relegated to stereotypes of shrill spinsters and old

maids. But it is also the stigma of online dating that has faded tremendously. (Though not completely, obviously, as Bravo still finds the practice unusual enough to devote an entire television series to it.)

There is a way to examine modern dating habits that could both entertain and enlighten. Unfortunately, Bravo relies on old tropes of “good” and “bad” guys and contrived awkward sexual interactions that will make only pearl clutchers blush and the rest of us who have tried online dating for more than hour scream, “so, what?” Perhaps the only new insight the show offers is in its confirmation of the worst impressions of men in the world of online dating. Sadly, sometimes even the “good” guys can be pretty darn deceptive, shallow, and arrogant.



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