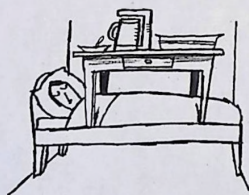


BRIEFLY NOTED

The Castle in the Forest, by Norman Mailer (Random House; \$27.95). Mailer's new novel chronicles the life of Adolf Hitler from birth through his early teen years. The story is narrated by D.T., a demon who acts as a guardian to the future Führer. This conceit brings a glint of dark Miltonian comedy to the bleak, and familiar, details of his early biography: the parents' consanguinity, the father's brutality, the mother's unhappiness, the children's illnesses—all produce alienation and humiliation. As a stylist, Mailer remains captivating, if sometimes infuriating, and he clearly relishes exploring taboo corners of his protagonist's being—his coprophilia, the sexual pleasure he takes in acts of violence, his simultaneous guilt and thrill over his malignant behaviors. Yet, strangely, Hitler is overshadowed as a character by the more vividly realized personalities around him. As if to bear out his profound fears of inferiority, he cannot quite hold the center even of his own life story.

The Year of Endless Sorrows, by Adam Rapp (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; \$15). In this first adult novel by an author known for his plays and his young-adult fiction, an aspiring writer flees the Midwest for the East Village, where he keeps a steadily growing manuscript "about knee pain and the end of the world" in the freezer of his roach-infested tenement. He narrates a year in the city with appealing irony, portraying himself as the straight man opposite a cast of misfit roommates, inane corporate bosses, and zany love interests. Rapp's dramatic skill yields strong characters and some good set pieces, but his story has a tendency to meander, and is sometimes tonally discordant. An epi-



sode at a party where the narrator's date strips and then urinates on a salmon platter is broadly comic but leaves the reader unprepared for a genuine tragedy a few chapters later.

The Foundation, by Joel L. Fleishman (PublicAffairs; \$27.95). Dwight Macdonald once called the Ford Foundation "a large body of money completely surrounded by people who want some," but Fleishman contends that foundations, since their inception, at the start of the twentieth century, have given the U.S. a significant advantage in economic and social development. Fleishman writes that in 2005 "about 68,000 foundations of all kinds existed in the United States, controlling estimated assets of half a trillion dollars and making annual grants totaling \$33.6 billion," and he points to many examples of their contributions to American life (including the 911 phone system and "Sesame Street"). He is optimistic about the future of philanthropy in the U.S., but he cautions that foundations have often been able to operate in obscurity, even when they are administering quasi-governmental programs, and he urges that they move toward greater transparency.

The Adventures of a Cello, by Carlos Prieto, translated from the Spanish by Elena C. Murray (Texas; \$24.95). Prieto, a Mexican cellist, mixes historical research and memoir in this biography of his cello, a Stradivarius from 1720 that he acquired in 1979. Antonio Stradivari made many fewer cellos than violins, and Prieto's, nicknamed the Piatti after an illustrious nineteenth-century cellist, is held to be one of his best. Prieto's archival work shows that it probably stayed in the Stradivari family and then travelled to Spain, where it would have been used, in 1787, in the first performance of Haydn's "Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross." The cello spent most of the twentieth century owned by two members of the Mendelssohn family, both amateur players, the younger of whom managed to smuggle it out of Nazi Germany on a bicycle.

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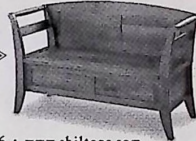
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