Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen
By PETER ALEXANDER MEYERS
Reviewed by Scott McLemee
A plea for the return of the citizen to the center of political life.

Published late last year, Civic War and the Corruption of the Citizen by Peter Alexander Meyers merits more attention than the rather narrow acclaim it has received to date -- though its neglect, so far, may be a matter of its timing as well as its tenor. It is the opening volume in a trilogy of works on political theory that will bear the overarching title "Democracy in America After 9/11."

Reading it now is a constant reminder of the difference that six months can make, for the pages of Civic War are saturated with the concerns, the topical references, and the uneasy ambience of the first several years of this decade, when the office of the president was occupied by a man who proclaimed his role to be "the decider" in tones suggesting that this is the most sophisticated political doctrine he or anyone else might ever imagine. As it happens, Meyers's focus as a theorist is on precisely that topic: how democracy is shaped by the habits (and the failures) of political imagination.

To discuss our recent experience in such terms means establishing a certain degree of distance from the events of the past eight years -- moving from journalism's first draft of history to a higher plane, from which we can examine not just long-term trends but (to use an old bit of philosophical shorthand) the "conditions of possibility" of democratic politics. For Meyers, the aftermath of 9/11 raises questions about the nature and activity of what he calls "the Citizen." That capital letter emphasizes the element of abstraction involved here, for Meyers is trying to define an essence, a mode of being, rather than a demographic group.

30 Seconds of Joy
ROBERT CHRISTGAU
Politics and transcendence in the art of the Congolese soukous.

"It's good that he addresses soukous's knotty political ramifications at all, and most of Rumba Rules is fascinating, even enthralling."

Corporatization Nation
In an illustrated review, Ward Sutton ponders the brand-bound destiny depicted in Douglas Rushkoff's Life, Inc.

"What can I buy to make myself happier?"

See "Corporatization Nation"
**Spotlight: What not to miss this week in books, music, and film**

**LITERATURE**

**The Book of William**
By PAUL COLLINS

In recent years several authors have taken on the daunting challenge of biographizing Shakespeare. From the scrappy Will in the World by Stephen Greenblatt to the highbrow ruminations of Harold Bloom's Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human, books abound that interweave the meagre details of Shakespeare's life with the rich history of his time, seeking ways to account for the eruption of his singular genius. In fact, the motivations of readers and publishers in the fraught era following the Bard's lifetime may have more to tell us about the transmission of that genius and the construction of its legacy. In The Book of William, Paul Collins unclasps the secret book of the First Folio -- the first posthumously-published edition of the Bard's plays and the chief source for his work -- and reads matter deep and dangerous. For this legacy of world literature would have been lost in nature's infinite book of secrecy were it not for the greed of early publishers, the burgeoning enthusiasm of critics and the public, and the tender ministrations of collectors.

Collins, a professor and book sleuth in the McSweeney's orbit, follows the fate of the few surviving First Folios from seventeenth-century printshops to Sotheby's auction room, watching as copies slip through the fingers of robber barons and rare books librarians alike. Scholars have long known the riches to be sought in the material history of books; in the study of the early editions of Shakespeare's works, Collins finds dukedom large enough for the general reader as well.

**-Matthew Battles**

**The Vision Revolution**
By MARK CHANGIZI

Primates are set apart from most mammals in their greater reliance on vision and a correspondingly reduced sense of smell. This trait is so extreme in humans that nearly half of our oversize brains are dedicated to processing visual information. As Mark Changizi explains in the introduction to The Vision Revolution, the visual system is perhaps the best-understood part of the human brain -- but, while researchers have mapped out how, few have provided satisfactory explanations for why we see the world the way we do.

As a theoretical neuroscientist, Changizi focuses on why humans have evolved such visual "superpowers" as color vision and binocularity. His answers are surprising, overturning theories that have dominated primatology since the 1970s. For example, Changizi argues that (despite what many textbooks say) color vision did not evolve to help our arboreal ancestors locate fruit in the jungle canopy but rather to help them read the social cues found in subtle changes in skin tone. (Or not so subtle, if you think of a baboon's behind.) Readers, however, need not be well versed in academic debates to enjoy Changizi's lucid explanations. Filled with optical illusions and simple experiments for the reader to perform, this book may be the most fun you'll have learning about human cognition and evolution.

**-Jennifer Curry**

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**Bury Me Deep**
By MEGAN ABBOTT

Nobody combines historical fact with bravura fiction the way Megan Abbott does. In The Song Is You, she took the real story of a young Hollywood starlet who really existed: Jean Spangler, a sexy-longlegs who disappeared one night and was never seen again. The papers called her Daughter of Black Dahlia, connecting Spangler to another notorious disappearance. The true parts of Bury Me Deep are based on another case that filled the tabloids in 1931, when a young Hollywood woman named Winnie Ruth Judd -- labeled Trunk Murderess, Tiger Woman, and Blonde Butcher -- gave herself up, saying that sexual jealousy had caused her to kill two of her female friends and dismember their bodies, after which she packed them into two trunks and shipped them to Phoenix. She was found guilty and was sentenced to death. Later, her lawyer asked for an amended verdict of not guilty on the grounds of insanity. Judd was finally sent to a mental hospital (probably because of a sheriff involved with the dead woman). She escaped seven times; after the final escape, she spent six years working as a servant for a wealthy family in San Francisco. Abbott's fictional version, Marion Seeley -- like Judd, a doctor's wife -- is his sharper and more touching. In her unique, pared-to-the-bone prose, Abbott brings her to vivid life. "Joe Lanigan, her corrupter, was no longer hers, would permit her to fall to the guillotine before he wore his own face." All three of Abbott's books have been nominated for an Edgar Award; she won one for the much-praised Queenpin.

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**Dreaming in Hindi**
By KATHERINE RUSSELL RICH

Katherine Russell Rich hit the skids with a bump and crash. Recovering from two bouts of cancer and getting fired from her...