

# “He’s Out”: The Exile of Ed Champion

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“If I have any advice to young people, I urge you to never write or become part of the publishing industry.”

On September 26, 2014, Ed Champion stood again on the edge of a bridge spanning the East River. Champion—a blogger, critic, and unpublished novelist—had written a despairing note on Facebook the night before: “I really have no reason to live anymore.” It was the second time in three months he had contemplated ending his life in this way.

Champion first came to my attention last summer after he published on his blog an 11,000 word screed against what he termed “Middling Millennials.” They were “an insufferable new group of mediocre writers and book boosters.” The bulk of the piece attempts to prove novelist and essayist Emily Gould is “a mediocre writer.” (Gould’s first novel, *Friendship*, was set to be released a few days later.)

“Middling Millennials” overflowed with grotesque descriptions of Gould’s body. She is “cold,” “a minx”; she was “hatched” rather than born; and Champion speculates about her “dewy newborn hands” reaching “with hollow hunger” for Twitter even before her umbilical cord is cut.

Suddenly it felt like everyone was reading, or pointedly not reading, an essay both frankly bad and starkly misogynistic. A flood of tweets, both subtle and direct, denounced or ridiculed the post and its author. “Put down the snapchat and pick up the Proust!” poet Jim Behrle wrote, “You’re on my lawn! The lawn is one of the most important literary sites! They don’t have a twitter for that!”

“Don’t mistake a loud fart in the dark for literary criticism,” BuzzFeed’s Alex Alvarez tweeted. “Seriously, if you know Ed Champion IRL,” *The Toast* co-founder Nicole Cliffe added, “and there’s a room he won’t let you into, it’s full of HUMAN FEMALE HEADS call the cops.”

Champion posted “Middling Millennials” sometime before 10am on June 26th. Before six o’clock that same evening, after the barrage of criticism, he tweeted: “No money, no job, no gigs, no agent (a MS out with three). Not good enough. So I’m going to throw myself off a bridge now. No joke. Goodbye.” Minutes later he tweeted a picture of a bridge walkway.

Champion eventually resurfaced. “Have abandoned idiotic plan,” he tweeted hours later. “Now heading home. Apologies. Staying off Twitter for months to get some help.”

"We are home," Champion's then-partner Sarah Weinman, news editor for Publishers Marketplace, confirmed. "Thank (most of) you."

Snippets of Champion stories bubbled to the surface of my Twitter timeline. "The venom is so widespread and continuous few people keep up with the it," writer and veteran book blogger Maud Newton tweeted. New Statesmen columnist Elizabeth Minkel suggested a collectively authored Tumblr document of Champion's transgressions. Millions writer Maureen Murphy offered up a screenshot of a comment Champion had directed towards her: "Learn how you'll end up dead and useless."

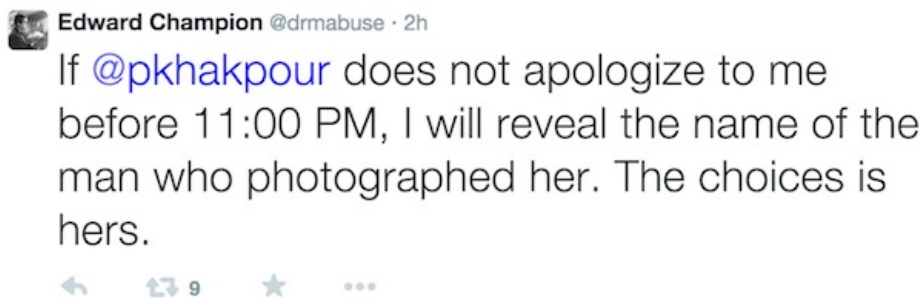
"Middling Millennials," the collective voice of my Twitter feed suggested, did not come out of left field. How long had this been going on? I wondered. Was anything been done about it? What could be done now? And who would be the person, or people, to do it?

The hints of Champion's long history of abusive behavior evaporated as the online literary community moved on to other topics and Champion himself kept lying low. When he very publicly disparaged another woman online in September, it looked to me not like a duplicate of what had happened in June but a prolonged conclusion of what June had begun: an individual and an industry coming to grips with a pattern of abuse that stretched back over a decade.

"I tweeted a number of inappropriate and over-the-line tweets to the novelist Porochista Khakpour, who I had been sparring with all day," Champion wrote in a November blog post titled "Apology." In it he describes the night of September 25, 2014. "I had been heavily drinking, but this does not excuse my behavior. I am reviewing what I tweeted after the fact, I don't even recognize the man who was tweeting that night. I am utterly appalled by my actions."

The catalyst, according to Khakpour, was a comment Champion had written on her Facebook page that disparaged Slate senior editor Dan Kois, a man on a lengthy list of personae non gratae. Khakpour deleted it, perhaps signaling to Champion that she had finally sided with his many censors—had, in fact, sided with one herself.

In response, Champion's Twitter account exploded with invective against Khakpour and culminated in a particularly chilling threat.



**Edward Champion** @drmabuse · 2h  
If @pkhakistan does not apologize to me before 11:00 PM, I will reveal the name of the man who photographed her. The choices is hers.



**Edward Champion** @drmabuse · 1h  
Five minutes. Who is the man who photographed @pkhakistan in the nude? I'm not afraid, and I won't be intimidated.

He tweeted the name of the man who had photographed Khakpour, then deleted it.

Khakpour tweets that night were desperate. "Please help." "I feel very unsafe." "oh god please if anyone knows any lawyers, anything. i can't do this."

"Every agent in the world was rejecting him," Khakpour later said in a phone interview. "That's why his final tweets where he's outing me, being really nice to me, what he's really saying is fuck you publishing. I'm just a weird symbolic sacrifice."

Before the end of the night Champion's Twitter account had been suspended.

"People don't realize that everything he did wasn't for the book world," his friend Levi Asher, writer and longtime lit blogger, told me. "It was sometimes just for fun. Champion had been in a relationship with Sarah Weinman for over eight years."

“They always presented themselves as if she was the one who kept him in check,” freelance journalist and critic Jacob Silverman told me. “His level of awareness was never ‘I’m an unstable internet personality.’ It was more like ‘I sometimes get into fights with people, and Sarah tells me in a loving sitcc way “Put down the computer honey.” They always seemed like a loving, supportive couple whose lives were really intertwined.”

“It’s hard to overstate what a positive, moderating force she’s been for him,” said blogger Eric Rosenfield. Weinman “practically defines the term ‘long-s

“Sarah is incredibly well connected,” critic and Bookslut founder Jessa Crispin said. “Publishers love her.” With over 200,000 Twitter followers—no sma publishing—Weinman has considerable clout.

As news editor of Publishers Marketplace, Weinman writes, with owner Michael Cader, an industry newsletter—Publishers Lunch—with a readership of 40,000.

“Every business has a few trade publications, and Publishers Lunch is the leading one in my business,” Dennis Johnson said. “It’s widely read around t

As the founder and publisher of indie press Melville House, Johnson has a different perspective than many of the writers and critics I spoke to for this s hear from publishers and rights directors from different countries who have read about some rights we had on Publishers Lunch. They read for exampl sold the rights to one of our books to a publisher in Germany. We might hear from the Italian rights director who saw that and became interested in the

“I think also because she’s so legit,” Khakpour observed, “I was friends with Ed longer than I probably would have been.”

According to Eric Rosenfield, Champion quit his day job when he moved to New York from San Francisco in 2006, intending to make a living as a freek writer. This seemed to go well for a while, but the stream of work trickled to a stop “as he began progressively alienating the people who he needed to g freelance writing work from” around 2011. “Ultimately, Sarah ended up supporting him while he worked on his novel.”

Champion’s relationship to Weinman ended the night he threatened Porochista Khakpour. “The woman I loved has left me after nearly nine years,” Che wrote on Facebook the next morning.

Novelist Jason Pinter, a close friend of Weinman’s, spoke to her that night. “She was absolutely terrified,” he tweeted a few days later. “I could hear Ed background screaming and ranting. Sarah was legitimately afraid.” When Champion got on the phone, “he was completely unhinged.” Pinter believed C “was capable of hurting himself or others.” He was terrified for Weinman. Someone called the police.

“I really have no reason to live anymore,” Champion wrote in the same Facebook post the next morning. Shortly afterwards he stood on the lip of the M Bridge, preparing to jump. Negotiators appeared, subway lines shut down, cars halted. After an hour, police were able to pull Champion from the edge transport him to Bellevue Hospital for psychiatric observation. Though the suicide attempt was reported in the Brooklyn Paper, few in publishing connec Friday morning bridge closure with Champion.

“If I have any advice to young people,” he had written on Facebook, “I urge you to never write or become part of the publishing industry... This world is cancer that no decent soul should ever partake from. Get out of it while you still can. Goodbye.”

Champion spent several weeks in Bellevue. By November, he was posting updates on Ello (his Twitter account still banned) about his life in New York homeless shelters. He describes watching the World Series with a group of men who, like him, didn’t have a place to stay.

“If you don’t have a bed, then you’re going to do a lot of waiting, especially at night,” he wrote. “There’s a fine politics to being in a shelter: be sure to sig right paperwork at the right time. You will get a... search that rivals DHS when you enter a shelter. You won’t get much closet space.”

“It was hellish for him,” Levi Asher said of what became Champion’s months-long journey through New York City’s homeless shelters. They spent a day during this period. “For me it was a Paul Auster-esque experience, with my best friend in this distressed state and knowing that at the end of our hang c going to buy him lunch, he was going back to a homeless shelter and I was going back to a home.”

Asher told me that Champion’s life has since regained a measure of stability. He’s no longer in shelters, he’s working again. Champion’s blog, which be active again with his November apology post, has since been infrequently updated and then with fairly innocuous posts. On Twitter—his suspension we over Thanksgiving weekend—Champion writes often but rarely to or with other people. He tweets a lot of links.

“I’m guardedly optimistic,” Asher said. “He used to be a very happy person, very gregarious, very much the center of hilarity. I don’t think that will ever f

again. I think he's now a more serious person."

"I still worry" he said, "but the evidence is pretty good. It will be a lifelong struggle."

Since I started charting the arc of Champion's path through the literary world, I've come up against the wall of everything I don't know. That I won't, or I never really know. Plenty can be gleaned from Twitter accounts and blog posts and Facebook updates, but not everything. Champion politely declined to talk with me for this article; Weinman never responded to my several requests. I suspect whatever happened in private lit the fuse of Champion's very public despair last September: terrifying and humiliating a friend and halting, for a time, a major artery of New York City life. But here we must move on.

"The fact is that he was an actual member of the community, not just a troll on the outside of it," Jessa Crispin said in a phone interview.

"People say it was a con job or all smoke and mirrors," bestselling novelist Jennifer Weiner echoed, "it wasn't. He was doing good work."

Ed Champion came up with the first generation of book bloggers—he started his website, [edrants.com](http://edrants.com), in 2003. He was accompanied by a handful of co-adopters: Maud Newton, Dennis Johnson, Levi Asher, Mark Sarvas, and Crispin among them. Many of these bloggers went on to new and different projects. Newton writes for Harper's and the New York Times. Johnson founded the indie press Melville House. Sarvas published a novel. Crispin helms a new novel (*Spolia*) and has a book due this September. Champion remains one of the few to actively blog.

He's also prolific. His very active archives stretch back over a decade. He also produced about a podcast a week (sometimes more) since 2005. The *B Segundo Show* has hosted authors and filmmakers and musicians from Sherman Alexie to Alison Bechdel, Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Nora Epstein, Mary Gaitskill, Grandmaster Flash, Michael Haneke, Christopher Hitchens, Edward P. Jones, Marilynne Robinson, David Lynch, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, George Saunders, Chris Ware, Karolina Waclawiak, Tobias Woolf, and Weird Al Yankovic. His first episode featured David Mitchell, who has since appeared on the show a total of four times. The list of authors truly staggers.

"His show was one of the first widely known book podcasts," Dan Kois told me. "It's one of the first ones that I paid attention to."

Weiner, who was on the podcast four times, appreciated that Champion's questions were literary, substantial. "To get to talk about that stuff is really rare, and why he was able to get so many authors."

"His podcast exemplifies Ed in that it's obsessively researched and very thorough," said Jacob Silverman, "but at the same time you could see his some personality flaws coming through. He could get self-aggrandizing with guests. Sometimes he asked questions that were challenging in the wrong ways, but he would make a point for himself. On the other hand, he read everything."

Whatever the quality, Champion's work on this front is not that of, as Laura Miller characterized last September in *Salon*, "countless other insignificant contributors." He regularly attended Book Expo America; he wrote for the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*; he got advanced copies of books; he set up interviews with publicists; he co-hosted a reading series at Brick Row bookstore; he went to the right parties. Though he was perhaps "the most hated man in books," he was, still, in books.

"He was smart about where these things were taking place," Jennifer Weiner told me. "People didn't talk about it." She spoke of conflicts that took place on individual Facebook pages, in direct messages, through at-reply conversations on Twitter. "You might see parts of it but not the whole megillah."

Over the past few months, I've spoken to twenty-four people by phone and nineteen more by email. Nearly every person I spoke to had a story about Champion: how he threatened them by phone and by email, on Twitter and in DMs, in comment sections and on his own blog; how he contacted their bosses and family members; how he created a reputation so toxic people—still—fear drawing his attention. Though his most public clashes have only occurred in the past year, Champion's history of misbehavior stretches back to the early 2000s.

"We were friendly—and I think this is how a lot of these stories start—he and I were friendly," Jessa Crispin told me. "I had one of the first breaks with the literary community."

In 2003, Crispin had asked writer Steve Almond to guest blog at *Bookslut* while she was away. "Ed sent this incredibly unhinged email to Steve," Crispin described, "and I thought it had to be a joke. Ed essentially threatened him because he wasn't formatting his paragraphs properly on the blog. That was the complaint." (Almond has "a vague recollection" of the incident.)

They had a complete break. "He sent one of these crazy emails saying 'You will live to regret this' and on and on and on. It was terrifying. I immediately

it. I didn't go in the room for two days. It's just words and he lives in another city, but there is something so violent and body-based about it. You feel so like he is behind you with a knife."

"I started noticing things," novelist Laila Lalami said in a phone interview. They got to know each other in 2003 and both became members of the Litblog, a semi-formal group of book bloggers, in 2005. (Mark Sarvas, Ron Hogan, E. Max Magee, Sarah Weinman, and Levi Asher were also among its members.) After the group's creation, she knew to keep her distance.

"Over the years I heard the same story. The details might change and the people might change, but the story was always essentially the same. Somebody says something that they thought was completely innocent or innocuous, then Ed would take great offense, and then would confront them and demand an apology or taking down a post or putting up a post, and if his demands weren't met then he would become extremely angry. Frankly it was frightening."

"He flew off the handle at me ages ago (don't remember when) for a perceived slight," book marketer Kalen Landow told me in email, "He had put together a post and I shared it on Facebook. For whatever reason he thought I'd stolen his content and I got a blistering series of DMs about it. I clarified with something like 'Uh, I posted a link.' He apologized and that was the end of that. It was a red flag for me."

"I was physically afraid of him for a while," novelist Elyssa East tweeted this past June. After posting a long string of thoughts about Hurricane Sandy relief efforts, Champion decided to call out the people he noticed had unfollowed him. "Hypocrites who could care less about the poor," he tweeted on November 1, 2012 and included East's name. Champion later emailed her about it. "He attacked me and brutally so," East said on Twitter, "all for unfollowing him."

Last August, when novelist Emily St. John Mandel tweeted "Victory is truly not caring when someone who you don't respect attacks you on the internet" was perhaps a veiled reference to Champion's belittling comments on a recent essay—he responded, "Victory is not resorting to the subtweet. I don't resort to either. Why don't you go swallow a glass of cyanide?"

"Reputation in that world is a kind of capital," John Freeman told me over the phone, describing the publishing industry. "I'm not saying that Champion causes a lot of damage, but the fear of damage he could do, even by manipulating Google searches, is real."

"Fear of intimidation, physical safety, and career backlash kept people quiet" about Champion's behavior, Rebecca Schinsky, director of content at Book Riot, tweeted last fall.

"Every publicist has been harassed by [Champion] at some point," Summer Smith, associate director of publicity at Bloomsbury, also said on Twitter.

"I have feared that he would harass/embarrass my author if I said no (or continued to say no) to his interview requests," Smith went on. "He bullies & intimidates & insults, that is how he gets interviews."

Elon Green, in his article on Champion for *The Toast*, reported that writer Joanna Rakoff appeared on *The Bat Segundo Show* unwillingly this past June after a couple of awful incidents with him, and asked not to do his (awful) show this time around." Her publicist said, "We don't want to make him angry, as he is so crazy and smear you."

"This wasn't something that 'happened on the internet' or something that could have been avoided by 'just unplugging,'" Emily Gould told me. "Talking about doing events, and promoting books online is my job."

"I didn't think he was really angry at first," writer and blogger Richard Grayson, who also occasionally contributed to Champion's blog, said to me in an email. "It seemed like a persona, the way Stephen Colbert played a character or (showing my age) Dean Martin pretended to be a drunk or Jack Benny a cheap drunk; it was a schtick and the nastiness was not to be taken so seriously. It probably was a serious misreading."

Levi Asher, who calls Champion his best friend, saw these qualities from another perspective. "He's an anarchist. He's a punk. He's fun. He's somebody who breaks stuff. It's a kind of 1960s prototype: Abbie Hoffman, Paul Krassner, Hunter S. Thompson. To me, that's the positive side of the line. Somebody who naturally pull a prank at a literary event. That's what he loved to do. He put on masks, hilariously tacky t-shirts."

It's true that there's an electric joy apparent in his videos, many of his podcasts, much of his writing. "He read so many, many books," Eric Rosenfield, told me in an email. "Sometimes he'd put out three *Bat Segundo* shows a week and read multiple books by each author to prepare because he wanted to know what he was talking to them about."

"He could piss off my friends sometimes," he went on, "but at the time I thought it was part of his obnoxious charm. I was also charmed by his passion for books."

and willingness to put himself out there and do things and try to make things happen.”

Jennifer Weiner, too, assumed that Champion’s behavior was performative. “There was a tradition of it—of book criticism as blood sport.” Referring to a time in which Champion decided to award “brownie points” to the New York Times Book Review on an issue-by-issue basis and then mail their office a brownies, Weiner said, “there is a universe in which it’s creepy,” but another “in which I could see myself doing it.” Why not, after all, bring pies representing VIDA’s gender-based pie charts to male-dominated publications?

Dennis Johnson remembered a character Champion sometimes played named Bat Segundo (the name taken from the David Mitchell novel *Ghostwritten*) at first, hosted the eponymous podcast. Champion once described this alter ego as “a deliberately unappealing and grating character.” A FAQ on his website, a short, fictional bio of the “former radio DJ” who “is very fond of tequila” and “known to cause trouble—largely unintentionally.”

When Champion assumed the role in public, Johnson said, “it was a scary character. He had a booming voice, very loud, very abusive. He’d come up and say ‘I’m Bat Segundo, who are you, bitch?’”

“He’s a big guy, a pretty stocky guy.” Johnson, who is 6’2”, described Champion as a few inches taller than himself. “He has this huge voice, and he would come over these women and call them names. It was borderline violent.” At one BEA event, Johnson was asked by a few women “to get [Champion] out of the room because he was terrifying people.”

“I ended up escorting him out of the party.”

“The book he is shopping around is very violent in nature,” Khakpour tweeted on September 26, 2014, “which normally I would never bring up, other than I’ve written me many times saying that he was starting to become the main character, who I believe is a murderer.”

On at least two occasions Champion called his threats of violence towards other writers “performance art.”

The line between the Champion who was playing a character and the Champion who was being himself flickers, blurs. Even his Twitter handle, @drma, refers to a criminal master of disguise—Dr. Mabuse—the subject of three Fritz Lang movies. In them, Mabuse uses a network of willing and unwilling participants—complicit criminals, manipulated and unknowing dupes, and blackmailed or hypnotized innocents—to put his plans into action. He also works primarily to remove. It’s a telling choice, even (especially) if an ironic one. It’s not clear, looking back through Champion blog, that he always knew who was who and what he was doing.

Champion made a practice of violating the boundaries between public and private. When some would ignore him, it was not usual for him to contact their friends or spouses. The message would inevitably reach its intended recipient, Champion’s original target, and speak its true meaning: no one is safe.

“Ed was just very unpredictable,” former NBCC president John Freeman told me. Champion, who attended high school with Freeman, has written over 100 posts that mention the critic since 2004. After Champion moved to New York around 2006, he began to show up to Freeman’s events, taking pictures and confronting him. Freeman made it a practice to ignore Champion, and so the blogger started reaching out to Freeman’s family members. “I wrote some essays about my family,” Freeman told me, “and my mother was dying. Ed found my younger brother and started posting comments on his blog.” Freeman had already endured some of Champion’s most extreme attentions, was shocked by this last violation.

Champion also made a practice of contacting his targets’ employers and—regardless of how unhinged he might sound in those emails—raised uncomfortable conversations for them in their workplaces. For novelist J. Robert Lennon, Champion performed a particularly noxious combination of both.

Lennon had a friendly professional relationship with Champion: he appeared on *The Bat Segundo Show* three times, he and Champion exchanged mail, and they saw each other occasionally when Lennon was in New York. On one trip to New York, however, Lennon had become absorbed in a particular family issue and emailed Champion explaining why they wouldn’t be able to meet up. Champion rejected Lennon’s reasons, called the family issue “a family problem,” and broke off the friendship. Then Champion forwarded the email in which Lennon had described this dreadful, and clearly private, situation to his contact he had at Graywolf Press, Lennon’s publisher. Champion demanded that they drop Lennon as an author: Graywolf could not in good conscience publish the work of a person whose family was involved in such circumstances.

I heard similar stories from Oyster Editorial Director Kevin Nguyen (who alluded that Champion, without naming him, was “the worst person in publishing”) and the blogger’s cyanide tweet to novelist Emily St. John Mandel) and writer Michele Filgate (who ended her friendship with Champion, also in part because of a cyanide comment). Over and over, Champion used the people around his targets—their families, their co-workers—as tools against them.

In Champion’s email to Nguyen’s supervisor, he claims he’s trying to take the high road. “Then he threatens physical violence against me,” Nguyen told me.

a gem.”

This is a long, complicated story. I want to take a moment, here in the middle, to remind you that as Champion harassed, stalked, and threatened various members of the literary community, he was, still, interviewing prominent writers, receiving advanced copies of new books (perhaps even from Graywolf), attending industry meetings and parties, writing for national publications. Champion continued the work that, while he loved, put him in contact with people already, or would later, hurt.

“He never hurt anyone physically,” Levi Asher insisted over the phone. As far as I can tell, this is true. And Asher is right to make this distinction: Champion used physical force to hurt another person. Fairly constant throughout his career, however, is the threat of physical violence, which seemed to hang about Champion like a shadow.

Blogger and novelist Mark Sarvas also felt it was important to note that the injury Champion did was not physical. “That is not in any way to discount the harm he has instilled in his victims, nor does it excuse the astonishing vitriol of his public pronouncements,” he said, “but it’s a data point worth registering.”

I frankly don’t know how I feel measuring physical hurt versus psychic. Are they equal? Does one hurt, or matter, more than another? Physical violence is demonstrable; it can, to a certain extent, be proven. How do you prove a spiritual wound? (The testimony of the wounded is rarely enough, especially if you’re a woman.) Are provable violences worse than those that cannot be acceptably substantiated?

It’s interesting to me too that mostly men have made this point about the absence of physical violence. Laura Miller, an exception, says: “While I can at least understand Champion’s grotesque and highly personal criticisms certainly feel assaultive, they don’t actually constitute assault.”

Another question: did Champion break the law? Does what he’s done become more wrong because or when he breaks one? Some things aren’t illegal but they don’t belong in the courtroom, not because they aren’t immoral or unethical. The law, a lawyer friend told me, trusts us (or at least wants to trust us) to adjudicate the majority of our lives. What’s clear, if nothing else is, is that painful little adjudicating was done here. The result is a disproportionately large number of people who have been hurt—some very badly—by Champion, many of whom still fear what he can do to make their lives miserable or make their bodies unsafe.

“I hate that he knows where I live,” Porochista Khakpour tweeted the day after Champion’s attack.

“I felt fear,” Emily Gould wrote in *Buzzfeed* not long afterwards, reflecting on her book tour the previous summer. “Not stage fright, fear for my physical safety.”

His history of explicit physical threats is long: to punch blogger Ron Hogan in 2007, to punch New York magazine writer Boris Kachka in 2008, to put a finger in critic Matt Zoller Seitz’s mouth in 2010, to promise “serious consequences” to critic Glenn Kenny and decapitation to blogger and critic Mark Athitakis. Athitakis was one of the very few people who notified the police of Champion’s threats. Champion took to his blog to mock Athitakis for overreacting to “really a bunch of silly performance art.”

Observers or friends who argue against some critics’ characterization of Champion as a misogynist often cite the above incidents as proof. Champion threatened men for physical threats, yes, on the whole. But it was not an exclusive category: his cyanide-drinking imperative to novelist Emily St. John Mandel is itself a threat of violence. Millions staff writer Lydia Kiesling experienced similar physical threats in the comments sections of her work there.

In response to a March 31, 2014 post, Champion speculates on where he’ll be in a year. “I am certain that it will involve answering a judge in a courtroom. Lydia’s attorneys stare at my manacled bulk with an admixture of vengeance and purchased alacrity. It will be ‘a hell of a legacy.’”

“This comment made my mom call me with real concern,” Kiesling tweeted on June 28, 2014. “I’ve fielded plenty of critical comments without wanting to respond; the ones he left during his feud with the Millions made me dread opening my email the day I posted something.”

“I really do not think that misogyny is any part of who Ed is,” Levi Asher told me. “I’ve hung out with him so much, I’ve never heard him be a sexist. The thing that enraged Ed was feelings about betrayal.”

Champion “was equally abusive toward men,” novelist and blogger Mark Sarvas said in an email. “His viciousness was gender-blind.”

“It’s 100 percent mental illness,” Porochista Khakpour agreed, “and I write a million tweets about misogyny.” She paused. (We were on the phone.) “But actually,” she said, “there’s definitely a sexually violent angle to how he attacked Emily [Gould] and I.”

I want to take a scalpel to these observations: that Champion was an avowed feminist, that he hurt men in equal number to women, that he attacked at some women in a sexually violent way. The first describes a state of mind, an intention. The second, a quantitative phenomenon. The third, a qualitative

Misogyny, in my view, can certainly be a state of mind but need not be. Misogyny is also systems that favor men above women. Misogyny is unconscious that belittle or objectify women. Misogyny is words or deeds that hurt women in particular. You do not have to hate women to hurt them in particular.

In his writing, Champion regularly drew from a deep well of sexual hyperbole. Though men were subject to this kind of attention, women—far more often—been subjected to Champion’s explicit descriptions of their bodies and of sexual acts involving them.

“There’s something sexual in the way that he imagines a woman and writes about her,” Jessa Crispin concurred. “There’s something very systematic about creating a kind of physical vulnerability.”

In 2004, he talked about what he’d do to a then 27-year-old assistant at a literary agency in exchange for a look at his manuscript. “We here at Return of the Reluctant have offered to give 24-7 cunnilingus to Kate Lee, if only she’d check out our wares. She’s declined. She doesn’t like our tongue action.”

Targeting a young woman early in her career with this kind of language is despicable. But Champion did not reserve this pattern of deeply inappropriate sexualization to the relatively unknown and powerless. He describes a 2008 video conversation between America’s only living Nobel Laureate in literature and the then-editor of the New York Times Book Review with an equally repugnant image. The interview was so fawning, Champion writes, Sam Tanenhaus nearly lick[ed] Toni Morrison to a needlessly sensual premature death.”

Fun fact: if you search Champion’s website for the word “cunnilingus,” Google returns 187 results—twelve pages worth. Champion offers oral sex to women who want something from, denies he wants to give it to women he interviews, fantasizes about performing it in different scenarios, and so on. (Sometimes it is straight up writing about sex, but it is not to those posts I refer.) The majority of comments are, by and large, made in jest. On other occasions he uses extreme but functional metaphors for being overly kind or flattering to a woman. Together they add up to a disturbing picture of a man who habitually describes refers to women in a sexual manner in decidedly nonsexual contexts. Readers: this is misogyny.

“People always want to blame some woman at the end of the day,” Porochista Khakpour observed. “Why don’t you just blame the guy?” She refers to one of the more enduring puzzles of this story: Sarah Weinman, Champion’s now-ex partner.

But Khakpour wavered between perspectives in her conversation with me, considering the matter. “Sarah has done a lot of things wrong.”

“Enabler” is a word that came up a lot in my conversations with people whether close to, estranged, or distant from the former couple. It’s true Weinman’s financial support of Champion after 2011 perhaps gave him the time to cause the amount of trouble he did. (In my notes I count at least 18 conflicts, public and private, between 2011 and 2015. I’m certain there were more.) Champion also did much productive work during that time: blogged, made a charming television documentary about Gary Shteyngart’s prolific blurbing, helped expose Jonah Lehrer’s and Q.R. Markham’s serial plagiarism, organized a weekly reading group, finished a novel, and started an impressive (albeit unfunded) Indiegogo project that would pay for him to walk across the country recording oral history. However, the accusations that have surfaced in the months since Champion’s first public suicide threat last June point to Weinman as an active accomplice rather than someone passively complicit.

Weinman cosigned Champion’s behavior in the Facebook post she wrote last June. “All the correspondence Ed has entered into these last few years, I did for myself and judged for myself. (I am, after all, the in-house editor.)” She’s also listed as a contributing editor on his blog. (Levi Asher, citing Weinman’s professional plate and Champion’s voluminous output, guesses she’s in fact seen “less than 1% of it.”)

“What’s also problematic,” Khakpour said to me, “is her job.”

“The routine of Ed going after someone and Sarah attempting to keep it quiet was something of an open secret,” Rebecca Schinsky told me in an email. “Many of us knew about it but no one talked about publicly.”

“I think she’s like Harvey Keitel in Pulp Fiction,” Jessa Crispin said on the phone, “She comes with the body bag and the bleach after Ed has done the crime. In the emails she’s sent my friends, she does damage control, she does isolation of the target, she does retaliation.”

In 2007, when Little, Brown publicity manager Shannon Browne wrote a blog post for the National Book Critics Circle website critical of blog culture, she received a pointed email from Champion. “I’ll be sure to remember these words the next time you’re seeking an outlet, either print or online, for a thoughtful interview of Michael Connelly,” a novelist who Browne did publicity for.



An email arrived from Weinman too. She echoed Champion's "concern" for Connelly. "Your piece comes off like it was written in ten seconds but might have ramifications on Michael, espec with his next book just days away from publication."

Byrne wrote back:

I appreciate hearing from you, but your reference to "bad ramifications on Michael" puzzles me. I knew that what I wrote might further charge the debate just my opinion and has nothing to do with Connelly. I know you're probably just being protective, but are you suggesting that bloggers would now gang up against him? Wouldn't that be against the journalistic responsibility that bloggers are claiming they practice?

"I'm not suggesting anything of the sort," Weinman responded. "However, as a publicist, anything you do and say – regardless of whether it's your own opinion – reflects on your client... Why put yourself in the position to even entertain such notions?"

In 2008, Champion critiqued Boris Kachka's New York magazine story about the publishing industry on his blog. Kachka was surprised to find Weinman's comments section, refuting his arguments against Champion. "I didn't even know they were going out at the time," Kachka told me on the phone. "I emailed him separately and was like, why are you defending this kook?" A voicemail in which Champion threatened to punch Kachka in the face followed shortly after.

When Kachka's history of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, *Hot House*, came out in August 2013, he knew he nothing positive would come from Champion or Weinman. Still he was surprised to see how it had been covered in *Publishers Lunch*. "Sarah wrote only the frickin' book review ever" to appear in the publication. It "started off with a snarky statement about how I'd been working at New York mag for thirteen years so this was my bar mitzvah, dismissing 'a decidedly midlist effort.' Basically like, 'no one is going to buy this book.'"

When her review was republished in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Kachka's editor contacted the publication to notify them of some factual inaccuracies as Weinman's relationship to a man who had fought with Kachka for years. Weinman, when she heard of the editor's message to VQR, wrote the editor who also works in the publishing industry—an intimidating email, "basically saying 'I don't think you should be crossing me.'" Kachka's editor backed off.

Writer Michele Filgate distanced herself from Champion and Weinman, both of whom had been her friends, after their behavior began to disturb her. Filgate admitted to both in an email why she wasn't interested in seeing them anymore. Champion's reply is hurt and angry. Weinman's response, however, is in its reserve:

That was a most interesting email. And now that the bullshit's out of your system, let's get to the heart of the matter: why now? I have my theories; I assume your question will be unanswered.

It's too bad, really. And, in the end, a tactically stupid thing to do. But then, Ed and I left high school a very long time ago.

"I perceived it as a threat," Filgate explains, "because she knows I'm working on my first book. She's the editor at *Publishers Lunch*, she knows a lot of the industry." She wasn't sure what it meant—"not print my book deal in *Publishers Lunch*?"—but the intent was clear to her.

"So much of publishing is who you know and who can vouch for you," Jessa Crispin observed, "and if Weinman's actively going around trying to damage people's reputations—and she is—then you can actually do a lot of damage to someone's career and their ability to make a living."

Rebecca Schinsky heard stories from her friends of how they had "received private correspondence (emails and/or Twitter DMs) from Sarah criticizing their behavior and supporting Ed" whenever the couple had perceived a slight against one or both of them. By the time Ed left an abusive comment on *Book* where Schinsky is content director, in May 2014, "I had heard enough versions of this story to know it was likely that he would respond publicly and that I would hear from Sarah privately as a follow-up."

"I notified my colleague (and boss) Jeff O'Neal that I had deleted a comment from Ed and that he should keep an eye out for an angry email about it. And basically what happened—Ed and Sarah both responded to me publicly and in DMs."

Weinman criticized O'Neal and Schinsky for their zero-tolerance policy for abusive comments. (Champion had called another commenter a "preposterous illiterate child" and an "unthinking oaf" among other things.) "Have a nice time on Sanctimony Island," she tweeted. "Must be lovely out there."

After a long back-and-forth, Champion challenged Schinsky and O'Neal: "I dare you to say that to my face."

Weinman concurred: "and say it to my face too. Please."

“We interpreted as an implied threat,” Schinsky explained to me via email. Schinsky also later described the encounter on Twitter: “Most of the exchange public, but private msgs from Sarah contained statements like ‘I know what you’ve done and always will.’”

Even as Champion performed his most public retaliation yet against Porochista Khakpour, who was a friend of them both, Weinman lashed out at the n tweeting about a threat Khakpour had received on Twitter.

“That’s odd,” she said in reply to Khakpour’s expression of shock and hurt,” apparently you couldn’t wait to ‘go public’ even though I was in the middle c to you? I am quite baffled.”

“I do feel worried for Sarah,” critic Jacob Silverman said, “and don’t fully know what the situation is or what it was like at home.”

“What she was doing didn’t make sense to me. It was journalistically unethical. It’s stupid. It just doesn’t make sense,” said Dennis Johnson.

“If it turns out that Ed was really ill, her enabling him was a pretty dastardly thing to do,” he went on, “in some ways more dastardly [than what Champio because she had real power in her job, power that Ed never had.”

It is impossible to ignore the current that runs through this whole story—that Champion is not well. Again and again I heard code words about his menta eccentric, unstable, manic. I also heard more explicit descriptors: mental illness, crazy.

“In the lit world, it’s all jokes, ‘We’re all crazy people,’” Porochista Khakpour told me. “People aren’t crazy the way Ed was crazy. This is absolutely a stc severe mental illness.”

Levi Asher does not condone Champion’s actions, but he does communicate a person radiating with pain. “I hope some people can find some sympath tweeted. “The armchair psychologist in me sees patterns of reversion to a frightening past of severe child abuse. But I have no facts, only guesses.”

Champion has written, a little, about his personal history. He describes growing up in a home rife with “both violent and verbal” abuse. “This made it ver to read or concentrate or think or feel or write.”

He writes wretchedly about high school. He describes the English muffin and ketchup sandwiches he ate because there was no other food, the “ancien typewriter with a highly unreliable ribbon and jittery keys” he had to type his papers on, a home “where shrieks from other family members careened ar corners and mice scurried and scratched in the walls,” and friends who, embarrassed, offered “their homes as momentary refuge.” He was “the poor kid wild and crazy hair and the trenchcoat and the hat and the Looney Tunes tees (found very cheap at Marshall’s and treated with some care, given that s for clothes was a rare occurrence).”

“One thing I don’t get about the Ed Champion story,” critic and former classmate John Freeman wrote on Facebook in October 2014, is “why he couldn cliché in then turning into an adult who was cruel and picked on people online and in person.” This, he identifies, is “the real failure in character, whethe unstable or not... Part of [Champion] must seek to inflict precisely that pain.”

“I feel terrible for him, and worse for the people he’s hurt,” blogger Richard Grayson told me. “I don’t think he means to do it.”

“Ed frequently liked to talk about how he had so many ‘enemies’ that were ‘out to get him’,” blogger Eric Rosenfield told me, “and I remember wonderin this world has ‘enemies’? Not people who don’t like them, but actual ‘enemies’? The whole thing speaks of a kind of persecution complex, and he had ε to see slights where they didn’t exist, to see someone bumping into him as a personal attack rather than an accident, for example.”

Some wondered whether the illness that Champion presented was the illness he was actually experienced. After all, people with mental illness (and ce those without it), do sometimes use the threat of self-harm to manipulate other people. “I think he’s using [it] as a ploy,” Jessa Crispin said. “I think he p I think that he’s mentally damaged in some way, but I think he uses it as a crutch to get his way.”

“My experience of people who are unstable and who repeatedly threaten to kill themselves,” Emily Gould observed over the phone, “and even to make standing-on-a-bridge type suicidal gestures—they aren’t going to kill themselves. They are pulling out the last weapon in their giant arsenal of things th going to turn the conversation in their favor. That’s shitty. That’s yet another shitty, manipulative, evil tactic.”

As other people begged compassion for Champion, Gould wondered: “Why are people worried about his mental health?” What about the people he hurt aren’t they worried about us?”

Since starting to write this story about Champion, so many people have warned me away, expressed concern and shock, or (helpful but alarming) encouraged me to call the police if ever I felt threatened. I sort of knew what I was getting into when I began, and I believe I have as good an understanding now as I have now that I've finished, but this fear is palpable. I know Champion will read this and I cannot imagine how it will feel for him. I would not want such a story to be written about me, but I also hope never to do the kinds of things Champion has done. And I think that if I ever do them, I will deserve a story like this.

"Experiencing criticism for your actions is not the same thing as having your life ruined," Mallory Ortberg wrote in *The Toast* on October 6, 2014, "no more unrestrainedly strangers talk about you."

"You can ruin your own life," she says, when you hurt someone else. "You have ruined your own life from the inside out."

Though Ortberg was writing about a particular situation—rape allegations that were then roiling the alt-lit community—I think this is a useful framework for any situation in which one person has hurt another. She argues that if someone has attempted to "physically and emotionally dominate" another person, bringing that hurt to light "is in fact the best possible thing that can happen" to the aggressor, to everyone.

"He's out," Khakpour said of Champion and the literary community. "He knows that. He decided to walk out like this. He decided to burn the whole thing down. And now we're the ones who are left with the mess."

"I felt for so long like the only person in the horror movie who knows the identity of the killer," Jessa Crispin said, "and everybody's like 'that's ridiculous. You're like, 'Okay, go into the cabin, see what happens, have a good time.'"

"The isolation of it," she said of being targeted by Champion. "The fact that nobody would talk about it in public. The way that there were real life repercussions talking about it."

"A lot of people that have known him from way back when," Laila Lalami concurred, "I think everyone is so tired. I am tired, just tired. People don't want to deal with it anymore. Everyone has busy lives. Everyone has books they want to write."

Champion was "an unfortunate package," Jennifer Weiner reflected. "He was a scary abuser who was also a thoughtful, committed reader. What do you do with that?" So many people in literature have been bad people, she said, citing Pound's anti-Semitism or Hemingway's misogyny. Book people "are in a way making excuses."

"It's tragic because he really can be intelligent, articulate, and above all passionate," Eric Rosenfield said. "He only ever wanted to live a life in the literary world which has now so utterly turned on him that I can't imagine a way back into it for him. As one of my friends once put it, 'He's got all this good stuff all put together wrong.'"

"I would like to remember Ed the way I saw him once onstage at the Bowery Poetry Club with Levi [Asher]," Richard Grayson said, "when they were playing some instruments (drums? maracas? I can't recall) to a Beat-era poem or song. He seemed like a different person at that moment: happy, carefree, unconcerned with anything but the fun he was having."

"I've always held out the hope that with proper care and medication, he might be a usefully contributing member of literary society," Mark Sarvas said, "though he's been vicious to me and many people I care about. He's obviously in eleven kinds of pain."

"People have said they hope Ed will get help," Levi Asher tweeted. "He has 'gotten help' and it hasn't helped. It's a truly frightening situation for everyone."

"He takes the blame," Asher admitted to me in an email. "That doesn't mean he won't do it again."

The literary community is not a unified front. It's not empty of jerks or weirdos or assholes or people who stand too close to you at parties. It's full, as my group of people is, of animosity, petty differences, unthinking dislike. Generally, people I spoke to who lived in New York City knew about Champion's abusive, inappropriate behavior. "No one had to warn me about Ed," said essayist Sloane Crosley, who appeared on his podcast in 2008. "By the time I spoke with him, I had been working in book PR for about seven years." Most people I spoke to from outside New York—many of them fiction writers interviewed on *The Bat Segundo Show*—had heard little if anything about his reputation. Some of them found out about his abusive behavior because they chose to target them. For others, it took Champion's attacks on Emily Gould and Porochista Khakpour to make them aware that he could and did behave inappropriately, even if they still knew nothing of the volume, intensity, or long history of his abuse.

"There's been a lot of talk about how silence enabled Ed. I'm not at all sure I buy that," blogger Mark Sarvas said. He explained why: "My read of him was

thrived on the drama of the public fight; and that he felt entitled to be reckoned with (hence his obsession with Sam Tanenhaus, who would not employ guessed—rightly as it turned out—that if I took away the oxygen and refused to engage with him, he would get bored and move on. That’s more or less what happened.”

Ignoring a person like Champion, which is to say someone both angry and unstable, poses its own sorts of risks. For people like John Freeman, it took Champion to “get bored.” For people like J. Robert Lennon and Porochista Khakpour, Champion needed little time to drastically and negatively alter the regardless of whether or not they engaged with him.

“I didn’t know he had alienated all these people,” Khakpour explained. “I didn’t know he had threatened all these people. I didn’t understand why this got totally celebrated in New York City. I slowly got bits and pieces. There is so much beef in the literary world, to pretend it’s Ed against the world is insane would I pay more attention to people saying ‘Ed, he’s crazy,’ when people in the literary world say that about everyone?”

“If ‘feeding the trolls’ provokes or encourages them in the short term,” Emily Gould wrote in BuzzFeed, “I don’t really give a fuck. In the long term, with st resistance, it’s the only way to create the impression that something has to change.”

Gould found a pile of sympathetic message in her inbox after Champion published “Middling Millennials” last summer. “It was really upsetting to get the emails,” she said over the phone. “It’s not making me feel better that it’s happened to you or that it’s happened for years. Why can’t you say something? Why am I the only person—it felt like at that moment—saying something? I’m grateful that it doesn’t feel like that anymore, but I got really upset. When had interviewed Merritt Tierce [in September 2014]—how come nobody told her? What happened there? Reaching out to someone in retrospect saying ‘so sorry’—you know, no. That’s so pointless and useless. I think of them differently than I used to.”

There was no way of behaving that would protect you from Champion’s anger. Ignoring him (John Freeman, Sam Tanenhaus) still resulted in several years of sustained attention. Confronting him (Boris Kachka, Michele Filgate) could do the same. If you spoke about him indirectly—much less unfollowed him—social media (Elyssa East, Kevin Nguyen), he would find you and explode. If you were his friend (Khakpour, J. Robert Lennon, Eric Rosenfield, even Levi Asher), he would find something—eventually—to explode over. Even giving him a taste of his own medicine—Mark Sarvas, with a partner, started an Ed Champion Twitter account, @drselfabuse, in 2009—failed to teach Champion a lesson. There was nothing you could do to make yourself safe, at least, not on an individual basis.

“You can’t tolerate it,” Khakpour said, speaking of Champion’s behavior. “These are only the stories we know. There might be double that number. This is a serious, dangerous situation.”

For over ten years, people in publishing have said through their actions that Champion’s behavior was acceptable because he provided a publicity outlet for authors who rarely get that kind of time and attention, because he dated a powerful voice in the industry, because he could attack a person in scary and new ways. Fear of Weinman’s professional retribution and Champion’s personal brand of abuse kept many quiet—and the worst stories remained unspoken until recently. The people who did talk about Champion’s behavior did little constructive, as far as I can tell, towards removing him from his relative position of power or legitimacy or protecting unknowing community members.

The task of how and when to deal with abuse as a community is profoundly difficult. After all, it’s one we rarely see to success. Think of the crimes of cover-up and cover-up perpetrated by the Catholic Church, or rape culture and its silencing effect on American campuses. How do we distinguish between what’s unfortunate and what’s unacceptable? When, in Champion’s eleven-year-career, were we supposed to say enough? Champion’s pain, his questionable state, complicates these matters further but it does not erase them.

What if, since 2003, people had said, publicly, “This is not okay” every time Champion did something abusive? And what if when someone said “This is not okay” we believed them? What if we understood testimony about and criticism of someone doing a bad thing as necessary, even empathetic, imperatives? What if we saw the public furor blooming out from the original seed of transgression (all those think pieces, all those subtweets) not as a bad or trivial phenomena but as a difficult work a community must to do figure out, first, what is going on and, second, how best to grapple with it?

The specter of the convicted innocent is something our justice system rightfully obsesses over. But as a woman, and as someone who witnesses how racial and class-based systems of oppression operate in this country, I also know how profoundly hard it is for a person in a marginalized position to make an accusation. And so I am more scared of no one speaking up than of too many. I am more scared of silence than false or petty speech. At least, with the latter, we have a chance.

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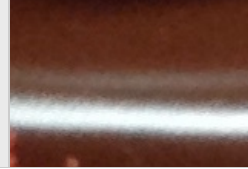
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