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Literary

American Weather
Charles McLeod
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It isn't often that a reader meets a narrator as duplicitous, as arrogant, as utterly sociopathic as is Jim Haskin, multi-multi-millionaire and president of the San Francisco ad firm, American Weather. AmWe's twenty-five impressively diverse, expressly "green" employees promote the organic, the solar, and the upcycled ("We sell shoes made of hemp and car tires"); but it is in the Red Room, Haskin's office, where the real money is made. And now in the wake of the subprime mortgage fiasco of 2008, Haskin is brewing an outrageous pay-per-view spectacle that will draw in Big Corporate sponsors—JP Morgan Chase, Marathon Oil, Boeing, Home Depot, Walgreen, and many more—as well as tweak the American libido "that covets and covets," to dig deep into its collective pockets. If anyone should get in the way, Haskin sometimes employs an identity theft ring that knows how to destroy careers, families, and futures. No, Haskin is not drawn to engender pathos in readers, not even after they hear him speak of the car crash that took his parents' lives, or of his years at Mr. Hand's Home for Well-Behaved Boys.

Unlike most of Charles McLeod's characters in *American Weather*, Haskin is perhaps larger-than-life, but he is utterly recognizable. In his voice, many will appreciate the sophistication of McLeod's prose and the slash-and-burn incisiveness of his satire—his bitter wit, epic rants, damning lists. Haskin becomes almost human when he considers his wife, Denise, comatose now as a side-effect from a drug that Haskin himself promoted, or his teenage son, Connor, banished now to a posh Eastern boarding school for the near-murder of a bullying peer. But human is too kind a word for Jim Haskin. Connor's periodic letters home lend Haskin a refreshingly typical "dad" persona, while they inject a healthier voice and, perhaps, McLeod's answer to the pervasive consumerist culture that Haskin takes so much delight in, and is so adept at manipulating, with "numbers jumping from checking accounts like lake trout at sunset on some bug-filled summer evening." McLeod's first novel is the mirror held up to twenty-first century America—a book, to quote from his epigram from Oscar Wilde, "that shows the world

its own shame."

Charles McLeod is a Hoyns Fellow at the University of Virginia. *American Weather* was published concurrently with McLeod's short story collection, *National Treasures*. His work has also appeared in such venues as *The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses, Alaskan Quarterly Review, Conjunctions, DOSSIER*, and elsewhere.

Joe Taylor