

# The lost 'Togetherness Brother'

**THE WORLD WITHOUT YOU**, by Joshua Henkin. Pantheon, 321 pp., \$25.95.

BY MARION WINIK  
Special to Newsday

A family assembles at its country house for a memorial to a lost son. In the course of the long weekend, old and new tensions — between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and among siblings — bubble to the surface.

It could be the plot of a Chekhov play or a Woody Allen movie. But on this classic narrative scaffolding, Joshua Henkin develops a painfully contemporary situation. The youngest child and only son of the Frankel family, Leo, was killed in Iraq on the Fourth of July, 2004 (on fictional assignment for Newsday, sad to say). On the first anniversary of his death, the family has gathered for the unveiling of his tombstone.

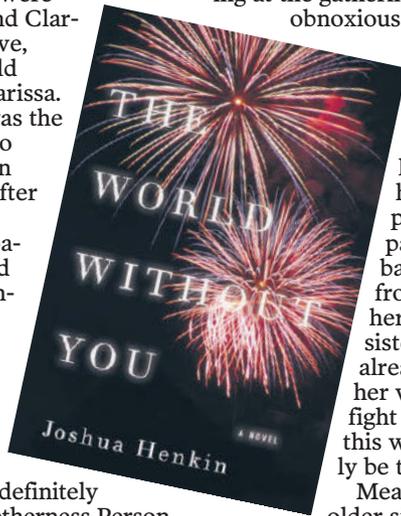
At the service, his sister Lily,

a D.C. lawyer, remembers a stray dog her brother adopted when he was 12. "There was only one way you could get Kingman to pay attention to you," she says. "If, for example, Clarissa and I were walking her and Clarissa had to leave, Kingman would strain after Clarissa. But then if I was the one who had to leave, Kingman would strain after me. She didn't want us to separate. Leo called her the Togetherness Dog. And he was like that, too. He was the Togetherness Person."

The Frankels have definitely lost their Togetherness Person. After a year of rage expressed in editorials against the war, 69-year-old mother Marilyn is spent and adrift. She plans to leave her husband, David, and

announces it to the kids at their first dinner together.

This dinner has already been ruined by the behavior of daughter Noelle, now an Orthodox Jew living in Israel. Arriving at the gathering with her obnoxious husband and four young sons in tow, she rejects the kosher meal her parents have specially prepared and passes out bagels brought from home to her family. If sister Lily hadn't already broken her vow not to fight with Noelle, this would certainly be the end of it. Meanwhile, their older sister, Clarissa, is too obsessed by her infertility problems to be fully present, arriving hours late because sudden ovulation required her and her husband



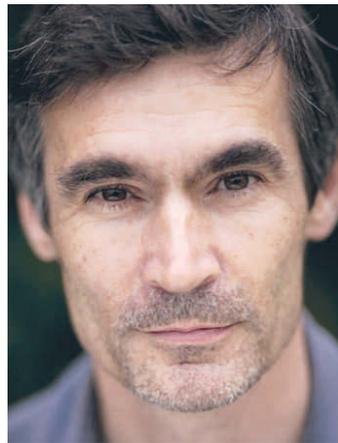
# Unrest in an old Paris cemetery

**PURE**, by Andrew Miller. Europa Editions, 331 pp., \$17 paper.

BY RON CHARLES  
Washington Post Book World Service

Andrew Miller's new novel stinks. What do you expect? It's full of thousands upon thousands of rotting bodies. No zombies — just good old-fashioned corpses crammed into a Parisian cemetery for more than 500 years.

The general background of "Pure" is true: The Church of the Saints Innocents was founded in the Middle Ages and eventually became the largest cemetery in Paris. You think you have storage problems? Giant pits held more than 1,000 bodies apiece until the ground was so packed that older corpses were dug up and stored to make room for new ones. Nearby buildings collapsed. By the mid-18th century, the atmosphere grew toxic: Merchants complained that their wine quickly turned to vinegar and their meat rotted,



Andrew Miller

pedestrians fainted and sickened. But the Mother Church was making a fortune from burial fees.

Into this pungent historical setting wafts Miller with a grave story set in 1785 about a man charged with emptying the cemetery and tearing down the church. It's Ken Follett's "Pillars of the Earth" in reverse.

We first meet Miller's fictional hero, Jean-Baptiste Baratte, in the labyrinthine mirrored halls of Versailles, where he receives an assignment that must be

"handled with the necessary flair, the necessary discretion": The crown has finally ordered that the cemetery be removed. For a young engineer from Normandy, this is a chance to make his name, but powerful forces — temporal and spiritual — are determined to resist him.

Jean-Baptiste is an endearing fellow, serious and earnest, torn between his ambitions and his good nature. Not exactly a country bumpkin, he's still dazzled by Paris. The early scenes of him stumbling around the city — trying to buy the right suit, trying to hold his liquor — are delightful.

He's eager to begin dismantling the cemetery, but the author takes his time. Miller's emphasis on character and place will determine who relishes this elegant novel and who finds its pace a little too sedate. But the scenes in the crowded market, the gated churchyard or the luxurious theater offer something close to time travel. And all of Jean-Baptiste's a la mode friends are wonderfully drawn, from the doomed church's organist "playing Bach to

to visit a roadside motel. Meanwhile, Leo's widow, who has come from California with his young son, Calder, is moving on to a new relationship and feels more out of place than ever with this family of feisty, competitive tennis and crossword mavens.

The skill with which Henkin explores the points of view and personae of his ensemble cast is masterful. From the aging, defeated patriarch to the innocent 3-year-old ("More than once, he's been asked by some unknowing soul where his father is, to which he has responded, cheerfully, "He's dead!"), Henkin depicts each in terms of his or her response to loss, both its damage and its unfolding trajectory. This was a central issue in the author's well-received 2000 novel, "Matrimony," too. Both books explore with subtlety and feeling the meaning of family, both those we are born with and those we choose, those we leave behind and those with whom we soldier on.

## this week

Readings and book signings on Long Island

### Thursday

The Bay Shore Historical Society hosts **John Hanc**, co-author of "Jones Beach: An Illustrated History" (Globe Pequot). At 7:30 p.m., *Bay Shore-Brightwaters Library, 1 South Country Rd., Brightwaters; 631-665-1707, bayshore.suffolk.lib.ny.us*

Movie critic **Jeffrey Lyons** talks about "Stories My Father Told Me: Notes From 'The Lyons Den'"

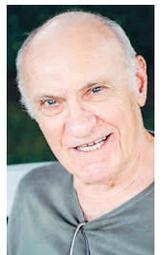
(Abbeville Press), about newspaper columnist Leonard Lyons. At 7:30 p.m., *Long Beach Public Library, 111 W. Park Ave., Long Beach; 516-432-7200, nassau.library.org/longbeach*



### Saturday

Novelist **Louis Begley**, who lives in Bridgehampton and New York, discusses "Schmidt Steps Back" (Knopf), a sequel to "About Schmidt" and "Schmidt Delivered." At 5 p.m., *BookHampton, 41 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com*

**Allan Retzky** reads from his novel "Vanished in the Dunes" (Oceanview Publishing). At 5 p.m., *Canio's Books, 290 Main St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-4926, caniosbooks.com*



Author **Bill Evans** signs and discusses his book "It's Raining Fish and Spiders" (Forge). At 4 p.m., *BookHampton, 91 Main St., Southampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com*